

# 忧郁先生想过 平静生活



青色羽翼

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# Mr. Melancholy Wants to Live a Peaceful Life - 青色羽翼/Cyan Wings

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## CHAPTER 1

At 5:59 AM, Yu Hua woke punctually one minute before his alarm rang. He turned off the alarm and quietly got out of bed. You Zhengping, sleeping soundly lying beside him, was entirely unaffected.

Yu Hua was twenty-seven years old. He was You Zhengping's partner, a graduate of one of the country's top three institutes of higher learning, and the former human resources manager of a famous banking institution, with an annual salary ranging from the hundreds to millions. Apart from necessary social engagements, company cocktail parties, and other such events, he always came home punctually at six in the evening, went to sleep before 11 PM, woke up a minute or two before 6 AM, and took a half an hour to an hour break at midday, depending on the state of work.

He had a calm and steadiness that far surpassed his actual age; there seemed to be many stories hidden in his deep eyes. Consistent good exercise habits had given him an excellent figure. His trim suits hid his muscles, giving a restrained air to the whiff of hormones.

Yu Hua's cooking was very good. He liked to get up a little early and prepare a sumptuous breakfast for his partner You Zhengping. Every time he saw You Zhengping's satisfaction eating the breakfast he had made, the happiness of being alive would rise in Yu Hua's heart.

At seven-thirty in the morning, You Zhengping was roused by the aroma of breakfast. He gave an exaggerated stretch, yawned enormously, and flopped in bed hugging his quilt with his hair a mess, mumbling, "What tasty things did you make today?"

Yu Hua laid breakfast out on the dining table and said to You Zhengping, lazing in the bedroom, "You said yesterday you wanted to eat a Guangdong style breakfast. I made shrimp dumplings, shumai, custard buns, congee with slices of fish, fried wontons, and a custard tart. There's also grilled sausages and steamed milk pudding with red beans. I didn't prepare much last night, and time in the morning is limited, so I only made a bit."

"You call that a bit?" You Zhengping vaulted out of bed, rushed into the bathroom, and quickly washed up.

He had married Yu Hua three years ago. After many years of living together, You Zhengping had developed a habit of eating breakfast, and his biological clock had also gradually become regular.

Before meeting Yu Hua, You Zhengping's living habits had been a total mess.

He'd played on his phone until three in the morning every day. Work started at 9 AM; he would be woken by his first alarm at 8:30. After turning off the alarm, he'd roll over to sleep some more. At 8:40, the second alarm would ring. Only at 8:50, when the third alarm, which was set

to make the shrill sound of a police siren, went off, would You Zhengping jump out of bed, take three minutes to carelessly wash up and dress, then run madly to his place of work, which wasn't far from his dormitory, and clock in precisely at nine.

He'd never eaten breakfast. Lunch had always been a high-calorie, heavily-flavored food like malatang or hotpot. In the evening he would snack constantly, and at eleven at night he would order barbecue and beer and eat until he was full to bursting.

The young You Zhengping had liked to go all out on eating and playing; food had to be eaten in big mouthfuls, alcohol drunk in big gulps, games played the whole night through. Night was party time for a young man. "Why sleep when you're alive when you can sleep forever after you die?" were the words he had used to fob off his elders. Living recklessly and triumphantly was the life You Zhengping had looked forward to.

Only when he and Yu Hua had met and fallen in love had You Zhengping slowly learned to go to bed early and get up early. He had also given up late night snacks.

After taking a shower and blowdrying his hair, he pushed back his thick hair. Thinking of his layabout friends, who still stayed up all night and were losing their hair by the day, You Zhengping laughed smugly and picked up a comb, preparing to comb his hair into a youthful and elegant hairstyle.

Facing the mirror, he brushed to the left and brushed to the right. There was always a stubborn lock of hair in the center that kept sticking up, like an unrestrained ahoge<sup>1</sup> pointing up to the sky.

Carrying the comb, You Zhengping went over beside Yu Hua, who had laid out breakfast. "There's a bit of hair sticking up. Comb it for me."

Yu Hua was not only good at cooking, he had magic hands like a salon's best hairdresser. With only a little arranging from him, You Zhengping's hairstyle would become elegant and individual. The disobedient ahoge would immediately become soft and smooth under Yu Hua's hands.

Yu Hua looked at You Zhengping's hair, got out a paper towel to wipe his hands, and calmly said, "I can't, there's oil on my hands. Why don't you use hair gel on it?"

"All right." The expectant look in You Zhengping's eyes dimmed at once. He looked at the expressionless Yu Hua and didn't deal with the hair that was sticking up. He carelessly dropped the wooden comb in the bathroom and sat down unhappily at the dining table.

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<sup>1</sup> Common anime visual cue of one lock of hair sticking up, often used to indicate silly characters.



Breakfast was tasty. You Zhengping had just eaten a shrimp dumpling when he saw Yu Hua putting away the kitchen implements and asked involuntarily, "Aren't you going to eat with me?"

"I already ate while you were showering," Yu Hua said with his back towards You Zhengping.

The delicious breakfast instantly became tasteless. With difficulty, You Zhengping swallowed the food a mouthful at a time. He decided he wouldn't speak to Yu Hua all day today!

After he had dully eaten breakfast, You Zhengping put on the clothes Yu Hua had prepared for him last night and couldn't resist going over to the kitchen.

Yu Hua was washing the dishes. There was only the rush of water in the kitchen.

"Well..." You Zhengping circled fretfully beside Yu Hua. "What are you doing today?"

The sound of the water stopped. Yu Hua, head lowered, stared at the dishes. There was no emotion in his voice. "Do housework, then go job hunting."

"Oh..." You Zhengping brought his face up in front of Yu Hua and pointed to his own cheek. "I'm going to work. Good luck job hunting!"

Yu Hua tilted his head, ignored You Zhengping's hint, and calmly said, "Be safe."

The subtext was, "You can go, don't get in the way of the housework."

You Zhengping stared fixedly at Yu Hua, sucked in a breath through his nose, then turned and left. He rushed to the garage, shut himself up in the car, got out his phone, and called his underling Cen Xiao. "Yu Hua is ignoring me. He didn't comb my hair for me, didn't eat breakfast with me, didn't even give me a good morning kiss before I went out. Does he want to get a divorce? No way, I managed to find someone so suitable, I'm definitely not getting divorced!"

Cen Xiao's murky voice came over the phone: "Listen, do you know what time it is?"

"8:20, forty minutes before work starts. What's the problem?" You Zhengping said confidently.

"So you know it's 8:20 and not 8:50!" Cen Xiao howled over the phone. "My first alarm only rings at 8:40. Do you know how precious every minute of sleep is for me at this time? I'm going back to sleep now. No matter how important your problem is, please wait until we start work at nine to talk about it."

Then he hung up the phone, and when You Zhengping called again, the phone had been turned off.

He hit the steering wheel in anger and snarled at the phone, "Was I wrong to call at 8:20? You crowd of night owls, not sleeping at night, not getting up in the morning—sooner or later you'll go bald from all that staying up late!"

After venting his anger at the phone, You Zhengping at last lay feebly on the steering wheel, thinking about his and Yu Hua's relations the last few days.

A week ago, when he'd gotten off work and come home, he'd seen that Yu Hua had come home very early and made dinner. He'd told him lifelessly, "I've been fired."

It seemed that Yu Hua had offended his company's management and had been fired at once. The company had given him a severance, but Yu Hua said it had all gone to cover a company executive's medical expenses, and he had also put in some money. You Zhengping thought this was the company maliciously taking his money; why should Yu Hua's salary go to an executive for medical expenses? He'd been angry enough to want to take his friends and go make a fuss in front of Yu Hua's company's doors; Yu Hua had held him back.

Yu Hua had taken out a loan to buy the apartment the two of them lived in. Each month's mortgage payment was over 8000. Their savings had gone to buy You Zhengping a car just a month earlier. The remaining money was only enough for two or three months of mortgage payments.

You Zhengping was a casual worker at the subdistrict office, with a monthly salary of 2500. Added up over a year, it was just enough for him to pay for the expenses of a gas-guzzling off-road car; he couldn't help at all with living expenses and rent.

Yu Hua had promised then that he would find work soon; he wouldn't let You Zhengping worry.

But a week had passed. Yu Hua had hit a wall a few times, becoming increasingly cold and silent. For a whole week, they hadn't hugged, kissed, or anything. Today was really over the line, not even a bit of physical contact; if he asked, Yu Hua wasn't in the mood.

You Zhengping was about to go out of his mind with fretting. This couldn't go on. He had to think of something!

After spending five minutes being depressed in the car, at 8:30, You Zhengping floored the gas pedal and drove the car out of the garage. He was going to go to work and find his crowd of underlings to discuss what he should do to improve Yu Hua's mood!

When You Zhengping's car drove out, Yu Hua was standing at the window upstairs, quietly watching him drive away.

Only when he couldn't see the car anymore did Yu Hua move his gaze to the kitchen sink. The dishes in the sink were all broken.

Yu Hua reached out, picked up the shards, and dropped them in the trash can. He had dropped them casually; the trash can split open.

Seeing this, Yu Hua sat weakly at the dining table, arms leaning on the tabletop. There was a crack. The dining table and the chair he was sitting on broke into pieces, the first-rate cedar wood furniture turning into a heap of broken wood.

Yu Hua stood and wrung his hands. He took a deep breath, and another deep breath, and at last got his strength under control. He didn't stamp the tile under his feet into fragments.

Yu Hua put a hand to his forehead in exasperation. The last few days, while You Zhengping hadn't been home, he had changed the furniture, tableware, and cooking implements three times, and had urgently found people to repair the floor tiles.

There was something he had always concealed from You Zhengping. He had once been a transmigrator who had travelled through countless worlds, carrying out all kinds of life-and-death games. He had brushed shoulders countless times with the god of death, at last obtaining the strongest power, becoming the final clearer.

A clearer was permitted one wish; no matter how difficult the wish was, it could be realized. He could even become the overlord of the universe.

But Yu Hua's wish had been: "I want to become an ordinary person, work an ordinary job in an ordinary world, meet an ordinary and lovable partner, get to know him and fall in love with him, and spend a peaceful life together."

So he had sealed all of his power, come to this world, and become an ordinary student. Relying on his own efforts, Yu Hua had tested into a good university, found a good job, then met You Zhengping and lived the peaceful life he had longed for.

Yu Hua had thought that life with You Zhengping was the happiness he had desired, but a week earlier, his happiness had been shattered.

When the executive at his company had fallen, Yu Hua had gone to help him up, but because his strength had been too fierce, he had bashed the executive's head against the wall.

The executive had been seriously injured and gone to the hospital. It had already been extremely benevolent of the company not to pursue criminal charges against Yu Hua. They had fired Yu Hua, and Yu Hua had used a portion of his savings along with the severance to pay for the executive's medical expenses.

The executive who'd gotten a concussion from having his head bashed had been quite friendly. He had advised Yu Hua to look into psychiatric help. Maybe being under too much stress had caused him to develop violent tendencies. He needed treatment as soon as possible.

But Yu Hua knew that this wasn't violent tendencies; it was his sealed power awakening.

That power was very unstable, now strong and now weak. Each time Yu Hua thought he could control it, the power would suddenly increase, making him constantly break the things around him.

Because of this, Yu Hua hadn't dared to touch You Zhengping these last few days, terrified that, like the company executive, he would smash his husband against the wall.

It was all right if he broke the material goods around him. He could just spend money and buy new ones. But You Zhengping absolutely couldn't be hurt.

Of course Yu Hua had noticed You Zhengping constantly looking for opportunities to get close to him this morning, but he didn't dare. He was worried that he wouldn't be able to control his strength, and You Zhengping would end up in the hospital.

The mess at home still needed to be cleaned up. Yu Hua took a deep breath, clasped his hands together several times, determined that this time he could control the degree of his strength, then carefully picked up his cell phone and bought a similar table and tableware online. He also told the merchant that they had to be delivered before three in the afternoon.

After putting in the order, Yu Hua relaxed slightly. He lost control of the strength of his hand. There was a crack; he had squeezed the phone and broken it.

Yu Hua: "..."

Staring at the remains of the phone, Yu Hua felt dismal. Could his peaceful life continue?

## CHAPTER 2

"What do you think I should do, guys?" Having arrived at work, You Zhengping pestered his underlings nonstop, telling them everything starting from Yu Hua losing his job to this morning's missing good morning kiss, then sadly asking for help.

You Zhengping's number one underling Cen Xiao yawned, taking a bottle of coke from the boxes of drinks piled in the corner. He gave a leisurely burp, then slowly said, "Everything will be fine in a few days when he finds a job."

"Right, right." Underling number two, Shi Yongfu, nodded disinterestedly. "You'll make it all up in bed. Go home tonight and make him give you a good night kiss. It'll be fine."

"Are you my brother or not!" You Zhengping hit the desk in anger. "My life is undergoing an unprecedented crisis!"

The underlings looked simultaneously at Cen Xiao, hinting with their expression that he should placate You Zhengping.

Cen Xiao drank the remaining half a bottle of coke. The stimulating taste cleared his head. He dropped the bottle in the trash can, went over to You Zhengping, and said, "Control your strength. Do you remember what happened to the last desk?"

You Zhengping had a boisterous temperament. It had been all right when he'd been single; he hadn't flipped out easily. Since meeting Yu Hua, he'd get worked up almost every day, from Yu Hua cooking for him to Yu Hua's excellent figure to Yu Hua's... Ahem, the rest couldn't be said. In short, at the least stirring, You Zhengping would be unable to control his strength and wreck the table and chairs.

At first Cen Xiao and the others had let You Zhengping have his way. It was normal for a person who was dating to have unstable emotions.

But You Zhengping's emotions had been unstable for three years. He spent each minute and each second in the passionately in love stage. And whether he was flying high or down in the dumps, the people around him still suffered.

He'd wrecked his own desk, Cen Xiao's desk, Shi Yongfu's desk, everyone's desks, the desks brought in from the storeroom, old desks other people didn't want...

"You really can't wreck another one," Cen Xiao said earnestly. "This desk is the one we put together out of the wreckage of the desks you broke before. Our superiors won't let us apply for any more office furniture. Save some!"

"Right, right!" Shi Yongfu was holding a bag of instant noodles and slurping them up. "Boss, look at me, you smashed my stainless steel lunchbox, and now I have to eat instant noodles made in their own packaging. Do I have it easy? Please control yourself. Is this a normal relationship?"

As he spoke, Shi Yongfu inhaled all the broth in the bag and neatly threw his single use chopsticks and the bag into separate trash cans.

You Zhengping looked at him suspiciously. "Don't you make noodles in the bag because you're too lazy to wash your lunchbox?"

"..." Shi Yongfu quickly changed the subject. "That's not important. Let's talk about Yu Hua."

Hearing the name "Yu Hua," You Zhengping forgot about the business of being too lazy to wash a lunchbox. He sighed lengthily. "What do you think, guys, is it because I make too little money and put too much stress on him that he's having an emotional crisis? Does he want to get divorced?"

Cen Xiao, who had drunk coke on an empty stomach, rubbed helplessly at his temples. He never should have gotten involved in You Zhengping's business. In the beginning, he'd only wanted to help his brother get out of his elders' plan to force him to get married. When had it come to this?

About four years ago, when You Zhengping had been only 21, he'd been carefree, living recklessly, challenging his friends to contests in all kinds of extreme sports whenever he had free time, living the life everyone wanted.

His friends envied You Zhengping, but his family was anxious. It didn't mean anything for a young man to have an unsteady temper and only want to play around, but couldn't he play at something safer, something more normal? His elders worried to death every time he did extreme sports.

At this point, one of You Zhengping's distant relations made a proposal. *The child is twenty-one and has never dated. Boys settle down when they start dating. A girlfriend will be much more useful than us elders.*

So his family started wildly trying to find someone to introduce to You Zhengping. You Zhengping was stunned and protested in the interest of a free life: "I'm not even of legal age to marry yet, aren't you all in too much of a hurry?"

The elders said, "That's all right, you can date for a few years and then get married."

With no way out, You Zhengping stamped his foot in irritation. "I don't like women, I like guys!"

This was only his excuse to get the elders to stop their plans for a blind date, but after discussing it, his elders kindly said, "So...do you like one of your friends? If you like one of them, bring him home. That Cen Xiao seems..."

You Zhengping panicked. He simply couldn't imagine one of the underlings he trounced during training becoming his partner. He shook his head like a rattle. "No, no, I haven't met anyone I like yet!"

The elders said, "You won't meet anyone nice doing those dangerous extreme sports every day. Let us introduce you to someone."

The elders wouldn't let him off, seeming to hold the attitude that even if he had liked non-humans, they would have found one to introduce him to.

Well aware that he couldn't get out of the blind date, You Zhengping had a brainwave. While he couldn't refuse his elders, he could make his blind date dislike him!

So You Zhengping fussily said, "The type I like is...the opposite of my layabout friends. Cultured, better looking than me, likes to wear suits, can speak at least five foreign languages, ideally a graduate of a Project 985 or 211 university<sup>2</sup>, a little older than me but not too old. He

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<sup>2</sup> Briefly, two different projects to develop Chinese higher education; Project 985 derives from the date of its announcement (98/5) and Project 211 from its slogan ("In preparation for the 21st century, successfully managing 100 universities.")

can't be someone from inside the system. Someone with prospects for advancing in business, with a future salary that can support me. Someone who looks at first glance like the cream of society!"

These exacting requirements did give his family pause. Just as You Zhengping was exulting over his own resourcefulness, his dad You Guodong spoke thoughtfully: "I have an old comrade-in-arms. He started his own business after leaving the army and knows a lot of people in big business. I can have him find someone to introduce you to."

You Zhengping: "..."

In a dignified tone, You Guodong said, "Your demands are so high, and I'm humbling myself to find you someone who fits your requirements. If you dare not to go when the time comes—hmph!"

As he gave a cold snort, You Guodong cracked two walnuts in his hand.

You Zhengping swallowed. Forcing himself to bear up, he said, "I'll go. If you find a suitable person for me, of course I'll go. I just don't know whether he'll like me."

Then he fled in defeat and went to his underlings to discuss what to do next.

Four years ago, Cen Xiao had been a hothead. He hadn't yet experienced the hypocrisy of humanity and the inconstancy of love. He and his friends racked their brains to think of something to help You Zhengping.

You Guodong was very efficient. The next day, he arranged a blind date, told You Zhengping to go on the date that weekend, and indicated that he and his old comrade-in-arms, as the people making the introduction, would accompany him.

"That won't work!" You Zhengping, who was just devising ways to spoil the date, said quickly. "If you guys go, will it be me going on a date, or you and your comrade-in-arms going on a date? If you come, I'm not going!"

His attitude was very determined. There was nothing You Guodong could do. He could only warn You Zhengping again and again that he absolutely couldn't be late.

On the day of the blind date, You Zhengping went to the arranged restaurant an hour early and used a telescope to observe people going into the restaurant from a place nearby.

"Boss, you've been looking for ages. What have you seen?" asked his underling Shi Yongfu.

"I'm observing the restaurant's quality," You Zhengping, sitting in Cen Xiao's off-road car, explained quietly. "This is a very stylish Chinese restaurant. To pick this restaurant, my blind date must have excellent taste. I have to appear to be the opposite of his preferences. That way, he'll turn me down. It's not my fault if he doesn't like me, hahaha!"

Cen Xiao said, “Boss, if you want him to turn you down, isn’t that easy? How about we ambush him in a corner and beat him up, teach him not to set his sights too high, make him tell your parents that he can’t measure up?”

“Do you think my dad hasn’t thought of that?” You Zhengping said, grinding his teeth. “He was afraid I wanted to ambush the man, so he didn’t even give me a photo! He only told me the number of the private room in the restaurant. I’ll only find out who my blind date is when I go!”

The underlings didn’t have any more ideas. They stared at You Zhengping.

You Zhengping said, “It’s all right, I more or less understand this person’s tastes. If I dress alternatively and act vulgar, he definitely won’t like me.”

They fished out their phones and searched for alternative shamate<sup>3</sup> looks. After going through some photos, the underlings babbled out suggestions for how You Zhengping could change his look—

“You have to wear clothes with holes in them, I’ll go to that store and buy scissors and cut your pants and shirt into a beggar’s rags.”

“The hair. It has to be styled and colorful. Your hair is too short, it would be too hard to style, but we can go for colorful. I’ll go to the hairdresser’s next door and buy colored spray-on hair dye.”

“Smack your lips when you chew, pop gum when you talk. I’ll go buy gum.”

“You have to wear flip-flops and scratch your belly! I’ll go buy flip-flops and a scratcher.”

“...”

“...”

The underlings poured out of the car one after another to buy things, leaving You Zhengping alone with his mouth hanging open. What did this crowd of underlings want to turn him into?

The underlings, each bringing the prop he’d fixed upon, came back to transform You Zhengping. There were kind smiles on their faces. Their eyes were full of sincerity. They were striving to use their intelligence to help You Zhengping.

“Fuck, you guys aren’t tormenting me on purpose, are you? Cen Xiao, put down the spray-on dye, I’ll kill you if you come near my hair!” You Zhengping yelled uselessly under his underlings’

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<sup>3</sup> A Chinese youth subculture with a style somewhere between goth and anime; the name is a transliteration of the word “smart.”



siege. "The scratcher is for later, during the blind date, why are you scratching the sole of my foot?"

You Zhengping struggled wildly. The off-road car parked at the side of the road vibrated fiercely from all their efforts.

By this point, You Zhengping had noticed that this crowd of underlings didn't actually want to help him, they were taking the opportunity to prank him! You Zhengping charged helplessly towards the car door. Cen Xiao said, "Weld the doors shut, You Zhengping isn't getting out of the car today. Hehe, boss, we're doing it for your own good!"

The car doors were firmly locked. You Zhengping got a window open with a struggle, wanting to jump out of it.

As soon as his head poked out the car window, Shi Yongfu, who was behind him, used the scissors to cut up his new pants. You Zhengping shouted, "Are you human? I just bought these pants, this is my first time wearing them! Go easy, my thigh is bleeding, help!"

You Zhengping climbed desperately towards the car window, trying to escape his underlings' clutches. Just then, a large, tall figure stood in front of the window. Lifting his phone, he said to You Zhengping, who was calling for help, "Do you need a hand?"

The inside of the car instantly fell silent.

The person outside of the car looked through the window, saw You Zhengping being held down by two people while of the two others, one was scratching the sole of his foot with a scratcher, and the other was using scissors to cut up his pants.

"Please stop this behavior, or else I'll call the police." The person outside the car turned his phone around, aiming the screen at all of them. The number displayed on the screen was 110.

You Zhengping opened his mouth wide, staring dumbly at this person's handsome and righteous countenance. His brain was blank. He only saw those sexy lips opening and closing; he had no idea what this person was saying.

"We-we-we-we're just joking," Cen Xiao said quickly. "We're friends, he...lost at Truth or Dare, he's being punished."

"Is that true?" the person outside the car asked You Zhengping gravely.

"Hehe," You Zhengping laughed stupidly. "What's your name?"

"My name is Yu Hua. Are they telling the truth? If they're threatening you, don't be afraid, I'll help you." Yu Hua's deep eyes were looking at You Zhengping, giving him endless courage.

“Threatening my ass!” said Cen Xiao, crumbling. “He bullies us every day. For once we have an opportunity to get back at him, and we get taken for criminals!”

To prove his innocence, Cen Xiao fished out his phone and opened the photo album. The photo album contained countless photos of You Zhengping trampling on them. Cen Xiao showed them to Yu Hua one by one, proving that they were a crowd of bad friends.

Only then did Yu Hua nod hesitantly and awkwardly say, “I’m sorry, I misunderstood. Although...joking is one thing, but you should do your best not to use lethal weapons. You may accidentally hurt your friend in the struggle.”

Shi Yongfu dropped the scissors he was holding, put up his hands, and said, “I swear after this I’ll only use the scratcher.”

“Sorry to bother you.” From outside the car, Yu Hua apologized to each of them and only walked away from the car when he’d gotten everyone’s understanding.

You Zhengping’s neck moved along with Yu Hua. Only when half his body was sticking out of the car window did he get hauled back by his bad friends.

“We finally found an opportunity to teach you a lesson,” Cen Xiao said weakly, “and we got taken for criminals. It’s no fun.”

The others also put down their tools in dismay.

You Zhengping, meanwhile, stared blankly for a while, laughed stupidly twice, and patted Cen Xiao, who was sitting in the driver’s seat, on the shoulder. “Go ahead and spray on your rainbow hair dye.”

Cen Xiao’s eyes widened. “Aren’t you more attached to your hairstyle than your head?”

“But I...” You Zhengping glanced out the car window again. “I think I’ve fallen in love at first sight... No, I have to spoil the blind date. After this meal ends, help me find that man from just now!”

Owing to their boss falling in love at first sight with a passerby and being determined to ruin the blind date, the underlings worked together to give You Zhengping an alternative shamate look.

With his hair magnificently dyed rainbow-colored, his clothes full of holes made by the scissors, wearing flip-flops, hand scratching his abs, chewing gum, You Zhengping walked duck-footed into the restaurant’s private room.

To show he had no quality, he blew a huge bubble as he walked through the door. The bubble blocked his vision. You Zhengping didn’t see who was waiting for him inside the private room.

But that wasn't important. No matter who his blind date was, You Zhengping had to make him dislike him.

Blowing the bubble, he put a foot on the table.

"Pop!" The bubble, blown to its largest, burst. You Zhengping got the gum back into his mouth and said to his blind date, "So you're this..."

"Uh!" After seeing the man's face, You Zhengping sucked in a breath, the gum sticking right in his throat.

"Are you all right?" His blind date quickly passed over a cup of water.

His concerned expression was just the same as when he had asked whether You Zhengping needed a hand from outside the car. It was gentle and courageous, full of righteousness and radiance.

"Ahem!" Drinking water and coughing violently, You Zhengping managed to spit out the gum.

He stared at Yu Hua, sucked in a fierce breath, stuck out five fingers and said, "Forget everything that happened after I walked through the door, give me five minutes!"

Then You Zhengping desperately ran out of the private room. At the door, he was running too urgently. His flip-flop twisted. Dragging his twisted leg, he ran, limping, towards the bathroom.

Watching him leave, Yu Hua sat back in his seat. Recalling what had just happened, he couldn't resist laughing.

## CHAPTER 3

You Zhengping flew at top speed to the restroom to gather his underlings. The underlings curiously asked, "Well, did you scare your blind date?"

"Shut up!" You Zhengping smacked the back of the head of the underling who had spoken. "Hurry up and find me some normal clothes, and the hair, my heavens, what am going to do about the multi-colored hair!"

The underlings were stunned by their fickle boss. A second ago, he'd wanted to ruin the blind date. The next second, he was ready to grow old with his blind date. Their boss's temper was like summer rain; it could come at any time.

Cen Xiao glanced at the restroom's faucets and shot Shi Yongfu a swift look. Shi Yongfu swiftly barricaded the restroom door, not letting anyone come in from outside.

"Boss, control your temper," Cen Xiao said, pointing at the heat-sensitive faucets. Water was trickling from all the faucets.

You Zhengping quickly calmed himself, not letting his special abilities influence the things around him.

Among the Protectors, he was the one with the strongest special ability, and also the hardest time controlling his abilities. To stabilize his emotions and control his abilities, when his closed-door training ended, You Zhengping would participate in contests in all kinds of extreme sports. He needed to experience all kinds of extreme emotions and control his special ability during the contests.

You Zhengping had experienced the despair of near death, the fear of the unknown, the anxiety of his teammates facing danger, and other glad and sorrowful extreme emotions. To control himself, he had tried experiencing all emotions once. His parents only saw him doing extreme sports; they didn't know that You Zhengping had once spent over a month alone in a pitch-black building.

He was well aware that he was a double-edged sword. In order to fully grasp the blade, he had to endure all hardships.

He had already succeeded, but it turned out that a blind date had sent all his efforts down the drain.

He had experienced all kinds of emotions, but he hadn't fallen in love.

The crowd of underlings quickly jumped out of the restroom window to find clothes. They were well-trained and robust; within five minutes, they all left and returned, bringing a suit, tie, and leather shoes for You Zhengping.

"There's really nothing to do about the hair," Shi Yongfu said. "Why don't you use a wig to deal with it? I found a wig that looks a lot like your hairstyle before."

With all their efforts, they finally stabilized You Zhengping's emotions, and the faucets stopped running on their own.

Cen Xiao opened the restroom door and gave You Zhengping a thumbs up. "Go and get him, boss! You can do it!"

You Zhengping felt that the suit he was wearing had turned into armor. He nodded at his underlings, fixed his tie and wig, and walked out with an expression that looked like he was going to conquer the whole universe.

As soon as he'd left the restroom, the underlings collapsed to the floor in fear. Their boss being in love had the sense of crisis of a world war.

You Zhengping looked at his watch. He'd told Yu Hua five minutes, but it had been fifteen. He didn't know whether Yu Hua had gotten impatient and left.

He took a deep breath and opened the private room's door. He saw that Yu Hua had taken off his suit jacket. He was wearing a dark gray shirt. His strong-jointed hand held a teapot with a classical air; he was pouring tea into two cups.

When he had poured the tea, Yu Hua put down the teapot and turned his head to You Zhengping, who was standing by the door. He didn't ask what he had been doing going out for so long, didn't pay attention to his attire being completely different from before. He stood up and smiled amidst the fragrance of the tea. "You're back."

At this moment, You Zhengping heard the enormous sound of his heart leaping into his throat.

*Thump, thump.*

He blankly followed Yu Hua to his seat. Yu Hua passed him the menu and said, "I don't know what you like to eat. I only ordered some cold dishes and pastries. I was waiting for you to come back to order the main courses."

You Zhengping couldn't see what was written on the menu at all. He ordered some dishes at random.

While they waited for the food, the two of them drank tea and chatted.

"I originally came to refuse this blind date today," Yu Hua said frankly.

You Zhengping covered his heart, secretly telling himself, *Control! I have to control myself. If my special ability erupts, Yu Hua will be hurt!*

Probably because his desire to protect Yu Hua got the upper hand, You Zhengping managed to hold back, patiently listening to Yu Hua narrate why he had come on the blind date.

Yu Hua was twenty-three, two years older than You Zhengping. He had worked at his company for just a year. Being put on regular payroll after his trial period, he had become an assistant in the company's human resources department. Yesterday, the company's president had suddenly gathered up all the men under twenty five, then sent away the average-looking ones, leaving a few good-looking ones.

The president had said that there was a sizable investment that they might be able to get; it would depend on these young men.

In the president's description, the head of an exceedingly wealthy investment company (meaning You Zhengping's father's old comrade-in-arms) had a bad-tempered and quarrelsome junior in his family, male, currently looking for an outstanding partner. Their company was fighting to win an investment. Though this business couldn't necessarily influence the investment company head's ideas, it was still an opportunity for a closer relationship.

The young employees who had just stepped into society hadn't thought that they would have to peddle sex appeal. One after another, they expressed that their sexual orientation was wrong and they weren't up to the task. The president could do nothing but employ the oldest and most primitive method—drawing lots.

Yu Hua drew the lucky number. After looking at his academic record and photograph, the other party was very satisfied with Yu Hua. The president said that he had to perform well. Only the other side could refuse; he wasn't in a position to gracefully decline.

Of course Yu Hua wasn't going to bow his head before the force of capital, and he also wasn't going to stand his blind date up. He had come this once to explain his reasoning.

"Oh..." You Zhengping's heart rate calmed. He looked at Yu Hua, his face grief-stricken.

At first, this would have been a good thing. Both sides had been forced on the blind date; both had come intending to refuse. They could have met, sat down, had a nice discussion, then told their elders and bosses that the other party hadn't liked him. Perfect satisfaction for both sides.

But...

You Zhengping stared at the teacup in his hand, saw the tea freezing over, and quickly took a deep breath, telling himself he had to calm down, calm down!

In a gentle voice, Yu Hua said, "I'm an unambitious person. My plan for the future is to live a peaceful life. I've never dated. I don't know how to be in a relationship.

"My emotional plan was to meet a person in the conventional way, someone who, like me, yearned for a comfortable household. It didn't matter whether they were a man or a woman. After dating for a while, we would set up a household before turning thirty. We might pass our time in trivialities, spend the rest of our lives dealing with trifles. Perhaps we would have some squabbles, but that's life.

"After wrangling for half a lifetime, when we'd grown old, my spouse and I could be at peace with what had happened when we were young and go hand in hand towards old age."

The peaceful life he described was too beautiful. It eased You Zhengping's feelings a great deal.

You Zhengping didn't dare to look directly into Yu Hua's eyes. He looked down at the tea with pieces of ice floating on it, thinking that he couldn't give Yu Hua this kind of future.

Disappointed in love, You Zhengping drank tea to cover up his uncontrollable expression, draining the cup of iced tea dry as though it were beer.

“Perfect. My family forced me to go on this blind date. I still want to play around for a few years.” You Zhengping threw the teacup onto the table, his expression firm. He was a strong person. He wouldn’t be knocked down by this trifle!

The underlings eavesdropping from the neighboring private room were dying from anxiety. They were really afraid that You Zhengping would explode after being disappointed in love.

Shi Yongfu silently mouthed, *Should we report it to our superiors, start making an emergency contingency plan?*

Cen Xiao’s ear was plastered to the wall. He shook his head at everyone: *Wait, things may take a turn for the better.*

After throwing the teacup onto the table, You Zhengping got up and prepared to leave. He had to leave the private room as fast as possible and drive somewhere with no people to prevent his special ability from going out of control.

“Wait!” Yu Hua hastily tugged You Zhengping’s hand, earnestly saying, “Hear out the rest of what I have to say, all right?”

What else was there to say? You Zhengping pulled off his wig in grief and indignation and faced Yu Hua with his stringy, multi-colored hair.

Yu Hua exercised a great deal of strength to resist laughing. His control over his emotions was first rate. Crossing worlds, his expression remained unchanged no matter how many dangers he encountered. But after seeing You Zhengping, he had nearly lost control twice.

Heaven knew how long he had laughed with no thought for appearances when he’d turned the corner after leaving the off-road car.

Having managed to stop laughing, he’d been considering what excuses to use to turn the other party down when You Zhengping had walked in blowing a bubble with his gum. Seeing his rainbow-colored hair, Yu Hua had nearly burst into laughter again.

Fortunately, You Zhengping had charged out of the private room, giving Yu Hua fifteen minutes to laugh in secret.

When You Zhengping had thought he was seeing Yu Hua elegantly pouring tea, in reality, Yu Hua, who had laughed until his abdominal muscles ached, had been pouring the tea to cover up his inappropriate burst of laughter.

“The foregoing was only my idealism.” Yu Hua picked up the wig, not daring to put his gaze on You Zhengping’s stringy rainbow-colored head. Staring at the wig, he said, “When you walked into the room just now, I realized how childish my ideas were.”

“Hm?” With a cautious look full of expectation, You Zhengping looked at Yu Hua...’s head. Yu Hua had his head down and was staring at the wig; he couldn’t see his eyes!

“The peaceful life I imagined was black and white,” Yu Hua said warmly towards the wig. “I have a premonition that if I miss my chance with you, I’ll lose my only opportunity for a life full of color.”

Whether bursting into laughter or feeling tender affection, there was one thing Yu Hua had to admit: he had fallen for You Zhengping.

At the moment he’d met You Zhengping outside the window of the off-road car, he’d seen infinite liveliness and vigor in him. In that instant, he’d known that if he missed his chance with this person, his life really would be a pool of peaceful, stagnant water.

So Yu Hua had quietly memorized the car’s license plate number, planning to earnestly and politely turn down his blind date, then use the license plate number to find those eyes full of liveliness.

But life was full of drama. A few minutes later, in the private room arranged for the blind date, he had seen those even brighter colors.

“Are you saying that you’re serious about dating me?” You Zhengping half-crouched, lifting his face, needing to looking right into Yu Hua’s eyes.

Yu Hua: “...”

He raised his head and used all his willpower to meet You Zhengping’s eyes. “Yes. I didn’t want our feelings to stem from being forced, so I wanted to explain all the details behind the blind date to you, then ask for your permission to pursue you.”

As he spoke, Yu Hua gently put the wig on You Zhengping’s head, then gave him an understanding smile.

This scene fixed itself in You Zhengping’s heart, becoming one of the most valuable images in his romance.

It also became Cen Xiao and the others’ nightmare.

For four years, four whole years, every time there was some new romantic development or trouble, You Zhengping would tell them all about it.

Now that Yu Hua had lost his job and their relationship had reached freezing point, You Zhengping couldn’t resist saying, “You don’t know how good he is to me.”

*We do know, actually. You’ve said it hundreds of times.* Cen Xiao and the other underlings exchanged looks and began to listen quietly to You Zhengping talking about Yu Hua’s



righteous expression when he'd appeared outside the off-road car, his patient consideration as he'd waited in the private room for You Zhengping to change clothes, his soft smile when he'd raised his hand to put his wig on for him...

Next, You Zhengping finally said, "He must be so sad now. How can I help him?"

Cen Xiao rubbed his face. He was about to answer when suddenly an unfamiliar voice cut in: "He must be worried about the economic situation at home. Your annual salary really is too low."

"Right, I..." You Zhengping's expression instantly cooled. "Who are you?"

Cen Xiao and the others only then realized that a man wearing flashy and alluring clothes, just like a peacock, was standing among them, and they had no idea when this person had shown up.

"Me?" The person took off his sunglasses, revealing a pair of peach blossom eyes. He took an ID out of his pocket. "I came for a residence certificate. When I came in, I heard you talking about how your husband was giving you the cold shoulder."

"Residence certificates are issued at the community center across the street," You Zhengping said seriously.

"This isn't the community center?" the peacock man said doubtfully.

"We're the office of the emergency subdistrict office. We're only allowed to help when the community center and the local police station are overwhelmed. The official seal is in the community center across the street. Go there to get your certificate issued." You Zhengping's answer was very official.

"Oh, I see. Sorry to bother you." Before leaving, the peacock man threw a coquettish glance towards You Zhengping. "You have to make money to reduce the stress on your husband."

"Yes, thank you for the suggestion." You Zhengping stood and saw the peacock man out.

After the peacock man had left, You Zhengping said at once, "Check the surveillance cameras, see when he came in."

Cen Xiao pulled up the surveillance playback and saw that the peacock man had been standing outside the door for about three minutes. During that time, You Zhengping had been narrating the history of his romance and the recent worries of married life. He hadn't mentioned anything related to special abilities.

They'd been trained. Normally when they spoke about work, they were very careful. Even if they needed to mention their assignment, they would use code words for their special abilities; they definitely wouldn't talk about them directly.

“Take the ledger to the community center,” You Zhengping ordered two underlings. “Investigate this person.”

“Is something wrong?” Cen Xiao asked.

“He was standing at the door for three minutes, and we didn’t notice him. Can he be an ordinary person?” You Zhengping said sternly. “You come with me to the public security bureau to investigate all his records.”

When the peacock man had taken out his ID just now, You Zhengping had memorized his ID number.

Everyone split up to act. You Zhengping and Cen Xiao were silent all the way to the public security bureau. Cen Xiao was thinking that while their boss was unreasonable in love, when it came to carrying out a mission, his abilities were first rate.

As they came to the public security bureau’s door, You Zhengping suddenly said, “Yu Hua has supported me all these years, so I’ve been secretly saving up my subsidy and bonuses. I have three or four million in savings. Do you think Yu Hua would believe it if I told him I’d won the lottery?”

Cen Xiao: “...”

The corners of his mouth twitched. “I think Yu Hua isn’t as...simple and easily fooled as you.”

“Oh, so I have to think of another way,” You Zhengping said with a sigh.

—

Author’s Note:

Yu Hua: We levelers have received specialized training. No matter how funny something is, we won’t laugh. Unless we can’t resist!

## CHAPTER 4

After meeting Yu Hua, You Zhengping’s abilities had become controlled. Going from destroying a whole underground practice field to only smashing a desk was a breakthrough development.

After they were married, the underlings frequently went to You Zhengping’s house to scrounge food. In the process, Cen Xiao had understood why You Zhengping had been able to control his abilities after starting the relationship.

Yu Hua had a manner that calmed you down. Whenever Cen Xiao came within two meters of him, he would feel a sense of the calm passage of time.

Every underling who had gone to You Zhengping's house to scrounge food had expressed that Yu Hua's cooking really was good.

Cen Xiao thought that it wasn't because Yu Hua's cooking was good; it was because he had forged a harbor for You Zhengping to rest in.

Yu Hua would carefully observe what everyone liked to eat, what interests they had, and prepare the most suitable food and most comfortable surroundings for everyone to rest in. They could eat the food they liked best. When they were full, they could play around in the living room. Meanwhile, Yu Hua would turn on the TV and listen to the news, followed by the melody of the Fishermen's Song during the weather forecast, as he conscientiously washed the dishes.

Smoothness seeped noiselessly into each of their spirits. Each time they needed to recharge their batteries, they would go to You Zhengping's house to scrounge a meal. One meal later, the next day they'd be brave men once more.

When Yu Hua had lost his job, never mind You Zhengping, even Cen Xiao had thought Yu Hua's company was being unfair. He'd gotten together with some friends to quietly investigate the executive in the hospital, hoping to find evidence that they were scamming their employee. But the injured executive's pretense was too lifelike. If they hadn't known Yu Hua, they nearly would have believed the contents of the medical records.

So now, Cen Xiao was in fact serious about helping You Zhengping think of something.

"What if I say...that I got the money from my dad?" You Zhengping quickly rejected his own idea. "No, my dad was very opposed to it when we got married. Yu Hua promised that he would make me happy. I couldn't get money from my dad."

You Zhengping's father You Guodong was the only one who knew the truth. He was a national serviceman, and You Zhengping's relative. He was entitled to know the secrets of the Protectors. Comrade You Guodong hadn't been opposed to You Zhengping marrying; he'd been opposed to his son concealing the facts about the Protectors from his closest companion. Because of this, even though You Guodong had been the one to make their blind date possible, he had also been the greatest obstruction when they got married.

You Guodong thought that there had to be mutual openness between companions. Marriage meant that they were going to undertake certain responsibilities together. He could conceal the Protectors from anyone, but not from his husband. But You Zhengping knew that what Yu Hua wanted was a peaceful life. He wanted to protect Yu Hua's peace and normalcy, so he had stubbornly refused to tell him the truth.

You Zhengping had decided to shoulder a heavy weight going forward to protect Yu Hua's calm passage through time.

The father and son's ideas conflicted. They had a big fight. You Guodong publicly announced that he was going to break off relations with You Zhengping. It was because Yu Hua had gone again and again to You Guodong to sincerely express that while he was only an "ordinary" person, he would definitely use his practical actions to prove that he could live a "peaceful" life with You Zhengping. This led to You Guodong being unable to hear words like "peaceful" and "ordinary." He thought his son had tricked Yu Hua, a nice young man living an earnest life.

You Zhengping and Cen Xiao knew all the details of the situation, but in Yu Hua's impressions, You Guodong was opposed to them being together. Asking You Guodong for money to tide them over would be an expression of lack of trust in Yu Hua. You Zhengping couldn't do that.

"So what should I do?" You Zhengping sat half-dead in the passenger's seat, feeling very sad. "He's so unhappy, and I have the money to help him, but I can't take it out. It's so frustrating."

"I think the most critical thing is to help him find a job," Cen Xiao said after thinking about it. "Yu Hua is a planner. He must have kept an emergency fund. Even if compensating for the medical expenses cost a lot, the remaining money should still last for a month or two. During that time, you have to encourage him to submit resumes, look for work, and find a job with a good monthly salary as soon as possible. Then he won't be so worried."

You Zhengping's eyes lit up. Not for nothing was Cen Xiao his top adviser. He could think of a way.

But he quickly said, "What if...he can't find a job? What then? On the day he was fired, Yu Hua came home and said that him hitting the executive had made a big impression, everyone in the circle knew, so it would be hard for him to find a high-paying job in the near future."

"Isn't that easy?" Cen Xiao said. "Each of us Protectors has a support staff quota, and they're formal staff members. First tell him that our subdistrict office is recruiting temporary workers. Have him work for a month, then transfer him to another position. In half a year, he can take the formal staff examination. Then you'd be perfectly justified in giving him the support staff position."

"Good idea!" You Zhengping gave Cen Xiao a thumbs up.

Cen Xiao continued, "The support staff's wages aren't high, but you can supplement them with your subsidy! Yu Hua's work ability is definitely first rate. No matter how much you gave him in merit bonuses, it wouldn't be overboard. You can use your subsidy to supplement his merit pay, and he can support you again."

"This idea of yours is really excellent!" You Zhengping finally cheered up a little.

This way, he could use merit payments or bonuses to "launder money," "laundering" his private savings into the household's joint funds bit by bit, and Yu Hua wouldn't need to worry about money again.

Having thought of a solution, You Zhengping finally concentrated his thoughts on the peacock man who had suddenly appeared at the subdistrict office's door. He and Cen Xiao hurried to the public security bureau and used their internal accounts to investigate the peacock man's personal files.

His name was Zhen Li, twenty-one years old, residing in You Zhengping and the others' jurisdiction of the Xuyang District. He was a born and bred Xuyang District native, graduating this year from Xuyang University. His identity information, residence permit, and education record were all real.

"Looks like there's no problem. Could it be that we were so distracted we didn't notice him?" Cen Xiao asked.

Staring at all the information in the materials, You Zhengping shook his head. "Zhen Li's parents both died in a car crash in his third year of university. After the funeral, he sold their home, moved out of the university dorm, and rented off-campus housing. He found the apartment through an agency and didn't have much contact with the landlord. His grades were average, he had little interaction with his schoolmates. His academic advisor doesn't remember him well. This is his photo from his time at school."

The photograph was of a person wearing black-framed glasses, not bad-looking, but plain and subdued, a completely different person from the peacock man they had seen.

"But this is the ID photo on his student ID," Cen Xiao said. "Most ID photos are plain, and anyway, the materials say that not long after his parents died, he started frequenting nightclubs. He had little contact with his schoolmates, but played it up at the nightclubs. There are also records here of him booking rooms at all the big hotels. With that kind of experience, it's normal for the photograph not to match the person himself."

"I'm not questioning his change of character," You Zhengping said alertly. "What I'm concerned about is that he isn't close to anyone. His parents died, he fell out of touch with his friends, and drifted apart from his schoolmates. His academic advisor doesn't remember him well. His landlord rarely comes in contact with him. The only people who have close contact with him are the ones who also spend all their time at nightclubs. Have another look at the people who booked the hotel rooms with him."

Cen Xiao looked carefully at the list of names. There were over a hundred records. Zhen Li's companions were male or female, young or old. In over a hundred names, there weren't any repetitions.

"Someone different every night," Cen Xiao said contemplatively. "That indicates his partners may not remember him clearly."

"If they were drunk, they may not even clearly remember getting the room," You Zhengping said confidently. "This is the sort of person who could disappear without anyone reporting it. With this background, he could come and go without making any noise."

Cen Xiao acknowledged You Zhengping's reasoning. "So there is something wrong. Do we arrest him?"

You Zhengping said, "Let's wait and follow him for a time, determine his identity, investigate his goal."

Cen Xiao started at You Zhengping.

"What?" said You Zhengping.

Cen Xiao shook his head. "Nothing, I was just thinking your IQ is actually pretty high."

"Of course." You Zhengping's eyes widened. "How do you think I got to be group leader for the Xuyang District Protectors? Something other than testing in on the public examination?"

Cen Xiao: "..."

*I really can't see any of that cleverness in your romance. Could you split off a bit of that IQ for love?*

—

While You Zhengping and the others were following up on the peacock man Zhen Li, Yu Hua was struggling to do housework.

The Xuyang District's express delivery was highly efficient within the city. After less than two hours, the new furniture and kitchenware were delivered. The delivery man came to the door, put the table where Yu Hua indicated, put the plates on the table, then left, leaving Yu Hua alone, staring at these items.

Though he had bought new things, he still had to wash and clean up.

Yu Hua exerted a lot of effort to wash the dishes, wipe them dry, and arrange them on the shelves. As he did this, he focused and kept his breathing calm, his energy highly concentrated, afraid that with one breath he would blow the tableware to pieces.

Only when he had managed to wash the dishes did Yu Hua realize that during the whole washing process, he hadn't breathed at all.

With his focus constantly increasing, he had awoken another ability—turtle breath.

Yu Hua had once carried out a mission on a world entirely without oxygen. His highest record for holding his breath was thirteen years and six months, which was how long it had taken him to finally complete his mission. Yu Hua even suspected that if it had taken him longer to complete the mission, then the time he held his breath may also have been prolonged.

After wiping the table, Yu Hua sighed. He was tired, really tired.

Using his current strength to wash dishes without breaking them, wipe the table without crushing it, was like an ordinary person stepping on an egg but controlling his strength so as not to harm it. The mental energy and control it took was hard for the average person to imagine. It really was too hard.

Having managed all this, Yu Hua still had to go out to get a cell phone.

He looked at the remains of the phone and sighed. You Zhengping had saved his wages for four months to buy him that phone. He'd been using it less than two months. Yu Hua was very upset about the phone breaking. This was You Zhengping's heart's blood, after all.

Yu Hua yearned for the life of an ordinary person. He absolutely couldn't imagine how hard You Zhengping, whose monthly salary was only 2500, had worked to save so much money to buy him such a costly cell phone. This was such a commonplace yet precious experience, worthy of being treasured all his life, and the phone had broken just like that. He was very sad.

Yu Hua spent some time being upset, then found a metal box and put the remains of the phone into the box and secretly hid it under the bed. When he had awoken his repairing ability, he would definitely fix the phone!

Before You Zhengping came home, Yu Hua went to a nearby mall to buy an identical phone, attempting to cover up.

Yu Hua wasn't short on money. When he had made his final wish, the System had given him an award in this world's money, placing a hundred million in his bank account in the form of a legacy. It was regular capital in this world. Using it wouldn't have an impact on the financial market.

But Yu Hua didn't want to touch that money. He liked the feeling of using his own hands to create value. He had persisted in not using it for over a decade, but this week, he had repeatedly broken his resolution, using his private savings many times to buy furniture.

As he picked up the new phone, Yu Hua remembered You Zhengping's concerned expression that morning, his heart aching faintly.

When they had gotten married, he had promised You Guodong that he would take care of You Zhengping with his own efforts. Now that he had lost his job and was causing his companion so much worry, Yu Hua felt he really was useless.

Their household savings had always been public. You Zhengping would only have to check the bank card balance to know that their savings were only enough to pay this month's mortgage, and Yu Hua wouldn't necessarily be able to control his strength this month. If he was unable to

control his strength, Yu Hua didn't dare to look for work. If he went to work and hurt another person, he didn't have the money to cover medical expenses again.

Holding the phone, Yu Hua thought that he had to find an excuse to move a bit of the money in his private account into the household account to keep You Zhengping from worrying.

How should he “launder” his private savings into the household assets? Yu Hua sighed lengthily.

An ordinary person's life was very hard.

—

Author's Note:

You Zhengping: How can I transfer over three million in private savings into the household account?

Yu Hua: What should I do to transfer a hundred million in private savings into the household account?

Messrs. Melancholy<sup>4</sup>: Ah, why is it so hard to have a nice life?

## CHAPTER 5

“I thought that your generation of Protectors was blessed,” You Zhengping and the others' superior Director Xiao said after reading the report You Zhengping had delivered. His expression was grave.

Director Xiao was You Zhengping and the other's direct superior, and he had formerly been called “the most powerful Protector.”

He was forty-three years old and had kept his figure well. Ordinarily he was as affable as a next door neighbor. Only in the slanting eyebrows that had picked up the marks of the passage of time could you see the keenness of his youth.

“If possible, I'd hoped that you wouldn't have the opportunity to encounter a Destroyer in your lifetimes,” Director Xiao said.

While You Zhengping's young generation were Protectors, they had actually never seen Destroyers. They had learned everything they knew about Destroyers from books. They had no real combat experience.

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<sup>4</sup> The author frequently refers to the leads collectively as 忧郁先生; 忧郁 (yōuyù, “melancholy”) uses almost the same characters as their surnames, 尤 (yóu) and 郁 (yù). (“Messrs.” is a rarely-used plural form of “Mr.”)



You Zhengping hesitated, then said, “I was chosen by you fifteen years ago to become a reserve Protector. You told us then that in the future we would face frightening enemies. But fifteen years have passed, and we haven’t come across a single Destroyer. Why is that?”

Director Xiao shook his head and said seriously, “I don’t understand either. Fifteen years ago, in my time, Destroyers came to our world regularly. They were hidden among the crowd, harboring different aims. When they were caught, they killed themselves. To this day, we’ve fought with the Destroyers for hundreds of years, but we still know nothing about the power behind them.”

Director Xiao had experienced the most arduous era. He had started taking part in hunting Destroyers at age seventeen. During the most difficult period, he and his team had apprehended over thirty Destroyers within three years. During that time, the sum of Destroyers throughout the whole world had reached the hundreds.

No one knew where the Destroyers came from, why they came again and again to this world. They would become some random person in this world, possessing complete identity records. No matter how advanced science technology got, they still couldn’t prevent the Destroyers from tampering with government records.

Such unknown beings were frightening to humans. Each nation showed unprecedented unity in facing the Destroyers, establishing an international organization to pursue the Destroyers throughout the world.

Despite this, after hundreds of years, they had yet to take a single Destroyer alive. Director Xiao had heard foreign Protectors say that they had captured Destroyers alive, but if they dared to ask about the power behind them, the Destroyers would self-destruct at once.

Ordinary people’s peaceful lives were forged from the sweat and blood of countless Protectors.

But since You Zhengping’s class had become reserve Protectors, this world hadn’t seen any more Destroyers.

“Fifteen years ago, we were faced with a crisis that threatened to destroy the world,” Director Xiao said, remembering. “I was planning to tell you this the first time you carried out a mission, but you haven’t come across a single mission.”

You Zhengping and the others felt very guilty facing Director Xiao’s envious “you are truly fortunate” expression. Their class of Protectors really had it too easy.

Director Xiao sank into his memories. Fifteen years ago, he’d been only twenty-eight, hardly older than You Zhengping, but he’d already been a seasoned veteran.

That day, all the world’s Protectors had simultaneously felt an enormous power that made their hearts palpitate. Unusual phenomena appeared in the skies. All the countries where it was

night saw a full blood moon, while all the countries where it was day experienced a total eclipse of the sun.

The globe's magnetic field was thrown into disorder. The birds and beasts wailed. Director Xiao stood under the blood moon, feeling the air around him congeal.

At that moment, all the Protectors prepared to sacrifice themselves. Director Xiao, who worked as a trainer for the reserve Protectors, stroked the ten-year-old You Zhengping's head, looked at the children sleeping soundly in the dormitory, picked up his weapon, and left the base.

The battle-tested Director Xiao knew that this was enough power to destroy the world. An unprecedentedly strong Destroyer had come to their world. He was too frightening and too confident. This Destroyer even felt it was beneath his dignity to conceal his power, openly declaring war on the whole world like this!

Before leaving, Director Xiao hid the base deep underground, hoping that the new soldiers could avoid this calamity. As long as they were alive, the inheritance of the Protectors would be unbroken.

All the world's Protectors and political leaders who understood the situation hurried to the place where the power had descended. It was Huaxia<sup>5</sup>!

Director Xiao, who was the closest, found that it was actually within his own jurisdiction, and in a residential district!

He was worried that this Destroyer would hurt ordinary people and rushed as fast as he could to the place where the power had appeared.

But while he was on the way, the power suddenly vanished. The air flowed again. The world grew calm.

Director Xiao came to the place where the power had descended, feeling a peacefulness he had never known before, for a time even having the idea of retiring and living calmly.

Later, when all the world's Protectors began to research that day's events, Director Xiao learned that it hadn't only been him; all the Protectors had had the idea of returning to civilian life.

And from then on, no more Destroyers had come to this world.

Ten years later, when the World Protection Organization announced that it was disbanding, they called that day "The Day of Rest," believing that that power had been the force behind the Destroyers paying its respects to them. This was how the curtain dropped on hundreds of

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<sup>5</sup> 华夏 - An old name for China, commonly rendered in English as "Cathay."

years of war spanning several generations of Protectors. This was the Protectors' victory, and also humanity's victory.

Many Protectors were skeptical about this point of view, especially people like Director Xiao, who had been closest to the power. They thought that that power hadn't been paying respects; it had seemed more like a lazy yawn.

Some countries had claimed that they would no longer be educating Protectors, but Huaxia hadn't given them up. They remained vigilant in peacetime; if they let down their guard and a Destroyer came to their world, humanity might not even have the power to resist.

Director Xiao persevered in educating You Zhengping and the others, but he hoped from the heart that these children could live happy, comfortable lives, never having an opportunity to come into contact with Destroyers.

Unfortunately, what would come would always come.

"Based on my experience, it's likely this Zhen Li is a Destroyer," said Director Xiao. "But the objective of Huaxia's Protectors is to protect. We can only take action after making certain of his identity. At present, focus on observation. I've requested identity protection from our superiors. You can go choose face-changing masks from the storeroom soon."

You Zhengping and Cen Xiao, who had never experienced battle, became excited. Face-changing masks were a defensive tool they had also only learned about in textbooks; they had never used them in actual combat!

They had heard that in order to protect the identities and families of the Protectors, the country had used the most advanced nanotechnology to manufacture these masks.

In past battles, Protectors had worn ordinary masks. As soon as the vicious Destroyers discovered their identities, they would take the Protectors' relatives as hostages. Countless innocent family members of Protectors had been murdered like this. Because of this, the country had done decades of research, finally developing this face-changing mask, which stuck perfectly to the skin and couldn't be easily torn away. Unfortunately, when this mask had just been developed, the Destroyers had disappeared. Even Director Xiao had never used them in actual combat.

You Zhengping went to the storeroom with Cen Xiao to receive face-changing masks for their unit. He picked around and chose a very well-preserved face about the same age as Director Xiao's.

Cen Xiao, on the other hand, chose a completely unremarkable face that you wouldn't have been able to pick out of a pile. He saw You Zhengping instantaneously turn into a charismatic uncle. Frowning, he said, "The most important part of undercover work is being covert. That face of yours is too identifiable!"

"It's precisely because it's so identifiable that it won't be associated with me. The difference is too great." You Zhengping adjusted his voice, making it sound low and resonant.

He put on a subdued suit. There was an ink-landscape print on his white shirt. It made him seem mature and steady.

"When Yu Hua gets older, he'll probably be this charismatic, too," You Zhengping said to his face in the mirror.

Cen Xiao: "..."

There was no help for You Zhengping's love-addled brain.

After receiving their defensive instruments, the two of them quickly went to join up with their companions who were shadowing the peacock man Zhen Li. They divided the face-changing masks up among them, becoming a crowd of ordinary-looking lackeys led by a handsome man in his forties.

"If you go ahead and attract attention, the rest of us can hide," Cen Xiao said, staring at You Zhengping. "That face really is pretty good. It's a valuable shield."

You Zhengping openly walked after the peacock man Zhen Li on the avenue. After following him for a while, he asked through his walkie-talkie, "Has he...been doing this the whole time?"

"Yes," answered Shi Yongfu, who had been following Zhen Li for two hours. "Since getting his residence certificate issued, he's been eating at the mall. He ate a hamburger on the first floor, sweets on the second floor, and ice cream on the third floor. In the fourth-floor food court, he ate malatang, rice noodles, and pastries. In the fifth-floor restaurant, he ate hotpot and barbecue. In the sixth-floor movie theater, he ate a two-person tub of popcorn."

Another underling, Bao Chengyue, said, "He's very clever. On each floor, he eats the food capacity of a normal person, doesn't attract attention at all. But he keeps eating on different floors, and in two hours, he's already eaten a week's worth of food for me. I suspect he's a Destroyer who wants to eat up our whole world."

"I envy his stomach," said Shi Yongfu. "My dream is to have an alternate dimension stomach."

You Zhengping said, "So he's only gotten a residence certificate and eaten? He hasn't done anything else?"

"Right, I have no idea what he wants to do," said Shi Yongfu.

You Zhengping frowned. Judging from the quantity of food, Zhen Li definitely wasn't an ordinary person. Even Protectors didn't have such a frightening eating capacity. His identity as a Destroyer was already established.

Their drill instructor had told them that in dealing with Destroyers, it was necessary to lure them away to a place with no people before acting. Destroyers normally seemed like ordinary people, but as soon as they encountered danger, they would show absolutely no regard for the lives of ordinary people. Through limited dialogue, the Protectors had discovered that Destroyers called ordinary people “natives” or “NPCs,” called the Protectors “bosses” or “minor monsters.” This game-style vocabulary demonstrated that the Destroyers thought themselves superior and didn’t regard others as intelligent life forms. In order to accomplish their missions, Destroyers would conceal their identities, take on the appearance of ordinary people, but when their identities were revealed, they would kill without hesitation.

For the safety of all the ordinary people in the mall, You Zhengping and the others had to be patient, wait for Zhen Li to leave the mall and go somewhere with few people before they acted.

“Boss.” Cen Xiao’s voice came from his earpiece. “I’ve seen Yu Hua, he’s next to Zhen Li.”

“What!” You Zhengping’s heart tightened. Yu Hua was an ordinary person. He couldn’t withstand a single punch from a Destroyer. He couldn’t get hurt!

Following Cen Xiao’s directions, You Zhengping, wearing the handsome uncle’s face, hurried over to Yu Hua. This was an arcade; Yu Hua and Zhen Li were playing Whac-A-Mole back-to-back.

You Zhengping: “...”

Was Yu Hua...that stressed? So this whole week, when he couldn’t find work, had he been coming to the arcade to play Whac-A-Mole to relieve stress?

Enduring heartache, You Zhengping exchanged money for some game tokens, sat next to Yu Hua, and played Whac-A-Mole while observing Yu Hua and Zhen Li behind him.

From the corner of his eye he watched Yu Hua, holding a little plastic hammer in his hand, missing mole after mole.

“Boss, Yu Hua really sucks at this game,” said Shi Yongfu, watching from far off.

*Shut up, Yu Hua was an academically and morally excellent student, he definitely didn’t play any games, it’s normal for him to be bad at them, don’t talk about him like that!* You Zhengping was sitting next to Yu Hua and had to conceal his identity. He couldn’t yell directly at his underling; he could only retort internally.

—

Yu Hua had wavered between “laundering money” and looking for work, then had finally decided that he had to proactively face the fact of his abilities inexplicably being unsealed and find a way to get used to his strength so he would promptly be able to return to work.

Restoring his identity as a normal person was more important than “laundering money.”

So he had chosen to go to the arcade, planning to practice controlling his strength by playing Whac-A-Mole.

Yu Hua whacked moles for an entire half an hour without hitting one. He sighed lengthily. He hadn’t been like this before.

In the past, Yu Hua had possessed the power to destroy a planet, but he had been able to use that power to gently brush away an ant on his shoulder without harming the ant at all.

Before, he had perfected his powers. But now, he couldn’t even control the physical strength to lift a few tons. Fifteen years of normal life had set him back too far.

Fifteen years ago, after clearing the last level and becoming a legend among countless worlds, Yu Hua had chosen an unopened ordinary world and become an ordinary person.

The System had said that countless levelers had been lost in this world, and that the world’s defense screen had gradually grown stronger. In a few more decades, the Chief Deity world would lose control over this world. The Chief Deity had also warned Yu Hua that an unopened world was very dangerous for levelers. If he sealed his powers, it was likely that he would die forever in that world, like an ordinary native.

Yu Hua thought that that was good. That was the ending he yearned for most.

After arriving in this world fifteen years ago, he had immediately sealed the outflow of his powers, from then on living the peaceful life he had constantly longed for.

Why would the seal on his powers suddenly weaken? Yu Hua couldn’t come up with an answer no matter how hard he tried.

Next to him, the uncle’s hands flew, whacking all the moles and getting full marks. Yu Hua turned his face, looking enviously at the uncle beside him, thinking, *It really is good to be normal. If I lowered this hammer, this game machine... No, the game machine along with the arcade floor may both be done for.*

Whac-A-Mole didn’t suit him. He would go shoot hoops.

Yu Hua stood up melancholically, ready to practice with a different game.

The “middle-aged” You Zhengping: “...”

He really wanted to follow Yu Hua, but Zhen Li, sitting in front of the game machine behind him, hadn’t moved; he couldn’t abandon his post.

What should he do!

You Zhengping was extremely annoyed.

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You Zhengping: Requesting assistance. My husband can't find a job after losing his, and he's wallowing in games. How can I help him? Urgent, I'm waiting online!

## CHAPTER 6

"Oh..." Zhen Li, sitting behind You Zhengping, sighed lengthily.

Zhen Li took out his phone and opened the mission prompt that only he could see: *Find the final boss who has been hiding in this underdeveloped world for fifteen years and kill him; the victor will become the next clearer, take all the powers and items he has obtained in the game to the real world, and have one wish granted.*

This was a hidden mission the System had suddenly issued a few days ago. It was also called a shortcut mission.

According to the System's exacting rules, wanting to clear was total lunacy. A great master had once calculated that to finish the game entirely, you had to go through over a hundred worlds. And the difficulty level gradually escalated, with each world having mortal dangers. Even if you cleared, you probably wouldn't be human anymore, but a machine without emotions.

In all of history, only one person had fully cleared, fifteen years ago. After clearing, this person had disappeared. Some people said his powers had reached the level of a god's. It was likely he could have killed the Chief Deity and become the new ruler of creation.

Zhen Li didn't understand that. How could a person who had been tortured by the System for thousands of years choose to become the new Chief Deity and torture other people who were suffering like he had?

At the time, a temporary teammate who had gone through over ten levels had told Zhen Li that a person who had lived thousands of years and had powers far greater than the average person would probably see ordinary people like ants. You couldn't analyze his thoughts using an average person's way of thinking. He had become a god. A god's attitude towards humanity would only be pitiless and domineering.

Originally, no one could believe that there was someone who could finish the game. The majority of levelers were like Zhen Li, choosing to get by. It didn't matter who they got by with. They lived day to day, staying in each world as long as they could. Who knew whether they would die in the next world?

Until the first clearer had appeared fifteen years earlier and given everyone hope.

So there really was someone who could escape the System forever. So it really was possible to leave this never-ending cruel survival game.

Everyone began to strive to finish levels, not getting by passively anymore, but all these years later, there had been no second clearer.

When Zhen Li had once more given up entirely, a hidden mission had suddenly unlocked. If you completed this mission, you could become a clearer. It wasn't only Zhen Li; quite a few people had triggered the hidden mission. These people had apparently formed a Clearing League, wanting to clear together.

But this mission was very dangerous. No one really knew how powerful the final boss was, but this unopened world was illustrious. Over hundreds of years, not a single player had made it through this world alive. No one knew how dangerous this world was, but it was definitely certain death.

Zhen Li was only a new leveler. While he'd received the hidden mission, he hadn't dared to go to this frightening world to die. He'd only wanted to keep drifting along, living from one world to the next.

But he really was unlucky. He had been caught by the Clearing League's people. The league's boss didn't dare to go to the unopened world to investigate for himself, so he had forced Zhen Li to come test the waters; if he hadn't gone, he would have been killed.

All around was death, so he may as well go try his luck. What if his luck was good and he cleared?

So Zhen Li had accepted the assignment and was conveyed to this world.

Before entering the world, Zhen Li used all the defenses he had equipped from the System, afraid that he would be killed as soon as he entered.

When he woke up, he found he was lying in a pitch-black room and was so scared he didn't dare to move. He only dared to get up and turn on the lights after lying down for a whole day. Then he discovered that he had been lying in a basement.

Zhen Li thought that perhaps this was an extreme survival little dark room game. Of course he couldn't open the door; if he opened it, there would be a trap, and he would definitely die.

He searched the room for clues, but this game was too hard. He couldn't find anything. He could only wait to die.

Zhen Li was trapped in this basement for fully seven days. He ate all the instant noodles and drank all the bottled water in the room, then began to starve. On the seventh day, he lay on the



bed and pulled up the System control panel to pick out an item that would give him a painless death. He didn't want to die of hunger.

Just then, there was a knock on the basement door. Zhen Li curled up under the quilt in fear, his whole body trembling.

After knocking for a while, the person walked in. Zhen Li bit the corner of the quilt and started to request the item and resign himself to his fate.

Just as he was about to click "confirm request," someone tore away the quilt. Standing in front of him, the landlady said, "I sent you a WeChat message, and you didn't answer. I called you, and didn't pick up. You're still a student. If you don't have money to pay the rent, I can give you a two day extension, but you can't disappear without saying a word!"

Zhen Li: "..."

Shaking, he got several hundred yuan out of his wallet and said, "If I give you the money, will you not kill me? Is this enough money?"

The landlady was astonished. "Why would I kill you? Have you spent too much time playing games at night? There's still five-hundred missing... Eh, forget it, you can give it to me with next month's. Also, the estate is taking a survey of residents. Remember to give me a copy of your residence registration booklet."

"Residence registration booklet?" Zhen Li looked foolishly at the landlady.

"What? Have you lost it? You young people are always losing things left and right. It's all right if you've lost it. Go get a residence certificate from the community center, then go to the public security bureau and make it up." Before leaving, the lady also told him, "You should get out in the sun more. There isn't a drop of color in your face."

When the landlady had gone, Zhen Li pondered for a long time, thinking that he had probably completed the initial mission by surviving in the little dark room for seven days, so the landlady had come to issue his next mission.

"It's lucky I resisted going out, or else I'd be dead by now." Zhen Li inwardly rejoiced that his passive mentality had saved his life.

After going out and getting familiar with the terrain, he found the community center and had the certificate issued.

After getting the certificate, no one gave him his next mission. Zhen Li was hungry, so he went to the shopping mall next door to eat.

He spent some time getting familiar with using his phone. After determining that there was still a good amount of money left in his savings, he started going all over the mall and eating.

Zhen Li's previous world had been an apocalypse world. He hadn't been able to eat his fill the whole time. Then he had starved for seven days in the basement. Now he wanted to eat everything he saw.

So he used his points to equip an alternate dimension stomach that could only hold food, then began to stuff himself in the shopping mall.

When he had finally eaten to his psychological satisfaction, he passed by the arcade and heard an employee saying that there was an event today. If you accumulated ten thousand game tickets, you would be entered in a lottery; there was a grand prize hidden among the prizes.

Zhen Li, who was extremely sensitive to missions, thought that this must be a hint for the next mission after getting the residence certificate. If he could only win the grand prize, the prize would definitely be a hint towards the final boss.

This world really was dangerous. Luckily, he was careful and prudent.

Wearing his showy and alluring clothes, Zhen Li played Whac-A-Mole for a while in the arcade. He was pretty good at games, but you couldn't win many tickets playing Whac-A-Mole, and he was tired of playing it, so he got up, left the Whac-A-Mole machine, and followed a native at random. The person he was following went to the basketball throwing area.

"Basketball..." Zhen Li got out his game tokens. "My throwing technique is pretty good. I can play that next!"

—

While You Zhengping was in a dilemma, not knowing whether to keep his eyes fixed on the mission target or to follow Yu Hua, he saw Zhen Li get up and follow Yu Hua to the basketball game area.

Yu Hua chose a basketball game machine and carefully picked up a basketball. He looked hesitantly at the hoop, then slowly tossed the basketball. The basketball flew up vertically for about a meter, then fell down. Never mind getting into the hoop, it didn't even get into the shooting area.

At this point, Zhen Li, who was standing next to him, had already made several shots. Zhen Li pumped his fist. Hey, he really was a perfect shot!

Yu Hua tossed the second basketball. This time, the basketball struggled to the shooting area and fell without touching the hoop.

Zhen Li noticed the native playing the same game next to him and stopped to watch Yu Hua shooting hoops. He couldn't resist laughing out loud.

Yu Hua knew he looked bad now. Since coming to this world, his temper had always been good. He'd never quarreled with anyone. Hearing that someone was laughing at him, Yu Hua slowly turned his head to look at him, saw that he looked young, probably still only a student, and he didn't make an issue of it.

Young people always had to show off a little. Yu Hua remembered that You Zhengping had also had that kind of temperament when they had just started dating. He and his friends would fool around in the car, making fun of each other.

When the two of them had parted ways after the blind date, Yu Hua had secretly followed You Zhengping. When they'd parted, he had mentioned wanting to see You Zhengping home, and You Zhengping had refused, saying that it would be embarrassing for a grown man to be seen home. Yu Hua had considerably not insisted, but when You Zhengping had left, he had stealthily followed.

After all, You Zhengping was too delicate; an ordinary pair scissors composed of iron and carbon could wound his skin. Yu Hua had never seen such a soft and adorable human. He was worried about You Zhengping going home on his own.

From a distance, he saw You Zhengping come up beside the off-road car. Cen Xiao and the others got out of the car, took off You Zhengping's wig, and pointed at his rainbow-colored head, laughing loudly.

You Zhengping wasn't taking this lying down. He held down their heads and gave them a beating, then snatched away the spray-on dye and sprayed all of their hair. Everyone had rainbow-colored heads; no one could make fun of anyone else.

Cen Xiao was very vain...and he put stock in attractiveness index. Though he couldn't measure up to You Zhengping, having this done to his hair still made him livid. He quickly got out a little knife and, with the help of his friends, he shaved off patches of You Zhengping's hair.

In the end, no one got the best of it. They went together to the hairdresser's to get their heads shaved clean and wait for their hair to slowly grow back.

Looking at their relaxed laughing faces and casual closeness as they played around, Yu Hua was very envious. You Zhengping, surrounded by his friends (getting held down and having his head shaved), seemed to be glowing. Yu Hua yearned for the friendship You Zhengping and his friends had. He knew there was no way for him to ever integrate with others. But there was nothing to be done. He would protect You Zhengping, protect their friendship. That way it would be like he had it, too.

Clearing his head of his brief recollection, Yu Hua nodded to Zhen Li, who was laughing him, then uncaringly picked up the third basketball to train his strength.

He didn't care about being laughed at, but You Zhengping was furious. Zhen Li was a Destroyer. Not only was he threatening the world, he was also laughing at You Zhengping's husband. It was simply unbearable!

"The peacock has his eye on the chick, I can't sit around being a sitting duck," You Zhengping said to his companions over the walkie-talkie.

"Peacock" was code for this mission's target, and "chick" was code for a Protector's family member. These terms were all part of the Protectors' coded language; only they could understand it.

"You can approach the peacock, but you can't provoke him. You have to protect the safety of the chick and all the birds," Cen Xiao ordered.

"All the birds" meant the ordinary people in the mall.

So You Zhengping, wearing the handsome uncle's face, went up next to Zhen Li, stared at him, then said, "Young man, you shoot very accurately. Would you like a contest?"

He wanted to take a risk getting close to Zhen Li, find leaks in Zhen Li's conversation, and infer the Destroyer's true aim!

When Zhen Li saw You Zhengping, his eyes lit up. As expected, there would be a prompt after he went into the arcade. It seemed that if he beat this man, he could get a clue about the final boss!

The three of them were standing in a row. Zhen Li and You Zhengping went into contest mode, while next to them, Yu Hua slowly picked up basketballs, tossed, missed, tossed, missed.

Finally a basketball touched the hoop. Yu Hua pumped his fist happily. He had finally found the knack of controlling his strength!

Next to him, Zhen Li picked up five basketballs at once and said to You Zhengping, "I didn't expect you to be so awesome. You threw four basketballs at once, and they all went in. Let's do five!"

But You Zhengping looked past Zhen Li at Yu Hua's glad look at getting the basketball to touch the hoop. He couldn't resist wiping the corner of his eye.

His Yu Hua really had suffered too much lately.

—

Author's Note:

Zhen Li: A clue will drop if I beat this man.

You Zhengping: I have to protect my beloved and the ordinary people in this mall.

Yu Hua: The basketball touched the hoop, I'm glad, yay!

## CHAPTER 7

Because Zhen Li and You Zhengping had accomplished the magnificent feat of getting three basketballs in at once, quite a few of the people strolling around the arcade had come over to the basketball area to watch the two great masters shoot hoops.

By the time the two of them got five balls in at once, there was a large audience watching the worldwide basketball throwing championship. There was even someone recording it with their phone and posting it online.

In the recording, a very attractive young man wearing a glistening green jacket was competing at shooting hoops with a handsome uncle with a perfect figure, whose face showed the marks of time. These two people's attractiveness, bearing, and technique were all first-rate. As soon as the recording was posted, it was instantly reposted countless times.

And among the characters in the recording, sometimes a figure would appear. This person's attractiveness and figure were in no way inferior to the other two, but his shooting technique was appalling.

The sharp-eyed netizens discovered this person—

[First I was sighing over the two great masters' faces...ahem, the two great masters' techniques. When I was getting ready to kneel, I saw that person in the corner of the recording, and I stood back up. I may not measure up to the great masters, but I'm better than next door.]

[The three of them are standing in a row. Could I ask that person who can't get the ball into the hoop no matter what he does, what gave him the courage to fight alongside two gods?]

[Probably because of his attractiveness. After all, the three of them are all just as handsome...]

[If we're talking about attractiveness, I have to kneel again. I have no way to attain that kind of attractiveness.]

[Everyone is cheering for the two great masters' technique. Was I the only one cheering when the hot guy next to pumped his fist when he finally got the basketball to touch the hoop? Poor guy, don't you see how hard he's trying?]

[I'm also cheering for next door. He looked so adorable when he pumped his fist in celebration.]

[Go, handsome, go! While your technique can't measure up to the other two, you won't lose to them in attractiveness!]

[I looked at the address, and it's at the shopping mall down the street from me. I'm dropping the unfinished hotpot in front of me to rush to the arcade to look at the hot guys. What's important isn't how good their basketball technique is, it's how good their faces are.]

[I'm dropping my Häagen-Dazs to come. What the hell is it doing keeping me from looking at hot guys?]

[I'm dropping my movie ticket to come, what the hell, the actors aren't as good-looking as the basketball-playing hot guys.]

As the recording spread, many people at the mall came to the arcade. When Zhen Li was struggling to hold six basketballs with two hands, there were cheers and applause all around.

Hearing the surrounding voices, Yu Hua looked around himself and saw that he was surrounded by people whistling and cheering. It made Yu Hua feel instantly uneasy.

He didn't like the feeling of being surrounded by people, he didn't want to attract attention, and he was only a social failure who had lost his job. If You Zhengping found out he hadn't gone to look for work but had instead gone to fool around at the arcade, You Zhengping would definitely be hurt.

Yu Hua knew that You Zhengping would never think he was useless. His husband was willing to wage war on the world for him. Before they were married, Yu Hua had asked You Zhengping, if Yu Hua couldn't earn money one day, what would they do?

You Zhengping had answered, "What are you scared of? When the time comes, I'll go out and do physical labor to support you. I'm very strong!"

Then he had flexed his arms at Yu Hua to show off his biceps. You Zhengping had seen Yu Hua smiling in disbelief and had taken him to the gym, lifting a hundred-pound barbell one-handed, indicating that if he went to do physical labor, he would definitely be able to earn a lot of money.

Yu Hua had only been asking in passing. Who could have known that You Zhengping was so earnest that he really had considered the possibility and wanted to support him with a strength that could lift a hundred-pound barbell one-handed? Yu Hua had felt then as though he had been wrapped in soft and steady warm water. He had quietly indulged himself for a few seconds, enjoying the gentleness coming from You Zhengping.

But he didn't want You Zhengping to support him, and he especially didn't want his husband to discover that he wasn't attending to his proper duties. Yu Hua put down the basketball, looked at the crowd, then quietly turned and left the basketball area.

The observing crowd was disappointed to see him leave. Someone even wanted to urge him to stay.

Yu Hua saw there was someone blocking his way and lowered his eyes slightly to look at this person. The look in his eyes was cold and distant. It made the person who wanted to encourage Yu Hua to stay immediately back up a few steps, not daring to try speaking to him again.

The handsome uncle You Zhengping had been holding six basketballs and planning to show the Destroyer Zhen Li how mighty the Protectors were, but when Yu Hua left, You Zhengping suddenly lost interest in relative superiority.

He dropped the basketballs and said, "I really can't manage six basketballs. You win."

The young people around them called, "Uncle, you haven't tried yet. Try it, maybe you can do it!"

Being called "uncle" for the first time, You Zhengping touched his face uneasily and said, "I've gotten old. I'm not as fit as a young man anymore."

Then he picked up the suit jacket lying on the shelf next to him and casually draped it over himself. The sleeves of the ink-patterned shirt were rolled up, showing thin but powerful arms. You Zhengping put one hand in his pocket and held the jacket with the other hand. He looked like he was easily conceding defeat. In fact, he wanted to chase Yu Hua.

"Wait!" Zhen Li panicked. What about his clue? Wasn't he supposed to get a clue if he won?

Seeing Zhen Li holding him back, You Zhengping turned alertly, wondering whether this Destroyer wanted to use the safety of all the people around them to threaten him. The look in You Zhengping's eyes sharpened, his expression filling with danger. The Destroyer was already right in front of him. Even if he wanted to hurt the people around him, You Zhengping would be able to trap him in his space.

You Zhengping was a rare spatial ability user. He could imprison or protect a person in his spaces. The Protectors' leadership had been extremely pleased and surprised when they had discovered You Zhengping. Before, the issue that the Protectors had been most worried about had been Destroyers hurting ordinary people. But You Zhengping could trap a Destroyer inside a space, and he could also use the spaces to protect ordinary people. His ability was made for protection.

At such a close distance, You Zhengping was certain of being able to capture Zhen Li. But there were too many people around, and there was still someone filming. He didn't want to cause more problems, so he smiled easily, imitating Yu Hua. "Was there something else?"

Zhen Li took a deep breath, got out his phone, and said, "How about...we friend each other and swap pointers another time?"

Seeing him voluntarily extending an olive branch, the surrounding observers began to clap wildly. From time to time came a girl's yell of, "I ship it, I ship it!"

You Zhengping saw that Yu Hua had already gone far away. He didn't know where he had gone. He blinked, covering up the struggle and suffering in his heart. He wanted so much to be by Yu Hua's side, to comfort him, to encourage him, to make his husband cheer up.

But that wouldn't do. He was a Protector. He couldn't abandon his work. He had to eliminate these vicious Destroyers.

You Zhengping blinked again, his expression steadying once more.

He put his arm around Zhen Li's shoulders and warmly said, "It doesn't have to be another time. Do you have time now? Let me get you something to eat."

*Here it comes!* Zhen Li thought happily. When they were alone, would the middle-aged be able to tell him the clue?

He turned and waved at the observers, saying, "This gentleman and I are going to exchange tips. Everyone scatter, we'll arrange to meet another day."

"Exchange what tips?" someone jeered. "Basketball, or something else?"

You Zhengping composed his expression, thinking, *I'm a married person, what's with the shipping? How infuriating!* He sacrificed so much for work!

Fortunately, the ordinary-looking Cen Xiao and other underlings were concealed among the crowd. They took the lead: "They've met someone who can appreciate their talents, what are you all gawking at? You can participate when you can get five basketballs into the hoop."

The underlings worked very hard to disperse the crowd. You Zhengping took Zhen Li's hand and smiled faintly. "What do you want to eat?"

"Whatever you want." *The important thing isn't the food, it's the clue!* Zhen Li thought excitedly as he shook hands.

Arm around Zhen Li's shoulders, You Zhengping took him as far as possible from the crowd. When they left the arcade, he suddenly discovered Yu Hua buying scratch-and-win lottery tickets at a lottery ticket stand in a corner. He was so upset he nearly cried.

Fortunately he had received specialized training and succeeded in covering up his true feelings.

Not giving anything away, You Zhengping walked by a restroom with Zhen Li. Cen Xiao had just told him in secret that they had already gotten everyone out of that restroom. He could act.

"I'll go wash my hands first after touching the basketballs," You Zhengping said, pointing naturally to the restroom.



"I'll go, too." Zhen Li raised his eyebrows. There seemed to be no one in the restroom. It was rather suitable for talking about clues.

The two of them went in together. You Zhengping stood in front of the sink, looking at Zhen Li in the mirror. Not giving anything away, he said, "Your shooting technique really is good. What work do you do? Does it have to do with basketball?"

"No, I'm just an ordinary student," Zhen Li said, remembering the materials the System had given him. "Basketball is only a hobby."

"Really?" You Zhengping said calmly. "Today is a weekday. Don't you have class?"

Here came the choice! Zhen Li's class schedule showed that he had many classes today, but instead he was amusing himself at the arcade. Should he acknowledge that he was cutting class, or should he find an excuse?

"I'm cutting class." Zhen Li resolved to gain the man's faith with sincerity. "Maybe I had some mystical sense that I would meet you today, and that's why I came to the arcade."

You Zhengping: "..."

No good, he couldn't control his impulse to beat this person up anymore.

Cen Xiao was just then reporting the circumstances to their superiors. When he received permission, he said to You Zhengping, "Boss, the higher authorities have approved you to take him alive!"

After all this time, You Zhengping had finally gotten permission. He pressed down on the back of Zhen Li's neck with his palm. "Really? I also think it was fate!"

Then his palm firmly gripped Zhen Li. At the same time, his thoughts moved, and he released a space that only had enough room in it to contain one person, firmly trapping Zhen Li inside.

To prevent against Zhen Li using something like a spatial ability to escape, You Zhengping's hand was also closed up in the space.

"Done," You Zhengping said.

Cen Xiao and the others charged into the restroom and saw that You Zhengping's right hand had vanished in midair. Shi Yongfu waved his hand a few times in the place where You Zhengping's right hand had been, saying in wonder, "Are Zhen Li and your hand here?"

"Yes," You Zhengping said, frowning, "he's using a heat weapon to attack my hand. It hurts a little. Let's hurry back to the base!"

“Why can’t we see your hand or touch it, if it’s still in the same place?” Shi Yongfu asked.

“It’s a parallel space. Things I put in the spaces exist in a space and time parallel to us. It’s not that I create an invisible space, it’s that I open a space separate from this world,” You Zhengping explained with some satisfaction.

And all abilities would be weakened to less than one tenth of their power in his spaces. Zhen Li, trapped in the space, seemed to be attacking his hand with a gun. With the restriction of the space, You Zhengping only felt a slight pain. He wasn’t seriously injured.

Despite this, if Zhen Li used too fearsome a weapon, You Zhengping’s hand might still not be able to withstand it. They had to return to the base as soon as possible.

Director Xiao had ordered them to do their best to take the Destroyer alive. Their world had been safe for fifteen years. A Destroyer appearing again meant that something was wrong. They had to think of a way to learn the reason from the Destroyer.

Even though Destroyers who were questioned might commit suicide, they still had to try.

They quickly took Zhen Li back to the base. This was an underground base that could withstand a nuclear bomb. Director Xiao and other formerly illustrious Protectors put on face-changing masks and nodded to You Zhengping. You Zhengping opened his space, letting Zhen Li out.

At this moment, Zhen Li’s rather good-looking face was covered in tears. He was too careless. How could a world where all the levelers had been lost be so simple to solve? It was a trap, it was all a trap!

He looked hatefully at the handsome uncle who had caught him. “Who are you people? I don’t have any money. Why did you kidnap me?”

Zhen Li knew that the Chief Deity didn’t permit levelers to tell the worlds’ natives about the System. If the levelers were questioned, the device the Chief Deity had planted in their heads would force them to commit suicide. So he had had to pretend that he didn’t know anything. He absolutely couldn’t reveal his identity!

Everyone: “...”

Was this person stupid?

The handsome uncle You Zhengping sighed and raised his injured hand, saying, “I used a space to catch you, and you used a heat weapon to shred my hand to bits. At this point, are you still pretending to be an ordinary person?”

Director Xiao shook his head. This was the worst grade of Destroyer he had ever seen. It was fortunate You Zhengping’s performance had far surpassed his imagination. Each time he saw

You Zhengping and Yu Hua together, Director Xiao would think that perhaps this Protector that the country had focused on educating was already past his prime. But the abilities You Zhengping had demonstrated in this action were admirable. It seemed he was only an idiot in love. He was stupid in front of Yu Hua, but the rest of the time he was quite normal.

“You already know my identity?” Zhen Li said hopelessly. “How could you know my identity? Did that final big boss send you? I’m really stupid, I thought you were there to give me a clue. I didn’t think you were an enemy. Of course it’s a final mission, how could a newbie like me pass? I’m a goner, boo-hoo...”

He couldn’t take the pressure anymore and began to wail.

Everyone: “...”

—

While the Protectors joined forces to grill Zhen Li, Yu Hua, at home, had used all his strength to make dinner and was waiting quietly for You Zhengping to come home when he received a message from You Zhengping: *The public security bureau is short on field personnel. We’re going to help. I’m working overtime today. I may not come home.*

Yu Hua put down his phone and looked at the table full of food, feeling a little sad.

From the time when they had gotten married to now, You Zhengping had always been idle, arriving home precisely on time. He had never worked overtime.

Yu Hua thought, *He must think I’m under too much stress. He’s voluntarily requested overtime to earn extra money.*

It was because Yu Hua was useless.

As Yu Hua was reflecting bitterly, his new phone lit up. A familiar interface appeared spontaneously on the phone.

Yu Hua unlocked the phone and saw a mission prompt: *A leveler has been captured by locals. Clearer 001 is requested to destroy/rescue this leveler as soon as possible, or else the System will use the arrested leveler to publicize Clearer 001’s identity in this world. The time limit is 24 hours.*

—

Author’s Note:

You Zhengping: We Protectors have received specialized training. No matter how sad we are, we won’t cry. Unless we can’t resist.

## CHAPTER 8

Yu Hua stared at his phone for a while. There were no waves in his heart.

Like before, he put You Zhengping's tableware in the place where his husband usually sat, as though You Zhengping were there across from him, calmly enjoying this dinner.

After eating his own meal, Yu Hua got up and went to You Zhengping's seat and ate all of his husband's food as well.

After eating two people's food on his own, Yu Hua sat in You Zhengping's seat, recalling his long thousands of years of loneliness.

Eating his own food just now, Yu Hua had looked at the empty seat across from him and felt very lonely. He'd come over to You Zhengping's seat wanting to create the illusion that both of them were there, but in the moment he'd sat in that chair, he had felt even more alone, because Yu Hua had found that even his own seat was empty.

He had turned on the TV. The voice of the news anchor and the sound of chopsticks lightly touching the bowl had reverberated inside the room. Under the lively background noise, the room had seemed to be empty.

Now the news broadcast ended and the sound of the weather forecast's Fishermen's Song began, following a gurgle of flowing water. Yu Hua calmly washed the dishes.

Yu Hua liked the weather forecast's background music. This tune gave him a kind of feeling of calm contentment. He liked to wash dishes to the sound of the Fishermen's Song, from time to time looking at You Zhengping sprawled on the couch enjoying the memory of dinner. Or he would look out the window at the setting sun. These comfortable, languid scenes made Yu Hua feel that he was truly living.

Yu Hua had lived for thousands of years, striving each day to clear. He had known countless varied and grotesque worlds, experienced unnumbered dangers. He'd once had teammates. These people had either died in cruel survival games, or they had had different ideas from him and had gradually drifted away.

He'd wanted to defeat the System, to possess supreme power. He had walked forward on the great road to freedom, losing countless friends, getting himself battered and bloody. He had looked up at the starry sky, struggling for the sake of one goal. When he had at last succeeded and become the first clearer, able to possess endless life and power, Yu Hua had turned his head, looked at the road he had walked, and found that there was only loneliness at the end of this road.

As soon as he had thought that there would be countless more days like this, that he would have to endure unending loneliness, Yu Hua had been afraid.

Strange. When he had been weak and faced undefeatable enemies, he had been able to summon boundless courage. But when he had become so strong that no one could oppose him, Yu Hua had been frightened.

Frightened of the endless life ahead, and frightened of himself, on the point of becoming emotionless.

While struggling towards a difficult goal, he had always shirked life, shirked an ordinary person's trivial reality.

So Yu Hua had made his final wish. He wanted to become an ordinary person, going briefly but peacefully and truthfully through one last life. That was the end he had chosen for himself.

When the dishes had been washed, the weather forecast ended. Yu Hua turned off the TV. In the quiet room, he picked up his phone once more.

There were two choices before him. Choice one was to listen to the System's command, rescue or kill that leveler, and be controlled by the System from then on, gradually leaving his current life, sooner or later changing back into what he had been at the beginning. Choice two was to ignore the System and let it reveal his identity; when the time came, could he still live a peaceful life with You Zhengping like before?

Yu Hua didn't want either of these.

Yu Hua immediately eliminated choice one and considered what method the System would use to publicize his identity after he refused.

This was an unopened world. Yu Hua had originally chosen this world because he knew the System had no way to control it entirely. So the System had no way to broadcast information openly in this world; even if it did broadcast the information, it wasn't certain that anyone would believe it.

The only thing the System could do was to use the leveler's mouth to reveal his identity.

Yu Hua had had dealings with the System for so many years. He knew that the System couldn't turn an unopened world's people into levelers. All levelers were randomly collected by the System from the worlds it controlled completely. The System was dedicated to making the levelers open new worlds for the sake of expanding its sphere of influence.

Therefore, the only person who could expose his identity was the leveler, the one who had apparently been captured by the locals.

The only way to make the leveler keep his mouth shut seemed to be to kill him, but that was precisely what the System wanted. Yu Hua didn't want that.

It seemed that at the moment there was only one thing to do.

Yu Hua pressed on the newly downloaded System app. The app had no option to uninstall it. The option also didn't appear in the phone's user settings.

The wily System had shut off the phone's uninstall function and was constantly reminding Yu Hua that he had an uncompleted mission.

Yu Hua bit through his right-hand index finger and dripped fresh blood onto the phone's screen. The drop of blood fell on the app.

When he pressed on the app this time, the option to uninstall finally appeared. Yu Hua clicked "uninstall." The System warned him: *If the mission is not completed within 24 hours, Clearer 001's identity will be exposed. Clearer 001 is requested to carefully consider whether to uninstall this System.*

"I won't consider," Yu Hua said firmly.

After uninstalling the System, Yu Hua clearly felt his own power strengthening again. In order to uninstall the app, he had forced an ability to unlock. This made the power he had managed to get accustomed to soar again.

Yu Hua stood in front of a mirror and reached out his injured index finger. There was still blood on the finger. Pressing hard, Yu Hua smeared the blood on the mirror.

—

Zhen Li was being grilled by the Protectors. He had just carelessly revealed his identity and told them about the final big boss in this world. He thought he was a goner for sure this time.

The System didn't permit clearers to reveal things concerning itself. As soon as they let it out, the clearers would self-destruct.

After letting out the fact about the final big boss, Zhen Li hugged his own arms in fear and tearfully said, "Stop asking, I'm going to self-destruct."

Director Xiao and the rest of the older generation of Protectors had experience. They knew that the force of a Destroyer self-destructing would be very strong. Hearing Zhen Li say this, everyone quickly retreated from the sturdy room and watched Zhen Li over the surveillance feed.

One minute, two minutes...half an hour passed, and Zhen Li hadn't self-destructed. He was curled up and hugging himself as though he was dying, looking pitiful.

Cen Xiao couldn't resist saying, "Is he really a Destroyer? Maybe he's just an idiot? Have we got the wrong person?"

All their studies had taught them that Destroyers were frightening and extremely dangerous, but this one seemed pathetic.

“I’m not very certain, either. He seems different from previous Destroyers.” Even Director Xiao was doubtful. “He just revealed the fact that there’s a frightening Destroyer hiding in this world, but he didn’t self-destruct like before... Could he really be just an ordinary person with delusional disorder?”

“How could that be!” You Zhengping raised his damaged hand. “My hand was so seriously injured when I captured him with the space. Did he do this with his teeth?”

“It looks kind of like cigarette burns,” Cen Xiao said, looking closely.

“Abilities trapped in my spaces are reduced to a tenth of their power. If you multiply this power by ten, you get a firearm,” You Zhengping said, pointing to his hand.

Seeing that a long time had passed and Zhen Li hadn’t self-destructed, the Protectors carefully returned to the room. Zhen Li saw that they had returned and he hadn’t died. He thought that he was about to suffer an unknown amount of torture. He was scared.

Just as You Zhengping and the others came in, Zhen Li looked up and suddenly saw a mirror floating in midair in front of him. These words were written on the mirror in blood: “If you listen to my instructions, you’ll live.”

Zhen Li thought he was hallucinating. He rubbed his eyes and saw the words change. “Pretend you can’t see the mirror and act according to my instructions, or else I’ll kill you.”

There was also a bloody dagger at the end of these words. The point of the dagger was aimed at Zhen Li.

Zhen Li sucked in a breath, faced the Protectors questioning him, wiped away his years, and said according to the instructions, “I’ll tell you, I’ll tell you everything.”

Director Xiao and the other old Protectors exchanged looks. This was their first time seeing such a cooperative Destroyer. Their vigilance rose.

You couldn’t write too many words on the mirror. Yu Hua only wrote the general idea and left Zhen Li to make up the rest himself.

Luckily, Zhen Li knew how to make up a story. He combined his own real situation with the mirror’s prompting and obediently related: “About seven days ago, a new program appeared on my phone. I couldn’t uninstall it. It told me I had to fulfill a mission, and if I failed, I would be wiped out.”

At this point, Zhen Li quaked internally. Saying this amounted to revealing the System’s secrets. He would self-destruct after saying it.

But the bloody words on the mirror had told him to set his mind at ease, so Zhen Li did his best to keep calm. He hadn't thought that he really wouldn't die.

Director Xiao picked up Zhen Li's phone and used Zhen Li's face to unlock it with facial recognition. He searched through the phone and said, "I don't see the app you told us about."

"I tried before, other people can't see it, as though it's my secret," Zhen Li said. "This week, I've been hiding at home investigating the phone. I discovered that what the System says is true. This morning I equipped an alternate dimension stomach, and I could eat a lot without gaining weight."

The bloody words had instructed him to tell some of his true experiences concerning the System. He could mix truth and lies. Zhen Li thought that he had been captured at the mall, so he talked about himself using the System at the mall. "I also used the System to equip a basketball throwing technique, though there was a time limit on it. It lost effect after an hour. And when you caught me, I used the laser gun ability to try to escape. But I failed."

This matched perfectly with the results of You Zhengping and the others' investigation.

Director Xiao nodded and said, "What did the System tell you to do?"

"It said that there was a big boss hidden in this world, and to protect the world, protect the ordinary people, I had to kill the big boss." Zhen Li looked at all of them. "The System also said that I would die if I failed the mission. If I revealed its secrets, I would also die. Are you the big boss's subordinates? Are you going to kill me?"

Director Xiao and the others: "..."

No, this Destroyer's style was completely different from what they were familiar with!

—

Author's Note:

Zhen Li: Huh? Why didn't I die?

Yu Hua: Because I'm holding down the System for you. Please start your performance.

## CHAPTER 9

"How much of what he said was true, do you think?" When the interrogation ended, Director Xiao left behind two team members to watch Zhen Li while the others went to a soundproofed room to discuss.



Cen Xiao cleaned up the transcript of the interrogation, printed it out, and gave each person a copy. A Protector of similar age to Director Xiao said, "Truth mixed with lies, I think. He's a good liar."

He laughed lightly, seeming to be fondly remembering the past. "This is my first time seeing such a stupid 'Destroyer.' Adding in the fact that he voluntarily revealed the phone app and the final big boss without self-destructing, perhaps he really isn't a 'Destroyer.'"

The Protectors weren't so easily fooled. They were battle-tried and had seen too many Destroyers of all kinds. They had experienced every kind of trap. They wouldn't easily believe Zhen Li's story.

Director Xiao said, "I've had the technicians thoroughly test that phone countless times. They're certain the app Zhen Li told us about isn't on it. I also had a Protector who's skilled at detecting power investigate it. He also didn't find any unusual power. Either the power in that phone is one we can't access, dark matter energy that can't be detected, or it's a hallucination."

"Hallucination?" You Zhengping's younger generation of Protectors were at this meeting to look on and learn, to understand the Destroyers according to their big shot elders' thoughts. At the same time, they could also put forward some creative suggestions.

A Protector wearing a Zhongshan suit turned on a projector and played a video. There were a several different Destroyers in the video. These were some representative segments chosen from the surveillance camera records of public places when the Protectors had been tracking their movements after determining their identities.

In the video, the Destroyers simultaneously began talking to themselves and pointing at empty space, as though there was a giant screen in front of them.

"Through many years of analysis and exchanging information with each country's Protection Organization, we can determine that Destroyers really do have a sort of 'control panel' or 'system interface.' This interface is planted in their brains and can appear in front of the Destroyers' eyes when it's in use. Furthermore, only the Destroyers themselves can see it," Director Xiao narrated for the young Protectors. "We've never seen a Destroyer use a phone app to manipulate the interface. If everything Zhen Li says is true, then either he isn't a Destroyer, or the Destroyers' technology has deteriorated."

You Zhengping's brain turned rapidly. He remembered Zhen Li's performance at the mall and instantly seized on two times.

He pulled up the surveillance from inside the mall, cutting out images from those two times. "The first time is at 10:03 AM. After eating a hamburger on the first floor, Zhen Li rubbed his belly, burped, and showed other signs of feeling full. But right after that, he went to the second floor to buy cake. After he got the cake, he didn't eat it immediately. Instead, he clicked on his phone many times, and then started eating the cake."

The resolution on the mall's cameras was very high. You Zhengping found a camera that was facing the phone and enlarged the video. Everyone saw that Zhen Li was wildly clicking and sliding on the phone's main screen, as though he were picking out a product. The main screen didn't change the whole time. When Zhen Li had clicked heavily on the phone as though he had finally made a decision, he started bolting down the cake. Then he went to third, fourth, and fifth floors to buy food.

"From this you can see that Zhen Li was already full on the first floor, but he was still unsatisfied. He wanted to eat more. So he used the phone, paid some price, and got the ability to keep eating," You Zhengping said.

Then he found another video. It was at 12:54 PM, the scene of You Zhengping, turned into a handsome uncle, going one-on-one at shooting hoops with Zhen Li.

You Zhengping said, "My basketball throwing match with Zhen Li increased from one ball at a time, to two at a time, all the way to five. When there were two basketballs, Zhen Li hadn't touched his phone. When I increased the number of balls to three, there was a trace of stiffness in his expression. Then he called a time-out. He told me then that he had to respond to a message and took out his phone. After he clicked on his phone a few times, it was as if his basketball technique had divine assistance. He wasn't even afraid when the number of basketballs went up to five. I had to set up a space track to get five in at once. How was he doing it?"

You Zhengping hadn't seen Zhen Li's phone during the basketball throwing competition. Looking through the mall's surveillance now, he could clearly see that Zhen Li hadn't been responding to a message. He had once again been repeatedly clicking aimlessly on the phone's main screen.

The older Protectors nodded. "He really did use the phone to activate some abilities. That probably requires some price, so he wouldn't use the abilities lightly. From these points, we can confirm that it's true that there's a mysterious app on the phone. The essential nature of both the phone app and the floating interface are beyond the technology and power we understand. Our current technology has no way to detect them. But judging from the change from an interface implanted in the brain to a phone app, we can see that the Destroyers' technology level has deteriorated. Why would such a phenomenon take place?"

Director Xiao considered, then put forward his own view: "Two reasons. First, there was some special circumstance among the Destroyers, an internal conflict or a natural disaster, and that's why no Destroyers have appeared in our world for fifteen years in a row. Having recovered from that period, the Destroyers have come to our world again, but because of the special circumstance, their technology deteriorated, concretely expressed in the change in the interface and the Destroyers being unable to self-destruct.

"Second, Zhen Li isn't a Destroyer. He's just an ordinary person from our world who was chosen and used by a Destroyer to attain some goal."

Both were possible. At present they had no definitive evidence to determine which possibility was the greater likelihood. And as for how to handle Zhen Li, that would depend on his identity.

If Zhen Li were a Destroyer, then he was an enemy. The Protectors would use torture to get him to talk, learn more information from him before he self-destructed. If Zhen Li were being used, then he was a victim, and behind him there was a more frightening enemy. The Protectors may choose to keep a protective watch on him.

You Zhengping reviewed the materials and video of Zhen Li's interrogation over and over. He pressed "pause" at a certain time and said to his superiors, "Right here, doesn't it seem like he's looking at a floating interface?"

This was precisely when everyone had returned after leaving the room due to concerns that Zhen Li would self-destruct. Zhen Li, staring at You Zhengping, who had walked in first, rubbed his eyes. He seemed to be confirming You Zhengping's identity, but looking closely, his eyes looked like they were moving from right to left. Instead of looking at You Zhengping, it looked more like he was reading words written right-to-left.

The Protectors silently replayed the video of Zhen Li's interrogation. Director Xiao snorted. "If not for Xiao You's attentiveness, he have pulled one over on us."

"I don't think his panic when he was caught was an act. Zhen Li hadn't looked at the floating interface then. Only after he revealed information without self-destructing afterwards could he see the interface," the Protector in the Zhongshan suit said.

Everyone exchanged looks, feeling that everyone's views had unified.

It wasn't that something had gone wrong within the Destroyers, causing their technology to deteriorate. There was someone behind Zhen Li, and that person was the Destroyer!

"Question him again!" Director Xiao said.

—

Zhen Li curled up and squeezed his eyes shut, remembering the last words he had read on the floating mirror after the Protectors had left: "You reading words in midair will definitely be noticed when the surveillance footage is reviewed. They'll guess that someone is instigating you. When they question you the second time, you just have to invent a backstage manipulator based on the System, and they'll let you go and use you to lure in the hidden instigator. You'll be safe then. I won't give you any more hints. You have free rein."

Would it really be like this mysterious person had said? Zhen Li thought nervously.

The people who had questioned him before came back into the room. Zhen Li stood up in a dither and looked innocent. "I really did tell you everything. Not one word was a lie!"

“Really?” Director Xiao said majestically. “Then why didn’t you tell us what you read in midair just now?”

Zhen Li was surprised. He didn’t cover up his expression at all, as though he had never thought that Director Xiao and the others would find out. In reality, he was astonished at the insightfulness of the person behind the mirror. That person wasn’t even here, but they could still foresee so many things. They had even guessed how the other side would judge!

Director Xiao pulled up the video and explained everyone’s analysis. He cried out, “If you dare to lie again, we’ll execute you on the spot!”

You Zhengping and the others cooperated with Director Xiao, raising their guns and aiming them at Zhen Li’s head.

Zhen Li was terrified, but what he was afraid of wasn’t the Protectors; it was that person who could predict everything without being on the scene or showing themselves.

He raised his hands and said, “I’ll tell you, I’ll tell you. There really was a person... No, I can’t say for sure that it was a person. He installed an app on my phone and told me to act according to his orders. If I didn’t do what he said, I would die. I could use the phone to equip some abilities, but there were restrictions, like the basketball throwing ability, I could only keep it for an hour, but the alternate dimension stomach I can use for twenty years.

“What I said before about the mission being to catch a big boss wasn’t a lie. The app told me that if I found the big boss hidden in this world, I could win my freedom forever, endless money, beautiful women, and super powers. And I could have a wish granted.

“There’s something I didn’t say before. The app told me that I’m not the only one carrying out this mission. There are lots of people who want to kill the hidden big boss. Everyone is vying to complete the mission. Some people have formed a league.”

This time the Protectors believed what Zhen Li was saying. Having analyzed it, they determined that the Destroyers had divided into two forces.

One side was the big boss Zhen Li talked about having to kill. Director Xiao suspected that this big boss was that immense power from fifteen years ago. It turned out that he hadn’t left but had been hiding in their world from the beginning.

The other side, meanwhile, was the Destroyer behind Zhen Li. Maybe it was one person, or maybe it was a group. They were hunting the powerful Destroyer who had been in hiding for fifteen years.

“This is intolerable!” After reaching a conclusion, Director Xiao was mad enough to pound the desk. “The Destroyers are having a civil war and using our world as their battlefield! What do they think our world is?”

You Zhengping clenched his fist and said, “Neither side is good people. We can’t let either force go! We must chase all of them out of our world!”

“Right!” Director Xiao said solemnly. “I’ve determined to let Zhen Li go temporarily, let him act openly and do something eye-catching. This way, if there are other Destroyers in our world, we can use Zhen Li to lure them in. Xiao You, Zhen Li lives in the Xuyang District. It’s within the scope of your jurisdiction. You have to secretly observe him. Keep in mind, you absolutely can’t let him know your identity.”

You Zhengping had always used the handsome uncle’s face in contacting Zhen Li. He and his underlings hadn’t revealed their true features. Zhen Li had no idea of their identities.

“Yes, sir!” You Zhengping said, saluting. “I guarantee that I will accomplish this mission!”

Director Xiao said sincerely, “Also, I’m not worried about the other Protectors, but you, Xiao You... You’re a married person, and you live in the Xuyang District and have a very close relationship with your partner.

“You have two choices now. First, you can tell him the truth, and we’ll carefully protect Yu Hua once he understands the situation. When this is over, he’ll be able to return to normal life.

“Second, you can keep concealing it, not letting a trace slip out.

“Previously, once Protectors’ family members found out the truth, they would follow their family members during battle out of concern. Then they would be taken by the Destroyers as hostages. This led to heavy losses.

“Since then, we’ve stipulated that if a Protector wants to marry, their spouse must undergo rigorous training by the organization before marriage. Of course this rule led to marriage rates among Protectors dropping greatly.

“You lived in a peaceful age. The rule had been relaxed by the time you were married. We didn’t conduct ideological and political training for Yu Hua, so we can only adopt extreme protective measures.”

You Zhengping stared blankly. He asked, “So...how long will it take for our mission to end?”

“Unclear. This may be a battle lasting ten years, twenty years, even a few generations,” said Director Xiao. “If you don’t want Yu Hua to be cut off from the outside world, to be strictly guarded, then prepare to hide this from him your whole life.”

You Zhengping covered his heart. Yu Hua longed so much for a peaceful life. How could he put him into such a dangerous position?

“I’ll conceal it to the end,” You Zhengping said painfully but firmly.

“Fine.” Director Xiao nodded. “I’ll arrange for you to transfer to the public security bureau as auxiliary police. That way you’ll be able to go out in the field any time.”

“Oh, all right.” You Zhengping held back his tears. His and Yu Hua’s peaceful life was gone, but this was for the sake of better protecting their future, and the futures of many other people.

If You Zhengping wanted everyone in the world to live peacefully, he had to undertake all of this.

As You Zhengping thought longingly of Yu Hua, Yu Hua himself was standing quietly in the bathroom, sending You Zhengping a message: *It’s already one in the morning, when will you be home?*

You Zhengping received the message, asked his superior for leave, and responded to the message: *I figure it’ll be tomorrow afternoon. I’ve gone out of town for work.*

Receiving this message, Yu Hua sighed in relief. That was fine, he could find someone to mount a new mirror before You Zhengping came home.

The mirror he had used to send messages had been unable to withstand his strength. It had shattered.

With difficulty, Yu Hua cleaned the shards of mirror. Looking at the wreckage of the mirror, he quietly decided that for the sake of his and You Zhengping’s peaceful life, he had to completely eradicate the System this time.

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Author’s Note:

The Protectors: Zhen Li is either a Destroyer or a victim. First, we’ll eliminate one proper answer.

Yu Hua: I have foreseen you foreseeing my foresight.

## CHAPTER 10

First thing next morning, the handsome uncle Protector once again dropped Zhen Li into his space, and he was returned in confusion to the Xuyang district, left in a park with no people in it.

Zhen Li blankly walked two circles around the park, saw the elderly men and women taking their morning walks nearby, and felt bewildered. Had he been let go just like that?

Why had they let him go? Zhen Li didn’t understand it at all.

Truthfully, Zhen Li felt his intelligence wasn't up to following that master who had sent him messages through the mirror. He didn't understand what the master's next move was.

So Zhen Li, in the park, quietly said, "Sir, great master, senior? Are you there? What should I do next?"

For a while, he called out like a thief. An elderly man carrying a bird and wearing traditional dress was quietly watching Zhen Li from off to the side.

Zhen Li: "..."

He spoke in a forced voice: "Ahem, I was exercising my voice."

The elderly man smiled. "There aren't many young people who are up as early as you."

The parrot that the elderly man was carrying flapped its wings and loudly said, "Great master, are you there? Great master, are you there?"

Zhen Li sucked in a breath. He'd been very quiet, how had the parrot heard him?

He stiffened his face, got wireless earbuds out of his pocket, and put them in his ears. "Great master, e-sports great master, are you there? Are you sleeping? What's my next step after my big move?"

After some aimless play-acting with the unconnected Bluetooth, Zhen Li scratched his head towards the elderly man and smiled awkwardly. "I didn't get up early. I just haven't been to sleep yet. I thought since it was morning anyway, I'd go right to the park to move around, then go to sleep after I ate."

The elderly man shook his head and was about to say something when Zhen Li quickly continued, "We young people have unhealthy living habits."

The parrot repeated after Zhen Li: "Unhealthy living habits, unhealthy living habits."

Following his very imperfect cover-up, Zhen Li trotted away from park. He had to find a mirror and contact the great master!

When Zhen Li left, the elderly man walking in the park stared at his back, tapped the parrot's head, and said with a kindly smile, "Parrot, oh, parrot, do you think he's really dumb or playing dumb?"

The parrot spread its wings and said, "Really dumb, really dumb!"

"I also think he's really dumb." The elderly man stroked his mustache. He used too much force, tearing the false mustache off.

“Really dumb, really dumb!” The parrot hopped around in its cage; it was unclear whether it was mocking Zhen Li or the elderly man who had torn off his mustache.

After fleeing the elderly man, Zhen Li returned to his underground little dark room in a flutter.

He was starting to understand why so many levelers had been lost in this world. There were people with super powers among the natives of this world. They were organized and disciplined, hidden in the crowd like ordinary people, so you couldn’t take precautions against them.

Maybe their individual strength wasn’t great, but gathered together to safeguard the world, they could exert tremendous force.

Unless the levelers overturned the whole world’s power, they couldn’t defeat this unknowably huge hidden organization.

No wonder the System had been unable to open this world all along.

So how had the big boss that the System wanted to destroy hidden himself in this world? Who was the person who had contacted him through the mirror? Did the target of the System’s mission have a connection with the Protection Organization? Zhen Li’s head was full of question marks, and he couldn’t find any answers.

The great master had told him through the mirror that the Protection Organization had let him go to act as bait, to lure in the other levelers who had come to complete the mission. Then wouldn’t his every move be harmful to the other levelers?

Zhen Li rubbed his chest. He understood that there were good people and bad people among the levelers, and there were many people who were as bewildered as he was. The levelers who had forced him to come to this unopened world to test the waters were bad people. Zhen Li had no objection to cooperating with the World Protection Organization to get rid of those people. But there were also many more people trapped inside the System. They didn’t want to hurt others; they only wanted to survive. They might choose to come fulfill the mission. Zhen Li didn’t want to harm these people.

He went into the bathroom. There was a mirror over the sink. Zhen Li quietly said towards the mirror, “Great master, if you can see me through the mirror, can you tell me what to do next?”

Zhen Li waited for a long time. The mirror over the sink reflected his face.

The housekeeping workman chatted with Yu Hua while mounting the mirror over the sink. “Why not change to a better mirror?”

Yu Hua said, “If I change to a better mirror, it won’t match the sink anymore. In a couple of years, I’ll change them together.”



“Fair.” The housekeeping workman aimed at the original mirror’s position and got to work.

Even though You Zhengping had said he would only be home in the afternoon, Yu Hua was still uneasy. He thought that the faster the mirror was mounted, the sooner he could relax. So he had called the housekeeping company first thing in the morning and raised the price to have the workman come earlier to mount it.

After the mirror was mounted, Yu Hua would still have to think of a way to make this brand new mirror look worn.

As he stared at the workman doing his work, someone outside used a key to open the apartment door. You Zhengping, looking exhausted, had returned. As he opened the door, he said, “Yu Hua, I’m so hungry, is the food ready... Why are there so many people in the house first thing in the morning?”

Yu Hua: “...”

Yu Hua had heard the sound of You Zhengping taking out his keys. At the time, three plans to resolve this had flashed through his mind:

First, shut the bathroom door and make the workman jump out of the bathroom window after mounting the mirror to avoid You Zhengping. But he immediately remembered that he lived on the 26th floor. An ordinary person couldn’t jump down from an altitude of a couple dozen floors.

Second, get rid of the workman and destroy the corpse to dispose of the evidence. But he had contacted the housekeeping company. The police would be able to find him through the communication records. That definitely wouldn’t work either. Furthermore, Yu Hua wasn’t willing to harm ordinary people.

Third, open the door before You Zhengping walked in, give him a warm kiss, tell him that he hadn’t made breakfast, and the two of them could go out to eat. This way, he could lure his husband away, and the workman could calmly do his work in the apartment. But then there would be no one to settle the workman’s account, and he wouldn’t have time to take care of follow-up arrangements, making the new mirror look like the old one.

In an instant, countless ideas flashed through Yu Hua’s head; in the end, he didn’t put any of them into practice.

He watched without moving as You Zhengping opened the door, arranged his facial muscles, and said with an astonished expression, “You’re back so early? Didn’t you say afternoon?”

“We finished the mission early, so I can rest for a day.” You Zhengping peered towards the bathroom. “What’s going on?”

Yu Hua calmly said, “I accidentally broke the mirror last night. They came to mount the mirror.”

Under the circumstances, he could only come clean. If You Zhengping asked how he had broken the mirror, he could dodge with some explanation like his hand slipping. Anyway, things were always breaking at home. He had thrown the pulverized remains of the mirror away first thing in the morning and had watched the garbage truck take the garbage away. No one would find out that the mirror had broken abnormally.

But You Zhengping didn't ask why he had broken the mirror. Instead, he took Yu Hua's hands in concern. "Glass shards are hard to deal with. Did you get hurt?"

You Zhengping carefully investigated Yu Hua's palms, the backs of his hands, his face, his neck, all the exposed skin. There was no use for Yu Hua's prepared excuse. He quietly watched You Zhengping, his heart full of a warm current.

Yu Hua softly said, "I was careful. It's fine."

He wanted to yank his hands back, but You Zhengping was holding them firmly. Yu Hua didn't dare to use too much force. He was afraid that if he yanked his hands back, he might tear You Zhengping's arms off. That would be a tragedy.

You Zhengping had needed to work up a lot of courage to grab Yu Hua's hands. He was hiding things from Yu Hua and felt guilty. He didn't dare to use too much force. If Yu Hua had used just a bit of force, You Zhengping wouldn't have dared to hold on to his husband.

But Yu Hua only gave one token struggle, not using force at all, giving You Zhengping boundless courage.

Gazing at Yu Hua, he said, "The mirror breaking is no problem. You've found a new one. And then there's me. You've supported me for so long. I can work hard at my job to earn money. You've been in a bad mood lately, so I've been sad, too."

Yu Hua's heart softened. He knew he had been deliberately giving You Zhengping the cold shoulder lately due his strength increasing. The two of them hadn't had a good talk in a week.

From the time they'd started dating to their marriage, they had always gotten along very well. There had never been a cross word spoken between them. With this inexplicable cold war, the two of them both felt bad, each wanting to reconcile with the other.

The reason for the cold war wasn't important. The important thing was that they still cared about each other.

The two of them got closer and closer. Yu Hua was afraid of hurting You Zhengping and only lightly touched his lips.

You Zhengping had a spontaneous and enthusiastic nature. Seeing Yu Hua hold out an olive branch, he quickly scrambled to take advantage, hugging Yu Hua and preparing for a French

kiss. Then he heard someone say, "Well, the mirror's been mounted, the mirror and work together cost 200 yuan."

With an outsider present, the two of them quickly separated, blushing. You Zhengping hurried to be the first to fish out his phone to transmit payment. Yu Hua was half a beat behind because he was worried about crushing You Zhengping's hand.

The repairman collected his tools and before leaving added, "I'm going, you two carry on."

Having missed their chance, the two of them didn't feel comfortable carrying on. You Zhengping wasn't opposed to goings on during the day, but Yu Hua was reserved. It would be better to exercise some restraint and wait until night.

"I'll go cook," Yu Hua said cheerfully.

"No need! You're the one cooking every day, today I'll...invite you out for breakfast," You Zhengping said.

"All right," Yu Hua said readily. Very good. He had been worried about breaking dishes in front of his husband.

The two of them went to a breakfast restaurant. Yu Hua didn't get involved, letting You Zhengping pick out breakfast and bring it to the table. Yu Hua looked at the fragile single-use chopsticks and smiled without moving, only looking at You Zhengping.

But You Zhengping misunderstood. He was wildly happy. Was Yu Hua acting spoiled today?

During the four years they had spent together, it had always been You Zhengping shamelessly acting spoiled. The composed Yu Hua had never revealed his childish side. Today he seemed a little willful; it was a very novel feeling!

You Zhengping was delighted. He picked up a soup dumpling and fed it to Yu Hua.

Yu Hua had been planning to say he wasn't hungry and would be happy to watch You Zhengping eat. He hadn't expected his husband to voluntarily undertake the task of using the tableware. This made Yu Hua exceedingly joyful. It seemed that he could eat his fill during this meal.

He opened his mouth and ate the soup dumpling You Zhengping was feeding to him.

Seeing two grown men playing the exciting game of feeding each other, the people in the breakfast restaurant couldn't stand to look directly at them; they all lowered their heads over their food, having been fed a bellyful of dog food.

In the middle of this, Cen Xiao and the other underlings, who all had no families and nothing to do, and who hadn't slept all night, also came to the breakfast restaurant. This was their regular

restaurant. Usually when they'd been up all night, they would all come here to eat breakfast, then go put their heads down and sleep all day. You Zhengping, however, had been eating the food Yu Hua cooked at home since getting married. He rarely went out to eat.

"Oh my goodness!" Cen Xiao covered his eyes, unable to stand the sight, and said, "Can you pay attention to the impression you're making? Look at how uncomfortable Yu Hua is."

You Zhengping had been smiling happily at Yu Hua. Seeing his crowd of underlings, he coldly said, "Don't hog the table. There's space at the next one."

"No, I want to sit here." Cen Xiao yawned, deliberately sitting next to You Zhengping. "I'm watching you two."

You Zhengping very much wanted to smack Cen Xiao to death. But with Yu Hua next to him, he couldn't reveal his true nature. He could only clench his teeth and say with a fake smile, "You're just itching for a spanking, aren't you? Don't you see that I'm in a two-person world after finally restoring good relations? If you're not using your eyes, donate them to someone who needs them!"

Not to be outdone, Cen Xiao pointed at all the people in the breakfast restaurant. "You call this a two-person world? You're the one who should donate his eyes!"

The underlings crowded themselves around the not very large table, ordered a stack of food, and started to eat with great relish.

Yu Hua had always envied You Zhengping's intimate relationship with his friends. He had also had this, once; he had had brothers who had fought shoulder to shoulder with him. With the passage of time, everyone had either been parted from him by death or drifted away. That brotherhood had vanished without a trace long ago.

Before meeting You Zhengping, Yu Hua had passed fifteen years like stagnant water in this world. He had experienced too many worlds. No matter how many beautiful things he saw, he wouldn't jump for joy.

The passing years had worn his feelings away in the gravel of time, dissolving them in endless missions.

When he had cleared, Yu Hua had experienced neither happiness, nor anger, nor grief, nor joy, only endless weariness.

Until that day when he had been outside the off-road car and seen You Zhengping fighting with his companions and climbing out the window. Yu Hua's emotions had been moved. He had remembered his own purest times.

Only then did Yu Hua learn that his emotions hadn't disappeared, and his memories hadn't been forgotten. These fine and simple feelings had only been hidden too deep, so deep he had been unable to dig them up himself.

By sheer luck he had met You Zhengping, met this colorful young man who had awakened Yu Hua's purest feelings.

The System had once again reached its evil clutches towards this world. He had to protect these young people's happiness.

"I was just making a public display of affection. We've been married for three years, I have the legal right to a display!" As he argued with Cen Xiao, You Zhengping picked up a stuffed bun and shoved it into Yu Hua's mouth, crowding all of Yu Hua's deep sentiments out of his head, leaving him with only a mouthful of meat bun.

"Have some dignity! You're polluting my eyes!" Cen Xiao furiously picked up a youtiao and stuffed it into the mouth of Shi Yongfu next to him. "I'm legally feeding my brother, how does my beloved brother feel?"

Being fed a mouthful of youtiao, Shi Yongfu beat his chest, saying, "I-I'm choking!"

Cen Xiao picked up soy milk and poured it into Shi Yongfu's mouth.

You Zhengping picked up a bowl of congee. Yu Hua quickly waved his hand, saying, "I'm not choking. You're feeding me very well, it's fine."

Then You Zhengping put down the bowl of congee and looked at Cen Xiao in satisfaction: *Did you see that? My technique is better than yours!*

"Damn it, I lost," Cen Xiao said dismally to Shi Yongfu. "It's all your fault for not eating as fast as Yu Hua!"

The victim Shi Yongfu said, "Could you be reasonable?"

After making a racket throughout the whole meal, everyone went to their respective homes to catch up on sleep. Yu Hua told You Zhengping that he had to go look for work and left home.

When he went out the door, the smile on Yu Hua's face disappeared. He took a small makeup mirror out of his pocket and wrote on the mirror: "I'm coming to you."

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Author's Note:

Housekeeping workman: I seem to have avoided a calamity?

## CHAPTER 11

Zhen Li sat in the bathroom hugging his knees. He didn't know where the great master behind the scenes who had rescued him was, and he didn't know when he would appear. So as not to miss any messages, he sat dozing on the floor of the bathroom. After all, he also hadn't slept all night. He was very sleepy now.

His head nodded. In his daze, a field of red appeared before his eyes. Zhen Li quickly opened his eyes and saw that densely crowded little words had appeared in front of him. He squinted. The words were blurry. He couldn't read them clearly.

The mirror that had appeared in front of him this time was only 5 cm in diameter, and the words again seemed to have been written in blood. This person had used some tool to write the words very small. At first Zhen Li would have been able to read the words on the mirror clearly, but once they were written, the blood had flowed down and the handwriting had gradually blurred. In his doze, Zhen Li had missed when the words had been clearest. Now he could only clearly read a few words."

"...go to...wait...wear...shake off...studio...laundry...money...time...Sys..." Zhen Li struggled to distinguish the handwriting. "What are all these words? Don't, don't vanish, I haven't understood!"

It seemed that the great master couldn't hear him. Before Zhen Li could understand the writing, the mirror shattered and disappeared.

Zhen Li: "..."

Judging from context, he could dimly guess that the great master wanted him to shake off a tail and go to some place to meet the great master, but he hadn't been able to read the place! As for the parts afterward about "studio" and "laundry money," Zhen Li didn't understand them at all.

What should he do? Zhen Li clutched his head.

He turned in circles around the room. When he had waited another half an hour, a small mirror appeared in front of him. On it was written succinctly: "Noon, go to a crowded mall, eat."

When Zhen Li had just understood the words, the mirror hanging in the air broke again.

He thought about it, named the mall where he had shot hoops yesterday, and arranged to meet the great master in the crowded food court. The mall's food court had many different stalls to pick up food and public seating for eating. In a public place like that, two strangers could meet without making anyone suspicious.

Zhen Li went through his wardrobe, found a fiery red ancient-style robe, and put on a wig with an ethereal air. He looked at himself in the mirror, thinking he was really extremely handsome.

This wasn't clothing that the System had provided. Zhen Li had equipped it himself. After he had cleared his first world, the System had told him he could use his points to equip one item from the store to carry around with him. This item would accompany him to every world, becoming the basis for him to clear; therefore, he had to choose carefully.

Zhen Li had spent an age picking before choosing a big wardrobe where he could store over ten thousand articles of clothing. He had also equipped many attractive and cheap articles of clothing from the System, stuffed them into the wardrobe, and taken them along to different worlds. These clothes were so cheap, all brand-name, and a 10-point pack could buy over a hundred. It really would have been too much of a loss not to buy them.

Later, when he had been caught the Clearing League, the Clearing League's bad guys had wanted to seize his starting carry-on item. When they'd opened the System and seen that it was a big wardrobe, each one of them had looked at Zhen Li as though looking at an idiot. The starting carry-on item was a great gift from the System, an opportunity that was hard to come by. All levelers would choose a functional item that suited them. And Zhen Li had chosen what? A wardrobe?

Zhen Li dressed in front of the mirror and said, "What *about* the wardrobe? What's wrong with a wardrobe? Looking good is also an asset. With so much pretty clothing, if I change each day, it's enough to wear for fifty or sixty years."

After doing his makeup, he looked in satisfaction at his bewitching red clothes and nodded, saying to the mirror, "Great master, I'm dressed very noticeably, you're sure to see me at once!"

An age passed, and a small mirror finally appeared in front of him. On it, very big, was written the word "sure."

Contented as a peacock, Zhen Li once again looked in the mirror.

Looking at the third broken makeup mirror, Yu Hua rather feebly pinched the corners of his eyes.

He had thought originally that he could get all the information across clearly in one message. He hadn't expected Zhen Li to be dozing and not see. A makeup mirror was too weak and would give out after being written on once. There was nothing to be done; he'd had to go to a makeup store and buy ten little makeup mirrors and an eyebrow pencil (to use for writing with the blood). With the shop assistant's surprised and wondering gaze on him, he'd put the mirrors and the eyebrow pencil into his briefcase, refusing the shop assistant's suggestions of brow stickers, eyelid tape, false eyelashes, eye shadow, blush, foundation, and other such products.

Having managed to explain things clearly and seeing Zhen Li in the mirror putting on false eyelashes and drawing in his eyebrows before the mirror broke, Yu Hua had felt pained by the

sight. After quickly responding with the word “sure,” he had removed the ability to see through mirrors.

This was the ability to use a mirror as a medium to send messages to another leveler using the System. While writing the words, Yu Hua could also see the leveler in the mirror. When he had seen last night that the leveler was the peacock man who had been shooting hoops next to him earlier, Yu Hua had been very surprised.

Yu Hua’s danger awareness was exceedingly acute. His sixth sense had let him dodge the sickle of the god of death countless times. If this had been fifteen years ago, a leveler would only have needed to appear within a hundred-meter radius of Yu Hua for him to notice. Yesterday Zhen Li had been showing off his basketball skills next to him for ages, and Yu Hua hadn’t caught a trace. This made him feel an intense sense of crisis.

With his vigilance so low, how could he face the enemies to come?

The anxious-looking Yu Hua went to take a couple of turns around the job center. He received a few forms, saw that it was just about time, then went to the pre-arranged mall to eat.

As soon as he came into the food court, he saw Zhen Li in ancient dress sitting eye-catchingly in the center, with a crowd around him taking pictures.

Yu Hua: “...”

In fact, he had recognized him at a glance, but there was no way to get close.

Beautiful Zhen Li in his red ancient costume was slurping malatang. The stark contrast between the ancient dress and the malatang assaulted the vision. Everyone was filming videos and posting them online, creating an even bigger sensation than yesterday’s basketball throwing.

There were also people who recognized that this was the hot guy who had gotten five basketballs in at once yesterday. Consequently, the number of people in the food court increased further.

Yu Hua took a deep breath and walked expressionlessly into the restroom. He wrote, “In five minutes, throw your phone out of the crowd towards the roujiamo<sup>6</sup> stand.” After making sure Zhen Li had seen it, he left the restroom and went to order a roujiamo.

He had chosen this type of food because roujiamo were wrapped in paper bags, and the food itself was soft and could stand up to being squeezed. It didn’t need to be eaten with chopsticks. There was no need to worry about breaking dishes or snapping chopsticks and so on while eating roujiamo. It was very safe.

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<sup>6</sup> 肉夹馍, literally “meat sandwiched in bread,” a street food that is exactly what it says on the tin.



Yu Hua stood carefully in front of the stand waiting for his roujiamo. He had to hold his body perfectly straight, not bump into anyone, to avoid breaking the bones of innocent passersby.

Zhen Li saw that it was about time. Under cover of his sleeve, he casually dropped the phone next to him onto the floor. At any rate, Zhen Li had gone through four levels. His physical quality was excellent. This sort of skilled movement took him no effort.

At that moment, Yu Hua was just receiving his roujiamo. He was listening, from among the noise of voices distinguishing the sound of a phone sliding along the ground.

Yu Hua packed up slightly and stepped accurately on Zhen Li's phone with the System app downloaded onto it.

Holding the roujiamo, he turned, and, using his body as a shield, he tapped lightly with the tip of his foot. The phone flew up from the ground and dropped precisely into Yu Hua's slightly open briefcase.

A phone with the System downloaded onto it was very sturdy. It wouldn't break from falling or being boiled. Even if it was dropped into the sea, it would still return to the leveler's hand. However, the System's plan to trap the levelers was just what Yu Hua wanted now. There was no need to worry about breaking the phone.

Yu Hua quietly walked to a place where there weren't many people, naturally getting the phone out of his briefcase as he ate the roujiamo.

When Yu Hua had asked for the phone, Zhen Li had cancelled the lockscreen code. Yu Hua effortlessly accessed the phone and found the System app.

He opened his hand, covering the System app interface with his palm. He gently closed his eyes.

A not especially strong power flowed into Yu Hua's body. He was absorbing the energy of Zhen Li's System.

A minute later, Zhen Li, who was eating malatang, felt his body go numb. He put down the big bowl and looked at his hands in surprise.

If there hadn't been too many people around, Zhen Li probably would have shouted in happiness.

A moment ago, Zhen Li had felt the power in his brain that had always been controlling him disappear. The System he'd been carrying in his soul was gone. He was free!

He didn't need to do missions anymore, didn't need to live a life where he might die anytime. Zhen Li really couldn't resist. He started to cry.

There were too many people filming around him. Zhen Li suddenly weeping made the hearts of the people around him clench. A girl carefully asked, "What's the matter? Is it bothering you that we're taking pictures?"

"No..." Zhen Li shook his head, holding back the wild joy inside him. He put on an act with difficulty, saying, "The malatang...is too spicy! Boo-hoo..."

"I have iced tea. I haven't broken the seal!" A passerby quickly passed over iced tea.

"I have a tissue, hurry up and wipe your tears!" Another girl wasn't to be outdone.

Everyone vied to give Zhen Li tissues and water. The feeling of being alive and cared for was so strong that Zhen Li cried harder. He took a tissue and wiped his eyes while saying, "It's too spicy, really too spicy. I won't anything so spicy after this."

While Zhen Li cried from joy, in the corner, Yu Hua slowly opened his eyes. He had absorbed the energy the System had left in Zhen Li's body and used that energy to seal a portion of his own power. Though he wasn't at the level of an ordinary person, he had sealed his ability to interrogate through a mirror, sealed his turtle breath, and reduced his arm strength to one ton; it was basically controllable.

Very good. Yu Hua smiled faintly.

After he had cleared, he had made a vow to become an ordinary person and peacefully go through one last world.

Yu Hua had escaped the System; he was free. But he knew that as long as the System still existed, new worlds would be controlled by the System, new levelers would become the System's offerings.

Yu Hua hadn't used his power to seal himself; he had drawn off the better part of the System's energy to use to seal himself.

He could have drained all the System's energy, made the so-called Chief Deity vanish, but the System still commanded countless levelers. It would have killed all the levelers to make up for the power it had lost.

To protect the levelers, Yu Hua had only taken a part of the power, forcing the System to sink into a defensive hibernation. And the System's control interface had degraded from a floating interface into a manually-operated app.

After he left, while the levelers couldn't escape the System, new levelers wouldn't be added, and the difficulty of the levels would greatly decrease. There would be countless new clearers.

The more clearers there were, the less energy the System would have. One day, all the levelers would have obtained their freedom. After the final leveler cleared, the System would lose all its power and come to the end of its road.

Yu Hua hadn't thought that after fifteen years, not a single clearer would have appeared. Instead, the System had risen from the ashes once more, possessing the ability to issue missions. Disregarding everything, it had sent the levelers to hunt and kill Yu Hua to recapture its energy.

These levelers were too weak. If they had been his companions from before, the System would have been drained dry long ago.

Yu Hua sighed lightly. Unfortunately, his companions had been gone by then.

While absorbing Zhen Li's System, Yu Hua had obtained some information. He knew that the System had used a hidden method to issue the mission to kill him. Quite a few levelers had received this mission. There would be other people coming to this world.

The World Protection Organization that Zhen Li had encountered would probably put Yu Hua in the same camp as those levelers, regard him as an enemy. Therefore, he had to not only get rid of the levelers, he also had to avoid the World Protection Organization. His identity couldn't be discovered.

Why was it so hard for him to live happily with You Zhengping like he wanted? Yu Hua sighed helplessly.

He typed a message on Zhen Li's phone, remembering at the same time to eat up the roujiamo to fill his stomach.

Yu Hua got up and quietly walked around the crowd surrounding Zhen Li. He held the phone between two fingers. As he brushed past the crowd, he flicked his wrist, and the phone flew like a poker card through a gap in the crowd to Zhen Li's chair. Now, while the phone no longer had the protection of the System app's power and had become as fragile as an ordinary phone, Yu Hua had used Zhen Li's System to seal the greater part of his power, so the phone didn't break when it fell. Instead, it safely reached its goal.

Zhen Li's robe screened the phone that had flown over. He felt the phone hit his thigh. Quickly using his sleeve as a shield, he picked up the phone on the bench.

Zhen Li casually excused himself, saying he was going to the restroom, and squeezed out of the crowd. In a toilet stall, he accessed the phone and saw the words written on it:

[Go register a studio, then recruit people. It doesn't matter what work it does. The important thing is to be able to launder money. Also, your presence will definitely attract other levelers. You'll make good bait. Delete this message after reading it.]

Zhen Li: "..."

He'd managed to get free, and he still had to engage in such dangerous work?

Also, what was that about laundering money?

—

Author's Note:

The System: You all treat me like a big villain, but have you considered my feelings? I've nearly been drained dry. Can't I engage in self-defense? Ah!!! (shouting itself hoarse)

## CHAPTER 12

You Zhengping had been in a good mood the last few days. Every day he'd come to work humming a tune. In the intervals between observing Zhen Li, he didn't forget to use a successful personage's expression to look down upon Cen Xiao and the others.

"Cen-ge, what's going on with our idiot boss lately?" Shi Yongfu asked uncomprehendingly.

"Idiot boss" was a private pet name for You Zhengping. They called him "boss" to his face and "idiot boss" behind his back. This demonstrated everyone's love and esteem for You Zhengping. A leader who didn't get roasted by his subordinates wasn't a good leader; a boss who wasn't secretly called out by his underlings wasn't a good boss.

Cen Xiao, the squad's second-in-command deputy captain, as well as the person who upheld the squad's spirit, raised his eyebrows and said impatiently, "What else could it be? When he's fighting with Yu Hua, he smashes desks. Now that they've made it up, he's winning at life. Look at the way his expression is always full of sympathy for us single dogs. It really makes you mad."

"He's coming, he's coming! What do we do?" Shi Yongfu said quietly.

Unflappably, Cen Xiao said, "No matter what he says, we won't ask how his relationship with Yu Hua is going. Don't give him the opportunity to show off. Frustrate him!"

The underlings exchanged looks, silently relaying messages.

You Zhengping came over carrying a big box of food. He put it on the desk and opened it, revealing the secret recipe roast chicken legs prepared inside. He said radiantly, "Yu Hua thought I was working too hard after he found out I'd become an auxiliary policeman, so he prepared snacks for me. What delicious chicken legs! Though he made a little too much. What should I do if I can't eat them all?"

Cen Xiao snapped his fingers. "That really is pretty worrying. But it's all right, we have to share in your troubles. Brothers, forward!"

A crowd of underlings swarmed forward, snatching all the chicken legs away. You Zhengping had only been showing off. He hadn't really been planning on sharing the food Yu Hua had lovingly made with his bad friends. As soon as he saw the chicken legs being snatched away, he advanced to protect them, but it was hard to take on a crowd with two fists, and You Zhengping only managed to rescue two.

"You guys..."

You Zhengping raised his hands, each with a chicken leg in it, and was about to lose his temper when Shi Yongfu came over and bit one of the chicken legs in his hands. He licked it with his tongue and said, "You're not going to eat this, are you?"

You Zhengping gaped at Shi Yongfu using the most shameless method to steal the chicken leg he was protecting. Now that it had been bitten like this, he couldn't eat it. He could only let it be snatched by Shi Yongfu.

He was worried that the last one would also be snatched, quickly bit off a piece, and began to eat along with his teammates as though venting his anger.

These young men were very active, had big appetites, and ate quickly. A dozen chicken legs were finished off in less than five minutes, leaving You Zhengping staring blankly at an empty box.

When Yu Hua had given him the box of food, he had said that You Zhengping definitely wouldn't be able to finish it and had wanted him to share with his colleagues. You Zhengping had been thinking of giving each person a half, leaving the rest for himself. But these people had snatched away two chicken legs each!

"Burp!" Cen Xiao belched, pulled out a wet wipe, and wiped his mouth. "Thank Yu-ge for me."

Even the wipe had been put in the bag by Yu Hua. He knew that these young men had bad living habits and had worried that they would wipe their mouths with their sleeves, so he had made You Zhengping bring along sanitizing wipes.

You Zhengping didn't know whether other people's marriages were happy; his marriage was absolutely happy.

Yu Hua took much too good care of You Zhengping. Cen Xiao and the others sometimes couldn't resist being envious.

You had to be indulgent after eating someone's food. Having eaten the snacks prepared by Yu Hua, Cen Xiao decided that on account of the chicken legs, he would give You Zhengping an

opportunity to brag. He said, “Fine, I’ll give you ten minutes to talk about your recent martial relations. We’ll...undertake the insurmountably difficult job of listening.”

You Zhengping’s character was dynamic; he was quick to anger and also quick to cool down.

Seeing his underlings were finally willing to listen to him describe his happy life, You Zhengping quickly wiped his mouth, straightened his clothes, then complacently told them what had happened after the mirror was fixed.

That day, taking the mirror being fixed as an opportunity, he had launched an attack, comforting Yu Hua over losing his job. He told Yu Hua that the city public security bureau had recently raised the auxiliary police’s salaries to the standard for public institutions. While his current salary didn’t match up to that of a civil servant, it was still a lot higher than the previous 2500. The base salary combined with the living subsidy was still over four thousand after withholding for the five insurances and one fund<sup>7</sup>.

This salary didn’t sound high, but he also had merit pay and could earn more the more he worked. As long as he was diligent and willing, there would be no problem paying the mortgage. He told Yu Hua not to worry and to take his time looking for work, not to take a job that didn’t suit him for the sake of money.

“Also, now that I’m an auxiliary police officer, the police station has given me a police-issued motor scooter. I won’t need to drive the car anymore, so I can also save on gas. Our car uses too much gas,” You Zhengping said economically.

Actually, the merit pay for one year wasn’t high at all. Even if it could just about cover the mortgage, it still wouldn’t be enough to live on. But You Zhengping didn’t really need to rely on his salary to support Yu Hua. He just needed to introduce the concepts of merit pay, bonuses, and so on, then slowly bring home those millions of his in secret. He really was clever to think of such a method!

As You Zhengping inwardly praised himself, Yu Hua, sitting beside him, hugged his husband.

Yu Hua held You Zhengping’s hands. These weren’t soft hands. There were quite a few callouses on them, and the palms were rough. There were also cigarette burns all over the right hand.

“This...um.” Seeing Yu Hua staring at the wounds Zhen Li had made on his hand, You Zhengping quickly covered up by saying, “This...was an accident. Last night, while I was carrying out my assignment, there was a drunkard using a cigarette end to burn himself, and I blocked him a few times... It’s all right, the wounds aren’t serious, they’ll heal quickly.”

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<sup>7</sup> 五險一金 - amount withheld from wages by employers to put aside for five insurances (endowment, medical, unemployment, work injury, and maternity) and a housing fund.

For You Zhengping, these were small injuries. When he had done live combat games at the base before, he had once carelessly walked into a trap and gotten half his body blown up by a landmine. If he hadn't opened a space in time to weaken the force of the explosion, he would have died on the spot.

You Zhengping's spaces could weaken the force of attacks to less than one tenth, but this wasn't an innate ability; it had been slowly acquired through training.

At the beginning, there had been no way for his spaces to suppress an opponent. During practice, when You Zhengping used a space to trap Director Xiao, Director Xiao could tear open the space and escape. To increase the spaces' defensive power, You Zhengping had undergone countless attacks, gotten blown up countless times, regularly faced the attacks of heavy firepower head on with the spaces.

The defensive power of his spaces had gradually been refined. Those days had been bitter. But everyone had told You Zhengping, *Your ability is very strong. Your power can protect countless teammates and ordinary people, as well as your family. To better protect all these people from the Destroyers, you have to become stronger. You have to become undefeatable.*

You Zhengping had been only ten years old then. He hadn't understood much of the general principle. He had only known that if he became strong, he could go home.

Sometimes when he had been injured, he would furtively wipe away tears in the infirmary, unwilling to cry in front of the boys in his grade.

You Zhengping wasn't afraid of pain or suffering because he'd known from a young age that tears were useless. He had left his parents too young. However much the leaders valued him and looked after him, they still couldn't be as perfectly considerate as parents. So he had tottering grown up with the mutual support of his little companions. Around eighteen-nineteen years old, he had had psychological problems.

That was his first time seeing his parents after becoming an adult. His mother had cried while she hugged him, saying her child had grown up.

You Zhengping had been extremely excited. He'd wanted to hug his mother back, but he'd found his arms suddenly wrapped in his space. His special ability had started going out of control.

He had immediately pushed his mother away and charged out the door of their home, running madly all the way to an empty suburb. His frenzied special ability had started madly cutting into the space around him, stopping only when his energy had been used up.

Since then, You Zhengping had started using extreme sports to control his emotions. He had to completely control his ability. He couldn't let it hurt his family.

And because of this, You Zhengping had lost his only opportunity after growing up to have someone cherish him.

“Tender affection” had been deleted from You Zhengping’s dictionary.

But now, Yu Hua was holding You Zhengping’s hand, tender kisses falling on the injured back of his hand. Yu Hua looked deeply at You Zhengping. “Does it hurt a lot?”

“No, no, it doesn’t hurt!” You Zhengping said in a flurry. “It’s just a small injury.”

“It’s because I’m useless,” Yu Hua said miserably. “I made you worry because I lost my job, made you go do such dangerous work.”

Yu Hua stroked You Zhengping’s burns with the pads of his fingers. He knew that cigarettes were addictive, that they were bad for a person’s health, that they polluted the environment. Cigarette ends weren’t very hot; they couldn’t even burn through glass. You Zhengping’s constitution was so weak that even a little cigarette could burn him like this.

So small and weak a life, struggling to open his arms, wanting to hold up a part of the sky for Yu Hua, so he could take his time looking for work without having to worry about the stress of living and household expenses.

Yu Hua had worked with countless people, and he had had quite a few companions...or rather, subordinates. Everyone had depended on him, obeyed him. He had been everyone’s backbone, undertaking stress that it would be hard for the average person to bear.

Yu Hua had lived alongside stress and responsibility. He had never felt that it was very hard.

But now, You Zhengping wanted to protect him, make it so Yu Hua didn’t have to worry, because You Zhengping was taking care of everything.

He wanted to use this body that was so fragile that even a cigarette could burn it to protect him; this was so touching.

Yu Hua kissed each wound on You Zhengping’s hand, then gently touched the center of his husband’s brow. In a low, hoarse voice, he said, “I haven’t taken good care of you.”

“Hey, it’s really all right, what did I tell to you?” His first time being cared for so tenderly, You Zhengping panicked. He wanted to comfort Yu Hua but didn’t know what to say, and he was afraid that his emotions were too agitated and his special ability would go out of control.

There seemed to be a calming force about Yu Hua. During the awkwardness of their first meeting, the happiness of their courtship, and the agitation now, while You Zhengping’s emotions fluctuated, his special ability remained calm from beginning to end.

As long as he was beside Yu Hua, You Zhengping’s abilities wouldn’t go out of control.



Next, You Zhengping could only say, “I, I’ll be as careful as I can after this. I won’t make you worry.”

“Yes,” Yu Hua agreed quietly, arms encircling You Zhengping’s waist.

Then...

“Yu Hua’s back is very strong. I think he’s stronger now than when he was working. Maybe he’s been resting up? Hehehe...” You Zhengping said to his companions, remembering or possibly reliving.

“Enough, enough!” Cen Xiao slapped You Zhengping in the face. “I only gave you ten minutes, and it’s been half an hour, shut up!”

The rest of them were single. None of them had even dated. They couldn’t take such a racy subject.

Resisting the urge to beat up You Zhengping, who was publicly flaunting his affections, Cen Xiao said, “Get back to business. Zhen Li has been acting strange these past few days.”

You Zhengping calmed down as soon as the Protectors’ work was mentioned. Frowning, he said, “I keep thinking there’s a plan behind Zhen Li’s actions.”

Earlier, You Zhengping’s so-called auxiliary police work had been to sit on his motor scooter and patrol the Xuyang District, tailing and keeping watch on Zhen Li along with some teammates, monitoring his actions.

Then they had found that there was no need at all to tail Zhen Li. He dressed too flashily and was excessively good-looking. There were always people stealthily taking pictures and posting them online.

Before he’d been caught by You Zhengping, the video of Zhen Li shooting hoops had spread all over the internet.

After coming back from the base, the video of him eating malatang at the mall while dressed in red ancient costume had also become popular. The picture of the beautiful man in ancient dress crying because the malatang he was eating was too spicy had been turned into a weight loss meme by the netizens. In the meme, Zhen Li was gently wiping his tears; the writing under it was: *I’m already crying, how could you make me eat more?*

On the third day, Zhen Li went back to school and conscientiously attended class, conscientiously submitted a request to suspend his schooling, conscientiously prepared materials for registering a studio.

On the fourth day, Zhen Li was photographed wearing formalwear while registering and once again became popular.

On the fifth day, Zhen Li rented a single room in an office building for an extremely low price from a landlord who liked his face.

On the sixth day, Zhen Li began recruiting on all the major websites. He didn't say what work the studio did, only told people to come interview.

On the seventh day, the Xuyang District's Protector squad gathered in a certain secret room, put in order the materials concerning Zhen Li's activities these recent days, and, after eating Yu Hua's secret recipe roast chicken legs, prepared for a collective discussion.

"I think he's using this method to look for someone," You Zhengping said acutely, having broken free of his love-addled mind. "The eye-catching outfits, eye-catching behavior, publicly recruiting on all the major websites... He's trying to lure someone out into the open."

Cen Xiao recalled Zhen Li's performance during the interrogation and doubtfully said, "Does he have the intelligence for that?"

"He definitely doesn't," You Zhengping said categorically, "but the person behind him does. Didn't he say? There's someone hidden in the shadows, forcing him to deal with another big boss."

"But we've been observing his communication records, his phone app usage, and everyone he's come into contact with recently. We've even investigated the people who posted videos of him online. Nothing came up. If there really is someone plotting behind him, how do they contact him?" Cen Xiao asked.

"Don't forget, he kept on saying there was an app on his phone, but we couldn't see it at all. This isn't something our existing technology can monitor. We can only hypothesize that there's someone behind him who can use a means of communication that we can't observe," You Zhengping said. "In our battle with the Destroyers, we're always learning by trial and error. There are some things we can simply assume. We can't insist on evidence."

"That's reasonable." Cen Xiao had been convinced by You Zhengping. He straightened out the materials and filed them, sending them to Director Xiao through the internal network.

Director Xiao responded: "Investigate all the personnel the studio hires. Quietly watch for changes."

So everyone got busy, closely watching each person who went to Zhen Li's studio to interview.

Until the ninth day, when Yu Hua brought his resume and was hired by Zhen Li.

You Zhengping: "..."

—

Author's Note:

Yu Hua: After absorbing Zhen Li's System, I can control my power and get close to my husband again. I'm in a very good mood!

The System: I'm drying up...

## CHAPTER 13

Since the System app had been deleted by an as yet unknown mysterious person, Zhen Li's days had been joyous.

Even though he was under observation by the World Protection Organization, even though he didn't know what the mysterious person wanted him to do, Zhen Li's state of mind was still extremely optimistic. He was so happy his heels didn't touch the ground when he walked; each step tapped out a dancing rhythm.

The System planted in his head, which could have killed him at any time, was gone, and he still had his wardrobe, clothes, and alternate dimension stomach. Did human life contain any greater blessings than this?

In a refined white scholarly gown, holding a fan in his hand, wearing a graceful wig, Zhen Li spun happily in front of the mirror.

He had arranged the studio very simply. There were two desks, two chairs, a big wardrobe for clothes, and a big mirror occupying an entire wall.

"I really am handsome." Zhen Li turned his fan as he spun in front of the mirror, long hair gently fluttering with him.

On a shelf next to him was a cell phone. On the phone's screen, countless barrage comments were floating by:

[Hot, hot, hot, so hot!]

[Ever since seeing that basketball throwing video, I was charmed by the boy with a hundred looks. I spent ages looking for you, only getting by on strangers' photographs. Today I've finally found you. From now on, I only have eyes for you and my cat!]

[Those gestures, that expression, that tone, it's too smug! But I like it, please do another spin!]

[You don't look at the livestream screen, don't thank viewers for sending you submarines, don't say your diehard supporters are awesome, don't sing songs. You're the least professional internet celebrity I've ever seen. But I like it.]

[What's so good about a guy spinning around? It's totally boring. I think I'll watch it a few hundred times.]

Just then, a knock came from the wide-open door. "Hello, I saw your posting to submit job applications online. I e-mailed my resume to your company earlier, and the response said that I should come this morning at ten for an interview. My name is..."

Zhen Li didn't even look at the man who had come for an interview. He was absorbed in looking at his own flourishing beauty in the mirror. He had established the studio according to the great master's orders, but he didn't know what the studio was supposed to do, didn't know when the great master was going to come to give him his next assignment.

Out of boredom, Zhen Li had spent each day looking in the mirror, changing his clothes, posing, and doing a self-taught livestream. In a few days he'd gotten several hundred thousand fans.

The phone couldn't film the applicant's face, but it recorded his voice, and the fans watching the livestream immediately got excited.

[Here we go, here we go, every day's essential event, watching President Zhen's fancy way of refusing the interviewee.]

[The day before yesterday, he wouldn't consider a university outside the top three, wouldn't consider anyone who didn't have mastery of less than five foreign languages.]

[Yesterday there was finally an applicant who had graduated from a big three with a foreign language level above the requirements, and he said they also needed to have three years of work experience in one of the country's top 100 enterprises in a senior management role or more. What kind of top 100 enterprise senior manager would come here to work?]

[I suspect President Zhen is only recruiting people for the pleasure of refusing them. Sooner or later his requirements will get so high no one on earth will fit them. We only want aliens hidden among the crowd here, hahahaha!]

[Is it really a good thing he's doing? He's simply trampling on people's hearts.]

[Oh, drop it. That poky little ad he posted on the job websites, however you look at it, it looks like a scam. What kind of decent job-seeker would consider this kind of dirt poor briefcase company? All the people who come to apply are his fans, all of them girls. It would be weird if he didn't refuse.]

[Think of the way the applicants from the last few days shrieked. Were they there to find work? They were craving President Zhen's body! Ah, I'm craving it, too (drooling).]

[But this time, judging by the voice, it's a guy, and a pretty steady one.]

Zhen Li didn't even look at the newcomer. He stopped his spinning steps, elegantly turned his fan over, then closed it against his palm.

Long, slim fingers holding the fan, Zhen Li said in an ethereal voice, "Our position here requires that you be a graduate of a top three university or better."

"I am," the livestream fans could only hear the newcomer saying. "Here is my diploma."

Because there had already been a university graduate the day before yesterday, Zhen Li was calm in the face of crisis. He faced the mirror and fixed his somewhat messy hair. "You also have to be proficient in five or more foreign languages."

"I'm a certified expert in English, Russian, French, German, Japanese, Spanish, Arabic, and Latin." The newcomer got all kinds of certificates out of his briefcase.

Was the applicant this time so awesome? Zhen Li was surprised, but he firmly told him the third difficult requirement: "Also, three years or more experience in senior management at one of the country's top one-hundred enterprises."

"I have that, too. Here is my resume. I used to be the human resources manager at — — Company. I resigned half a month ago," the newcomer said calmly.

Zhen Li turned his head in shock and took all the materials from the newcomer's hands. After sitting in his seat and carefully examining the materials, he said, "Since you're so capable, why do you want to come work at this crappy little studio?"

Though Zhen Li had changed his position, the livestream screen also faced the desk. They could still see his ethereal figure. But the applicant seemed to still be standing by the door. He hadn't appeared in front of the lens.

[What else could it be for? It's for love!]

[Hurry, hurry! Hurry and let me see his face. Is he handsome? His voice is killing me, a first-rate voice actor's voice.]

"I..." The newcomer hesitated, then said, "I had different views from my previous superiors. You could say I resigned peacefully. Owing to certain unfortunate events that took place when I resigned, it would be hard for me to find a new job in the near future. But it seems my present savings won't be able to support modern life, so I really need this job."

Zhen Li had just been worrying about what excuse he should use to refuse this very qualified applicant. Hearing this, he quickly said, "Oh, so this is only to fill up the transitional period for you. You're unlikely to work long-term at my studio. What I need is someone who can collaborate and struggle with me in the long-term. If you came here only with the idea of

adjusting your condition, then I'm very sorry, you're outstanding, but you aren't suited for this job."

The newcomer laughed quietly. "No. I'd originally hoped to spend my time peacefully working at a fairly steady enterprise, form part of an ordinary working group. But what's happened recently has made a change in my ideas. Rather than following all the rules and regulations of a large company, I hope instead to work at a small company with potential, forge a base with my own hands. Doesn't that have more meaning? It's the pleasure of entrepreneurship."

Zhen Li's expression at once became very brilliant. This applicant was very difficult to deal with. Could he be someone sent by another leveler or the great master behind the scenes?

He looked the applicant up and down. High, straight nose bridge, regular features, handsome looks, an upright back, a proper bearing, unnaturally long legs, and a plain black suit. Based solely on his appearance, the applicant was flawless, but there was an aloof quality about him. However you looked at him, he didn't seem like a leveler who had experienced countless worlds, or like the matchless great master in person.

Zhen Li felt conflicted. He put the applicant's materials down. Rubbing his hands, he said, "Uh...do you have a significant other?"

His question made the barrage heat up at once:

[Wait, why did he suddenly ask this question? Weirdlyexcited.jpg.]

[President Zhen, let me see the applicant's face! My ears are getting pregnant just listening to his voice, his face must be so handsome.]

[I just drew a graph based on the direction of President Zhen's line of sight, the distance of his eyes from the ground, and the distance between his position and the applicant. My preliminary estimate is that the applicant ought to be between 183 cm and 188 cm tall. I don't know what his face looks like, but with that height, his legs must be up to standard.]

"I've been married for three years. I live with my husband in the Xuyang District. My husband also works here. I won't resign because of a long-distance relationship. I won't refuse to go on business trips because of my marriage. My husband is very supportive of my work." Each sentence the applicant spoke left Zhen Li no way to refuse.

Married? Zhen Li smiled in satisfaction.

The System wouldn't normally arrange a married identity for a leveler. When levelers came to a new world, they would for the most part get an identity with no family or connections, without any burdens. That was the only way to silently blend into the world without anyone detecting their identities.

Since this person was married and deeply in love with his husband, this also couldn't be the person he wanted to find.

So Zhen Li straightened out the applicant's materials and returned them. "I'm very sorry, but this company can't employ you."

"Why? Are you livestreaming?" the applicant asked.

"In order to be open and impartial, I usually livestream the course of interviews," Zhen Li explained simply. "Even though your husband is supportive of your work, this company still hopes to hire some unmarried, even single, people. I'm unable to reveal the concrete reason. It involves this company's secrets."

*In short, this company can't employ you.*

Just then, Zhen Li saw the applicant interlace his fingers and stride towards the livestreaming phone. He lightly pressed the palm of his hand over the phone. Just like that, Zhen Li's new high-definition wide-angle view phone broke.

The applicant's gaze swept coldly around the studio. He waved his arm gently, and the studio's main door tightly shut and locked itself.

Then he went up to the mirror, crooked his finger, and tapped lightly. Just like that, the mirror occupying the whole wall shattered, the pieces crashing to the floor.

Zhen Li: "!!!"

The applicant raised his hand to untie his too-tight necktie and undo the top two buttons of his shirt, revealing sexy collarbones.

He walked over to Zhen Li's president's desk and leaned both arms on top of it. Unlike his previous warm voice, his current tone was extremely aggressive. "I told you to open a studio, and this is how you accomplish the mission? Livestreaming? Is that it?"

Zhen Li: "!!!"

Looking at the applicant's murderous expression, Zhen Li felt like he'd had icy water poured from his head to his feet, the cold bone-chilling. Every bit of skin stung from the freezing cold.

Zhen Li immediately sprang up from his seat and knelt on both knees in front of the applicant, putting both palms on the ground. The movement was smooth and natural. He must have practiced it many times.

"I-I-I-I didn't know that it was you, great master. I was blind. I'm really too stupid!" Zhen Li said with his head lowered.

Naturally, the applicant was Yu Hua. He looked down from on high at Zhen Li kneeling and sighed gently. "I didn't tell you to kneel."

"Right, right!" Zhen Li nodded repeatedly. "It's my way of using body language to express my worship for someone I revere. It comes from the heart!"

"Get up. I don't have that sort of feudal hobby." It was June, and wearing the thick suit was a little warm. Yu Hua took off his jacket and sat in Zhen Li's chair. The look in his eyes was cold and unfeeling, as though looking at a tiny ant.

Zhen Li falteringly got up. He didn't dare to raise his head to look at Yu Hua. He could only warn him, "Great master, I think the World Protection Organization has been observing me. I don't know whether there are cameras in this room."

"Just call me Yu Hua. You're the boss," Yu Hua said calmly, sitting in the boss's chair. "There's surveillance in the office building's lobby and in the corridor outside your door. There's someone secretly filming from the office building across the street. As for the inside of your office...is there any need for surveillance?"

Zhen Li had the livestream turned on all day. There was no need to install surveillance inside the office. And the World Protection Organization didn't want to alert him, so they had been using long-distance methods to keep watch on Zhen Li.

Zhen Li looked at the window and thought it was lucky that the sun was too intense in the afternoons and would affect the lighting in the livestream. To better show off his complexion, he had closed the blinds long ago. Even if there was surveillance outside, they wouldn't see what was happening inside the room.

"Yes, I was wrong, I shouldn't have been livestreaming, and I'm very stupid, I didn't recognize you at first, great master....Yu Hua," Zhen Li obediently acknowledged his mistake.

"Forget it. You've done very well from the standpoint of attracting others' notice. And all levelers have their own hobbies. I'm not planning on suppressing your nature," Yu Hua said amiably.

Even he yearned for a peaceful life and struggled to cover up his superhuman skills. During his university entrance exam, he had forced himself to make mistakes, avoiding the calamity of testing into the number one university.

Over the endless years, levelers all developed some psychological problems. It was normal for them to have some eccentric hobbies.

"How long have you been a leveler? How many levels have you passed?" Yu Hua asked.

"It's just been fifteen years. I've passed four levels. This is my fifth," Zhen Li answered truthfully.



Yu Hua frowned slightly. He remembered that the first ten levels were for newbies to get adjusted. They were very simple levels that you could pass thinking with your feet. When he had been a leveler, it had only taken him half a year to clear the first ten worlds, and his companions had also only taken one year. Even if he and his companions had been exceedingly strong and Zhen Li's cohort of levelers were weak, fifteen years ago, the System had had the greater part of its energy removed. The difficulty of the levels had fallen to one fifth and below. It had taken Zhen Li fifteen years to go through four newbie levels?

"Though I deleted your System, in order to deal with the other levelers, I left you your foundation item from the first world and the ability that took the most points. What are your remaining item and ability?"

The first world's carry-on item could be upgraded, and it was the basis on which a leveler could survive in a world where survival was difficult. As long as Zhen Li still had his first item, Yu Hua could help him upgrade it, give Zhen Li the strength to deal with other levelers. That way, Yu Hua could hide himself.

As soon as the item and ability were mentioned, Zhen Li cheered up. He said exultantly, "My first item is a wardrobe that can hold tens of thousands of pieces of clothing. I filled the inside up with clothes! My ability is an alternate dimension stomach. I can eat without getting fat. It's a very practical ability!"

Yu Hua: "..."

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Author's Note:

Zhen Li: This company requires a top three university diploma.

Yu Hua: I have that.

Zhen Li: This company requires mastery of five foreign languages.

Yu Hua: I have that.

Zhen Li: This company requires three years or more of senior management work experience at one of the country's top one-hundred enterprises.

Yu Hua: I have that.

Zhen Li: ...This company doesn't hire humans.

Yu Hua: I think I really wasn't human in the past.

Zhen Li: ...This company doesn't hire people from this world!

Yu Hua (faint smile): What a coincidence. I'm not.

## CHAPTER 14

Zhen Li didn't notice Yu Hua's increasingly dangerous expression. He went on regardless: "I was originally chosen by the System after I died in a car crash. Each extra day I live is free. Of

course I have to live comfortably. It's like the song says, 'A few brief autumns and life is done, don't stop until you've had your fun<sup>8</sup>.'

"I took stock when I finished my first mission. My abilities are average. If I actively leveled up, passed the safe newbie levels, and came to the regular levels, I might die on the first day.

"Counting it up that way, if I could safely live a hundred years in the ten newbie worlds, then I'd be doing better than the average person.

"So I treated each level very seriously, lived happily in each world."

He looked seriously at Yu Hua. Yu Hua had one hand on the desk and was lost in thought, fingertips tap-tap-tapping on the desktop, each tap banging on Zhen Li's heart. This made Zhen Li involuntarily slide into a kneeling position again.

"You're right," Yu Hua said suddenly. "Having a proper understanding of yourself and being willing to assume the consequences, enjoying the journey of life without looking to the outcome—you are wise."

He-he'd been praised! Zhen Li covered his heart, for the first time in a long time remembering the surprise and happiness of getting first prize in a five-thousand meter race in high school and being praised by his homeroom teacher.

So he knelt more precisely, nodding his head repeatedly, saying, "Right, right! I do understand myself pretty well! So, great master, I think you'd better find a way to seal my mouth. The World Protection Organization is still watching me, and I've accidentally found out your true identity. If they use extreme methods to torture me, I won't be able to hold out."

Zhen Li looked up at Yu Hua, face full of sincerity and the words "I'll definitely give you away." Who knew how he had managed to fuse these two meanings so perfectly?

Yu Hua held his right hand with his left, restraining himself from impulsively doing away with the person in front of him.

He couldn't hit him; if he hit him, he might die. He couldn't kill him; at the moment, he had only this one chess piece. If he killed him, there would be no one to help him.

Yu Hua was only helping Zhen Li because he had no choice. The System had issued a mission, forcing him to save or kill Zhen Li. The System's goal had probably been to have Yu Hua kill Zhen Li, because Zhen Li really was useless.

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<sup>8</sup> Song by Taiwanese singer 李丽芬/Li Li-Fen, 爱江山更爱美人 (translated as "The Bold and the Beautiful"): <https://youtu.be/-DwvDoXAxvU>. The original lines are: 人生短短几个秋啊/不醉不罢休.

Zhen Li had been captured by the World Protection Organization less than half a day after walking out the door, and he had given up the System's mission. If the System hadn't wanted to use the Protectors to kill Yu Hua, Zhen Li would have self-destructed when he'd told them about the big boss hidden in their world.

The System had deliberately let Zhen Li reveal the existence of the big boss and had tempted Yu Hua to kill Zhen Li with the threat of making Yu Hua's identity public within twenty-four hours. If Yu Hua really had snuck into the base that night and assassinated Zhen Li, the World Protection Organization's base would have been alerted. They would have sensed danger. All the world's Protectors would have put forth all their efforts to kill Yu Hua. Then, in self-defense, Yu Hua would have been forced despite himself to release the System's energy and unseal his power. Then the System's evident plot would have succeeded.

Therefore, Yu Hua hadn't shown himself prematurely. Instead, he had tried to work out what the Protectors were thinking and secretly lead them to release Zhen Li. He had let the Protection Organization think they hadn't been forced, but had reached this answer through rational discussion.

After Zhen Li had been released, Yu Hua had hurried to absorb the energy of Zhen Li's System within the twenty-four hours of the System's stated mission. For one thing, this was to prevent Zhen Li from being threatened by the System into exposing his identity; for another, it was to give the System a warning.

Yu Hua had used concrete actions to tell the System, *I simply want you dead. The only reason I haven't acted is to protect the levelers. If you really do throw away all concerns and reveal my identity, we'll all be in for it. No one will survive.*

This way, the System definitely wouldn't dare to use the threat of exposing Yu Hua's identity against him again. The two sides' battle would be hidden out of public sight and wouldn't harm this world's ordinary people.

The only thing Yu Hua hadn't expected was that the chess piece he had chosen would be such a good-for-nothing.

Zhen Li didn't know that he'd wandered by the gates of hell. He added anxiously, "Also, with the World Protection Organization watching me, if you join my studio, won't your identity be revealed?"

Yu Hua knew this chess piece's IQ was insufficient. He had to explain outright: "I want to make them suspect me."

"What?" Zhen Li looked uncomprehendingly at Yu Hua.

Yu Hua picked a pen up off the desk. He pressed down on the pen cap with his index finger, making it stand upright and conspicuous on the tabletop. "I want to act very worthy of

suspicion, to look as much as I can like either a leveler or the target of the System's mission, to make the Protection Organization investigate me."

"Huh?" Zhen Li's mouth hung open. He completely didn't understand Yu Hua's line of thought.

"Then I'll make them overturn every point of suspicion, think that none of their doubts have any legs to stand on, even feel apologetic towards me, an 'ordinary person.'" Yu Hua raised his index finger slightly. The standing pen fell over.

Yu Hua said, "The System won't let things go at this. It wants to kill me to retake its power. There will definitely be more and stronger levelers coming to this world in the future. When the time comes, I won't be facing levelers of your grade, but stronger and more ruthless ones.

"One day I'll have to unseal myself, whether I want to or not. If the Protection Organization suspects me then, I won't be able to explain it away.

"So I want to appear in their line of sight before that, give them the impression that 'Yu Hua definitely can't be a leveler.' This way, even if I slip up, the Protectors will think of excuses for me, fooling themselves."

Zhen Li, still kneeling, applauded, cheering on Yu Hua's scheme. He thought about it, then asked, "So what should I do?"

"Two things." Yu Hua held up two fingers. "First, be the first to suspect me."

"Oh, I see," Zhen Li said, suddenly seeing the light. "It makes sense to use me to lead the Protection Organization to investigate you. At the same time, the Protection Organization doesn't trust me. The more I say something, the more they'll question it. People only believe what they've verified themselves. As soon as they've determined you're an ordinary person, when the time comes, even if I tell the Protectors, this is the world-destroying big boss I'm looking for, they'll only think I'm using you as a scapegoat."

"That's exactly right." Yu Hua finally nodded at Zhen Li. He might be a little stupid, but he was very obedient, knew himself well, and was easy to train.

"Oh, right, you should be careful for the next few days, great master." Zhen Li picked up a tablet and pulled up a screenshot from the basketball throwing video. "The uncle who was shooting hoops with us, and the people in the crowd whose faces I've circled, are all Protectors. It was that man who caught me that day."

Yu Hua took the tablet and frowned faintly. Protectors and a leveler had been next to him for so long that day, and he hadn't noticed it. His vigilance had atrophied too much.

He closely examined the Protectors on the high-definition screenshot and said, "These people seem to be in disguise. It's too bad that 99% of my abilities are sealed. I can only use 'truth-seeing eyes' if I unseal at least 50% of my power. I can't see their true faces."

In standard kneeling posture, Zhen Li said, “What is your primary power, great master? The people I met in the Clearing League had powers concerning strength, speed, defense, aid, and healing. Those aren’t so hard to deal with, but I heard that there are also high-grade time and space power users. Those two abilities are huge problems. If you aren’t prepared ahead of time, they’ll be very hard to handle.”

Yu Hua smiled faintly. “All of them.”

“Huh?” Zhen Li rubbed his ears.

“3841 worlds were enough for me to possess all the abilities,” Yu Hua said.

Zhen Li was so scared he stopped breathing, terrified that he would annoy the great master by breathing too loud.

“But these abilities have no use in daily life. I’ve sealed them all. If I need one later, I can unseal it then.” Yu Hua swept his eyes indifferently over Zhen Li kneeling on the floor. He got up and went up beside him, putting his hand lightly on Zhen Li’s wig. “It doesn’t matter if you give me up. For the sake of my peaceful and pleasant life, I don’t object to shutting up anyone who knows. Anyway, there are so many people in this world, right?”

Zhen Li couldn’t hold back a hiccup. His wig couldn’t withstand the pressure and slid off.

The keen instincts of a prey animal kept Zhen Li from pursuing this topic. He quickly changed the subject. “Sir, you-you-you just said there were two things. What’s the other one?”

“Not bad. Your memory’s all right. You didn’t forget about that,” Yu Hua said. “The second thing is even more important than the first. When I absorbed your System’s powers, I left your hidden System account, and I transferred a hundred million to it.”

“A hundred million!” Hearing this number, Zhen Li’s eyes glowed. He instantly forgot about his hiccups. “Is it a reward for me?”

*Dream on!* Restraining his anger, Yu Hua said, “It’s the salary you’re going to pay me in the future. It doesn’t matter what business you undertake. Within three years, you’ll openly and legally return that money to me, and then you’ll be free.”

“I don’t have any business sense. How can I earn a hundred million?” Zhen Li asked weakly.

“Any way you like. Haven’t there been things like virtual currency, credit investing, shared services online recently? Pick some business with a fast return on investment, put together a nice project, then raise my salary,” Yu Hua said.

Zhen Li said, “...I think that half of what you just said is written down in the criminal laws.”

Yu Hua conveyed to Zhen Li with a look, *You can break the law, but make sure that I get my salary properly and legally and without knowing about it.*

Zhen Li: "..."

He thought he understood his position in the great master's eyes: a person who could be tossed out to die any time.

After the two of them had negotiated, using a contract personally drafted by Yu Hua, Zhen Li's studio engaged Yu Hua as director of human resources, responsible for overseeing the studio's potential future employees, who may never exist at all.

Yu Hua signed it and left his thumbprint. Zhen Li signed it and added his freshly-carved official seal. Then at last it received the seal of the Labor Department. Thus was an employment contract completed, in triplicate: one for Yu Hua, one for Zhen Li, and one for the Labor Department.

An original copy of the employment contract came in front of You Zhengping two hours later. He lifted the contract with trembling hands and said in distress, "I *told* him not to be in a rush to find a job, to patiently look for a suitable one. Why would he join Zhen Li's studio? Human resources director? What human resources is he directing? The Destroyers?!"

"Calm down, calm down!" Cen Xiao soothed You Zhengping. "That's the head office's desk in front of you, we can't go around smashing the director's desk!"

Cen Xiao was shocked. Their squad had also been acquainted with Yu Hua for four years. Yu Hua was a warm-hearted, domestic man, who seemed something like a wife (ahem), but had very manly qualities in unexpected aspects. He was kind and considerate and often had You Zhengping bring food for them. Cen Xiao and the others thought that You Zhengping had stepped into the grave of marriage too early, but they believed from the heart that Yu Hua was in fact a good final resting place. The air of home he had about him neutralized You Zhengping's violent tendencies. With him there, You Zhengping could control himself.

"Director, we've known Yu Hua for many years. He definitely can't be a Destroyer." Cen Xiao scrambled to speak for the enraged You Zhengping.

Director Xiao looked at You Zhengping with a complicated expression and gave everyone a copy of the materials. "The first time Zhen Li appeared in front of us, Yu Hua was at the mall playing Whac-A-Mole back to back with him and shooting hoops in the same game area.

"After leaving our base, Zhen Li immediately went to that same mall to have lunch, and Yu Hua just happened to be there.

"The first person Zhen Li hired after setting up his studio was Yu Hua.

“I also know Yu Hua, and I also hope he isn’t a Destroyer. But this is a Protector’s work. The whole world is at our backs. As soon as we discover a suspicious point, we must investigate and verify.”

“I, I request to be the one to investigate Yu Hua. I want to personally prove his innocence,” You Zhengping said, choked with emotion. “When we got married, you investigated his past in secret to examine his political record. He’s completely innocent. The last three generations of his family have been ordinary people. How could he be a Destroyer?”

“Destroyers can occupy certain ordinary people’s bodies,” Director Xiao said with a sigh. “Though most Destroyers choose identities with limited social connections, it’s still not impossible for Yu Hua to be chosen. You’re Yu Hua’s family member. Emotions will cloud your judgment. In this investigation, you have to step back as much as possible to avoid suspicion. You can only cooperate, not take part. That includes Cen Xiao and the rest of the squad. You’ve also known Yu Hua too long. It’s inappropriate for you to act in this. The head office has dispatched someone else to the Xuyang District. Before this has been clarified, You Zhengping, you and your squad will be on rest from duty. Once Yu Hua’s identity has been determined, we’ll redistribute assignments to you.”

“How can that be!” You Zhengping got worked up and smashed Director Xiao’s desk.

“How can it be otherwise?” said a man standing behind Director Xiao. He was holding an injury report. “This is the injury report from half a month ago on Yu Hua’s superior. The evidence shows that half a month ago, Yu Hua suddenly burst out and injured him, giving his direct superior a concussion. After this, you had your first period of cold war, lasting about a week. You were only reconciled when Zhen Li appeared. We have ample reason to suspect that Yu Hua was replaced by a Destroyer half a month ago.”

This man wore a form-fitting Zhongshan suit. He touched Director Xiao’s desk lightly with the palm of his hand, and the desk that had been broken into sawdust was immediately restored to its original form.

He reached out a hand towards You Zhengping. “My name is Lian Yufan. I’m in charge of this case. As a family member of the suspect, I hope you will cooperate with the investigation.”

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Author’s Note:

You Zhengping: Human resources director? What human resources is he directing? The Destroyers?!

Yu Hua: Oddly enough, the post really is to direct Destroyers.

## CHAPTER 15

In order to avoid suspicion, You Zhengping not only couldn't participate in the investigation, he also had to hand over his nanotech face-changing masks to Lian Yufan's squad. The reason was that they had shown their nanotech mask faces in front of Zhen Li. Rather than wasting new masks, it was better to keep using these masks, equating these faces with the Xuyang District Protectors. It would also help to conceal You Zhengping's squad's identities.

You Zhengping held the box with his mask in both hands. Lian Yufan reached out to take it, but You Zhengping didn't let go.

Director Xiao, Cen Xiao, and the others looked at You Zhengping, who was still holding on to the box.

Lian Yufan raised his hands and yanked but felt that his strength couldn't match You Zhengping's. He smiled politely. "Captain You, I'm only temporarily borrowing this mask. When the investigation has ended, the Xuyang District will be your responsibility."

Director Xiao, Cen Xiao, and the others turned to Lian Yufan and nodded. This was right.

You Zhengping clenched his teeth and said, "Yu Hua can't have been replaced. I've been living with him for so many years. You think I couldn't tell whether my partner had become a different person?"

The observers saw You Zhengping's steady look and thought that they ought to trust his judgment.

Lian Yufan was different from You Zhengping. You Zhengping did things openly. He liked what he liked, hated what hated. His emotions were very sincere. Lian Yufan, however, was extremely formal and ceremonial in his work. He said, "Of course we trust your judgement and instincts as captain, but we need evidence for everything. We can't draw conclusions solely based on your feelings."

The subtext was that You Zhengping might be blinded by his feelings.

As everyone was well aware, You Zhengping's feelings really were a problem. He'd even just smashed Director Xiao's desk.

You Zhengping was angry. Were they trying to say that his and Yu Hua's back strength exercises the last few days had been fake? If he couldn't even recognize his own husband at negative distance, then he might as well be dead.

"I'm not opposed to investigating Yu Hua. We can only untie our emotional knots and continue our peaceful life if there's a clear investigation. But I want to investigate for myself. I want to personally prove that Yu Hua is innocent!" You Zhengping secretly strained. The handsome nanotech mask drew closer to him.

Everyone's gazes followed the box with the mask towards You Zhengping.



“You’re joking!” Seeing that his strength couldn’t compete with You Zhengping’s, Lian Yufan furtively tore a corner of the box and used his repairing ability to pull the box towards himself. “When you were training at the base, your stamina, ability, reaction speed, and judgment really were all number one, but you failed in your reasoning grades again and again. Each time there was a worldwide Protector competition, your grades fell short of mine. You’ll always be second!”

“Oh, so you were the number one cold-blooded bastard who abandoned his teammates every time a crisis approached, who did away with the ‘hostages’ and ‘family members’ to kill the ‘Destroyers’ in the tests along with them!” You Zhengping said in realization. “Then I really can’t entrust Yu Hua to you!”

*You’re using your special ability, are you? Do you think I don’t have a special ability?!* You Zhengping saw Lian Yufan’s little trick. He stirred his thoughts, using an invisible space to wrap around the piece of the paper box that Lian Yufan had seized. Lian Yufan’s special ability was reduced to one tenth, and the box once again moved towards You Zhengping.

“I only acted according to my instructors’ teachings each time, choosing the best, most correct option, the one that could protect the most people!” Lian Yufan put his back into it, using his whole body’s strength to fight for the box with the mask.

“Bullshit!” You Zhengping was irritated enough to curse. “You’re only always abandoning the people closest to you because you don’t have the ability to protect everyone. If your ability isn’t strong enough, go train and become stronger. Don’t bully family members without powers and wounded teammates! Only a good-for-nothing makes choices. I want it all!”

“You’re the one talking bullshit! Human strength is too insignificant in the face of the stars, in the face of the universe. Strength is limited, and so is energy. A reasoning test isn’t testing how strong you are, it’s testing your ability to put the interests of the country and the people above everything else when you truly encounter a situation where you’re faced with a difficult choice. For the sake of protecting this world, everything can be sacrificed, including yourself!”

In contrast to the quiet and tranquil Yu Hua, You Zhengping had the ability to make people lose their tempers. The always rational and controlled, always smiling and polite Lian Yufan had been forced into real anger by You Zhengping. He was angry enough to start exchanging curses with him.

The box with the mask was pulled this way and that by their every trick. Gen Xiao and the others, along with Lian Yufan’s squad, who had long ago accomplished the handover, moved their gazes left and right following the box, their necks twisting until they cramped.

Director Xiao, however, was calmly listening to their dispute. He even poured hot water into his thermos mug, picked it up with both hands, and started to drink.

Neither of the two men would give an inch. The struggle over the box with the nanotech mask was in full swing, both sides deploying their special abilities to the full. The air inside in the room was influenced by their power, colliding violently, actually curling up into a small-scale tornado in the office.

There was a huge bang, and the box at the center of the power broke. The mask inside cracked into pieces. The two men fell back simultaneously. Their subordinates quickly surged forward to catch their bosses.

Director Xiao was sitting in the middle of this. His mug exploded, sending all the boiling water splashing into Director Xiao's face. The just-restored desk broke into two pieces again.

Director Xiao calmly wiped his face and said in an impressive voice, "Has one of you gotten the upper hand?"

The two men climbed to their feet at the same time. You Zhengping looked at the broken mask and frowned, but Lian Yufan put his hand over the mask, and the handsome uncle mask was restored. The mask at last came intact into Lian Yufan's hands.

While Lian Yufan had gotten the mask, he was still in an awkward spot. Their powers had collided, and You Zhengping had suffered no losses, while Lian Yufan had received an internal injury. Leaving aside the different forms of their special abilities, You Zhengping's power far exceeded Lian Yufan's.

Lian Yufan wiped away the fresh blood at the corner of his lips and used all his strength to maintain his perfect upright posture. He strolled up to Director Xiao, grit his teeth, and repaired the desk and the thermos mug.

Heaven knew how hard it had been for him to walk these few steps. With each step, he felt his legs were breaking. His ability could only be used on inanimate objects. It had no effect on living things. He could only bear the wound he had received.

Acting as though the quarrel and loss of control just now hadn't happened, Lian Yufan held the mask and signed the handover receipt, swallowed the blood rushing up his throat, and smiled politely. "Handover complete."

You Zhengping clenched his fist. In this struggle, his power had been stronger, but he had still lost to Lian Yufan.

During the fight, You Zhengping had used his special ability to guard the mask, concerned that it would break in the struggle. But in the end, while both sides had been using their strength, Lian Yufan had quietly strained to destroy the mask. Only he could restore the mask once it had been destroyed. As soon as the mask was broken, You Zhengping had lost without a doubt.

"A dirty trick!" You Zhengping said quietly.

“Not dirty at all,” Director Xiao said. “Your power to protect lost to the power to destroy.”

You Zhengping was seized with panic, staring blankly at Director Xiao.

His superior was right. If his power to protect had been a little stronger, he would have won the struggle.

“It’s always harder to protect than to destroy.” Director Xiao stood and went to the window with his hands clasped behind his back. “It takes at least ten days to construct a building, but demolishing it is the matter of only an instant. We are Protectors. We bear a calling and a responsibility. It’s often not enough to rely only on power.”

You Zhengping slowly lowered his head. He had no actual combat experience, and the fight just now had made him realize what a difficult thing it was to protect. The slightest mistake, and everything was lost forever.

Lian Yufan lifted his head haughtily. The pain he felt seemed to decrease. Then Director Xiao said to him, “But I haven’t said that you were in the right.”

Director Xiao turned, gaze sweeping over the two young squad captains. While this generation of Protectors was immature, they had unlimited potential.

Director Xiao undid his buttons, revealing an enormous scar on his body. The scar ran from his shoulder to his lower abdomen, cutting him in half. Everyone sucked in a breath when they saw that scar.

Director Xiao said, “I got this wound when I was twenty-five. I was wounded by a Destroyer with an invisible laser weapon. My body was torn in two. I was about to die. I told my companion not to mind me. This Destroyer’s power was very special. It could hide the attack of any weapon. Someone had to bring that information back, or else more people would die.

“But he didn’t abandon me. He took me away from that Destroyer and fled back to the base through the sewers.

“The lucky thing was, it had rained a lot that day, and there was a lot of water collected in the sewers. We hid among the sewage, and the Destroyer didn’t find us.

“Back then, even if he’d left me behind, I wouldn’t have had a word of complaint. I would have died happy if it meant my companion could bring the information back.

“But when my injury had healed and I went back home to visit my relatives, when I saw my parents’s faces, growing older by the day, I was exceedingly grateful to that companion, thankful that he had saved me.

"If he had left me behind, I would have died at only twenty-five, dealing a heavy blow to my family, who loved me and knew nothing about the situation."

"The reason a life is so heavy is that it doesn't only support a single person's existence. It also supports the emotions of a household, of a group."

Looking at Director Xiao's striking scar, Lian Yufan also slowly lowered his head. His hidden injury surged up. Lian Yufan couldn't hold out. He coughed violently, coughing up blood. You Zhengping got out a tissue and passed it to Lian Yufan. After a moment's hesitation, Lian Yufan took it.

Seeing their interaction, Director Xiao nodded in satisfaction, put on his shirt, and said, "I have no way to judge which of your viewpoints is more correct. After all, historically, relying on emotion has led many people to disaster."

"During training, we teach you rational behavior. But in actual combat, there's just one thing you need to remember. We are Protectors. If we're protecting our teammates, our families, or the enormous multitudes behind us, we aren't in the wrong."

"Yes, sir!" You Zhengping and Lian Yufan raised their heads simultaneously, solemnly saluting Director Xiao.

Following the salute, You Zhengping put his thumbprint on the handover receipt, saying to Lian Yufan, "I trust in Captain Lian's rational judgment and analytical abilities. I request that you... verify Yu Hua's innocence"

Lian Yufan extended a friendly hand towards You Zhengping. "I also trust in Captain You's intuitive judgment. I will find the evidence."

The two of them shook hands and made up. You Zhengping promised to cooperate with the organization's activities, and Lian Yufan expressed that he certainly wouldn't disturb their married life.

Director Xiao looked at their clasped hands in satisfaction, nodded, and drank another mouthful of goji berry-infused water.

The two squads left the base and went in opposite directions. When they were out of sight, You Zhengping and Lian Yufan spat simultaneously.

You Zhengping said, "Bah! Lian Yufan couldn't beat me, so he used treachery to steal the mask. Next time I'll peel off his sanctimonious face for sure."

Lian Yufan said, "Bah! You Zhengping's emotions are so unstable that he wouldn't even give me a stupid mask. Intuitive judgment? Him? He's an obvious patsy, and Yu Hua has definitely been replaced. Just wait for me to uncover the evidence!"

The two squads: "..."

Cen Xiao stared blankly when he heard You Zhengping's words. "I thought you'd grown up, but in fact...you really have grown up. You've learned how to put on an act!"

You Zhengping said, "You can't be direct in dealing with Lian Yufan. In eight years of training, every time there was a worldwide competition, it was that bastard who got the better of me! One day, I'll come out number one!"

Cen Xiao turned his head and said to his teammates, "Did you see that? That amply demonstrates that it's always your enemies who make you grow up."

You Zhengping ignored Cen Xiao and the others' mental activities. He strode elegantly on his long legs, got on his police-issue motor scooter, put on his safety helmet, and said, "Didn't they tell me to cooperate with the work? I'm going to go advise Yu Hua to quit!"

Then he rode off on the motor scooter, leaving dust behind. It was a good thing the scooter's highest speed was only 50 kph, or else You Zhengping would have been driving at a race car's speed.

Cen Xiao and the others were half a beat too slow. By the time they got on their scooters, You Zhengping had already vanished.

"Let go after him. He's so worked up that he might get excited and reveal our identities." Cen Xiao and the others quickly chased after him.

You Zhengping quickly arrived at Zhen Li's studio. He didn't have time to take the elevator. He ran right up the stairs to the twenty-first floor.

At that moment, Zhen Li was practicing dancing in front of the phone.

With his hundred million in three years, the stress Yu Hua had put on Zhen Li was too great. He didn't want to earn the money illegally. When the money had been paid back, he still wanted to live in this world in comfort, accompanied by his wardrobe. If he went to prison, he would have to wear a prison uniform. Zhen Li thought prison uniforms were repulsive!

The only thing he could think of was to use his suddenly skyrocketing popularity and his precise kneeling technique to beg his fans for tips.

Zhen Li didn't know how to sing or dance. Luckily, at the end of each world, he'd used the points he'd won to raise his physical capabilities. A good body was the best asset for survival. Zhen Li had never stunted in that aspect. His current physique was still in the bounds of an ordinary person's, but in every respect he was at the gifted level among ordinary people.

After only a few days of study, Zhen Li could dance quite well. The livestream fans had witnessed his rapid improvement with their own eyes and had all sent him presents.

While Zhen Li danced, Yu Hua sat at a desk that the livestream camera couldn't reach, flipping through the most recent financial reports, considering how to sell Zhen Li at a good price.

Zhen Li had no idea of his future danger. Receiving praise from the livestream fans, he happily said to Yu Hua, "Great... Er, Human Resources Director Yu, what do you think of my dancing? Is this pose right? Does it look good?"

Yu Hua didn't let Zhen Li call him "great master," and he didn't permit him to use his full name, so this was the form of address Zhen Li had to use for him.

Hearing Zhen Li's words, the barrage was exceedingly excited:

[It looks good, it looks good, it looks very good! If I were Human Resources Director Yu, I'd kneel down before your yoga pants on the spot.]

[Director Yu is President Zhen's only employee, a graduate of a top three university, proficient in eight foreign languages, a former senior manager at a top one-hundred enterprise with an annual salary of hundreds of thousands. Why would he resign to come to work at President Zhen's crappy little studio?]

[For love!]

[President Zhen, let us have a look at Director Yu, I'll send you a hundred submarines!]

[President Zhen may kneel down, but he still won't let us see Director Yu. Give it up, guys. But President Zhen's kneeling does look very good. He's obviously a practiced hand at it.]

[I send a gift every day: when can we see Director Yu?]

When You Zhengping charged into the office, what he saw was Zhen Li in a provocative pose, asking Yu Hua whether it looked good. His eyes swept over the phone and caught sight of the [They're together!] comments on the barrage. He was instantly mad enough to bust a lung.

It didn't look good at all!

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Author's Note:

You Zhengping: Caught in the act!

Zhen Li: Director Yu, who is he? Aren't I the only one? (Aren't I your only collaborator?)

Yu Hua (to You Zhengping): ...I can explain.

Yu Hua (to Zhen Li): You're dead!

## CHAPTER 16

You Zhengping had always appeared in front of Zhen Li in the form of the handsome uncle, and Lian Yufan had taken that form. Zhen Li had seen You Zhengping once before at the subdistrict office, but they hadn't made a deep connection. They were practically strangers. Seeing a stranger burst into his studio, Zhen Li was bewildered.

On account of You Zhengping's uniform, Zhen Li got up and politely asked, "What's the problem, Uncle Policeman? We're a legitimate business."

Though Director Yu had ordered President Zhen to do some illegal work to make money quickly, President Zhen, for the sake of his own life, wasn't planning on putting those orders into practice. Why would the police come to the door?

"What did you call me?" Hearing the word "uncle," You Zhengping's voice rose two keys.

Zhen Li was a Destroyer, threatening the safety of the world's people, running a briefcase company and tricking his husband Yu Hua into joining it, getting Yu Hua investigated by the Protection Organization. Zhen Li had done all this to them, and yet he still wanted to seduce You Zhengping's Yu Hua and swagger around calling him "uncle?" Was he old? No, he was only twenty-five!

But Zhen Li's records said he was in his third year of university, twenty-one years old. He really was younger than You Zhengping.

"Don't you normally call the police 'Uncle Policeman'?" Zhen Li's face had the word "innocent" written all over it. "I was being respectful. If you don't like that, then how should I address you? Auxiliary Policeman-gege?"

The composition "Auxiliary Policeman-gege" sounded too much like "Honored Concubine-jiejie!"

"This is my husband. He must have come to visit me." Yu Hua, who had been sitting steadily at the desk, quickly got up and nearly hopped over the desk.

When he left the desk, Yu Hua's face appeared on the livestream for the first time. The barrage instantly went crazy:

[I was wrong, I only thought that Director Yu was over 185 cm tall. I didn't expect Director Yu to be so handsome!]

[Despotic director and cute president, what a great plot, that's worth having.]

[The little auxiliary policeman is also very handsome! You're adorable when you're fuming, like a little squirrel. I want to poke your cheeks.]

[Wanting to poke +1, when there's such a cute guy on patrol, I want to bring him food and water, want to bring him home. Wait! The cute guy is married? Ah!!! Screaming myself hoarse!]

[No, he's not the only one who's married, Director Yu is also married, what did he say? This is his husband? So you're really married? You weren't only saying it during the interview to make President Zhen jealous?]

[The two of you look barely over twenty, why do you have to go into the grave of marriage so young?]

[When Director Yu walked over, no, when he slid over at the speed of light on his long legs, his face was very close to me, wow, he's really handsome!]

Yu Hua's handsome face was quickly followed by a black screen. Yu Hua had turned off the livestream.

He could sell Zhen Li off at a good price...ahem, with a good contract, and leave after getting back his hundred million. But he didn't want himself and You Zhengping to appear in the public view. They were an ordinary couple, living a life of common concerns and trivialities. They wouldn't get involved in the flashy culture of internet celebrities.

When he heard that the "Auxiliary Policeman-gege" was the great master's husband, Zhen Li was dumbfounded. During the interview, the great master had in fact said that he had a husband with whom he was very close. But Zhen Li had thought that this was only because the livestream had been going then, and the great master hadn't wanted the fans to put him and Zhen Li together in their imaginations.

But now, not only had the great master introduced this person as his husband, he had also run over to the Auxiliary Policeman-gege with his voice shaking and his steps unsteady, his ingratiating posture just as practiced as Zhen Li's kneeling.

Fortunately, Director Yu's knees were straight. After shutting off the livestream, he went to You Zhengping, held his husband's hand, and introduced him to his "boss." "President Zhen, this is my husband, You Zhengping. Pingping, this my boss, Zhen Li."

"Pingping" was You Zhengping's childhood name. Normally only his elders called him that. He didn't especially like this name because it sounded unsophisticated. Yu Hua understood his husband's views and wouldn't call You Zhengping that in front of his crowd of underlings. In the ordinary course of life, he would only murmur the name "Pingping" in You Zhengping's ear when they were performing back strength exercises together.

Calling him "Pingping" now in front of Zhen Li was to tell Zhen Li about "Pingping"'s importance to Yu Hua.

This intimate form of address also succeeded in eliminating You Zhengping's anger. He'd wanted to throw Yu Hua off, but when he heard "Pingping," he softened, turning his push into a



pull, squeezing Yu Hua's hand and saying to Zhen Li, "Hello, President Zhen. I'm sorry, I came to visit my husband without making an appointment. It was rude of me. You can just call me Mr. You."

He stuck close to Yu Hua. If not for Yu Hua and Zhen Li's relative positions in the workplace, You Zhengping definitely would have kissed his husband right in front of Zhen Li!

"No, you don't need to call me 'president,' I'm the youngest, you can just call me Xiao Zhen, sir," Zhen Li said stupidly, not yet recovered from the news of the great master having a husband.

"Boss, I'd like request leave to go talk to Pingping." Only Yu Hua could maintain his "normal" persona in this moment.

As he spoke, his lips inadvertently brushed against You Zhengping's ear, simultaneously shooting Zhen Li a cold and vicious look.

Yu Hua was telling Zhen Li that You Zhengping was his. *Don't think of hurting him.*

Feeling Yu Hua kiss his ear, You Zhengping was delighted. As he smiled, he sent Zhen Li a fierce look, warning him not to even think about seducing Yu Hua.

Zhen Li: "..."

An age passed before he finally found his voice. Pretending to be calm, he said, "We've just signed a contract. This doesn't count as a full working day. You can leave early, have a nice candlelight dinner with Mr. You."

Mr. You and Mr. Yu's expressions simultaneously said, "At least you know your place." They left the office holding hands.

When they were gone, Zhen Li sat down on the floor to recover. After a long time, he climbed to his feet with difficulty, picked up his phone, turned on the livestreaming software, and publicly explained why the livestream had suddenly stopped earlier. He said that Director Yu didn't want his work to impact his family, so he had turned off the livestream. As the boss, Zhen Li was extremely apologetic. He would livestream at the same time tomorrow.

Because the three of them were so handsome, the fans forgave Zhen Li. Zhen Li sighed in relief and sat on the floor hugging his knees, thinking, *Why do I have it so hard?*

When Mr. You and Mr. Yu went downstairs, they met Cen Xiao and the others, who had just hurried over. You Zhengping looked distastefully at them. "What are you guys doing here?"

*We were worried about you!* Cen Xiao swallowed the words down and forced himself to say, "You shouldn't do your personal business while wearing your uniform. We brought your clothes. Hurry up and change."

“Personal business while wearing your uniform” was a veiled warning to You Zhengping not to impulsively reveal his identity.

“I’ve got it,” You Zhengping said dully, still not in a great mood. “Give me the clothes. I’ll go change.”

He accepted the casual clothes he usually wore and took them to a restroom to change, leaving Yu Hua with Cen Xiao and the others.

They’d known each other for a long time, so they were fairly familiar with each other. It wasn’t awkward without You Zhengping there. “The roast chicken legs were delicious, thank you.”

Yu Hua liked everything connected to You Zhengping and treated his friends very well. He said, “It was Zhengping who wanted me to make some for you. He said you had all been working hard patrolling every day and wanted me to help you eat better.”

“Don’t put in a good word for him.” Shi Yongfu waved his hands. “If we weren’t strong enough, he wouldn’t have given us a single mouthful to eat! He’s unbearably stingy. One of these days, he’s going to get so fat!”

“No, I measure his weight and body fat percentage regularly. If there’s any fluctuation, I adjust his diet to make sure he stays healthy.” Saying this, Yu Hua’s tone was faintly self-satisfied. You Zhengping’s ability to eat while maintaining a good figure was because of what Yu Hua fed him.

Cen Xiao and the others: “...”

They were suddenly feeling full. Was it fun luring the single dogs in and then killing them? They wanted relationships, too!

When You Zhengping came out after changing, he saw his underlings “joyously” chatting with Yu Hua and felt inexplicably displeased. He dumped the auxiliary police outfit he’d changed out of into Cen Xiao’s arms and impatiently said, “Beat it, don’t get in the way of our two-person world.”

Cen Xiao was used to You Zhengping’s attitude; brothers were there for mutual mockery. He tactfully led the underlings away. Before leaving, he told Yu Hua, “Next time you make something tasty, send some for us, too!”

“All right,” Yu Hua agreed, smiling.

“Why would you make them food?! A hoard of locusts. They stole all my chicken legs.” At the mention of the chicken legs, You Zhengping felt hurt. “You get so tired doing the housework, there’s no need to make anything for them.”

Yu Hua did what the livestream fans had wanted to do, poking You Zhengping's puffed-out cheek. Smiling, he said, "They're your friends. I want them to approve of me, to like me, to wish us well."

You Zhengping's anger cooled at once. Holding Yu Hua's hand, he said, "I'm off work. Do you want to go have a candlelight dinner or go home and cook for me?"

"Which would you like?" Yu Hua asked.

"I think the food you make is the best!" You Zhengping said.

"Then let's go home." A warm current rose in Yu Hua's heart. "I like to watch the news broadcast while eating, and listen to the weather forecast background music while washing the dishes."

This was Yu Hua's plain yet happy life. He definitely wouldn't let anyone destroy it.

"All right, all right!" You Zhengping nodded his head repeatedly.

Then his phone's message notification rang. You Zhengping fished out his phone. It was from a strange number that had sent an advertising message.

But You Zhengping could tell that this message came from Lian Yufan, using the Protectors' code.

Lian Yufan said: *Don't go home. We're searching your apartment.*

You Zhengping's anger instantly flew to the top of his head. Damn it! How did Lian Yufan know he was going home? Who was spying on them? And that was his and Yu Hua's home, what right did those bastards have to search it!?

Before he could encourage Yu Hua not to go home, the same number sent him another coded message.

Translated, the message was: *I planted a nano-listening device on you that sticks to the skin, the newest technology. It won't be discovered. Scout out Yu Hua's intentions during dinner. Be careful of personal information. Don't be counter-probed. As a relative of the suspect, you must cooperate with the work of the organization.*

You Zhengping's hand shook as it clutched the phone.

"What does it say?" Yu Hua looked at the message, not at all guarded, and saw that it was an advertisement. "These businesses are a pain. If you buy something at the store, your personal information gets leaked, and you're always getting junk messages. There's no way to block them."

“Right, you’re always getting junk messages,” You Zhengping said, squeezing the words out from between his teeth. “How about we go out to eat?”

“Hm?” Yu Hua looked doubtfully at You Zhengping. Why would he change his mind just like that?

“I, I got paid today! I haven’t been working for a full month, but my job issues wages at a fixed time every month, so I’ve been paid ahead of time. Though it’s my trial period salary, it’s still 4000 yuan, so I have an opportunity to invite you out to eat,” You Zhengping said, smiling, quickly thinking of an excuse. He wasn’t smiling from happiness. Under his sweet smile, there was deep agony.

He was cooperating with Lian Yufan to lie to Yu Hua. He was a bad partner.

“So much money? Then we really do have to celebrate,” Yu Hua said cooperatively. “What do you want to eat? As the guest, shouldn’t I be the one to choose?”

“Of course, go ahead and pick. Somewhere with a nice atmosphere,” said You Zhengping.

“Then...will the restaurant where we had our blind date do? The atmosphere is good, there are private rooms, and it’s the place where we met,” Yu Hua said into You Zhengping’s ear.

Yu Hua’s expression was smiling, but he wasn’t happy. He knew that You Zhengping had an uncontrollable character. At dinner today, he would definitely ask about Yu Hua’s relationship with Zhen Li. Given Yu Hua’s qualifications, he was simply wasting his talents on Zhen Li’s studio. You Zhengping would definitely want an explanation.

Yu Hua had already prepared a flawless excuse, but when he thought of lying to You Zhengping, who was so pure, he felt very sad, as pained as if the System had used its power to block all the blood vessels in his heart.

“Of course that’ll do. I also love that restaurant. So many of our memories are there.” You Zhengping’s expression was fond.

But inside he was crying. He was going to lie to and interrogate Yu Hua at the restaurant where they had first met. It was too cruel.

Both their hearts were full of self-blame. Neither of them dared to look at the other’s expression, so neither found out that his husband was forcing a happy look.

This couple that seemed so much in harmony while actually being at odds got a taxi and went to eat dinner hand in hand, their smiles brimming with sweetness.

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Author’s Note:

Yu Hua: I'm lying to him.

You Zhengping: I'm lying to him.

Messrs. Melancholy: I'm a real scumbag!

## CHAPTER 17

As the person paying, You Zhengping naturally wanted to let Yu Hua as the guest order the food.

Yu Hua chose a few dishes that You Zhengping liked. He didn't have a strong taste for good food. There weren't any foods he particularly liked, nor any he disliked. What he liked was watching You Zhengping eating with gusto.

In fact, You Zhengping wasn't a picky eater, either. He ate everything. But he would eat with enjoyment when he encountered something he liked.

"This is all what I like. What about you?" You Zhengping was a little dissatisfied when he saw the menu selections.

"I like whatever you like." Yu Hua wasn't trotting out a cheesy pick-up line or going through the motions. Only when he saw You Zhengping eating happily would Yu Hua feel that the tasteless food had taken on flavor.

Hearing him say this, You Zhengping felt even more guilty. He didn't know how to question Yu Hua.

Yu Hua, meanwhile, naturally poured a cup of green tea for You Zhengping and casually said, "I just found a job. I hadn't had time to tell you yet. How did you know? News travels fast."

Yu Hua didn't suspect You Zhengping. He had known his husband for so many years; he had the most fundamental faith in him.

You Zhengping downed the green tea in the cup as though it were plain water. Gritting his teeth, he said, "I, I asked Cen Xiao to get his friend at the job center to look out for information about you. You've been looking for work lately and haven't wanted to tell me about it, so I was kind of worried."

He lowered his head guiltily. "I'm sorry. I should have given you your space."

"What's the problem?" Yu Hua naturally refilled You Zhengping's teacup. "You didn't ask me about my job-hunting every day. You considerately asked around in private. You left me enough space, and you were secretly looking out for me. I'm very happy."

How could Yu Hua be so nice?! Hearing his answer, You Zhengping nearly started to cry. Yu Hua was a sweet fool. No wonder he had been fired by his old company for offending an executive. It had certainly been the executive's fault.

"I feel very bad." You Zhengping clutched the teacup with both hands, not daring to look up.

Seeing You Zhengping with his head down, not moving, Yu Hua took his hand and held it, saying, "Everyone sometimes gets into a gloomy mood. When I'm sad, I just think that there's someone secretly looking out for me, who will work hard to prop me up no matter how down and out I am. You don't need to feel apologetic. I should be thanking you."

You Zhengping raised his head and looked into Yu Hua's eyes, thinking, *This must be my genuine Yu Hua. Lian Yufan is just stirring up trouble. And Zhen Li is just using Yu Hua's kindness to trick him.*

Thinking of the Destroyer Zhen Li, You Zhengping felt a sense of crisis. If Zhen Li hadn't tricked Yu Hua into working at his studio, Yu Hua wouldn't have been suspected by the Protection Organization. No matter what the outcome of the investigation was, You Zhengping had to convince Yu Hua to resign!

"Since you're not annoyed about me worrying about you, then there are a few things I want to say to you." You Zhengping rubbed Yu Hua's palm with the pads of his fingers.

The palm of Yu Hua's hand was ticklish from being rubbed. With a quiet laugh, he said, "What do you command?"

"You were a senior manager at one of the country's top one-hundred enterprises. You have such high qualifications. Can't you get any job you want? Why do you have to go work at that crappy studio?" You Zhengping asked unhappily. "I had Cen Xiao look into it. President Zhen's studio was registered only three days ago, and he hadn't even finished the paperwork to suspend his university studies before running off to start a business. He's so unreliable!"

You Zhengping couldn't mention topics like "Destroyers," "danger," or "plot." He had to rack his brains for reasons.

Yu Hua had known all along that his husband would be unsatisfied with this job. No normal person would be satisfied. But he had already thought of an excuse.

"Of course I know his studio is irregular." Prepared to lie to his husband, Yu Hua didn't want to face You Zhengping's pure eyes with his own crafty face. He lowered his head and looked down at their clasped hands, reciting his lines according to plan. "But, Pingping, I've been working for five years since graduating university. In another three years, I'll be thirty."

"So you're youthful and promising. Your talents are wasted at Zhen Li's studio," You Zhengping said firmly.

Yu Hua continued reciting his lines. "There's a saying that goes, 'A man should be able to stand on his own feet by the age of thirty.' In fact, before leaving my last job, I was uneasy, but I never dared to tell you."

"Uneasy about what?" You Zhengping asked, not understanding.

Yu Hua said, "I looked at my profession, the space for advancement, the peak of the industry, and saw that I might be only a human resources senior manager for the rest of my life. Of course, the title of 'senior manager' sounds very dignified, but what is there behind it? On call to work overtime at any hour, bosses ordering you around, more and more new people who want their freedom and are hard to manage, caught helplessly between the high and low ranks, and...yourself in a daily decline.

"Pingping, do you remember how many times I couldn't make breakfast or dinner for you because I was working overtime? In three years, there were 176 breakfasts and 459 dinners. To this day, we've been married 1072 days, and for half that time, I've been unable to be by your side. Aren't you sad when I'm not home?"

"Yes, I get lonely, but that's work, isn't it?" You Zhengping's face gradually flushed. He hadn't expected Yu Hua to be hiding so many thoughts. "And you've been so anxious, but I didn't notice it at all, only wanted you to make food every day. I've really been falling short."

*Absolutely not!* Yu Hua frowned. He loved that life. He enjoyed the feeling of real living that way. He liked working overtime and getting messages from You Zhengping that said, "Finish work soon and come home, I miss you." It motivated him!

He had originally planned to wait until the mortgage had been paid off, then stop working as a senior manager, leave the high-pressure human resources department, and transfer to a comparatively leisurely department to live out his later years. Those were his true wishes!

But now, the System had recovered, his abilities were gradually being unsealed, and levelers were appearing in this world... All of this put together was forcing Yu Hua to do battle whether he wanted to or not. He had already cleared, but now he had to take up his old profession again, perhaps even endanger his family!

Yu Hua untruthfully said, "So I've given myself three years. Before turning thirty, I'll attempt to build a business from scratch. I want to know where the limit of my abilities is. I want to try challenging myself. I want to give you a steadier and more comfortable life."

You Zhengping couldn't hold back anymore. Tears flowed freely down his face. Choked with emotion, he said, "I'm the one who's been pressuring you too hard."

"No." Yu Hua gently picked up a tissue and wiped away his years. "You're my motivation for forging on ahead."

Yu Hua looked at You Zhengping's tears, feeling desolate. He'd made his husband cry with his fake reasons.

"But why does it have to be Zhen Li's studio?" You Zhengping said, not giving up despite his sadness.

Yu Hua had thought of a reason for this, too. He smiled faintly and said, "The first point is, his stringent requirements for candidates show that Zhen Li is ambitious. He suspended his university studies to start a business and began recruiting high grade employees from a weak position. I admire that bravery and self-confidence. I didn't expect a modern young man to have such drive. He makes me feel that it's worth the struggle!"

You Zhengping: "..."

He very much wanted to grab Yu Hua by the shoulder and give him a strong shake, shout, "Wake up!" *Zhen Li doesn't have drive, he has an overinflated sense of his own abilities!*

Yu Hua continued talking total nonsense. "Second, the time limit of the contract he gave me is very good. It's precisely three years. I plan to start a business before thirty. If I don't have any success before turning thirty, I'll go look for another job. With my prior experience, it won't be very hard to find work at thirty. It's very suitable."

You Zhengping: "..."

In fact, he had a support staff position that Yu Hua could use no matter how old he was. There was no need to think about the term of Zhen Li's contract.

Nearly finished reciting his lines, Yu Hua briskly said, "Third, Zhen Li is extremely young. He has the energy and potential of the young, and also the lack of experience and foolishness of the young. He and I arranged that I would participate in operating the studio and in human resources management, and hold 40% of the company's stock.

"Also, I have a mean idea that I'll only tell you. Zhen Li is immature. I can easily persuade him, use my professional experience to brainwash him. I'll have the greatest say in building the business and be able to make the studio develop in the direction of my ideas."

You Zhengping: "..."

Yu Hua understood You Zhengping too well. The reasons he had prepared in advance put a stop to each of You Zhengping's protests.

You Zhengping had wanted to bring up the studio's unreliability as a reason, and Yu Hua had said, *Unreliability is for the best, I can undermine the boss*; You Zhengping had wanted to say that a start-up could fail, and Yu Hua had said, *I'm allowing for my own failure, it's an opportunity I'm giving myself*; You Zhengping had wanted to say that there were lots of



companies that wanted to employ him, and Yu Hua had said, *I've come to a professional bottleneck and can't take the work anymore, I want go out and take a risk.*

Yu Hua had precisely predicted all the persuasion methods You Zhengping had prepared; they had all died in the womb before getting out of his mouth.

The food was brought out. You Zhengping didn't know what he could say. He covered up by eating. This was all food that he liked to eat, but You Zhengping didn't taste it. With difficulty, he put the food in his mouth and chewed it mechanically, swallowing without any joy.

Yu Hua felt guilty and grieved. He also couldn't eat. The two of them ate this meal without paying attention to it, merely shoving food into their stomachs.

You Zhengping snuck a look at Yu Hua, saw that Yu Hua was focused on picking out fishbones, and quickly sent Cen Xiao a message: *How can I get him to quit?*

Cen Xiao, a grand master of emotions when there was something to take care of and a meal-scrounging rascal when there wasn't, had returned to the base to listen in after parting from You Zhengping. He had already heard Yu Hua's reasons.

Yu Hua's explanations left them with nothing to say. Even the eavesdropping group suspected this was only a coincidence.

As You Zhengping's diehard follower, Cen Xiao was particularly worried for him. Receiving You Zhengping's request for assistance, he wrestled over it for an age before responding: *You only talk principles with outsiders. Family doesn't need reasons. You can just flat out refuse to listen.*

When You Zhengping read this message, his eyes lit up. He thought about his displeasure when Zhen Li had been dancing in front of Yu Hua and the fans had been saying "despotic director and cute president" on the barrage. He instantly had a new excuse.

What was he doing reasoning with his partner? Talking reason wasn't the way to get the upper hand in a marriage. Today, he would be completely unreasonable!

You Zhengping stabbed the bottom of his bowl with his chopsticks, making a very loud noise, indicating that he was unsatisfied.

Yu Hua looked at his husband in surprise. He ought to have already persuaded Pingping. What else what his husband unsatisfied about?

After succeeding in getting Yu Hua's attention, You Zhengping loudly said, "I just don't like you working with him. He's younger and better-looking than me, the livestream fans ship you two, and he called me 'uncle.' He was deliberately calling me old. I don't approve!"

Yu Hua absolutely hadn't expected this. He stared blankly, disbelief written all over his face.

You Zhengping pounded the table. He wasn't being the considerate family member today, he was being a troublesome little demon!

"What's that expression? Why aren't you answering? Are you feeling guilty? Have you had a change of affections?" You Zhengping accused.

"No, no." Yu Hua quickly waved his hands. "I just never thought that... In the eyes of outsiders, can Zhen Li really match up to you? It's like someone telling me the manmade lake in the park next door is wider than the East Sea. I was having trouble accepting such a viewpoint."

You Zhengping: "!!!"

Yu Hua's tone was sincere, his expression not faked at all. He was in earnest. This attitude instantly filled You Zhengping with joy. He couldn't work up a temper. He couldn't even resist smiling.

"I didn't think that you...saw me like that." You Zhengping patted his thick hair, awkwardly saying, "I always thought I was a weirdo with rainbow hair to you."

When he mentioned the circumstances of their first meeting, Yu Hua also couldn't restrain a smile. He simply got up and went to sit next to You Zhengping. Smiling, he said, "You also look good with a normal hairstyle."

They held hands tightly, their hearts growing another step closer together.

After they ate, You Zhengping called Cen Xiao while he was settling the bill. "What do I do? I can't work up a temper. I can't stand to upset him."

Cen Xiao said, "...I'll sew my mouth shut if I have to look after you two again!"

At the same time, Yu Hua expressionlessly got out a makeup mirror and used his small remaining amount of unsealed power to send Zhen Li a message: *My husband thinks there's something worth looking at about your flat face. While I can't see anything good about it, to relieve my husband's worries, please go run into a pole tonight to disfigure your face. Otherwise, I'll do it myself.*

Zhen Li: "..."

—

Author's Note:

Yu Hua: Tomorrow I'll disfigure your face.

Zhen Li, working hard to practice dance and planning to use his good looks to make money: ...

## CHAPTER 18

After the melancholy husbands left the studio, Zhen Li, on his own, earnestly considered how to earn money in the future.

Yu Hua had only given him three years, and it wasn't three years to earn a hundred million; it was three years to distribute a hundred million to Yu Hua. There was an essential difference there.

According to the contract, Yu Hua's salary wasn't high at all. It would be unreasonable to give a newly-hired employee too high a salary. Even if he gave Yu Hua an annual salary of a million, he still couldn't launder a hundred million in three years.

What was really worth working on was Yu Hua's 40% of the stock. That was the company's income, not Yu Hua's salary.

So he had to make the studio a success in order to be able to make room for a hundred million to exist.

The only method Zhen Li had for making the studio a success was to sell his looks.

But now, a small mirror had appeared in front of him with these unfeeling words written on it.

He and Yu Hua had already settled the means for making money, but now he was telling him to disfigure his face. If he disfigured his face, how was he going to make money?

Zhen Li was in deep agony. He said towards the empty mirror, "Can't I think of another way? I'll...start a ship with someone else, or I'll go to a night club and drink to drown my sorrows, act like I like women... No, I don't like men to start with, I don't like anyone, why do I have to disfigure my face?"

Before he'd finished crying out, the unfeeling Yu Hua had put the makeup mirror away. Because Yu Zhengping had come back after settling the bill and Yu Hua couldn't let his husband see him looking in a makeup mirror for no reason, he didn't hear what Zhen Li had said.

Seeing that the mirror had disappeared and that the great master showed no sign of paying attention to him, Zhen Li turned on his phone camera, took a selfie, and posted to the livestream website: *High-resolution, no makeup, no touch-ups, no filters. Leaving a commemoration. I won't have a chance after this [photo].*

[When I read high-resolution and no makeup, I thought I was going to see a face full of blackheads and uneven skin tone, but it's actually still so good-looking. Is President Zhen deliberately showing off his looks?]

[I've been staring for ages at the table and chair and blinds to evaluate it, there really is no beauty filter, no Photoshopping, it's an original.]

[I don't believe your skin looks that good without makeup. Let me come tug on your eyelashes, how can a human being have such long eyelashes? They have to be false!]

[Is the one who wants to pull on his eyelashes a demon? What if you tear the real ones out? I'm different, let me run my fingertips through your thick black hair, I don't believe your hair is real, how could a modern young man not be going bald?]

[Am I the only one who noticed the part about not having a chance after this? Is President Zhen planning to retire from being an internet celebrity, or is he going to become a makeup promoter and not appear on camera without makeup again?]

"Neither..." Zhen Li said to himself, reading the comments.

He favorited the comments praising his looks and promoted the nice-sounding ones.

After leaving a commemoration of his face, Zhen Li ordered takeout. It was all alcohol.

Carrying three boxes containing baijiu, red wine, and beer, he went to a little park near the office building. He opened a can of beer and started to drink sorrowfully.

Zhen Li couldn't touch his face while sober. He also didn't want Yu Hua to do it himself tomorrow. If he let the great master do it, he might lose more than his face.

Zhen Li was planning to get drunk and run headfirst into one of the park's old trees, get himself bloody and break his nose. He thought it would be worthwhile to repay the great master for saving his life. Yu Hua had deleted his System and left him his wardrobe and alternate dimension stomach. Even if he didn't have his looks, he'd still have clothes and good food.

Zhen Li's alcohol tolerance wasn't high. He was somewhat drunk after four cans of beer.

He staggered over to throw the beer cans into a trash can, then opened a bottle of red wine.

His sense of taste was being gradually numbed by the stimulus of the alcohol. He started not being able to taste the bite of the alcohol. He only felt that the bottle of wine he'd just opened was sweet, and started chugging it like a soft drink.

With a 750 ml bottle of red wine in his belly, Zhen Li was already quite drunk. He stood up and stared at the wine bottle, dimly considering how seriously injured he would be if he smashed the bottle over his head.

After looking at it for a while, Zhen Li shook his head and said, "No, the sanitation workers will have trouble sweeping the glass away, and it might hurt the feet of the cats and dogs in the park. It's uncivilized, impolite, and environmentally unfriendly."

He obediently dropped the wine bottle into the trash can and quietly put his head back to look at a big tree.

“I’d like to eat a skewer. I forgot to order one just now.” Before running into the tree, Zhen Li decided to have a good meal.

He fished out his phone, vaguely planning to order takeout. Then he saw an elderly man walking towards him with a birdcage in his left hand and a bag full of fragrant prepared food in his right.

Smelling the prepared food, Zhen Li looked quietly at the elderly man and saw the elderly man stop in front of him. He asked involuntarily, “Did you buy that? Can you finish all that tonight? Could I buy half of it?”

The elderly man cheerfully sat on a park bench and said to Zhen Li, “Young fellow, I bought some food and want some alcohol to accompany it. You have quite a bit of alcohol there. How about we swap?”

Zhen Li nodded repeatedly. Red-faced, he rushed to pass the elderly man a bottle of baijiu.

“Here, that’s for you.” The elderly man passed Zhen Li a bag of prepared food.

Zhen Li saw the elderly open the bag and prepare to grab the food bare-handed. He quickly said, “Don’t, it’s unsanitary. The baijiu isn’t for drinking, it’s to wash your hands to disinfect them.”

“Disinfect, disinfect!” the parrot in the birdcage shouted.

“You’re pretty meddlesome.” The elderly man coldly swept his gaze over Zhen Li’s bleary eyes. The two of them luxuriously used 100 proof baijiu to disinfect their hands, then drank beer accompanied by prepared food.

After gnawing on a chicken leg and drinking two more cans of beer, Zhen Li was thoroughly drunk.

The night wind caressed his face. He looked at the elderly man in front of him and started to wail. “I can’t stand it, I really can’t stand it, what should I do?”

The elderly man hadn’t expected him to burst into a drunken fit and even start crying just like that. He said in astonishment, “What can’t you stand?”

Zhen Li pointed to his own face. “Do you know how many years I’ve loved it? Ever since I’ve had an appreciation for beauty, I’ve loved it, cherished it, taken all kinds of pains to protect it. Even when I got into the car accident, I only thought of protecting it. I love it so much, why would it leave me?”

People out at night heard a young fellow crying his lungs out. They faintly heard expressions like “love” and “can’t stand” and “leave me” and sighed to themselves. Another heartbroken man who’d been broken up with.

“Wait, let me take this slowly.” The elderly man screwed his finger in his ear and said in astonishment, “What do you love?”

“My face, of course,” Zhen Li said, sobbing. “I don’t love men, and I don’t love women, either. I only love the hundreds of thousands of clothes in my wardrobe, and this face, which is worthy of those clothes. I don’t want to hurt other people. Why am I so unlucky?”

He hiccuped drunkenly, calculated his running speed, and took a few steps towards a far off tree trunk. He got into a running-up posture aimed at the tree trunk.

“What are you even doing?” The elderly man was stupefied, so stupefied he tore off his white mustache all at once. He carelessly stuck the mustache back onto his face, but because he was too anxious, he not only didn’t get the mustache to stick, he also tore off a piece of the wrinkled skin stuck to his face.

“I have to part from my beloved, use it to memorialize my new life,” the intoxicated Zhen Li said expressively. “Since ancient times, gratitude and loyalty have forced people to make hard choices. If you keep to one, you can’t keep to the other. *Hic!* I can’t say more, if I say more the alcohol will wear off. Without the courage of alcohol, how can I accomplish this arduous task?”

He backed up a step and ran towards the big tree as fast as he could.

“You’re crazy!” The “elderly man” dashed to the tree in one big stride. He was in time to block Zhen Li.

Zhen Li crashed headfirst into the “elderly man”’s chest and drunkenly lifted his head. He asked, “What are you doing? I just managed to work myself up to run.”

His tone was pretty unhappy.

“Zhen Li, are you stupid? You crashed into me pretty hard, it hurts a lot,” the “elderly man” said, clenching his teeth and covering his chest. Zhen Li had never introduced himself, but in this moment of desperation, the “elderly man” had used his name.

But Zhen Li was already so drunk he had no sense of vigilance. He couldn’t tell what the “elderly man” meant. He only murmured, “Why did you stop me?”

The “elderly man” put his arms around Zhen Li, who couldn’t stand upright. He seemed to holding him up, but in reality he said quietly into his ear, “Zhen Li, the Clearing League sent me to assist you. I’ve noticed that you seem to be in trouble. Do you know the final big boss’s identity?”

It had been all right before he'd mentioned the final big boss. When he did, Zhen Li's drunken fit got worse. He didn't say a word about who the big boss was. All he wanted to do was to run into the tree to disfigure his face.

There was nothing for the "elderly man" to do. He could only knock Zhen Li unconscious and clean up the scene in the park to avoid leaving behind his fingerprints and DNA.

After cleaning everything, he helped the unconscious Zhen Li into an off-road car park by the side of the road.

An off-road car stopped in the melancholy husbands' garage. Yu Hua got out of the car and opened the door for You Zhengping, who was sitting in the passenger's seat. The two of them had returned home after finishing dinner.

Since You Zhengping had started working as an auxiliary police officer and had had a motor scooter to use as his means of transportation, their car had been left to Yu Hua to drive. He had originally bought this new car for You Zhengping. After picking the car up, You Zhengping had taken his friends out for a spin. Cutting the ribbon on the car had been secondary; the primary thing had been to flaunt it.

But now that Yu Hua had lost his job and You Zhengping had chosen more difficult work, the off-road car instead belonged to Yu Hua.

Every time he drove this car, Yu Hua inwardly resolved that he had to bring back those contended and peaceful days.

The two of them came home. When they had just opened the door, Yu Hua felt that there was something faintly off about the air inside the apartment.

Lian Yufan's squad had been very careful while searching the apartment. They hadn't left a mark. They hadn't even changed the positions of the hairs on the floor. They had really succeeded in coming and going without a trace.

But Yu Hua still noticed that outsiders had been in his home. He didn't determine this based on evidence. It was his acumen as a leveler. As soon as he walked through the door he felt that there was breath mixed into the air that didn't belong to him or You Zhengping, like a wild animal waking with a start when it felt its territory had been invaded by a small animal.

Even though he had absorbed the energy of Zhen Li's system, all of Yu Hua's abilities were still gradually recovering and couldn't be restrained.

Having noticed this, Yu Hua couldn't resist squeezing his arms. He needed a new leveler, new energy from the System to restrain his power, which was growing stronger by the day.

Yu Hua had expected that his house would be searched in secret. He had known that the Protection Organization's investigation would include this step. Yu Hua suspected that a camera may have been planted in the house. Until he was relieved of suspicion, he had to pretend not to notice that he was being observed.

Yu Hua naturally took off his jacket, then casually got You Zhengping's home clothing for him. Seeing his husband agreeably change clothes, Yu Hua felt displeased. He had wanted to have an intimate moment with You Zhengping, but he wasn't going to do back strength exercises while being watched by the Protection Organization. Tonight he had to remain steady.

But You Zhengping didn't know about that. He'd been paid today and the two of them had just had dinner. You Zhengping had also been jealous of Zhen Li. If they didn't do anything tonight, then it really would seem like there had been a cooling of feelings.

Yu Hua was in a very awkward position.

As he changed clothes You Zhengping secretly observed their home. He relaxed slightly when he saw that Lian Yufan's squad hadn't left any revealing marks behind.

He had agreed with Director Xiao's request to cooperate with the investigation into Yu Hua, but his condition had been that they couldn't plant surveillance in the apartment. You Zhengping could observe Yu Hua up close; others couldn't.

You Zhengping knew that the house was safe and there weren't any outsiders watching, but that damn Lian Yufan had hidden a listening device on him somewhere!

He must have sneakily stuck it onto his skin during the work handover. Lian Yufan had used some means to keep You Zhengping from noticing or even finding out where the listening device was.

You Zhengping didn't want others to hear their conjugal interactions, but Yu Hua had gotten a job today and had a new goal for the future. The atmosphere was really good. Something would definitely happen.

You Zhengping was in a very awkward position.

The two worried people changed into loose home clothes. Each harboring his own thoughts, each disturbed, they smiled warmly and hugged each other, their lips getting closer and closer...

"I have to go brush my teeth, I ate garlic chives tonight," You Zhengping said.

"I'll go take a shower, I'm all sweaty," Yu Hua said.

The couple came up with excuses at the same time. Each seeing that the other had something to do, they inwardly thought at the same time, "Great!"



The apartment Yu Hua had bought was large, fully two-hundred square meters. It had a big kitchen and three bathrooms. The two sunward-facing bedrooms each had a bathroom, and there was a public one in a corner of the living room.

The two of them quickly ran to different bathrooms to shower. While showering, You Zhengping received a message from Lian Yufan, saying that he had found important evidence, telling You Zhengping to return to the base as soon as possible.

Cen Xiao cooperated with Lian Yufan, sending You Zhengping a text message saying they needed to work overtime.

You Zhengping showed the text message to Yu Hua, who had just finished showering, then quickly got dressed and left. Before going, he left Yu Hua with an apologetic kiss.

Seeing that You Zhengping had to work overtime to carry out his assignment, Yu Hua worried about his husband working so hard. At the same time, he relaxed, inwardly celebrating how fortunate it was that You Zhengping was working overtime. Otherwise they would definitely have been spied on tonight.

When You Zhengping was gone, Yu Hua walked aimlessly around the apartment, feigning boredom, while in reality secretly inspecting the apartment.

Before getting in bed and going to sleep, he deliberately pushed his phone onto the floor “by accident.” While bending down to pick up the phone, Yu Hua stealthily looked under the bed.

That one look made Yu Hua’s heart jump—the box with the cell phone was gone.

The phone that You Zhengping had saved his salary for four months in order to give him, the one Yu Hua had broken half a month ago because his power had greatly increased, the one he had been planning to repair once his restoring ability had awakened, was gone.

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Author’s note:

The levelers in the eyes of the Protectors: Destroyers, treacherous, savage, malignant tumors that have to be removed.

The levelers in the eyes of the System: Tools to keep the System functioning normally, toys, chess pieces to use for getting rid of Yu Hua.

The levelers in the eye of Yu Hua: Perfect medicinal supplements. Let’s have another one, I’m about to bring the house down again!

## CHAPTER 19

You Zhengping rushed to the police station, which was outwardly his official post. He received his outfit and police-issue motor scooter and zoomed off to the base.

He had been adequately trained in maintaining secrecy. All his actions had to fit the reasons he had thought of. If he said he was going to work overtime, he had to go to the police station to go through the formalities. This wasn't only for the sake of concealing his identity; it could also keep his family from being spotted by Destroyers.

With every department cooperating to the best of their abilities, Lian Yufan was extremely fast. In a few hours, he had turned up a big heap of materials. There were three piles laid out on Director Xiao's desk. One pile was Yu Hua's report cards and academic records from his time at school; Lian Yufan had classified these as unimportant and had stacked them together. One pile was a record of all major events in Yu Hua's life since going to work and getting married. The final pile was the report on the investigation into what had happened since Yu Hua had lost his job. These fifteen days contained more material than the previous fifteen years.

Next to the three piles of materials was a small box.

You Zhengping had shaken hands and made up with Lian Yufan right in front of Director Xiao earlier that day. Naturally he couldn't step up and punch Lian Yufan. He had to force down his anger and say, "Where did you put the nanotech listening device?"

Lian Yufan pressed on the webbing between his fingers. "I put it there when we shook hands."

You Zhengping squeezed the base of his right thumb, rubbing off the new-type listening device firmly stuck to the webbing.

He gave the listening device to Lian Yufan and went to the desk. He picked up the first pile of materials and quickly ran his eyes over Yu Hua's report cards.

Before age twelve, Yu Hua hadn't come to this world yet. The identity was one the System had forged for him according to his wish. Yu Hua had wanted to live an ordinary life, so the System had given him grades that were steadily at the bottom of the class. After arriving, Yu Hua had thought that grades at the bottom of the class were too eye-catching and didn't fit his future position in life, so he had gradually raised them, keeping himself in the top ten of his class and the top one-hundred of his grade.

These grades wouldn't get him too much attention, and they weren't so excessively low that he wouldn't be able to test into university.

But Yu Hua had been attending the Xuyang District's key primary school. These grades had narrowly gotten him into the key middle school. On coming to middle school, he'd been near the bottom of the class again and had had to make fewer mistakes, until he was in the class's top ten. But many people from key middle schools went on to key high schools. He had once again squeaked by and tested into a key high school, where he was again near the bottom of the class. When he had once again raised his grades to the top one-hundred of his grade, Yu

Hua had discovered that over a hundred people from their high school tested into one of the top two universities each year.

This time, no matter what, Yu Hua hadn't wanted to test into too good of a school. He had just managed to test into the top three university.

You Zhengping silently hugged the report cards.

"What are you doing? Are you trying to steal the results of my investigation?" Lian Yufan, noticing what he was doing, said guardedly.

"Bah!" You Zhengping said. "I've never seen my husband's report cards before. Are you telling me I can't get copies to frame?"

"Decide whether you want copies after you've read my report," Lian Yufan said coldly, handing You Zhengping a photocopy of the investigation report.

When everyone present had a report, Lian Yufan said, "I first went to the hospital to visit the executive from Yu Hua's former job. His external injuries have already healed, and he's going to be released from the hospital tomorrow. Yu Hua paid for the medical expenses."

You Zhengping, Cen Xiao, and the others had suspected all along that the leader had been faking to extort money. After reading the medical records Lian Yufan had rigorously examined, they frowned. They hadn't expected that Yu Hua really had hit the executive, and very seriously. This was simply unbelievable!

At the same time, Lian Yufan played the surveillance footage from the company's lobby. In it, Yu Hua and the executive, talking and laughing, walked side by side towards the elevator. The executive stepped into a puddle of water that the janitor hadn't yet had time to clean. He slipped and lost his footing. Seeing the executive about to fall, Yu Hua reached out his arms to support him from behind. But his slight supporting gesture turned into pressing on the executive's back, shoving his head against the wall next to the elevator.

You Zhengping: "..."

This sequence of events really couldn't be explained as a slip of the hand.

Lian Yufan said, "Many people saw the scene at the time. Employees at the company all thought it was an accident. The security guard in charge of monitoring also claimed that, saying that Yu Hua may also have stepped in the water and lost his footing, and that's why he used so much force. But we've all undergone specialized training. We see things differently from other people. I think it wasn't an accident. It was caused by Yu Hua losing control of his strength.

"And afterwards, the company didn't fire him, like Yu Hua said it did. His interpersonal relationships at the company were good. The executives also believed it was an accident. It

was Yu Hua who insisted on resigning and using the last sum the company paid him to cover the medical expenses.”

Lian Yufan’s conclusion concerning the matter of Yu Hua injuring someone was: after Yu Hua was replaced by a Destroyer, he quickly resigned and distanced himself from his original colleagues to avoid people who were familiar with him noticing anything strange.

“The reason he suddenly injured someone hasn’t been completely clarified yet,” You Zhengping said in rebuttal. “You can’t draw a rash conclusion. Voluntarily resigning also doesn’t mean anything. Yu Hua explained to me that he wanted to set up a new plan for his work goals. You must all have heard that while you were listening in on us. Tonight, when I cooperated with Captain Lian’s investigation, Yu Hua precisely recounted every day he had worked overtime during our three years of marriage. Would a replacement have such a distinct understanding of everything?”

“Of course he would. It’s very simple.” Lian Yufan pulled out a series of photocopies of a calendar from the stack of materials. He had made these copies while searching Yu Hua’s home.

This was a desk calendar. Yu Hua didn’t keep a diary, but he had a habit of writing down the important things that happened each day on the calendar. The calendar notes started on the day he had gone on a blind date with You Zhengping: courtship, marriage, all the way to the day before he had hit the executive, each day some bits of new and joyful events.

*—XX/XX/XX, Went on a blind date I’d meant to refuse, met a very cute boy (rainbow-colored), Xiao You. I want to get closer to him. I don’t know whether he’ll like me.*

*—XX/XX/XX, First date. I researched countless strategies beforehand, formulated the most perfect plan for a date. Xiao You was wearing...some torn-up clothes I don’t know how to describe. He said they got chewed up by a dog before the date. Later I found out that he’d dressed up too well for the date, and his friends were jealous. By the time they were finished fighting, it was nearly time for the date. Xiao You rushed over wearing his ragged clothes so he wouldn’t be late (I wanted to laugh).*

*My formulated plan didn’t come in useful at all. Instead of a movie, I went with Xiao You to buy clothing. Instead of the restaurant, I went with Xiao You to Cen Xiao’s backyard to roast Cen Xiao’s mixed green onions. It’s my first time knowing that you can be so happy without a plan, that life is full of accidents and happy surprises and an unnoticeable air of fireworks.*

*PS: I’m kind of jealous of Cen Xiao.*

*—XX/XX/XX, Exercise. My back strength seems a bit lacking.*

*—XX/XX/XX, Planned to propose. Unsurprisingly, all my plans were overturned. I bought a pair of rings and made a plan with a wedding company. In the morning, Xiao You came to pick me up. I sat in his flashy car, and he took me to the Bureau of Civil Affairs.*

*I panicked, not because I was suddenly being pushed into marriage, but because I hadn't brought my papers. Xiao You got out my ID and residence registration booklet. I don't know when he got them.*

*This time, no matter what, I couldn't let Xiao You run wild. I pulled a long face and snatched away the ID and residence booklet, turned, and went towards the — — Hall, where there's a little more space.*

*Xiao You was flustered and quickly explained that if I didn't want to get married, then we could go on as we were, and he had advanced prematurely.*

*I saw him looking scared and suddenly felt secret delight. I maintained my displeased expression, turned magnificently, went down on one knee, and put the diamond ring on his ring finger.*

*When I made the fiercest expression while saying the most romantic words and saw Xiao You's surprised and happy look, I felt secret delight. The tail-end of my proposal plan was a success.*

*PS: I deliberately held hands with Xiao You and made the diamond ring flash in Cen Xiao's eyes. This is a tiny inner pettiness of mine.*

—XX/XX/XX...

You Zhengping, grinning, had only read a few pages when he heard Lian Yufan say, "Yu Hua was in the habit of keeping notes. The replacement would of course get to know his body's circumstances. Naturally he knows about the important times between you two perfectly well. Starting from half a month ago, the day he mistakenly injured the executive, Yu Hua hasn't written in his calendar diary again. That's also an important piece of evidence."

Neither You Zhengping nor Cen Xiao listened carefully to what he was saying. Cen Xiao thought in shock, *So Yu Hua is jealous of my relationship with You Zhengping. That's horrifying. You really can't just go around reading people's diaries. How am I supposed to look Yu Hua in the face after this?*

You Zhengping, meanwhile, pulled a long face and said, "Copy these materials for me, too. I'll take them away and go through them slowly."

Take them away and get them bound into a book, then read it like a serial romance with himself as the main character.

Lian Yufan said, "...Did you hear what I said?"

You Zhengping and Cen Xiao nodded repeatedly. "We heard, we heard."

You Zhengping suddenly thought that it would be nice for Lian Yufan to investigate more things he didn't know about Yu Hua. The report cards, the calendar diary, these were things he could collect and occasionally take out to read.

No wonder lovers were always unable to resist sneaking looks at each others' phones or diaries. You Zhengping had always been very scornful towards this kind of snooping. He had abundant trust in Yu Hua. But, having read the calendar pages, You Zhengping thought that he could often go through the calendar after this.

Lian Yufan knocked lightly on the table. When he had everyone's attention, he explained the third piece of evidence—Yu Hua's recent spending reports.

"You keep on saying that you understand the person sleeping beside you, but do you know how many household goods Yu Hua has broken lately?" Lian Yufan said. "One hundred and seven dishes, two tables, three chairs, one mirror, twelve tiles. After resigning, he must have told you he went to look for work, right? But actually, he didn't leave the house. He stayed home breaking household goods and replacing them with identical ones while you were at work."

The pink romantic bubbles floating around You Zhengping after the diary dispersed. Distressed, he said, "Why would Yu Hua do that? If he was in a bad mood, he could have told me, and I could have taken him to the storehouse at work to break tables. Why did he have to use the good furniture at home? Replacing it costs so much money! We hardly have any savings!"

Lian Yufan: "..."

Was that the important point?

He took a deep breath and told himself not to get into it with a lovesick idiot. He continued, "The important point isn't the waste of money, it's why his disposition would change so much that he started breaking furniture. He's a perfect gentleman in front of everyone. All of his psychological evaluations at work have been outstanding.

"And he didn't only break furniture and tableware." Lian Yufan opened the box. "There's also this phone. You must not have noticed that he switched to an identical new phone?"

You Zhengping took the box. The phone inside the box looked as though someone had smashed it to bits with a hammer.

"How could he break such an important phone?!" Cen Xiao, who had been silent for a long time, said in grief and indignation. "Do you think we got off easy when You Zhengping bought that phone?"

Lian Yufan: "..."

*What does this have to do with you? Why are you so upset?*

You Zhengping's apparent salary was only 2500. He'd wanted to give Yu Hua a phone for his birthday and didn't dare to use his private savings to buy it. So that no one would know, his food and drink had come from his underlings. He had saved four months of salary from the cracks between Cen Xiao and the other underlings' teeth, buying the phone through a great deal of hard work.

For outsiders, Cen Xiao and the others were also temporary workers at the subdistrict office, with salaries of 2500, like You Zhengping. During those four months, You Zhengping had said they couldn't expose their true salaries, so everyone had grit their teeth and struggled together, tightening their belts to help You Zhengping save money.

And You Zhengping could really eat!

During those four months, if Yu Hua hadn't occasionally had You Zhengping bring everyone snacks, Cen Xiao and the others didn't know how they would have made it.

Those four months had been the darkest, more bitter than group training at the base when they were young. At least at the base you would be fed well and given new clothes!

Cen Xiao didn't want to think about those four months when they'd been saving money and hadn't been able to have soda.

"If this really was done by a replacement, there's no need for anyone else to step in, I'll get rid of him myself," Cen Xiao said, looking serious. "If Yu Hua broke it...then he can make us some more snacks."

—

Author's Note:

The false investigation: Finding evidence that Yu Hua is a Destroyer.

The real investigation: Large-scale scene of abusing single dogs.

## CHAPTER 20

Lian Yufan wanted to ask, *Did something happen when your Xuyang District squad was doing group training? How come none of you can grasp the important point? Is this a question of money or food?*

He'd thought that Cen Xiao was the only normal person in this squad. Why was he also being irrational?!

"Ahem!" Director Xiao, presiding over the scene, gave an energetic cough. "Everyone put away your personal relationships and listen carefully to Captain Lian's report."

Only then did the Xuyang District squad calm down. It hadn't only been You Zhengping and Cen Xiao. The squad's five other members had also started tearing up when they'd seen the phone.

So much hard work had gone into buying that phone!

Lian Yufan said, "The important point here is, why would Yu Hua break the phone? A normal person couldn't crush a phone like this with his hand. I suspect he used a hammer or other heavy implement to smash it. If he used a tool to break it, that shows that it wasn't an accident. It was deliberate."

"I think that the fact that the phone can be broken actually shows that Yu Hua isn't a Destroyer," You Zhengping explained seriously. "According to our investigation into Zhen Li's phone, Destroyers' phones are equipped with an app we can't see. If that app is present, human strength has no way of breaking the phone. While interrogating Zhen Li, we used a ten-ton force to press on the phone. The phone manifested a nearly undetectable power shield that could withstand water pressure ten thousand meters or more under the sea."

Lian Yufan said, "I didn't say that this phone was equipped with the app. Given the functions of modern smartphones, I think that Yu Hua accidentally disclosed certain information on the phone, and to be absolutely safe, he smashed the phone like this. Unfortunately, he didn't know that there was someone with a power like mine among the Protectors."

Lian Yufan smiled in self-satisfaction. The reason he hadn't immediately restored the phone was so that everyone could clearly see how thoroughly it had been wrecked.

His hand touched the pieces of the phone, and the phone was completely repaired, restored to its original form and power level.

Lian Yufan didn't know the code, so he passed the phone to You Zhengping. You Zhengping had never snuck a look at his husband's phone, so naturally he didn't know, either.

Yu Hua had set up a fingerprint lock and a passcode. You Zhengping input Yu Hua's birthday, the day he had given him the phone. That was wrong. Then he put in his own birthday and their wedding day. Those were wrong, too.

You Zhengping frowned in thought, then input the date he'd just seen on the calendar, the rainbow-colored day when the two of them had first met. He succeeded in unlocking the phone.

You Zhengping lowered his head and smiled, feeling sweetness in his heart.

He hadn't thought that that day would be so important to Yu Hua. Actually, for You Zhengping, that day was simply a disaster. He had lost all face for the rest of his life that day.



Afterwards, since he had already revealed himself, he didn't cover up his true nature at all. Anyway, Yu Hua had seen the worst of it. What was there to conceal?

Before meeting Yu Hua, aside from occasionally fooling around with his underlings, You Zhengping had been fairly proper in front of Director Xiao and his elders, or rather, his mood had been strained.

But with Yu Hua's care, You Zhengping's mood had gradually steadied, and his true character had been revealed. Yu Hua had spoiled him so that he became more and more lawless.

Lian Yufan took the phone and found the shopping links Yu Hua had used to change the household goods, as well as some photographs and communication logs. All of it was normal.

There was only one hidden folder. It was encoded. Even You Zhengping couldn't unlock it. Lian Yufan thought that he had him at last. After getting the technicians to unlock it, he saw a training chart for back strength exercises.

You Zhengping: "..."

"This might be some kind of code. I'll ask the cipher group to decipher it," Lian Yufan said.

"No, no, no need!" You Zhengping snatched away the phone. "You don't need to worry about that."

"Comrade You Zhengping!" Lian Yufan said in displeasure. "You keep getting in the way of my work. Are you protecting your family member?"

Of course not, he was protecting his own face. He wasn't about to let Lian Yufan investigate the frequency of their conjugal relations. You Zhengping touched his face and said, "This isn't important. Tell us about the other evidence."

Next, Lian Yufan laid out a comparison between Yu Hua's high school basketball grades and the basketball throwing video from eight days ago, proving that Yu Hua's basketball throwing technique had changed greatly.

In short, he was a different person.

You Zhengping wouldn't acknowledge Lian Yufan's evidence. He thought that while these things had suspicious aspects, they couldn't serve as conclusive evidence. There were some explanations he could directly ask Yu Hua for. Yu Hua wouldn't refuse to answer.

Lian Yufan, however, thought that You Zhengping was simply being childish to consider asking him directly. Wouldn't that alert the enemy?

The atmosphere in the room was strained. Director Xiao saw that neither side was going to back down. He knocked on the desk and said, "I also have evidence here that Captain Lian overlooked."

"That I overlooked?" Lian Yufan was taken aback. "Director, have you also been investigating?"

Director Xiao sighed and said, "Seeing how worked up you two were in the office today, how could I completely let it go? When you called everyone to the base tonight, I thought you were being too hasty. It's been less than twenty-four hours, and you're already issuing a conclusion. Aren't you afraid that there's something you haven't noticed?"

"I'm certain that I've investigated Yu Hua's movements, internet chat logs, purchase records, input frequency of commonly used expressions, and so on," Lian Yufan said. "At the moment, I can't think of any other content to investigate."

Director Xiao took a folder out of a drawer. "On the day of the basketball throwing, Yu Hua bought a hundred scratch-and-win lottery tickets at a lottery ticket stand next to the arcade. Did you find that?"

At the mention of the scratch-and-win lottery tickets, You Zhengping felt pained. He'd held back and not asked Yu Hua why he had gone to the lottery ticket stand. Now You Zhengping's breathing became labored, and he asked, "Did he win?"

"No," Director Xiao said heartlessly. "He doesn't seem to have good luck. After drawing his tickets, he asked at the lottery ticket stand how to cash in. When he found out, he was very disappointed and left."

Lian Yufan frowned and said, "I really didn't find that, but buying scratch-and-win lottery tickets isn't something that needs to be noticed, is it?"

Director Xiao nodded. "The lottery tickets only show that his luck is bad. He bought a hundred in a row at two yuan each and didn't win any. But it can also be indirect proof that, since his luck is bad, he could have stumbled on Zhen Li's studio while looking for work."

Lian Yufan said, "...Director, did you reach that conclusion because you're presupposing that he isn't a Destroyer?"

Director Xiao said, "I just wanted to tell you that when Yu Hua went to the arcade, he didn't only shoot hoops and play Whac-A-Mole, he also bought lottery tickets, and you overlooked that. Also, when he went to the job center, he didn't only go to look for work. He also went to another place. You only investigated his movements, but you didn't look deeply into the concrete details of the terrain."

"Where else did he go?" You Zhengping asked in concern.

Director Xiao took a medical report out of the folder. Sighing, he said, "Leaving the job center by the back door, there's an office building across the street with a psychological consultation office in it. Starting six days ago, Yu Hua has gone to get psychological consultation each day when he goes to look for work. These are his consultation records. Do you want to read them?"

These were things his husband didn't want him to know. You Zhengping didn't want to read them in secret. He hesitated, and the records were taken by Lian Yufan.

Since Yu Hua had dared to go directly to Zhen Li's studio to apply, he had naturally made complete preparations. How could he not have expected that the World Protection Organization would find some of his unusual records?

No matter who was looking at it, accidentally injuring an executive, frequently changing household goods, practicing shooting hoops (and getting onto the hot searches because of Zhen Li's popularity), buying the scratch-and-win lottery tickets (and being disappointed after checking out the process of cashing in, since he couldn't use lottery tickets as a way to launder money), and replacing the phone, were all very suspicious.

Yu Hua hadn't chosen to cover up these traces. He had calmly let the Protection Organization investigate.

The furniture and dishes had already been thrown in the trash and disposed of. The Protection Organization couldn't find the furniture he had accidentally broken in the mountainous piles of trash. Also, the sanitation workers wouldn't take close care of the cast-off goods while removing the trash. Their methods of disposing of them were very crude. It would be impossible to tell how the furniture had originally been broken.

The phone was the only thing Yu Hua couldn't stand to throw away. He had to reluctantly use a hammer to break the phone he had originally crushed into more pieces. When he had broken the phone behind You Zhengping's back, Yu Hua's heart had dripped blood.

After preparing all of this, Yu Hua had gone to the psychological consultation office in an extremely secret fashion.

He had wanted to let the Protection Organization first find some obvious evidence, then, when they had practically determined that he was a leveler, to find the psychological consultation office and overturn their ideas.

Yu Hua had gotten five psychological consultations in all, five days in a row, once per day. The first two days, he had acted resistant. The result of the psychological test had been that his condition was good.

The third time, under the psychologists's expert guidance, he had started gradually "letting down his defenses," admitting that he had deliberately chosen answers on the test that would lead to a good outcome. Yu Hua had been a senior manager in human resources; he had a

certain level of knowledge of the field of psychology. There were some test questions whose outcomes he even had memorized. Naturally he could choose the most ideal answers.

The fourth time, clearing away psychological obstructions, he had openly acknowledged his destructive tendencies. When he had been supporting the executive, he had suddenly wanted to beat up this person who normally made him work overtime and who exploited and inconvenienced him. After injuring the executive, he had felt very conscience-stricken. He had never thought he would become like this.

Even though his colleagues had spoken up for him, Yu Hua had still insisted on resigning, afraid that there would be another instance of assault.

He had been worried that he would hurt You Zhengping and didn't touch his husband for a long time. But the excessive restraint had instead backfired. When his husband left home, he would smash household goods, enjoying the pleasure of destruction.

He had also openly acknowledged another thing, that he hadn't cooked for his husband in a week. The seemingly tasty food had all been half-prepared products he had bought or simply takeout from home cooking restaurants.

This state of affairs had lasted for seven or eight days, until he had inadvertently broken the phone that his husband had given him. Then Yu Hua had become aware that there was a problem and had started actively facing it and solving it.

He had at first tried having contact with more people at the mall. And when he had played Whac-A-Mole at the arcade, he had deliberately missed all of them, attempting to use a hitting game to control his desire to destroy. And it wasn't that he couldn't get a basketball into a hoop. It was that he had been considering his strength.

He had even bought a hundred scratch-and-win lottery tickets to enjoy the destructive action of scratching.

He had been afraid of his husband finding out about these things, so he had hidden all of it.

During the fifth consultation, Yu Hua's attitude had improved considerably. He said that he couldn't let his husband undertake strenuous economic pressure, so he had decided to go interview for a job. He wanted to try out a low-stress, more creative workplace. It didn't matter that it was a briefcase company. That sort of boss would probably have something on his conscience. If Yu Hua really couldn't control the desire to beat someone up and beat up his boss, he wouldn't dare to go to the police.

Everyone who had read the psychological consultation record: "..."

Cen Xiao thought of Zhen Li's foolishness and nodded. "Yu Hua is very clever. Zhen Li definitely wouldn't dare to go to the police if he got beaten up."

You Zhengping, however, remembered that Yu Hua had said during dinner that Zhen Li lacked social common sense and was a perfectly controllable superior. He hadn't understood the subtext behind Yu Hua's words then. He hadn't thought there would also be a secret like this.

"Captain You, pay close attention to your husband's circumstances in private," Director Xiao said solicitously. "He can influence your emotions and help you stabilize your special ability. You can't do without him."

"It's my fault for making up a job with too low a salary at the beginning! If I'd known earlier, I'd have made up one with a higher salary!" You Zhengping said.

He had rather enjoyed the feeling of being supported by Yu Hua, so he hadn't changed jobs. It was all his fault. He had put too much pressure on Yu Hua.

Director Xiao said, "Ahem!"

The story Yu Hua had prepared was perfectly sound. Most of the Protectors had already been convinced. Only Lian Yufan was still unwilling.

He clenched his teeth and said, "Director, he may have prepared all of this. I can't completely trust this conclusion. I'm requesting a crisis test and would like Captain You to cooperate."

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Author's Note:

Yu Hua: In predicting reasoning, no one can match me.

## CHAPTER 21

Early in the morning, Yu Hua turned the on TV to the news channel. To the background noise of the morning news, he tied on an apron and absent-mindedly chopped filling, rolled out dough, and made dumplings.

You Zhengping hadn't sent him word all night. Yu Hua was afraid of disturbing his work, so he hadn't sent him a message.

He didn't know the scope of an auxiliary police officer's work, but it was definitely against discipline to sneak looks at your messages while on duty. Yu Hua wanted to be an understanding and virtuous family member. He didn't want to make trouble for You Zhengping.

Though he'd worried about You Zhengping all night, Yu Hua was also somewhat glad that his husband had had to go work overtime last night. He wasn't sure whether there was surveillance inside their home. It would be better if he knew what had happened after he'd left home, Yu Hua thought as he rolled out the dumpling wrappers.

Just then, several human figures appeared in front of his eyes. Their leader was the handsome uncle who'd had a basketball contest with Zhen Li that day. He was taking the others to search the kitchen.

Yu Hua reached out a hand, felt that the handsome uncle was only an image, and understood.

This was "time replay," one of Yu Hua's sealed abilities. Like a surveillance playback, it would play back what had happened in a place, from the past few hours to the last several years, and only the person using the ability could see it.

Because he'd wished so strongly to know what the Protectors had done in his house last night, Yu Hua had inadvertently unlocked yet another ability.

Yu Hua rubbed his eyes feebly. His seal was like some knock-off product with no quality guarantee.

Luckily, because the enormous power to support the operation of this ability was still sealed, Yu Hua could only see a playback of the last twenty-four hours. What he wanted to know was precisely what the Protectors had done yesterday, so he began to observe the Protectors' movements.

With a thought, Yu Hua adjusted the speed to 128 times faster, and the hours flashed by.

Yu Hua watched Lian Yufan, using the handsome uncle's face, remain silent the whole time, from beginning to end using gestures and glances to command his subordinates. These gestures must have been the Protectors' specialized code. Yu Hua could only get a general idea. He couldn't decipher it entirely.

They searched everything and found a safe that Yu Hua had secretly hidden in a cabinet when the apartment was being decorated. Looking pleasantly surprised, the handsome uncle pried open the safe and photographed the calendar diary Yu Hua had hidden in the safe page by page.

Then these people also found the phone Yu Hua had hidden. When Yu Hua saw the phone being taken away, he frowned faintly.

When he had bought the phone and some costly household goods, he had in fact used the money in the System's hidden account. The history of this money was unclear. There would be trouble if they investigated its source. Fortunately, Yu Hua had a cautious nature. Even using the System's money, he still paid in cash.

To confuse the Protectors, Yu Hua had even withdrawn some cash and put it in the safe. It wasn't much, only enough to pay the mortgage for two months.

When he had worked at his previous job, his year-end red packets were directly distributed in cash. He would also regularly put a portion of his bonuses into the safe in front of You

Zhengping. Cash circulates in the market. It would be very difficult to investigate it. The Protectors wouldn't be able to find the source of the funds used to buy the phone.

The reason Yu Hua was displeased wasn't that he was worried about them suspecting the funds. He was worried that they wouldn't return the phone. Even though it was broken, it was still a present You Zhengping had given him.

After taking these things, the handsome uncle and the others quickly cleaned up the apartment and left. They didn't plant any listening devices or observation equipment. This gave Yu Hua a faint friendly feeling towards the Protection Organization.

Yu Hua turned off the "time replay" and pondered as he folded dumplings. Apart from them unexpectedly not planting monitoring equipment in the apartment, everything was moving exactly according to Yu Hua's plan.

If the Protectors had already found the psychological consultation office, then there was only one method left to them. That was to stage a threat to his life and see whether he would use his abilities in a matter of life and death. If he didn't, then he would be cleared of suspicion.

While Yu Hua was pondering, the door of the apartment opened, and You Zhengping returned.

As soon as he walked through the door, he smelled the aroma of meat filling. You Zhengping quietly walked into the kitchen and watched Yu Hua's back as he made dumplings. Remembering the contents of the calendar, You Zhengping couldn't resist hugging Yu Hua from behind.

He knew about Yu Hua's psychological state but couldn't display it. He had to wait to consult the squad's psychology expert after the investigation was over. There was nothing You Zhengping could do now, apart from hugging Yu Hua to give him warmth.

Lian Yufan was forcing You Zhengping to take Yu Hua to perform a crisis test. Director Xiao had approved it. You Zhengping had protested for a whole night but in the end had still been overruled.

If Yu Hua really did end up in danger, then even if it meant revealing his identity, You Zhengping would still protect him.

"You're back." Yu Hua had already heard the sound of the door opening. Feeling You Zhengping hug him, he turned his head slightly, smiling warmly at his husband.

You Zhengping went up slightly on tiptoe and kissed Yu Hua's cheek, then buried his face against his sturdy back. Rubbing his face against Yu Hua's back, he said, "I didn't sleep all night again. I'm so tired."

"You've been working hard." Yu Hua's voice was somewhat stifled. "When my job picks up, will you resign? Go back to the subdistrict office to work, like before, nine to five, a healthy routine."

"Now that I've managed to transfer, I have to stick with it for a while. I got one of Cen Xiao's relatives help me change jobs. If I resign too soon, it'll be losing face for them," You Zhengping said.

Hearing Cen Xiao's name, Yu Hua's back muscles tensed. He quietly continued making dumplings.

You Zhengping stroked Yu Hua's back, acutely feeling the slight change.

So it was true! Yu Hua became strained when he heard Cen Xiao's name. What he'd written in his diary was true. He really was jealous of Cen Xiao! When he noticed this, You Zhengping was extremely pleased and surprised.

Yu Hua always acted very calm. When Cen Xiao and the other underlings came as guests to their house, he would make a lot of good food to eat, and he had never raised any objections to You Zhengping's friendship with them. You Zhengping had always thought his husband was very magnanimous, that he wouldn't randomly get jealous or annoyed. But actually he could be jealous of people.

Even though the person he was jealous of was that idiot Cen Xiao, You Zhengping was still extremely happy.

He said deliberately, "If Cen Xiao hadn't come to take over my shift this morning, I wouldn't have been able to come back during the day."

"Really?" Yu Hua was like a calm black cat. His heart was full of surging waves, but on the surface he was unmoved. "Then we owe him thanks. The next time you go to work, I'll make some extra snacks. Also, invite your friends over to eat when you have time."

You Zhengping poked Yu Hua's back and felt that the muscles were even more tense. His exterior and interior were so inconsistent.

"All right." You Zhengping decided not to expose this matter, hiding his happiness in his heart, leaving it for himself to enjoy in private.

Breakfast was finished in these warm and pleasant surroundings. You Zhengping ate with unusual satisfaction. After eating breakfast, Yu Hua had to go to work.

He got dressed and straightened his tie in the mirror. Before leaving, Yu Hua asked, "Are you working overtime again tonight?"

"No, I'm getting a day off in compensation," You Zhengping said.



He hesitated, then said, “Do you have Sunday off?”

Yu Hua could have any day off he wanted now. He said, “The contract promises holidays and days off according to national law.”

“Then let’s go on a date on Sunday,” You Zhengping said. “I feel like we’ve been apart too much lately, and our routines have been a mess. I want to get out and relax a little, just the two of us.”

The “just the two of us” moved Yu Hua. From their blind date to their engagement, from their wedding to their honeymoon, Cen Xiao and the others had always come along (worried that You Zhengping’s special ability would get out of control and he would kill Yu Hua). Yu Hua had never experienced a date with just the two of them.

“Fine,” he agreed reservedly. He opened the door. “See you tonight.”

“See you tonight.” You Zhengping smiled brightly.

When Yu Hua was gone, You Zhengping sprawled spreadeagled on the bed and closed his eyes unhappily. It wasn’t “just the two of them” at all. There would be a crowd of Protectors arranging a trap!

—

When Yu Hua arrived at work, the office door was locked. Zhen Li hadn’t come to work.

He opened the door and saw the window that Zhen Li hadn’t closed last night. In the sunlight, the desks were covered in dust.

“We should hire a janitor,” Yu Hua said to himself.

He liked to do housework and take care of You Zhengping, but he wasn’t going to clean the office.

The office was around three-hundred meters square. Zhen Li hadn’t decorated. He had only arranged the desks. After assuming his post, Yu Hua had gone on a second-hand app and bought a desk, and the two of them were currently planning to make do with this wretched state until they had found a project that could earn (launder) money. Then they would decorate.

There was a bathroom in the office. Yu Hua found a cleaning rag and was about to go into the bathroom to wet the rag and wipe the desk.

As soon as he walked in the door, he saw Zhen Li, sitting tied up on the toilet seat with tape stuck over his mouth. Seeing Yu Hua, Zhen Li began to struggle fiercely. He breathed hard, and the tape over his mouth loosened a little.

Seeing Zhen Li like this, Yu Hua's expression was very calm. He quickly stepped back out of the restroom, got out his phone, and dialed 110.

That was the choice of a normal person faced with his boss having been kidnapped.

"Don't move." A dagger pressed against Yu Hua's neck, right at his main artery. "Drop your phone. Don't call the police."

Yu Hua was carrying the phone he had bought. Of course he didn't care about it at all. He casually dropped it onto the floor. The call hadn't gone out.

"Hands on your head. Leave this place. Don't ask anything, and don't turn your head at all. You can't see my face," this man said, taking pains to change his voice. "After you leave, don't come back. You're fired. Go find a new job."

Yu Hua: "..."

He could find a new job, but he still didn't have his hundred million.

He put his hands on his head, his mind revolving quickly, deliberating whether this man was a leveler or a Protector. If he was a leveler, then it was simple. He was so presumptuous; Yu Hua would just beat him to death. If he was a Protector, then this might be the crisis he had predicted. He had to act like an ordinary person the whole time.

Yu Hua slowly walked towards the door. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw that there was a birdcage behind the door with a parrot inside it.

When had this parrot appeared? Had it been there when he had come in? Yu Hua's alertness hadn't fully recovered yet. He couldn't be sure.

The parrot stared fixedly at Yu Hua, as if it wanted to remember him.

Last night, while the bill was being settled, he had used a makeup mirror to send Zhen Li a message, telling him to disfigure his face. That had been around 20:30. He had seen Zhen Li's entirely unharmed face through the makeup mirror.

Just now, Zhen Li, tied up in the bathroom, hadn't had any signs of a beating on him. He had been brought here unconsciously or willingly. The important thing was, he hadn't disfigured his face.

When he'd seen him, Zhen Li had anxiously tried to blow away the tape, as if he had wanted to use language to convey some message to Yu Hua. His gaze had been sincere and unflinching. He hadn't had the appearance of a traitor.

Yu Hua had predicted that the Protectors would question Zhen Li. If this was a Protector, Zhen Li could have carried on according to their original plans. There would have been no need for him to be this panicked.

In a flash, Yu Hua determined that this person was a leveler, and that Zhen Li hadn't told him the fact that Yu Hua was the target of the System's mission.

The only question was, what was this parrot?

Yu Hua stared at the parrot, opened his mouth, and voicelessly mouthed the word "collaboration."

"Collaboration! Collaboration!" the parrot said.

"Wait," the person behind him said, calling Yu Hua to a stop and aiming the dagger at his temple. "What collaboration are you talking about?"

—

Author's Note:

Yu Hua: Do I beat him to death? Or beat him to death? Or beat him to death?

## CHAPTER 22

Yu Hua sighed almost invisibly. From this conversation, he could be entirely sure that this person was a leveler, and a stupid one at that. Just because of a single mouthed word, he had revealed his ability, his nature, and his weak spot. He really wasn't up to much.

Faced with the dagger, Yu Hua didn't turn his head. Instead, he calmly said, "I didn't say anything."

He looked at the office's main door. He knew he definitely couldn't walk out that door. The Protection Organization, to avoid alerting the enemy, hadn't installed surveillance inside the office, but there was surveillance in the corridor outside the door. If Yu Hua left right after coming in, he would be filmed. While he could later use all kinds of excuses to muddle through, it would still be better to avoid that if he could.

While the window was wide open, the office's blinds were drawn. There were people watching from the office building across the street. They couldn't see what was happening inside the office, but they could use infrared signals to tell that there were three people inside the room. He couldn't kill the new leveler in this room.

How annoying. What a job! Yu Hua sighed.

“Are you trying to trick me?” The man behind him pressed down on the back of Yu Hua’s neck. “Don’t play dumb. There’s nothing in this world that can hide from my eyes!”

When the back of his neck was pressed down, a trace of murderous intent flashed through Yu Hua’s eyes. He said, “Do you have a grudge against my boss? Why would you want to catch him? He’s only an ordinary entrepreneur.”

“Ordinary? Ha, only you natives would take him for an ordinary person,” the man behind him said with a cold laugh. “Don’t change the subject. What did you mean by ‘collaboration’? I was ready to let you go, you’re the one who exposed yourself!”

“You know that he’s not an ordinary person?” Yu Hua’s voice had a faint tremor in it.

“Hm? Do you know, too?” the man behind him said. “Who are you? Are you a native, or are you like Zhen Li?”

Yu Hua said, “Of course I’m not like my boss. He has very strong powers. How did you catch him?”

“Strong my ass! He’s just an idiot. He won’t answer any questions,” the man behind him said. “You’ve seen Zhen Li’s power first hand, and he took you in as human resources director. It looks like he trusts you. Tell me about your history with him. Tell me every detail clearly. Also, what does ‘collaboration’ mean?”

Yu Hua lowered his eyes, avoiding the parrot’s line of sight, gradually understanding what had happened earlier.

The man behind him was a leveler who had been sent by the System to kill Yu Hua, essentially no different from Zhen Li. According to what Zhen Li had said, not all the levelers had received this assignment. The levelers who had received the mission had organized into a Clearing League. They had kidnapped Zhen Li and made him go on ahead to test the waters as cannon fodder.

Before the main force arrived in this world, the levelers who came here would all be the advance troops; they would all be cannon fodder.

The man behind him thought he was a cut above Zhen Li. Last night, before Zhen Li could disfigure himself, he had stopped him and asked him whether he had clues about the boss. Zhen Li wouldn’t have said, but he had a disposition that couldn’t hide things. With this person’s parrot also monitoring, Zhen Li must have slipped up. After their talks fell through, the man behind Yu Hua would have noticed that Zhen Li had opened a studio and decided to look for clues there. That was how today’s scene had come about.

A new leveler, quite stupid, easy to use, with a parrot that could silently monitor others; the Protection Organization’s suspicion and investigation of Yu Hua, an unknown hidden crisis test,

the lack of a janitor... Countless matter that needed to be resolved flashed through Yu Hua's brain. He linked all these things together and produced a perfect plan.

He only needed to inconvenience himself for now, feign weakness to launch an attack.

Yu Hua hadn't been mighty from the beginning. He had also once been weak. He was no stranger to showing weakness, though it had been a long time, and he didn't know whether he could get back into the swing of it.

Yu Hua said, "My boss seems human, but he's very powerful. He can eat a whole cow at once. To use a commonplace term for it, he has super powers. He forced me to work for him. He said he's looking for an even more frightening person. I'm only an ordinary person who saw the job advertisement and came to respond, but I ended up boarding a pirate ship with no way to get off. If you can control my boss, you must be very powerful, right? When I was about to walk out of the office, I thought that it would be nice if I could collaborate with you to get rid of my demon of a boss."

"You call him powerful? Ha! Didn't you see that I tied him up?" the man behind him said. He seemed to be relaxing his guard a little.

"I don't know what means you used to control him, but he definitely won't take it lying down. He may be able to eat the ropes and the tape!" Yu Hua said, raising his voice in "fear."

The bathroom door was unlatched.

Zhen Li, who had been able to hear their whole dialogue: "..."

Was the great master instructing him on how to use his currently pitiful ability to escape?

Zhen Li looked down at the plastic ropes binding him, thinking that eating plastic was bad for your health, and that even the alternate dimension stomach wouldn't be able to handle this much. The great master didn't blame him for getting captured; that was already plenty benevolent. If he couldn't even get himself out of trouble, then he really was done for.

Zhen Li thought that if he made a good showing, maybe he wouldn't need to disfigure his face.

He started up his alternate dimension stomach and swallowed the tape. Then he braced himself, raised his legs with difficulty, and bit the ropes on his legs.

At this moment, Zhen Li's body was bent into an unbelievable shape. An ordinary person without his flexibility may have dislocated a joint by now.

Zhen Li took a deep breath and brought out the alternate dimension stomach's greatest absorption power. At last he absorbed the ropes bit by bit into the alternate dimension and succeeded in getting free.

He rolled off the toilet seat. His whole body was numb. He crawled tottering out of the bathroom. When he'd just opened the door, he heard Yu Hua say, "If you can kill the boss and free me, I'll tell you everything I know. The boss said that right now he can only determine his target's general range, he..."

Before Yu Hua had finished, the parrot discovered Zhen Li crawling out of the bathroom and loudly called, "He's out, he's out!"

The man behind Yu Hua pushed him aside, striking out with the dagger in his hand, stabbing through Yu Hua's suit jacket and pinning him to the wall. He turned his head to deal with Zhen Li. "You dared to lie to me and tell me you had no clues? How lucky that I thought of a way to get to this person. Now I've found out that you've made some progress after all."

Yu Hua stared at the hole in his jacket, the look in his eyes growing dangerous.

Zhen Li noticed Yu Hua's expression and suffered unspeakable agony, but he still had to pretend. In a tearful voice, he said, "Yes, I have found a clue, so if you kill me, you won't get anything!"

"What is the general range of the boss? What means are you planning to use to find him?" The man behind him no longer had the appearance of a white-haired elderly man. He was a short-haired, long-legged, handsome young fellow in an all-black form-fitting outfit. His features were stern, and he held a dagger that he was pointing at Zhen Li's chin. This was an assassin-type leveler who was skilled at disguise and the use of short-range weapons.

"Oh, right!" Zhen Li shot Yu Hua a wild look. "What means am I going to use? Why would I tell you?"

How would he know? He was only a pitiful boss working for his human resources director!

"I know!" Yu Hua seized the opportunity to "sell out" his boss. "Though he doesn't have a clear idea of the boss's range, he opened this studio and started his popular internet livestreams to find that person! And he's forcing me to use unfair contracts to hire more and more new people. He says this plan requires a lot of money. The studio has to make money. He wants to bring new people in, cultivate their fame, then use harsh contracts to sell them to other management companies! I don't want to help him trick people, you have to stop him!"

Zhen Li: "..."

With a lifeless look in his eyes, he said to the assassin with the parrot, "Right, I need money. I need to sell off a lot of people to realize this goal."

"Is the boss you've found among the wealthy or the political leaders?" the assassin said. "I already know there's a Protection Organization in this world. These people are hidden among the crowd, very powerful, and they have the aid of the country's heavy weaponry. Is it because

of that that you're worried about the political big shots being protected and don't want to alert the enemy ahead of time, so you're using the complicated method of the studio?"

Zhen Li glanced at Yu Hua out of the corner of his eye and saw Director Yu blink once. Taking the hint, he said, "Of course not. How could you guess my brilliant plan with your IQ?"

The more he denied it and the more panicked his expression became, the more the assassin would trust his own guesses.

"I understand," said the assassin, analyzing. "There's a powerful organization in this unopened world. They've prevented the System from opening the world. They're the real culprits behind killing countless levelers. Their leader is the target of the System's mission. But the leader's identity is very mysterious. He must be a very important person, but you don't know which one, so you're making money to raise your position, getting closer to their position, so you can observe up close."

Zhen Li blinked, not understanding why things had taken such a dramatic turn.

In reality, since he had gotten drunk last night, everything had been developing in a direction he absolutely hadn't expected.

After getting drunk, he'd gone right to sleep and only woken up after seven in the morning. When he woke up, he'd been lying on the studio's floor all night. His whole body was sore. And there was this black-clothed young man sitting next to him. There was a birdcage next to the young man.

Zhen Li vaguely felt that the parrot in the birdcage was familiar, but there were so many similar-looking birds in the world, and he wasn't a bird expert. He couldn't tell them apart. He thought that the black-clothed young man had found him drunk in the park and brought him back. After Zhen Li politely thanked him, the black-clothed young man threateningly pressed a knife to his neck.

The black-clothed young man said that the Clearing League had sent him to support Zhen Li. The head of the league had said that Zhen Li's powers were too weak, and it would be better if he had an assassin hidden in the shadows to help him. The black-clothed young man was a cautious person. He had secretly watched Zhen Li for several days before acting. He asked Zhen Li whether he had any clues about the boss.

Zhen Li's answers were evasive. He fooled the young man, but he couldn't fool the parrot's eyes.

The young man concluded that there was a problem with the studio, so he tied Zhen Li up in the bathroom and waited for an opportunity. The opportunity that had shown up was Yu Hua.

Listening to their dialogue, Yu Hua said in alarm, "What-what do you people want? What is the Protection Organization? Who do you want to kill?"

"It's not your turn to speak!" The assassin brandished his knife, leaving a wound on Yu Hua's face.

Seeing this, Zhen Li didn't dare to look at Yu Hua. He only stared at the assassin's face, so scared his eyes bulged. This leveler in front of him was done for.

"The things you've found are very worthwhile. Why didn't you say so sooner?" The assassin pinched Zhen Li's chin between his thumb and forefinger. "I came to help you, not to hurt you. Don't even think of taking the whole clearing prize for yourself, hm?"

The final "hm" was deep and nasal. Zhen Li turned his face away in agony.

"I want to join your studio. Get me a director's position, too," the assassin said, straightening up. "Why would you get a native as your human resources director? Aren't you afraid of giving secrets away?"

Zhen Li swallowed. "Because...he's short on money and easy to fool, and also...the studio needs a normal person as a cover-up."

These were excuses that Yu Hua had told Zhen Li ahead of time. They had originally been meant to fob off the Protection Organization. Now they were being misappropriated to trick the assassin.

"How can you guarantee he won't blab? I saw that he was about to call the police just now," the assassin said.

"I...used intimidation, fear, used his family to threaten him," Zhen Li said.

"Ha, what low-grade tactics." The assassin went up to Yu Hua, touching the wound on Yu Hua's face with his fingertip. "I've poisoned your blood. If you think of betraying us, telling someone about our identities, you'll die at once. Can you feel the taste of the poison flowing in your blood?"

He'd felt it. Yu Hua stared coldly at the assassin.

The so-called poison was actually a type of power of the System. Levelers who chose the assassin path as their primary skill could turn energy into an organic power that destroyed immune systems. This was colloquially called poison.

They could also put restrictions on the activity of that power. That was the type that Yu Hua had been poisoned with. If he told someone about the assassin and Zhen Li's identities, the power would immediately destroy his vocal cords, rendering him unable to speak; then it would attack his limbs, so he couldn't write; finally, it would attack his organs, and he would die in agony, unable to speak or write.



Of course, that would have been the outcome for an ordinary person.

Yu Hua, on the other hand, had absorbed that energy as soon as it had entered his body, unsealing another 1% of his power.

Getting in the way of Zhen Li disfiguring his face, tearing his clothes and putting more pressure on his already strained household finances, cutting his face and undoing his seal... If this person didn't still have some use, Yu Hua would have absorbed the power of his System and returned the poison to him unaltered.

"Very good. Now you're ours," the assassin said complacently, thinking he was in control of the situation.

The assassin lifted Zhen Li and said to Yu Hua, "Is this your so-called powerful boss? Hahaha!"

Laughing, he took a syringe and injected the liquid inside it into Zhen Li's artery.

Seeing the assassin's movements, Yu Hua's eyes flashed faintly. Could that kind of poison disfigure his face? The studio now had a janitor with a face that could be sold. There was no more need for President Zhen to peddle his looks to make money.

"Don't think you have nothing to worry about just because you're a leveler." The assassin put away the syringe and put his hand on Zhen Li's shoulder. His expression was sinister. "I got a special item from the System, an item that can implant a virus in a leveler's System. You won't be able to use your System in the near future."

Zhen Li: "..."

*That's all? My System is gone, and you haven't noticed?*

Yu Hua: "..."

*That's all? You can't temporarily disfigure his face? Xiao You will still be jealous, what should I do?*

The assassin, who believed he had completely seized control of the studio, said to Yu Hua, "I need a title now that I've joined your studio. As human resources director, why don't you draw up a contract? You'd better behave yourself."

He gave the "pitiful and helpless" Yu Hua a malicious smile.

Resisting the impulse to do away with him, Yu Hua turned on his computer and printed a contract for an "environmental services director." The contract stipulated that the environmental services director was responsible for sanitation management and security management in the studio. At the same time, he also had to work alongside President Zhen to

earn money for the studio. This was a contract with unusually harsh terms, wildly probing the edges of what was permissible under employment law.

From his position of power, the assassin didn't even read the contents of the contract. He signed his name—Yuan Luori.

As the boss, Zhen Li had to sign the employment contract. He scanned the contract's terms, gave Yuan Luori a grateful look, and mouthed "thank you."

"Thank you, thank you!" the parrot suddenly said.

"Thank you?" the assassin Yuan Luori said, laughing. "I treat you like this, and you're thanking me? Are you stupid?"

Zhen Li looked down and applied the studio's official seal, thinking inwardly, *Thank you for raising my position from the lowest in the studio. Thank you for helping me get out of disfiguring my face.*

After signing and applying the seal, he said, apparently to Yuan Luori but in reality to Yu Hua, "Now that there are two employees at the studio, the best way to attract attention and make money is to hype up a ship. If we promote a ship, the two of us will be tied together, and getting any other directors or whatever involved will be heresy."

"Hype what?" Yuan Luori said, frowning.

Yu Hua understood. This was also an acceptable method.

If Zhen Li and Yuan Luori were a ship, then he could stay above it all, not getting involved, and You Zhengping wouldn't need to be jealous of Zhen Li.

"It means Director Yuan and President Zhen will livestream together," Yu Hua explained concisely.

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Author's Note:

Reporter: President Zhen, may I ask, who is the person you're most grateful to?

Zhen Li: It must be Director Yuan. His presence let me find the meaning of life.

LimingLuori<sup>9</sup> fans: We ship it, we ship it!

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<sup>9</sup> Yuan Luori's given name (落日) means "setting sun"; Zhen Li's given name is used in a word that means "dawn" (黎明, liming). Put together, you get a pretty cute ship name.

## CHAPTER 23

The employment contract needed to be filed at the Bureau of Personnel. They had done this with Yu Hua's contract before.

Zhen Li didn't have this legal awareness. When he had hired Yu Hua, it had been Yu Hua, fulfilling the responsibilities of a human resources director, who had reminded him.

Yuan Luori sat in Zhen Li's chair, legs crossed arrogantly on top of the desk. Seeing that Yu Hua was about to leave after arranging the contract, he got up out of his half-collapsed slouch and stood on the desk, the tips of his feet lightly touching the desktop. Then, like a black cat, he noiselessly appeared in front of Yu Hua.

"Where are you going?" Yuan Luori said in warning.

Yu Hua lowered his eyes to avoid Yuan Luori and his parrot seeing his contemptuous expression. In a resigned voice, he said, "When we hire a new person, I have to go register it at the Bureau of Personnel. That's stipulated by law."

"Ha, law?" Yuan Luori tossed the dagger playfully. "What good is law? Can you eat it? You natives have it too easy. In the eyes of us levelers, law is worth less than a slice of bread. Pooh!"

Seeing a sight too painful to behold, Zhen Li covered his face and turned away, not daring to look at Yuan Luori's smug, arrogant expression. This was his first time feeling that knowing too much was painful.

"You both have super powers, so you think you can trample on the law, but I'm different. I'm just an ordinary person. I've spent the first part of my life properly observing law and discipline. I hope to pass the rest of my life just as steadily," Yu Hua said.

"If you want to file it, go ahead, but..." Yuan Luori pointed to the wound on his face. "What will you do if someone asks you about that wound?"

"I'll say...that a feral black cat scratched me." Yu Hua looked Yuan Luori's clothes up and down.

Yuan Luori could tell that Yu Hua's "feral black cat" meant him. He didn't take offense. Feral meant free, and feline animals had strong attack and alertness capabilities, which suited the life of an assassin. Feline imitation was among Yuan Luori's skills. Calling him a black cat was tantamount to praising him, saying he was a killer in the night. He wasn't averse to this form of address.

“You can only get at me with your words. Remember, if you dare to tell anyone, not only will you be poisoned to death, your family is also finished,” Yuan Luori said in a dangerous voice.

Yu Hua’s gaze swept over Yuan Luori. Leaving behind a meaningful gaze, he took the contract and left.

Hearing their dialogue, Zhen Li covered his face.

He had suddenly realized the great master’s intentions. The great master going to file the contract meant that they were going to keep the feral black cat. If you were taking in a stray cat, didn’t you first have to vaccinate it to eliminate anything dangerous it might be carrying? Maybe you even had to snip off its balls.

Thinking of that, Zhen Li felt excited. He thought, *Ignorance really is bliss*. Then he went over and said, “Director Yuan, should we discuss how to promote our ship? I can see that your skeleton is very supple, as flexible as a cat’s. It should be easy for you to learn to dance, right?”

Yuan Luori’s attitude towards Zhen Li was all right. It wasn’t the sort of superior attitude he had towards Yu Hua. He coldly said, “If you like making a fool of yourself, then go ahead. Don’t imagine that I’m going prance around with you! At most I’ll appear in front of the livestream camera. As for the ship, that’s your responsibility.”

“Okay.” Zhen Li nodded indifferently, then started planning dance moves according to Yuan Luori’s physique.

The great master wanted to conceal his identity, and he would cooperate for now, though first he had to prepare himself. Zhen Li thought that with Yuan Luori’s attitude, in a few days he would be studying sliding knees along with him.

*Yes, I’ll include the kneeling position in the dance teaching program. When we study it on the livestream, we’ll definitely be able to attract many fans*, Zhen Li thought.

After they got popular, they would have to hire a dance teacher... Would the great master agree to spending money before they had earned any? Zhen Li was very worried.

While Zhen Li was racking his brain to plan out a program for making money, Yu Hua had already arrived at the Bureau of Personnel. It was upstairs from the job center’s hall. After filing the contract, he left behind one original copy of the contract, and put the other two in his briefcase. When he got back, he would give one to Yuan Luori.

When the time came that Yuan Luori no longer looked down on law and found out that he had to use legal methods to protect himself, maybe he would cry. Yu Hua thought this rather cheerfully.

He raised a hand to touch the wound on his face. When he'd left the studio, he'd immediately gone to a pharmacy to buy a bandaid to cover up the wound.

He needed to prepare a first aid box for the office. In the future, there would be many dust-ups like this. They couldn't always go to the hospital. Yu Hua wrote out a shopping list in a small notebook.

After filing, he slacked off during working hours. He went to the office building behind the job center and entered the psychological consultation office.

Yu Hua had originally made an appointment for this time. Even if he hadn't had to go file Yuan Luori's contract, he still would have punctually kept the appointment.

Since he had started psychological consultation, using stress, anxiety, mania, and other such excuses to cover up his behavior, he had to see it through to the end. He needed a medical record of his condition gradually improving after changing jobs. This way his reasons for remaining at his post in Zhen Li's studio would stand up.

Yu Hua planned for this process to last three months. At first he would come for a consultation every day or every other day. When the situation had been alleviated, he could go once a week to consolidate his position. In three months, he would make the psychologist issue the conclusion that he had already basically recovered. Regardless of whether the Protection Organization was going to investigate the follow-up records, since he had started, he had to play the game in full.

During an hour of psychological consultation, following the psychologist's "lead," Yu Hua explained how he had found a new job, that his boss was rather stupid, that he had little stress at work. The new position gave him room to spread out. His mental state was gradually stabilizing, and the desire to destroy decreasing.

He said that he had bought a stack of little makeup mirrors and put them in his briefcase. When his mood became unsteady, he could break a mirror for relief.

But he knew that this was a remedy that only made matters worse. It couldn't treat his psychological malady at its roots.

Fortunately he had already learned to accept his imperfect self, accept that he was weak, selfish, and petty. He could speak openly with himself. He wouldn't avoid problems again.

The psychologist encouraged and praised Yu Hua. At the end of the conversation, the psychologist hesitated and said, "Because of family circumstances, my place of work is going to change. I may go very far away from you. Would you object to online chats?"

Yu Hua paused. He stared at the psychologist and saw that this forty-something psychologist looked a trace unnatural. He understood.

It seemed that the World Protection Organization had already found his psychological consultation records. To observe him up close, the Protection Organization no doubt wanted him to switch to a psychology expert in their organization. Using online chats would make it easy to switch to a different person without being noticed. If Yu Hua didn't accept the internet as a medium, that would be even better. They could simply recommend that he switch to someone more specialized.

Yu Hua considerably said, "I don't especially like the online method. I feel that it's unsafe and worry about my personal information being revealed. But I trust your insight. Could you recommend a psychologist in the Xuyang District area to me?"

As expected, his psychologist relaxed and easily said, "Of course I can. I can recommend a senior of mine from school who's more specialized than I am, though the price will remain the same."

"All right, thank you," said Yu Hua.

It seemed that the Protection Organization knew that he was currently hard up and wouldn't accept too high a price. They were fairly considerate.

Yu Hua didn't hate the Protection Organization. If they hadn't been protecting this world, the System would have occupied it long ago.

The System would occupy a world, then extract the living bodies in that world that had potential to service it in obtaining power. First it used its power to occupy one or two worlds. Then it would arrange for some intelligent life forms to die in accidents. These so-called deaths were fake. Actually, the System would extract the living bodies before death and throw them into different worlds to perform missions.

These living bodies, also known as levelers, carried out missions of many different kinds, but the basic goal was all the same: to destroy the world order and make it easy for the System's power to invade.

The levelers were used, but they couldn't be called completely innocent, either. Because when they accomplished a mission, as the System's chosen teeth and claws, they would also obtain a part of the world's power, becoming stronger and stronger.

The System used the eternally unattainable carrot of "clearing" to bait the levelers, used the explanation that this was "fake," a "game world" to lower the levelers' moral baselines. When the levelers had already killed many people across numerous worlds, the System would finally tell them the truth.

A small number of levelers, after finding out that they had killed people in real worlds, would mentally collapse, fall into total disorder, and the System could take the opportunity to absorb their energy. But the majority of the levelers would have already had their minds numbed after so many worlds. Some clever people may have already discovered that this wasn't a game

world, and that they were being used as executioners. But so what? They had to live, had to clear.

Over the endless years, the levelers lost their consciences and morals, but they didn't know that they were all only thin branches of the System. Not only could they not clear, the System could absorb their energy at any time.

This was what it looked like to be meat on the chopping block.

The difference between Yu Hua, who was a clearer, and the rest of the levelers was that he was an aberration.

If one compared the levelers to the System's cells, then Yu Hua was a constantly splitting and consuming cancerous cell. He had survived countless missions, seized the System's power, and finally had become a tumor that the System had no choice but to cut away. Before leaving, this tumor had dealt the main body a fierce blow, taking away the greater part of the System's energy.

Unfortunately, he couldn't entirely eliminate the System, or else the System's other cells would die along with the main body. But Yu Hua had left behind the seeds of the cancer. If the cells could only seize the opportunity, each one of them could escape the System.

Yu Hua had known that this was a world that the System had never been able to capture. He didn't know what there was in this world, whether he could live out the peaceful life he wanted there. But this was the hardest world for the System to control. No matter what kind of world it was, he would spend his last life there.

After coming here, Yu Hua had been fascinated by this world's peace and had lived at ease. And at the most appropriate time, he had met You Zhengping.

He was grateful to the Protection Organization for guarding this world, though it would be better if they could return the wreckage of the phone to him when the investigation was over.

When he was finished with his errands, Yu Hua returned to the office and saw Zhen Li livestreaming with Yuan Luori.

Zhen Li had introduced the company's Director of Environmental Maintenance to everyone, and indicated that from now on Yuan Luori would always livestream with him. Director Yuan learned well and knew some dance fundamentals. They would invite the fans to supervise the whole course of their dance studies. When they had a finished product, they would rent a specialized dance stage and record it for everyone to watch.

[There's a little too much information in what President Zhen said. I don't know where to start. Let's line up.]

[What I want to know is, in a company with only three people, what's the difference between a Director of Environmental Maintenance and a janitor?]

[I think there is a difference. You could read it as environmental protection + maintaining security, so he's a janitor + security guard.]

[Their company has no equipment. The president is so poor he uses a cell phone for livestreaming. The picture is very narrow. If President Zhen's movements are a little too expansive, they go out of the frame. What does such a poor company need a security guard for?]

[To protect President Zhen's face! Are you telling me such a good-looking face doesn't need protection?]

[Can't Director Yu protect President Zhen's face? Why did they have to hire Director Yuan? I don't want the ZhenYuan<sup>10</sup> ship, I want the YuZhen<sup>11</sup> ship!]

[But Director Yu is married, and that policeman is also very handsome. They shouldn't be broken up. Let's ship ZhenYuan...]

[There's nothing interesting about ZhenYuan. Director Yuan may be handsome, but he doesn't move at all! He won't even meet President Zhen's eye. I'm not having any of this fake candy! Yuan Luori is too unprofessional, I demand you change to someone else!]

The barrage was full of a string of "I don't agree to their marriage," and "someone else, someone else." Zhen Li didn't dare to order around Yuan Luori, who was still living in an illusion. He awkwardly danced through the two hours of the livestream. After turning off the livestream, he looked anxious.

It wasn't going too far to say that Yuan Luori was a security guard. Yuan Luori's presence really was for the sake of protecting Zhen Li's face. The netizens hadn't guessed wrong.

Yu Hua, on the other hand, wasn't in a hurry. He had a use for Yuan Luori.

When the Protection Organization saw that Zhen Li's studio had hired another person, they would definitely investigate Yuan Luori's identity. Yuan Luori was an out-and-out leveler. He absolutely wouldn't stand up to investigation.

Yu Hua guessed that the Protection Organization would definitely have one final trial for him. Rather than let the other side act, it would be better to plan something himself. He would make Yuan Luori, who was entirely unsentimental about the natives, attack him. Yu Hua would be

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<sup>10</sup> The characters used are 真 and 圆, pronounced the same as their surnames but respectively meaning "true" and "circle."

<sup>11</sup> Similar to the above, the characters used here are 玉 and 枕, "jade" and "pillow."



gravely injured, Yuan Luori would reveal himself in front of the Protection Organization, and Yu Hua would become the innocent passerby Yuan Luori saw him as, escaping entirely.

He very properly drew up a plan for the company's professional future, putting on an appearance of working until it was time to leave. In reality, in the course of casual conversation, he had secretly hinted many things to Zhen Li. Next it would be President Zhen's turn to act.

When Yu Hua came home, You Zhengping had just woken up. He was sitting up in bed, his eyes drowsy, looking lost.

Yu Hua changed to his slippers. Without even taking off his jacket, he walked into the bedroom and went over to hug You Zhengping and kiss his face. He had heard too much of Yuan Luori's stupid, egotistical talk today. His mind was in disorder. He had come to You Zhengping to recharge his batteries.

Last time, his powers had awakened very abruptly. There had been absolutely no warning signs. The wholly unprepared Yu Hua hadn't been able to control his power in time, leading to his power collecting entirely in his physical strength. Now, because of the stimulus of Yuan Luori's poison, more of Yu Hua's power had awakened than last time, but this time he had been ready. He had directed the power towards abilities that could hide his identity. His strength hadn't increased. He could touch his husband as usual.

You Zhengping, having been kissed, was about to smile when he saw the bandaid on Yu Hua's face and said in concern, "What's this? Did Zhen Li hit you?"

You Zhengping had thought all along that Zhen Li had bad intentions.

Yu Hua enjoyed Xiao You's concern very much. He raised a hand to touch the bandaid and said, "No, a new employee came to the company today. His name is Yuan Luori. He and President Zhen seem to be old acquaintances. They started fighting as soon as they saw each other. I went to break it up and got hurt by mistake."

"Another one?" You Zhengping was on the alert. "What does he look like?"

Before, if anything at all had happened in the Xuyang District, Captain You Zhengping would have been notified. But his family member was currently being investigated, and You Zhengping had been temporarily suspended from duty. His work was temporarily being handled by Lian Yufan's squad. News was slow to arrive.

Seeing that You Zhengping was sounding the alarm bells, Yu Hua guessed that he was jealous again. In spite of himself, he felt glad. "Relax, he seems to have a good relationship with President Zhen. While I was in the office, they were always whispering to each other and livestreaming. I felt like a third wheel."

Zhen Li and Yuan Luori had a good relationship? Could it really be a party of Destroyers? You Zhengping couldn't keep lying down anymore. He pulled away Yu Hua's bandaid. Seeing the

wound under it, he said in surprise, “That’s no ordinary accidental injury. That was clearly done by a knife!”

“Yuan Luori is a little eccentric. He likes tossing around a dagger for fun. I put a stop to that, but President Zhen said that Director Yuan had a strong sense of propriety and wouldn’t randomly hurt people. And it wasn’t a big knife, the wound isn’t deep. It’ll be better soon,” Yu Hua said, holding You Zhengping’s hand.

“Better my ass!” You Zhengping said angrily. “This wound seems small, but it’s actually very deep. That dagger must be light and thin, very sharp. It’s clearly meant for hurting people. A wound of this depth will leave a scar!”

He struggled out of Yu Hua’s arms and jumped out of bed. “Who the hell is he? I’m going to go give him a seeing to!”

“Wait!” Yu Hua couldn’t let his husband face Yuan Luori directly. He quickly took You Zhengping’s hand and said, “You understand knife wounds very well.”

“I...” The impulsive You Zhengping sucked in a breath, looking guiltily at Yu Hua. Of course he understood. You Zhengping had been first in weapons skills in the nationwide competition. He was proficient in eighteen kinds of weaponry. He knew perfectly well what kind of weapons caused what kind of wounds.

“Have you seen wounds like this while carrying out your missions as an auxiliary police officer, or did you play with knives before when you were obsessed with extreme sports?” Yu Hua asked nervously. “Let me see if you have any injuries. If you’ve been injured, don’t hide it from me.”

“No, no! I haven’t been injured,” You Zhengping said quickly. “I... You know I used to be kind of rebellious, I really did play with knives, and so would Cen Xiao and the others. But I’ve cleaned up my act and settled down now. I don’t know whether Cen Xiao and the others still play around.”

“I’m glad you’re all right.” Yu Hua relaxed, at the same time feeling jealous again. “I met you too late. There are so many things I don’t know about you.”

Cen Xiao had been part of too much of You Zhengping’s past. Yu Hua couldn’t help feeling that it was somewhat unbalanced.

Before, You Zhengping wouldn’t have been able to read the subtext in these words. But after reading the calendar diary, he understood. He kissed Yu Hua and quietly said, “Then I can tell you about it over time.”

“All right.” Yu Hua smiled brightly.

"I'm hungry. I've been sleeping all day. I haven't eaten anything." You Zhengping rubbed his stomach.

"Soon." Yu Hua quickly undid his tie, changed into home clothes, tied on a little bear apron, and prepared a lavish dinner for his starving husband.

As soon as he went into the kitchen, You Zhengping, clenching his teeth, picked up his phone and sent Lian Yufan a coded message, asking why he hadn't been notified of the new developments today.

You Zhengping had just examined his phone. There wasn't a single message. Lian Yufan didn't take him seriously at all!

Lian Yufan said: *The company has employed another Destroyer. Yu Hua's identity is even more suspect. We're keeping watch on the basement Zhen Li rents, waiting to question him when he returns. For the moment, you have no authority to learn this information. You'll hear about everything after the date.*

Yu Hua was a Protector's family member. The organization had had misgivings about investigating him, so they hadn't gone to question Zhen Li directly. Now that someone who was clearly a Destroyer had joined the company, the Protection Organization had to carry out its full function.

You Zhengping quickly deleted the message and stared gloomily at the phone.

He had seen Zhen Li. He was somewhat of a coward. The Protection Organization could easily control Zhen Li. But Yuan Luori didn't seem easy to deal with. One meeting, and Yu Hua had been accidentally injured by him. He really couldn't feel easy about Yu Hua working with the two of them.

Then Lian Yufan sent today's psychological consultation record translated into code. You Zhengping read that Yu Hua said he was doing better and better now. He felt tormented.

The new job was making Yu Hua happy, letting him walk out of the shadow. As his family member, he couldn't force him to resign.

When the news broadcast started, Yu Hua had just finished making a table full of lavish dinner food. You Zhengping, his feelings complicated, sat at the dining table. Looking at the four dishes and soup in front of him, he nearly started to cry.

Yu Hua hummed a tune while filling a bowl with rice for You Zhengping. He was clearly in a very good mood.

You Zhengping, enduring his sadness, began to gobble up his food. He choked after eating only two mouthfuls and started to cough violently.

“Don’t eat so fast. Eating slowly is good for your stomach.” Yu Hua passed over a cup of warm barley tea, lightly patting You Zhengping’s back.

You Zhengping swallowed the tea and nodded. “It’s so good, and I’m so hungry. I couldn’t hold back.”

The two of them ate up all the food while watching the news, concerning themselves with the country’s major events.

Yu Hua ate twice as much as usual. Now that his powers had been unsealed, he needed more food, and he had unconsciously increased the amount of food he’d made. You Zhengping saw how he was eating and thought that it was true that a good mood increased your appetite.

“Where are we going for our date this weekend?” Yu Hua asked You Zhengping, who was lazily lying on the couch while Yu Hua cleaned the room and washed the dishes.

“Let’s go...to the amusement park in the suburbs. I always went there when I was little. I kind of miss it,” You Zhengping said.

The swish of the water as the dishes were washed and the Fishermen’s Song playing as background music in the weather forecast mingled. Curiously, Yu Hua said, “Isn’t it going to be closed down soon because it’s too old? I heard that the government is planning rebuild the amusement park next year. While it hasn’t closed yet, will there be visitors?”

It was precisely because there would be few people that it was a good place to act. Choosing an amusement park that was about to be abandoned and renovated made it easy to encounter danger!

“Didn’t I promise that I would tell you stories about my childhood?” You Zhengping went into the kitchen and hugged Yu Hua from behind, burying his face against his back. He said, “I have lots of memories at that amusement park.”

“All right,” Yu Hua said lightly. “It’s good that there won’t be many people. It’ll be easy to be alone, and we won’t have to worry about getting lost.”

In another two days, it was the weekend. Yu Hua had been waiting in vain these two days for the Protection Organization’s attempt. Zhen Li, meanwhile, had been beaten up by Lian Yufan.

Complying with his subordinate’s instructions, President Zhen first told the Protection Organization that neither of the two directors was a Destroyer, and all he wanted was to start a business and live a quiet life. When that was seen through, he said that both of them were Destroyers. Then he said that Yu Hua was, while Yuan Luori wasn’t. Finally, after being punched twice, he said that Yu Hua wasn’t and Yuan Luori was. In short, he didn’t say a word of truth.

Lian Yufan knew that he couldn't get the truth out of him like this, so he ordered Zhen Li to take Yuan Luori to the amusement park this weekend.

Zhen Li cleverly used code to tell Yu Hua about this. Yu Hua, who had been looking forward to a date with just the two of them, looked grave.

The Protectors and the levelers were both trying to destroy his two-person world.

"Fine," Yu Hua said heavily. "Let them come."

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Author's Note:

Many people have come to the soon-to-be-closed-down amusement park today. They're separated into:

Lian Yufan's squad, seven people; Cen Xiao and the others, come to watch the fun, six people (seven in all adding in You Zhengping); the Destroyers Zhen Li and Yuan Luori; a Protector squad captain; and the world's most powerful Destroyer, Yu Hua.

The amusement park: Do you people think I'm not closing down fast enough?

## CHAPTER 24

Zhen Li turned circles around the office like an ant boiling in a pot. Occasionally he used his long sleeve to wipe his forehead. Today he was dressed in the cool and roomy outer robe of the Wei and Jin Dynasties<sup>12</sup>; the spacious, dark purple robe with its expansive sleeves had a pattern of bamboo leaves embroidered on it, perfectly combining the alluring and the repressive. His anxious look added even more to the aesthetic of a sickly beauty of the period. Sitting in front of the livestream unmoving, he could still attract fans.

The fans were very confused. How could Zhen Li wear such a gay shade of purple and look like such a baffled little hipster? It must have been that his temperament was too stupidly foolish, or else his expression was too anxious.

Next to him was the as-ever unprofessional Yuan Luori in his eternally unchanging form-fitting black clothes, disdainfully watching Zhen Li parading his looks out of the corner of his eye, feeling that his patience had already reached its limit. He was very impatient with Zhen Li's activities; at this rate, how long would it take him to clear?

The livestream fans had already seen it all from Yuan Luori. With these interactions, there was no way to promote a ship; candy shoved down your throat wasn't sweet at all. They weren't buying.

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<sup>12</sup> Period from 220-420, example of clothing of the period can be seen here: <http://www.chinesetimeschool.com/Portals/2/cms/images/201303/634982715179500000.jpeg>.

After struggling through the daily fixed 10am-12pm livestream, Zhen Li turned off the livestream and sighed lengthily.

He was a newbie who had taken fifteen years to go through four levels, but he had to manage a studio and realize a hundred a million in profits in three years. Not only did his subordinate directors not listen to his orders, they were always threatening his life.

Take this livestream, for example. What internet celebrity livestreamed every morning? Didn't everyone choose traffic-heavy times around eight in the evening? Could you make any money livestreaming in the morning?

But Yu Hua hadn't agreed. He had said that he had to go home in the evening to cook dinner and watch the news. He didn't want to work overtime at the office because of a livestream. Anyway, two people working overtime in the evening was an ambiguous situation; he wouldn't be able to explain himself to Xiao You.

So Zhen Li had been forced to arrange to livestream in the morning. That he was still able to attract fans like this was all thanks to the big wardrobe he had equipped. But despite this, Yu Hua still thought his foundation item was too lowly.

Not only did he get bullied by his subordinates, the World Protection Organization also had its eyes on Zhen Li. It was one thing to be interrogated about Yu Hua and Yuan Luori's identities; Zhen Li had been prepared for that. But what kind of cursed mission was it to make him lure Yuan Luori to the amusement park? How could he get him to agree without raising his defenses?

Tomorrow was the planned date. Zhen Li, caught in the middle, was harassed enough to cry. His IQ wasn't high enough, and most of it was spent on his appearance. How could he think of a way? He had to rely on Yu Hua, who was a master strategist.

Since the start of the livestream, Zhen Li had been shooting looks at Yu Hua, hoping that the great master would come up with an idea.

Noticing Zhen Li's roving eyes, the livestream fans had all asked President Zhen whether he really couldn't stand Director Yuan and wanted to switch partners, and that was why he kept making eyes at Director Yu offscreen. Zhen Li was nearly scared to death when he saw the barrage. His gaze froze at once. He was petrified that Yu Hua would dig his eyes out.

There was no one to help him. All Zhen Li could do was keep up an awkward lagging conversation with Yuan Luori after the livestream ended.

"How many worlds have you passed?" Zhen Li asked.

"Thirty-seven."

“That’s a lot, amazing,” Zhen Li praised lifelessly, but he was thinking, *The great master passed 3841 worlds. That’s more than a hundred times your number.*

Yuan Luori said, “It’s not that much. I heard that all ten of the Clearing League’s first-rate masters have passed over a hundred, and the head of the league has passed two-hundred eighteen. He’s the most powerful among the current levelers.”

Yu Hua, pretending to be busy next to them: “...”

“Oh, two-hundred eighteen.” Zhen Li snuck a glance at Yu Hua. “How fe—many! Amazing!”

“What’s so amazing about it? Even at two-hundred eighteen, he’s still nowhere near clearing. I don’t know how many levels the first clearer passed. It must have been at least five hundred.” Yuan Luori was sitting on the desk with one leg bent up, hugging his leg with both arms, his chin resting on his knee. He seemed rather lonely.

“Five hundred levels...may not be quite enough.” It really wasn’t enough. Even the order of magnitude wasn’t enough.

“Who knows? I can’t imagine any more.” A trace of weakness appeared in Yuan Luori’s face. He drew a dagger from his waist and stabbed the table with it, fiercely saying, “This is a multi-person mission. The System promised that anyone who participated would clear. I barely survived my thirty-seventh world. I may not be able to survive the next. I can’t let this opportunity go!”

Yu Hua looked at the desk. In an “Office Materials Requirement List,” he entered: *Purchase desks at second-hand market, quantity: 50.*

“R-really?” Zhen Li’s feelings were very complicated. He picked up Yuan Luori’s birdcage and poked the parrot inside it. “You’re so desperate to clear. What are you planning to do after you clear?”

“Don’t touch the parrot.” Yuan Luori snatched away the parrot. “Of course I’m planning to take the enormous power I get from inside the System, go to a...a safe world like this one, and occupy that world. I want everyone to look at me!”

“Well, actually, you can also do that here by doing a good job attracting fans,” Zhen Li whispered.

Zhen Li was deliberately avoiding the parrot, so Yuan Luori didn’t hear these words.

Yuan Luori’s mood changed at the mention of his wish after clearing. He had a desire to talk and said to Zhen Li, “What do you think, has my idol already taken over the System and become the controller of countless worlds?”

“Who is your idol?” Zhen Li was panicked.

Yuan Luori said, "Of course it's the legendary clearer."

Yu Hua: "..."

Yuan Luori said: "I was enduring my nineteenth world when he cleared. That world was too hard. I was seriously injured and about to die. Then the System issued a notice, announcing that to celebrate the emergence of the first clearer, all the worlds' difficulty levels would be reduced to one tenth. It's all because of him that I was able to survive. He's my savior."

"Apart from survival, the reason I want to clear is so that I can get closer to that matchless person."

Yu Hua really couldn't listen to any more of this. He threw the office materials requirement list he'd just filled out onto the desk and expressionlessly said, "Why didn't the clearer wait a few more minutes to clear?"

Hearing Yu Hua slander the person he most revered, Yuan Luori ground his teeth. "If I didn't need to hide, if I didn't still have a use for you, I'd already have..."

"No, no, no!" Zhen Li quickly acted as peacemaker, blocking Yuan Luori. "You have to take this seriously, you can't reveal your identity, the Protection Organization is very powerful!"

Yuan Luori held himself back. If the target of the System's mission really was the head of the Protection Organization, then he truly couldn't act rashly.

Seeing that the two of them had talked awkwardly for ages without mentioning tomorrow's date at the park, Yu Hua gave Zhen Li an excuse. "Boss, I've finished today's work. I request permission to leave early. I have a date with my husband tomorrow. I want to get home early today to prepare."

"Oh, all right, go ahead, I'll count it as full attendance," Zhen Li said.

After Yu Hua left, Zhen Li quietly said to Yuan Luori, "There's something I have to confess."

"What?"

"Actually, my identity has already been exposed. The night before yesterday, a person from the Protection Organization with the rank of captain ambushed me at my house, interrogated me, and made me tell him which of you and Yu Hua was actually a leveler," Zhen Li said.

"You..." Hearing that Zhen Li had revealed his identity so easily, Yuan Luori was so angry he got out his dagger. "Good-for-nothing!"

Zhen Li obligingly said, "That's right, I'm a good-for-nothing, but I didn't reveal your identity, I said that Yu Hua was the leveler."



“Good for you, but will they believe that?” Yuan Luori slowly put his dagger away.

“We can make them believe it,” Zhen Li said. “The Protection Organization is planning to test Yu Hua tomorrow during his date to see whether he possesses special abilities. We only have to follow quietly and make it look like Yu Hua has powers, and you won’t be suspected anymore. That’s the strong point of a hidden assassin type.”

Yuan Luori wiped the dagger with Zhen Li’s wide sleeve and praised him: “Finally you’ve said something clever, but you’re not ruthless enough. I not only want to use him to get rid of suspicion, I also want to make the Protection Organization kill him. I have to conceal my identity, so I can’t touch him, so can’t I make the Protection Organization do it themselves? Hahaha!”

Zhen Li raised his head and looked at Yuan Luori, thinking, *Go ahead and laugh, today’s the only time you’ll get to do it.*

Now that he had finally succeeded in tricking Yuan Luori, the rest of this wasn’t Zhen Li’s business. He lightly patted his sleeve, planning to leave the office.

“Wait.” Yuan Luori called Zhen Li to a halt and said suspiciously, “He only asked you for leave just now. How would the Protection Organization have known the night before last that he had a date tomorrow?”

This question brought Zhen Li up short. He said uncertainly, “Could it be because he booked tickets online using the real-name system?”

“I feel uneasy. You and I will go to that amusement park tonight to lay traps ahead of time,” Yuan Luori said.

“Huh? I’m going, too?” Zhen Li said in surprise. “The Protection Organization knows my face. I’ll be observed.”

“No problem, I know disguise techniques.” Yuan Luori pulled a crumpled-up old man mask out of the System’s space.

“I won’t do it,” Zhen Li refused. He didn’t even have the System anymore. All he had left was his alternate dimension stomach. Wasn’t he going to his death if he went to the amusement park?

“You have to go,” Yuan Luori said, clutching the back of Zhen Li’s neck.

With a death grip on the back of his neck, Zhen Li couldn’t refuse. He tearfully went with Yuan Luori through the night to lay traps at the amusement park.

Zhen Li spent a busy night, and You Zhengping and Yu Hua didn't sleep well, either. They were both masters at pretending to be asleep. They seemed to be sleeping soundly all night, but in reality they didn't sleep a wink.

In order to rationalize the Protection Organization's actions, You Zhengping had announced all over the police bureau that he had a date that weekend, and he had swapped several shifts with colleagues into order to get the day off. Due to his massive public display of affection, many people knew his itinerary, so there would be nothing unusual about the Protection Organization scouting it out. Yu Hua wasn't suspicious at all.

The two worried people held each other through the night. In the morning, Yu Hua "regained consciousness" per the alarm as usual. He opened his eyes. With complicated thoughts, he looked at You Zhengping's sleeping countenance. When he had looked for a while, he scratched his husband's nose and said quietly into his ear, "Get up, the itinerary is tight today, we have to be up early."

"Uh-huh..." The wide-awake You Zhengping hugged the quilt and said, "Let me sleep for five more minutes. I'm so sleepy."

He never got up early. It would be unreasonable for him to get up right away now.

"I'll go make some simple food first. You can sleep for another ten minutes, that's all, all right?" Yu Hua said.

"Yeah, call me when it's ready," You Zhengping said "murmurously."

Today's breakfast was milk and homemade sandwiches. Yu Hua quickly fried two eggs, warmed up the bread in the toaster, prepared the savory Spam and greens, spread salad dressing on the insides of two slices of bread, arranged the pieces of Spam, fried eggs, and greens on them, and within five minutes, two simple sandwiches were completed.

Yu Hua warmed the milk to the most suitable temperature for drinking and poured it into a cup, then went to get You Zhengping out of bed.

You Zhengping pretended to struggle for a moment, then got up with his hair a mess. He quickly brushed his teeth and ate the breakfast Yu Hua had made in a few mouthfuls.

While You Zhengping was showering, Yu Hua quickly washed the dishes, dried them, and put them in the cupboard, properly arranging them, changed into casual dress that was suitable for moving around in, and waited for his husband by the door.

His husband washed up very quickly. His hair was still wet when they were about to go out. Yu Hua was worried he would catch a cold and got out a blowdryer to dry You Zhengping's hair for him. Only when it was more or less dry did they change to sneakers and go out.

In the car, they put on You Zhengping's favorite music to listen to. He sat in the passenger's seat, took a picture of Yu Hua seriously driving the car, and posted a Moment of it with the comment, "We're going on a date today. Got up early, so I'm tired. Luckily there's an angel to drive for me, so I can catch up on some sleep."

"Why hasn't anyone favorited it?!" You Zhengping said resentfully five minutes later.

Yu Hua was amused by his impatient look. "Cen Xiao and the others don't get up until noon on days off. It's only seven. Your friends aren't out of bed yet."

"Crowd of night owls. They'll be bald sooner or later," You Zhengping said discontentedly.

He understood perfectly well that Cen Xiao and the others had been lying in wait at the amusement park since three in the morning. They were wide awake now.

You Zhengping's squad were irregular personnel, but this time, they were dealing with two or even three Destroyers at once, so Director Xiao was very cautious and had put Cen Xiao temporarily in charge of the squad so they could support Lian Yufan.

The amusement park opened for business at eight-thirty. Yu Hua reached the suburbs after driving for an hour. He parked the car and got out a picnic basket. Inside were the snacks he had prepared last night, such as roast chicken and roast duck. He had carefully wrapped these up in tinfoil to keep them warm and fresh.

This amusement park was already deserted to the point of having no restaurants or shops. There was only a small supermarket remaining at the entrance, and the only food items it supplied visitors with were bread, instant noodles, and bottled water. Lian Yufan hadn't wanted to harm innocent people; at this moment, all of the amusement park's employees had been swapped with the Protection Organization's irregulars. These people were robust and talented, and they had been carefully cultivated. The only difference between them and Protectors was that they didn't have special abilities.

The Protectors and the irregulars wore nanotech masks. Apart from Lian Yufan, taking the lead, who was using the handsome uncle's face, the rest all had unremarkable man-in-the-street faces.

Yuan Luori and Zhen Li were disguised as an elderly man and woman buying tickets on the scene. The "elderly man" Yuan Luori was holding his parrot, and the parrot was vigilantly watching the people around them. The "elderly lady" Zhen Li kept his body as stooped as possible, pretending to be short.

All the ordinary people had been cleared out of the amusement park. The only people wearing their own faces were You Zhengping and Yu Hua. There wasn't a single ordinary citizen. They were all people with super powers or veteran special forces.

The park opened at eight-thirty. The melancholy husbands went in, holding hands and carrying a lunch basket. They were met with the sight of a peeling “Welcome,” shops with tightly closed doors and windows, dried-up fountains, a yellowed lawn, withered flowers, and creaking attractions.

You Zhengping: “...”

Truly a great place to commit major crimes in broad daylight! If you ran into trouble here, no one would come to help even if you screamed your throat out!

Yu Hua was also astonished by the bleakness of the amusement park. He pointed to the lawn and said, “Uh...are you sure about looking for memories here?”

“Of course!” You Zhengping stubbornly ran up to a closed sugar figurine stand. “I still remember, when I was eight, I came here and ate a sugar figurine. When I’d eaten it, I wanted another one. My dad wouldn’t buy it for me. He said it was bad for my teeth. I was a brat then. I was so mad, I cried and rolled around on the ground in front of a whole crowd. The people around us all criticized my dad, saying that the child only wanted to eat a sugar figurine, why not buy it for him?”

He recalled it as he spoke, standing by the side of the sugar figurine stand, stroking the long-rotted wood.

Yu Hua put down the basket he was holding, picked up the camera hanging around his neck, and photographed the scene of You Zhengping remembering his childhood.

“What happened then? Did our dad buy you the sugar figurine?” Yu Hua had married into his husband’s family; You Zhengping’s parents were his parents, too.

“My dad didn’t spoil me,” You Zhengping said, laughing. “He brought me up to the sugar figurine stand and bought twenty of them at one go. He ordered me to eat them all up. A real man had to take responsibility for his own words. Since then, I don’t dare to eat candy anymore.”

Remembering the taste of those twenty sugar figurines, You Zhengping unconsciously rubbed his stomach. He had eaten until his tongue had gone numb back then. It really was a psychological shadow.

“That’s a bit cruel.” Seeing his lingering fear, Yu Hua’s heart ached a little.

You Zhengping said, “I didn’t really eat all of them. My dad ate the rest. He doesn’t like eating sweets, but that day he said, a son throwing a tantrum in public is the father’s fault, so he also had to bear a portion of the responsibility. When we finished eating the twenty sugar figurines, he seemed to be in more pain than me. I was a very bratty, very mischievous child when I was little. Cats and dogs all hated me. It’s because my dad was an example to me that I got out from the crooked path and onto the the proper one.”

The two of them chatted as they walked, and the deserted amusement park didn't feel very scary. At each place they came to, You Zhengping talked about a childhood memory, and Yu Hua took a photograph to commemorate it.

"Stop taking pictures of me, we need to take a picture together," You Zhengping said. "Let's find someone to take a picture for us. Uncle, could you help us out?"

Lian Yufan, having been called "uncle," turned woodenly and took the camera, inwardly cursing You Zhengping while on the surface he calmly took a picture of the two of them.

Yu Hua hadn't expected that You Zhengping would choose the Protection Organization's leader right away. His face stiff, he held You Zhengping's hand and let the handsome uncle take a picture for them.

Not far off, the "elderly lady" Zhen Li watched the scene of the Protector captain taking a picture for the most powerful Destroyer. He was so scared his white-haired wig nearly fell off. What a masterpiece this was!

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Author's Note:

Hundreds of years later, this photograph will be entered in the history books.

University entrance exam history question: In this photograph, who is the most powerful Destroyer, and who is the most powerful Protector? What era-spanning significance does this photograph have?

Answer: The Protector and the Destroyer were united in marriage, setting off the first shot of the era of peace. It became known as the "Amusement Area 531 Event." This was the first time humans had a different understanding of Destroyers. You Zhengping and Yu Hua's marriage safeguarded the world's stability and peace for many years. We must applaud Comrade You Zhengping's sacrifice.

(I can't go on.)

## CHAPTER 25

When the picture had been taken, Yu Hua quickly went up and took back the camera. His movements were so quick they could practically have been called "snatching," as though he were afraid that the passing handsome uncle wouldn't return the camera.

The reason Yu Hua was being so cautious was in fact that he knew that the person in front of him had stolen away his treasured phone remnants. The phone was his sorrow. He really couldn't trust the handsome uncle.

Lian Yufan: "..."

He nodded awkwardly to You Zhengping, then turned and left.

When the handsome uncle Lian Yufan had left, Yu Hua took an alcohol disinfecting wipe from the side of the basket and carefully wiped the camera.

You Zhengping, said, "...I didn't know you had mysophobia."

"I don't have mysophobia," Yu Hua said.

He was just disinfecting.

When he was finished, he saw You Zhengping staring at him. Yu Hua threw the wipe in a trash can and went over to squeeze You Zhengping's hand. He glanced around, saw there weren't many people taking notice of them, then slightly lowered his head to kiss his husband's forehead. Then he said, "I really don't have mysophobia."

You Zhengping touched his stealth-attacked forehead and nodded happily.

Yu Hua took out a few individually wrapped disinfecting wipe and stuffed them in You Zhengping's pocket. He said, "Take some, too. You can wipe your hands if you touch a stranger."

You Zhengping: "..."

Yu Hua wasn't normally so fastidious. What was going on today? Was it because he thought the amusement park was too old and too dirty?

All right, so it was kind of old.

The two of them talked and laugh. It was nice to retrace memory in this old amusement park, so never mind about the attractions. Yu Hua and You Zhengping, of course, weren't afraid of the roller coaster on the point of collapse or the unsafe drop tower, but the average person would have been afraid of them. As "ordinary people," they wouldn't try them out.

The "elderly man" Yuan Luori, holding his birdcage, caught sight of handsome Uncle Lian; his gaze moved from the melancholy husbands to Lian Yufan. He thoughtfully observed the limbs of several "staff members" and "visitors." The parrot in the cage said, "Sturdy! Sturdy!"

"That's right, sturdy and strong limbs, nimble movements, quick reaction speed," Yuan Luori said quietly to the parrot.

He opened the birdcage. The parrot spread its wings and soared, spinning a dozen meters up in the air.

Yuan Luori closed his eyes and silently counted: "One, two, three..."

The “elderly lady” Zhen Li, slouching, came over to Yuan Luori. He was just about to pat his back when Yuan Luori alertly grabbed his hand. Yuan Luori’s eyes were still tightly closed, but Zhen Li had the feeling that he was being spied on from above.

Yuan Luori’s birdcage was the foundation item he had chosen in his first world. It was unlike Zhen Li’s wardrobe, which was entirely for the sake of beauty. The vision of the animal inside the birdcage was linked to Yuan Luori’s.

Whether it was a parrot or a swallow, a sparrow or a finch, or even a rat, butterfly, dragonfly, grasshopper... If Yuan Luori put it in the birdcage, his field of vision would widen greatly. He would be able to observe the surroundings from different points of view, his field of vision far surpassing that of a human. This was a secret attack-type leveler’s best item.

Yu Hua had already guessed that Yuan Luori’s vision was linked to the parrot’s, but what Yuan Luori hadn’t demonstrated yet was that after each ten levels he passed, he could add another animal to his birdcage. After passing thirty-seven levels, Yuan Luori could link his vision to that of three animals.

Closing his eyes meant that Yuan Luori could better link his vision to the parrot’s. He tapped lightly with his toe, and a scurrying rat was sent hurrying into the birdcage that had been placed on the ground. At the same time, he let go of Zhen Li’s hand and used his fingers to grab a bee that had just been about to sting Zhen Li.

Even though Zhen Li was made up as an “elderly lady,” he still had to be the best-dressed person at the amusement park. He was wearing an expensive floral-patterned dress that naturally attracted bees and butterflies.

Yuan Luori put the bee in the cage, too. All three animals were ready.

All the water in the amusement park had dried away. If there had been any, Yuan Luori would have chosen a fish for his third animal. That way, he would have commanded land, sea, and air.

He took care of the rat and the bee as quickly as possible, opened the cage, and let the two animals out.

Though Yuan Luori had his eyes closed, he could now overlook the entire amusement park, observing more closely than 360 degree surveillance with no blindspots.

He set aside Yu Hua and You Zhengping, focusing on observing the others. He realized that apart from the melancholy husbands, there wasn’t a single ordinary person in the amusement park.

“Ha, they’ve really prepared to the fullest.” Too bad they had run into him.

What he, Yuan Luori, feared least was a crowd.

An assassin could most easily deploy his powers when mixed into a crowd.

Yuan Luori took a bubble machine out of his backpack. He had prepared it last night. Inside was a poison he had adjusted. He pressed the button to blow bubbles, and countless clear bubbles spurted out, reflecting rainbows in the sunlight. Yuan Luori, surrounded by bubbles, had the feeling of being in a dream.

The bubbles spread extremely fast throughout every corner of the amusement park. These bubbles had been specially modified by Yuan Luori and wouldn't burst easily, and the bubble machine had been equipped from the System, so they flew much faster than they would have from an ordinary bubble machine.

"What are you doing?" Zhen Li said in surprise. "If you release poison in such a wide area, it'll harm ordinary people."

"This amusement park has already been cleared of ordinary people." Yuan Luori got out a white cloth and blindfolded his eyes to avoid his line of sight coinciding with the sight lines of the three animals, making it hard to distinguish the images.

"Didn't you say you wanted to kill Yu Hua, make the Protection Organization think he was the leveler? You're going to expose your identity if you release poisoned bubbles without restraint like this." Zhen Li strove to change Yuan Luori's mind.

Zhen Li hadn't gone through many levels. He hadn't yet been infected with the levelers' bad habit of seeing human lives as trash. He valued life and didn't want to hurt others, whether they were ordinary people or the handsome uncle Protector who had beaten him up quite a few times.

"I'll leave a survivor. Let's say Yu Hua's husband." Yuan Luori smiled ruthlessly. "If I impart him with certain ideas, then, when he survives, he'll lead the Protection Organization according to my intentions."

Lian Yufan and Cen Xiao were separated into two teams. Lian Yufan's people were watching Yu Hua, while Cen Xiao was keeping an eye on Yuan Luori. The three-sided spy Zhen Li had already told the Protectors how Yuan Luori would be disguised, so Cen Xiao and the other underlings had fixed on him from the start.

All the same, the inexperienced young Protectors couldn't imagine the might of the System's items. It took three seconds for Cen Xiao to guess that these weren't ordinary bubbles. But in those three seconds, the bubbles had already floated to every corner of the amusement park.

"Everyone take note, those aren't ordinary bubbles! They may be explosive or poisoned! Cover your mouths and noses, protect your skin, stay away from the bubbles as much as possible!" Seeing the bubbles propagating practically at the speed of sound, Cen Xiao no longer cared about exposing his identity; he shouted into the walkie-talkie.



Apart from You Zhengping and Yu Hua, everyone instantly heard Cen Xiao's warning.

But it was already too late. Everyone was surrounded by bubbles. There was no escape.

The melancholy husbands were also surrounded by bubbles. Both of them knew that the bubbles were dangerous, but neither could reveal himself in front of the other.

"So even an old amusement park like this would release bubbles. How pretty," You Zhengping said, smiling.

"Yes, very romantic." Yu Hua used his whole lifetime's supply of acting skills to control his facial muscles, doing his best to put on a romantic expression, but inside he was quickly analyzing the toxicity of the bubbles.

According to his many years of experience with the System's items, the larger a range a weapon had, the less powerful it would be. The toxicity of a weapon that could disperse itself quickly throughout the amusement park would definitely be diluted to a thousandth of its effectiveness. It could only cause unconsciousness. And the attack range of each bubble would be very small!

The most important thing was, from Yu Hua's analysis of Yuan Luori during the past few days, he had been spoiled by excessively easy levels. He had a childish sort of idea that he was the whole world; he thought he was a master strategist, but in reality his plans were full of holes.

All Yuan Luori had in mind was that Yu Hua and You Zhengping were ordinary people, that Yu Hua knew his and Zhen Li's identity and therefore had to die, that the Protectors on the scene who saw him act would also have to die, and that he would leave behind only You Zhengping, who knew nothing of the truth. So Yuan Luori's first attack was to make the Protectors lose the power to resist, leaving behind the melancholy husbands. Then he would use some item or ability to control Yu Hua to leave You Zhengping with the impression that his husband had super powers.

So in the first attack, neither of them would be harmed. And Yu Hua wasn't going to let You Zhengping be harmed!

He laughed quietly and said, "Very romantic, and there's no one around, we..."

Then he covered his husband's eyes and dropped a quick and domineering kiss on him. As long as You Zhengping couldn't see, then as soon as the bubbles exploded, Yu Hua could arrange an energy barrier to protect You Zhengping.

You Zhengping was dying from anxiety. He couldn't have his eye covered. If he couldn't see what was happening around them, how was he going to protect Yu Hua?

You Zhengping braced himself and reached out his hands to cover Yu Hua's eyes, too, kissing and embracing his husband. At the same time, mind tensed quickly, his senses expanding to

their limit. As soon as the bubbles next to Yu Hua exploded, he would immediately open a space to protect him.

“You think covering your skin is enough? Your eyes are still open! Bang!” Yuan Luori said, turning the corners of his mouth up in a smile.

Apart from those around the melancholy husbands, all the bubbles surrounding the other people exploded, blossoming into one gorgeous rainbow flower after another.

The Protectors had shielded their skin in time, but the exploding foam still splashed in their eyes. They fainted one after another.

“Crap!” Cen Xiao dodged left and right, but at last there was a bubble in his blindspot that he didn’t dodge.

The moment the bubble exploded, someone opened his mouth and bit down to the back and left of Cen Xiao, swallowing the bubble.

“You...” Cen Xiao turned and saw Zhen Li, his wig and wrinkles gone, wearing a fashion floral-patterned dress.

Zhen Li had no time to talk to him. He quickly ran a couple steps and ate a bubble at Cen Xiao’s left side.

Zhen Li only had the alternate dimension stomach left. He would save whoever he could.

Cen Xiao touched the nanotech mask he was wearing. This face was completely unfamiliar; Zhen Li couldn’t have recognized him.

“Aren’t you with the Destroyer? Why are you helping me?” Cen Xiao said.

“I’m a peace-loving Destroyer. I’m not like him.” Zhen Li ate bubbles as busily as a gluttonous snake. His foot twisted in its low-heeled shoe, and Cen Xiao reached out to help him keep his balance.

Zhen Li had already eaten just about all the bubbles around the two of them. Yuan Luori glared viciously at Zhen Li. “Traitor! Just wait until I take care of you!”

Then the blindfolded elderly man ran off wildly towards the melancholy husbands. Zhen Li saw that events were going badly. You Zhengping was an ordinary person!

He kicked the low-heeled shoes off his feet and ran off barefoot after Yuan Luori.

“Crap! Yu Hua is an ordinary person!” After staring blankly for a moment, Cen Xiao also chased after Zhen Li.

Zhen Li ate the bubbles up ahead, clearing the way for Cen Xiao. Cen Xiao made easy progress.

Two or three meters away from the melancholy husbands, Yuan Luori was blocked by Lian Yufan. He raised his brows in astonishment. There was someone who hadn't been poisoned.

Lian Yufan had about a dozen intact bubbles in his hands. In the instant the bubbles around him had popped, he had quickly repaired them, avoiding getting hit anywhere important. Neither his skin nor his eyes had touched the poison.

"Take these back!" When Lian Yufan saw Yuan Luori, he tossed over all the bubbles in his hands.

Of course Yuan Luori wasn't afraid of the poison bubbles he had released himself. He didn't dodge, letting the bubbles exploded against his face. But the bubbles concealed countless shards of glass inside them, which stabbed Yuan Luori's skin as the water droplets flew.

He had the false skin of an elderly man stuck to his face, but quite a lot of bits of broken glass still stabbed his exposed skin. If his eyes hadn't been blindfolded, he would have lost them.

When he had restored the bubbles, Lian Yufan had concealed some bits of glass he'd been hiding in his palm inside them. This was his special means of attack.

When he had tossed the bubbles, Lian Yufan hadn't stopped moving. He had charged right towards Yuan Luori. His hand brushed some glass bits off Yuan Luori's face, then changed into a fist, as if yanking something.

Yuan Luori, his face covered in glass, hissed from the pain. And before he could equip an item to use to attack Lian Yufan, from not far off, countless sharp pieces of mirror flew quickly towards Yuan Luori's face.

These mirrors came from the amusements park's house of mirrors. The house of mirrors was already abandoned. Because of the nature of his special ability, Lian Yufan took careful notice of damaged objects. He had come to the amusement park at three o'clock this morning to prepare. He had taken bits of glass from the broken mirrors. This was for the sake of attacking the enemy!

Seven or eight huge mirrors smashed into Yuan Luori's face. He fell down. Lian Yufan sneered. "Destroyer, don't underestimate us Protectors!"

Just then, Zhen Li ran over and saw that Yuan Luori had fallen with his face all bloody. He quickly said, "Protector captain, that might not be him!"

Lian Yufan crouched down to investigate. As soon as he touched Yuan Luori, his body deflated like a balloon, turning into a flat, empty skin.

“This is ‘the cicada escapes by shedding its skin,’ an item worth a lot of points!” Zhen Li said. “He’s not here anymore.”

“What side are you actually on?” Lian Yufan said warily, unable to completely trust Zhen Li.

“For the moment I think he’s on ours,” Cen Xiao said, hurrying over. “I checked on the way, and apart from us, everyone else is unconscious. We’ve underestimated the Destroyers this time.”

The three of them didn’t say anything extraneous after meeting up. They quickly exchanged information, then headed towards Yu Hua and You Zhengping.

But it was already too late.

The distance was only two to three meters. After using “the cicada escapes by shedding its skin,” Yuan Luori appeared over the embracing lovers’ heads. He stood firmly in midair on an enormous bubble and pressed down with his palms. A double-sided mirror appeared between the couple, separating them. The moment the double-sided mirror hit the ground, the hundreds of bubbles surrounding the two of them popped simultaneously.

The two people who had just been kissing opened their eyes. The bubbles splashed into their eyes, and they nearly fainted. As they wavered, a human figure appeared vaguely in front of them. The average person would have been half unconscious at this moment and would only have seen a blurry outline, but the two of them could see clearly. Each saw his husband, who had just been in intimate contact with him, holding a crossbow and shooting an arrow at him. This was an illusion caused by the double-sided mirror.

“I shouldn’t be able to see now, so I have to get shot!” the two of them thought at the same time. “Otherwise I’ll reveal my identity. Yuan Luori will definitely leave a survivor. Since I’m the one he wants to kill, then Yu Hua/You Zhengping won’t be attacked!”

Yu Hua instantly decided to pulverize the arrowhead with his massive internal energy at the moment the crossbow bolt entered his body. This might make him release another 1% of his power, but that didn’t matter. Yuan Luori’s System seemed very strong; it should have enough sealing power.

You Zhengping instantly decided to open a space in front of his chest, hide half of the crossbow bolt in the space, and cut open some of his skin, to make it look as though he’d been shot.

When Cen Xiao and the others hurried over, the two of them were shot at the same time, flying backwards.

Cen Xiao and Lian Yufan caught You Zhengping and quickly dragged him behind the nearby drop tower. They were his teammates. In an emergency, they had chosen to support their teammate.

Zhen Li dragged Yu Hua to the other side of the drop tower. He knew Yu Hua wouldn't be injured. Right now, he had to help the great master cover up!

Yuan Luori saw that the two of them had been separately taken away and didn't know whether they were dead or alive. He snapped his fingers lightly, and countless arrows flew out of the air.

Cen Xiao waved his hand, and a curtain of fire appeared in the sky, burning the arrows and blocking the view of Yuan Luori's three sight lines. All animals fear fire.

Beneath the curtain of fire, You Zhengping opened his eyes and silently mouthed, *Where's Yu Hua?*

Lian Yufan looked towards the other side of the drop tower, his expression troubled.

You Zhengping's rage instantly mounted to his heart. He ripped the nanotech mask from Lian Yufan's face, put the handsome uncle mask on his own face, and was about to charge towards Yuan Luori up in the air.

Lian Yufan thought, *He doesn't even know to change clothes.*

He and You Zhengping were wearing about the same pants and shoes today, but their shirts were different. Lian Yufan grabbed his shirt and You Zhengping's shirt with one hand each and tore off a piece of each. He quickly stuck the piece of his clothing onto You Zhengping's waist.

Lian Yufan put his special ability to use, restoring the pieces to the shirts. With the use of the special ability, one black t-shirt and one white t-shirt swapped places at the moment that You Zhengping flew out from behind the screen of the fire curtain.

At that moment, You Zhengping became the handsome uncle protector.

Lian Yufan, wearing You Zhengping's white t-shirt, covered his chest and dropped to the ground, pretending to be the half-dead You Zhengping.

You Zhengping opened countless miniature spaces invisible to the naked eye in the air. Stepping on the small spaces, he came up in front of Yuan Luori. He glanced down out the corner of his eye and saw Yu Hua lying at Zhen Li's feet, not moving at all. Yu Hua had fallen in a pool of blood. You Zhengping couldn't tell whether he was dead or alive.

An invisible space opened in front of Yuan Luori. Inside was an electric current You Zhengping had stored.

You Zhengping's spaces could not only protect people and imprison them, they could also collect natural forces.

Irrepressible rage came through the mask's voice-changing device. "You have a death wish!"

—

Author's Note:

Yuan Luori: Whichever one of you husbands lives, you'll be my mouthpiece, hahaha!  
The melancholy husbands (seeing their partner wounded): You're dead meat!

## CHAPTER 26

Why would so many levelers have been lost in this unopened world? While being trounced by You Zhengping wearing the handsome uncle's face, Yuan Luori understood.

For one thing, it was because there was no possibility of abandoning or failing at a mission to scout out an unopened world; because the System's control over an unopened world was weak, the levelers could go in but not out, and they had no way of getting information to outside worlds; they lost the option of making a getaway.

The other reason was the Protector in front of him!

When he had used a mixture of the bubble machine equipped from the System and his own skills to take down the majority of the Protectors, Yuan Luori had been proud of himself, thinking that this world's super powered organization was no better than this.

What Yuan Luori didn't know was that he was facing young Protectors who had only trained for fifteen years but had never experienced actual combat. In the words of Director Xiao and the other elders, today's young people were only trainees. Apart from the small number of captains and deputy captains, the others weren't qualified for actual combat.

This action to probe and contain Yuan Luori was a test Director Xiao had given Lian Yufan and You Zhengping's squads. In the future, countless Destroyers might come to this world. Before that happened, it was necessary for the new people to become familiar with the Destroyers' awesome powers and innumerable battle tactics.

But when You Zhengping furiously charged out to champion Yu Hua, when he saw Yuan Luori standing on the big bubble and understood a new use for his space ability, the battle was already over.

The electric current released from the space swept over all the bubbles like a silver snake. Yuan Luori, who was using a bubble as a place to stand in midair, bore the brunt. His whole body went numb from being electrocuted. He was unable to move.

He only had time to press down on the bubble machine and release more bubbles that would burst on contact to attack You Zhengping.

You Zhengping opened a space and wrapped the bubbles in it. He concentrated, pushing the space with the bubbles hidden inside towards the electricity-numbed Yuan Luori. When it was

close enough, You Zhengping opened the space. The bubbles flew out, surrounding Yuan Luori.

“Ha, how could the weapons I released myself harm me?” Yuan Luori said, forcing himself to bear up.

You Zhengping sneered. “We Protectors never copy and paste.”

In their first special ability class, they learned to turn attacks against the attackers, use the Destroyers’ confidence in their own abilities to deceive them.

Therefore, Lian Yufan had known to hide bits of glass in the bubbles when attacking Yuan Luori, and You Zhengping of course also knew to lead the lightning from the space into the bubbles.

Hundreds of bubbles glowing silver pelted towards Yuan Luori. Yuan Luori fished out his phone with difficulty. He wanted to use a new item...

A tongue of flame curled around Yuan Luori’s phone. Cen Xiao, stepping on the space ladder You Zhengping had laid out, had also mounted to the sky. The controlled flames snatched away the Destroyer’s System item.

“I’m sorry, but the second lesson we learn is not to give Destroyers the opportunity to use a new ability when they’ve reached the end of their tether,” Cen Xiao said.

This was knowledge and experience countless Protectors had exchanged their flesh and blood for over hundreds of years. A Destroyer could get an item to protect his life from a floating screen that the ordinary person couldn’t see with the naked eye. When he seemed to be about to do this, the Protectors had to immediately prevent him from attaining a new item or ability.

You Zhengping’s generation of Protectors was in fact quite a bit weaker than their elders, but because of the System’s hibernation, Yuan Luori and the other levelers had also become weaker. The floating screen controls had become cell phone controls, and it was much easier to snatch away a phone than a floating screen.

While he grabbed the phone, the communicator stuck to Cen Xiao’s arm began to vibrate. Each vibration represented a Protector awakening.

Their constitution was stronger than the average person’s, and they’d been trained countless times in counterattacks. The poison could knock them out for a time, but that couldn’t last more than five minutes.

As they got up, the Protectors quickly went to help the irregulars they had brought with them, injecting them with a detoxifying serum.

In an instant, the circumstances had reversed.

And during these few minutes, Yu Hua had also prepared.

His identity was inconvenient. He had to be more cautious than You Zhengping. He activated a “mirror image form” ability before daring to get up.

When Yu Hua had been stimulated by Yuan Luori’s poison into waking 1% of his power, he hadn’t put that power towards strength. He had chosen to awaken some illusion abilities, in order to deal with the Protection Organization’s investigation.

With “mirror image form,” Yu Hua could create a mirror image to stand in for him. This mirror image could maintain a physical form for a brief time, not exceeding five minutes.

When he had created the mirror image, Yu Hua didn’t have time to change clothes. He casually snatched an enormous black cloak from Zhen Li and put it over himself, wrapping himself up tightly from the neck down.

Zhen Li: “...”

*That’s new. I haven’t even worn it yet.*

However he was inwardly muttering, Zhen Li also obediently handed over a silver mask that could block a person’s whole face. When Yu Hua had put on the mask, he added a layer of protection from the mirror image power to ensure that other people wouldn’t see his features.

During this process, he was hidden behind the “mirror image form,” and there were the bubbles to screen him. No one saw him.

While Yu Hua had delayed for just a few minutes, up in the air, You Zhengping had already beaten Yuan Luori half dead.

When Cen Xiao snatched Yuan Luori’s phone away, Yu Hua flew up into the air.

Since Cen Xiao had taken down the fire curtain concealing the base of the drop tower, as soon as Yu Hua was up in the air, he could see “You Zhengping” lying on the ground, alive or dead.

Intellect told Yu Hua that Xiao You had been rescued by two Protectors and should already have received emergency care. He wouldn’t be too seriously injured. But when he saw the “injured” You Zhengping, anger and pain surged into his heart. The explosion of feeling made Yu Hua stop holding himself back. 2% of his power burst out entirely!

At this moment, You Zhengping and Cen Xiao simultaneously sensed an enormous power. It felt like the air around them instantly congealed. Under the pressure of this power, the two of them actually felt that it was hard to breathe.



*Another hidden Destroyer? And so strong?* You Zhengping and Cen Xiao thought at the same time.

They were old friends and could work together in tacit understanding. In an instant, without needing to exchange a glance or a word, they got into formation under the oppression of that power. The two of them stood back to back, looking around warily.

Cen Xiao spread a circle of fire around the two of them, guarding against enemies coming from above or underfoot.

They looked all around and noticed a silver light jumping into the air from the drop tower. A black-cloaked man stood between them and Yuan Luori. He wore a shining silver mask over his face. His features were indistinguishable.

This man was extremely fast, his movements entirely noiseless. When he had jumped, the air around him hadn't even moved. If not for the explosive power just now, the two of them wouldn't have noticed him at all.

Lian Yufan, who was pretending to be You Zhengping, clenched his teeth. He also felt that presence. If You and Cen couldn't deal with it, he was prepared to move, even at the risk of exposing You Zhengping's identity.

Cen Xiao had formed the fire into a spear. He was just timing his attack when, against expectations, the black-cloaked man ignored the two Protectors and flew to Yuan Luori, kicking him fiercely, bringing the already injured Yuan Luori to his last gasp.

You Zhengping, Cen Xiao, and Lian Yufan: "..."

What was going on?

The black-cloaked man lowered his voice and used his power to project it. The whole amusement park could hear his deep, resounding voice: "Yuan Luori, I'm the one you're looking for."

The Protectors in the process of giving aid and the irregulars who had already woken up raised their heads simultaneously and saw the black-cloaked man wrapped up tightly from head to toe.

"You're the hidden big boss, I..." Yuan Luori used all his strength to get up. He spat out a mouthful of fresh blood, picked up the crossbow he had been lying on, and shot at the black-cloaked man.

Cen Xiao's pupils contracted. When he had snatched Yuan Luori's phone, he had relaxed for a moment; it hadn't occurred to him that Yuan Luori would also have a hidden weapon!

If the black-cloaked man hadn't suddenly appeared and raised his guard, when Yuan Luori shot that arrow, Cen Xiao would have been seriously injured if not dead.

Yuan Luori was an assassin. An arrow shot by him was extremely powerful. The arrow flew as quickly as the speed of sound, ripping through the air, puncturing countless bubbles as it went. The water droplets attacked the black-cloaked man at the same time as the arrow.

But the black-cloaked man only extended two fingers from within his cloak, pinched lightly, and succeeding in grabbing the arrow Yuan Luori had poured all his strength into.

The instant the arrow touched the black-cloaked man's fingertips, it turned into powder. The black-cloaked man had used some power to pulverize the metal.

"If I kill you, I can clear. Then I'll be free." Yuan Luori climbed with difficulty on the big bubble, not letting go of a sliver of opportunity.

The parrot, the bee, and the rat assembled at the drop tower. Yuan Luori had to think of a way to get back his phone!

Hearing the parrot's cry, the black-cloaked man laughed coldly and said, "A detection-type starting item?"

A breeze gently blew his black cloak, followed by a snap of the fingers. Yuan Luori's vision suddenly went black. All three of his lines of sight had disappeared!

Yuan Luori quickly removed his blindfold and saw that his vision was a blur. He could only see the outlines and color of the black-cloaked man. He couldn't see any of the things around him clearly.

"This type of item does in fact have potential. If you can capture a powerful enough creature, never mind land, sea, and air, you can even clearly observe the cosmos," the black-cloaked man said. "But if a leveler is always using an item linked to his vision, his own vision will gradually worsen. As soon as you're stripped of your ability, it becomes difficult for you to see things clearly right in front of you."

Yuan Luori couldn't see it, but You and Cen could see clearly that when he had snapped his fingers, a marble-sized energy ball had gathered on the black-cloaked man's left shoulder; he had turned the Destroyer's ability into a single body of energy!

After stripping away the "vision link," the black-cloaked man went on: "What other abilities do you have? Poison skills? Concealing your breathing? Agility? Explosive force? Stamina? Are the dagger and the sniper rifle in your backpack for trying to assassinate me with?"

With each ability he spoke, Yuan Luori felt that there was something being pulled out of him. At the same time, the energy ball on the black-cloaked man's left shoulder grew larger and larger.

Finally, all Yuan Luori had left were his System points, his disguise skills, and the bubble machine.

The black-cloaked man went over to Cen Xiao in his man-in-the-street mask. “Give me the phone.”

Cen Xiao stared at him, gathering up his courage to say, “I-I can’t.”

“If you won’t, that’s all right.” The black-cloaked man’s attitude was nicer towards the Protectors.

The energy ball on his shoulder floated up lightly, floating over to Cen Xiao. Cen Xiao stared as a clear current was sucked out of the phone by the energy ball. When the energy ball was the size of a tennis ball, Cen Xiao felt that the phone no longer had the ability to withstand attack. If he squeezed it gently, it would break.

Yuan Luori’s perceptions were linked to the System app. The instant the System’s power was removed, he fell weakly to his knees on the big bubble, like a rooster that had had all its feathers plucked. He no longer had the ability to resist.

The black-cloaked man held out his hand. The tennis ball-sized energy ball floated into his palm. The black-cloaked man said towards the energy ball, “Listen to me, Clearing League. I am the person you’re looking for.”

Yuan Luori stared. There was no way to transmit messages from an unopened world, but this black-cloaked man could use the power of his System to speak to the Clearing League. Who was he? He could do things even the System couldn’t do!

The black-cloaked man said, “You’re being pressured by the System and will persevere in attempting to accomplish your mission. I can understand that. For levelers, killing and being killed are things you have only yourself to blame for. But when you come to this world, you must comply with this world’s laws! If you act within the rules, I’m willing to have dealings with you, and I can leave you a means of survival.

“But anyone who harms public safety—will be killed! Anyone who tramples on the country’s laws—will be killed! Anyone who murders ordinary people—will be killed without pardon!”

Each “killed” seemed to be a sharp knife stabbing into Yuan Luori’s heart. His body was powerless. He felt that he was already dead.

After expressing his ideas, the black-cloaked man turned off the communication channel. From his palm, the energy ball sank into his body. He seemed to have entirely absorbed that energy.

The instant the energy ball disappeared, the bubble machine, the only item left in Yuan Luori’s hands, also disappeared, and the bubbles covering the amusement park also broke and dispersed.

Like a real soap bubble, the big bubble floating in the air and supporting Yuan Luori became insubstantial. Yuan Luori fell from over a hundred meters up in the air. He peacefully closed his eyes.

He'd lost. He had been utterly defeated by the mission's target. He hadn't even been able to touch the hem of his cloak.

Strung up and beaten by the Protectors and the black-cloaked man in turn, Yuan Luori had lost all his will to fight. With his eyes closed, he waited to die when he hit the ground after falling from a height.

You Zhengping opened a space and trapped Yuan Luori inside it, saving his life. From Yuan Luori's conversation with the black-cloaked man, he had guessed that in the future there would be Destroyers coming to this world one after another, and Yuan Luori seemed to know them. The Protection Organization needed Yuan Luori to supply information about the other Destroyers.

"I'll leave that thing to you," the black-cloaked man said.

"Are you a friend or an enemy?" You Zhengping's eyes were full of animosity.

"I have no intention of being your enemy." The black-cloaked man gazed downward and, seeming careless, asked, "Are there casualties?"

*I don't know whether my husband is dead or alive!* You Zhengping clenched his fist and forced himself to say, "The person we rescued wasn't seriously injured. The arrow only scraped some skin. We performed emergency care. I don't know about the one Zhen Li took away. You people snatched him away, so we couldn't come to the rescue in time."

"He's still alive. I've treated his injury. He's only unconscious now," the black-cloaked man said.

When the black-cloaked man and You Zhengping learned that the people lying below were all right, they relaxed simultaneously.

Because of Yuan Luori's conceit, this fight had become a mess, forcing both of them to step in. It was a good thing they had been able to find substitutes.

The dust had settled, and the black-cloaked man prepared to leave. But You Zhengping boldly blocked his way and said, "Don't even think of leaving. You're the Destroyers' target, so you have to work with us."

"Don't think too highly of yourselves." Yu Hua looked coldly at You Zhengping, thinking that the issue of the phone hadn't been settled yet. He would only show a little mercy.

He lifted his hand slightly, wanting to teach a lesson to this Protector who had snuck into his home, taken pictures of his diary, and stolen his phone.

Yu Hua looked him up and down. At the moment his gaze swept over the handsome uncle's pants, it paused slightly.

These were a pair of light gray pants, about the same style that You Zhengping had put on this morning. By coincidence, there was also a black stain on one pant leg.

You Zhengping sometimes washed his clothes in secret. He wouldn't get them fully clean, and Yu Hua would have to wash them a second time. For the sake of convenience, Yu Hua had bought three washing machines and put one in each bathroom. One washing machine was for washing coats and jackets, one for inner clothes, one for shoes.

One day, You Zhengping had been suddenly been inspired to wash his own clothes. He'd shoved shirts and pants of all different colors into the same washing machine, and this pair of light gray pants had been stained by a pair of black-washed jeans.

When Yu Hua had come home, he'd washed them by hand for a long time but couldn't get them completely clean; no matter what, the inconspicuously placed stain wouldn't come off. Yu Hua had felt frustrated. These pants had been expensive, and they had only been worn once before being stained like this.

You Zhengping had casually said that it didn't matter. Anyway, it wasn't in an obvious location. He'd wear them as they were. He'd hugged Yu Hua in consolation, saying that he would wear these pants until they fell apart, finally succeeding in cheering up the gloomy Yu Hua.

When Yu Hua saw the color on those pants, he looked down at the "You Zhengping" lying on the ground. His vision was very acute. Even from such a long distance, Yu Hua could clearly see that those pants didn't have a black stain.

This handsome uncle Protector had just taken a picture for him and You Zhengping.

That face...

The black-cloaked man quietly looked at the handsome uncle, reaching out a hand towards the nanotech mask he was wearing.

The man-in-the-street Cen Xiao got in front of You Zhengping, facing this powerful Destroyer alongside his brother.

The rest of the Protectors had gradually gathered here. As there were more and more people, then no matter how powerful the black-cloaked man was, Cen Xiao would still be able to hold him. No doubt a teammate had requested reinforcements from the base. When Protectors with Director's Xiao's abundant level of experience came over, they'd definitely be able to take the black-cloaked man alive!

Seeing the other Protector defending the handsome uncle, Yu Hua faintly felt that these two's interactions looked very familiar.

Delay would cause trouble. The energy ball he had just absorbed was beginning to reseal Yu Hua's power, and more and more people were approaching. The "mirror image form" below wouldn't hold out for much longer.

Yu Hua waved a hand, and a beam of light entered Cen Xiao and You Zhengping's eyes. Their vision flashed. They couldn't see what was in front of them.

When their vision recovered, the black-cloaked man had vanished.

The arriving Protectors also hadn't seen which way the black-cloaked man had gone. They said there had been an eye-piercing flash of light. They hadn't seen what had happened during those few seconds.

After the fierce battle, You Zhengping was somewhat worn out. He controlled his spaces to let himself and Cen Xiao down. When he had touched down, without taking the time to switch back with Lian Yufan, he first charged towards Yu Hua. He inspected his chest and saw that there was indeed no wound. His pulse was strong and his breathing regular. He seemed to be sleeping.

You Zhengping at last breathed a sigh of relief.

—

Author's Note:

Yu Hua: You underestimate a wife's understanding of a husband's clothes!

## CHAPTER 27

### Investigation Report

*Full Name: Yu Hua*

*Sex: Male*

*Age: 27*

*Physical Condition: Excellent*

*Place of Work: Zhen Li Studio*

*Position: Human Resources Director*

*Marital Status: Married*

*Family Members: Parents deceased, spouse You Zhengping, no children*

*Character: Steady and domestic, ordinary*

*Hobbies: Cooking, housekeeping*

*Reasons for Investigation:*

1. *Became the Destroyer Zhen Li's first staff member*
2. *Twenty-five days ago, resigned after suddenly harming a superior*
3. *Behaved coldly to his spouse*

*Course of Investigation:*

1. *Thoroughly inspected the subject's education enrollment records, report cards, work experience, and close colleagues' assessment*
2. *Investigated all aspects of the subject's movements, purchase records, psychological treatment records, manner towards others, and other indications during these twenty-five days*
3. *Performed a crisis test to test the subject's reaction when faced with a fatal threat*

*Outcome of Investigation:*

1. *Likelihood that the subject of the investigation was replaced twenty-five days ago: 0%*
2. *Likelihood that the subject is not a Destroyer: 99%*

*Signature of Investigator: Lian Yufan*

*Appendices...*

Behind the single page "Investigation Report" were attached dozens of pages of evidence. After reading the report, Director Xiao said, "Why only 99%?"

"The remaining 1% is my intuition. Though the evidence is conclusive, I still reserve the right to remain suspicious," Lian Yufan said.

"Maintaining constant vigilance isn't a bad thing. Your caution should be encouraged," Director Xiao said. "But the case of Yu Hua can be brought to a close for the meantime. Unless new evidence appears later, there's no need to waste human effort and materials on investigating. We are facing a new crisis. For a long period in the future, we'll be short on manpower."

"Yes, sir!" Lian Yufan saluted without any complaint.

After reading Lian Yufan's report, Director Xiao looked towards You Zhengping in concern. "How is Yu Hua's condition?"

You Zhengping said, "We performed a thorough analysis on the road back to the city. There was no internal energy reaction, no signs of an awakening special ability, no particular illness or physical symptom. As the mysterious black-cloaked man said, the arrow wound to his chest has healed. Only his clothing was torn. There was no external injury. Due to the influence of the poison bubbles, he's presently unconscious. He has been injected with serum to raise his metabolic rate and immunity. The military doctor said, given his constitution, he should awaken in another four to five hours. He's been taken to the Xuyang District Public Hospital's emergency ward. If an examination shows normal results when he wakes up, he'll be able to leave the hospital."

"The only good news about this business is that it didn't bring about human casualties," Director Xiao said.

Then he said to Cen Xiao, "What are the results of Zhen Li and Yuan Luori's interrogations?"

Cen Xiao reported: "Zhen Li has been very cooperative with our investigation. He admitted that his power has already been removed by the mysterious black-cloaked man. He only has the defensive capability of the alternate dimension stomach remaining. In this business, Zhen Li consumed poison bubbles to protect me, giving me precious time to support my teammates.

"He reports that the alternate dimension stomach isn't very powerful, and he doesn't know where the things he eats go. And the biggest weakness of the alternate dimension stomach is that the size of the things it can absorb is impacted by the size of his mouth, so the things he can eat are limited. This time, he managed to absorb the bubbles because they possess elasticity and the ability to shrink. Otherwise he couldn't have done anything.

"Also, he reports that following this battle, his mouth became quite a bit larger, and he hopes that the Protection Organization won't provide him with food that requires opening his mouth wide to bite it in the near future. For example, things like hamburgers, bread, and mantou are all food items he's refusing. He would like to have some congee, ideally with a small spoon."

Director Xiao said, "...He has quite a lot of requests."

Cen Xiao continued, "Zhen Li confessed something. He said that he established the studio at the mysterious black-cloaked man's instigation. The black-cloaked man's position is opposed to that of the previous mastermind behind the Destroyers. The Destroyers' goal is to kill the black-cloaked man. According to what Zhen Li says, if they kill the black-cloaked man, they can realize a wish, no matter how unbelievable the wish is.

"The Destroyers established a Clearing League for this purpose, and they may appear in our world in great number. In order to get rid of the Destroyers, the black-cloaked man ordered Zhen Li to form the studio. The more well-known it became, the better. It would set up a target, attract other Destroyers. Yuan Luori was the first person to fall into the net."



Director Xiao said, "This train of thought in fact aligns with ours, though it's unclear what the black-cloaked man's position is."

"Request to report!" You Zhengping raised his hand.

Director Xiao nodded in agreement, and You Zhengping said, "Based on what the black-cloaked man said in the amusement park, I believe he isn't an enemy. He's willing to observe order and cherish life. He also healed the injury of Yu Hua, an ordinary person on the scene. This adequately demonstrates his position. I'm in favor of working with the black-cloaked man."

"Your view is worth consideration, but it's immature," Director Xiao said reasonably. "At present, the black-cloaked man has yet to make any show of goodwill or display any intention to collaborate with us, and we don't know where he's hidden or what his true identity is. That he's willing to observe order now is only the immediate situation. No one knows whether he'll change his views in the future. For the time being, we can only view the black-cloaked man as both friend and foe. We can't get too close to him. We must remain alert and strive to find out his true identity so we can control him."

Director Xiao also said to Cen Xiao, "Did Zhen Li say how the black-cloaked man contacts him?"

Cen Xiao answered, "Zhen Li said, the black-cloaked man can speak right into his mind to tell him what he wants him to do. When he's being contacted, he can answer, but he can't initiate contact himself. His position is passive. The black-cloaked man's statement to the so-called Clearing League confirms that he does in fact have this ability."

"Such a powerful figure. If he really is as full of goodwill like as says, that's good. If he's an enemy, it will be a devastating blow to the world. Ah..." Director Xiao shook his head. All they could do for now was to actively seek out the black-cloaked man's true identity and do their best not to clash with him.

Cen Xiao said, "Concerning hiring Yu Hua, Zhen Li said he knows his own brain isn't much use. He didn't know how to develop the studio and manage his future employees, and he was afraid of being scammed by crafty investors after the studio became popular. He doesn't have the app or his powers anymore, so he wants to seriously make money and live a law-abiding life."

"Yu Hua's appearance was extremely timely for Zhen Li. With someone around who could take responsibility for the parts of the work that require using your brain, he can focus on great fan influence."

"You seem to have a good opinion of Zhen Li," Director Xiao said in warning. "Don't lose your judgement out of gratitude because he saved you."

"That's not it," Cen Xiao said. "He really does give you a sense of standing apart from worldly strife, and he hasn't hurt anyone since coming to this world. I believe we can trust this part of what he says."

"What about Yuan Luori?" Director Xiao asked.

Cen Xiao said, "...He was heavily injured and at first refused treatment. He only allowed the doctors to treat him after he was injected with a sedative. Since waking up, he's refused to eat and has been passively resisting. It seems like he doesn't want to live anymore. No matter what we ask, his answer is always, 'Just kill me.'"

Everyone: "..."

This Destroyer was also quite a headache.

"I sent Zhen Li to persuade him. They're both Destroyers. I hope there will be some effect," Cen Xiao said.

Director Xiao thought about it, then turned on the isolation room's surveillance screen.

In the isolation room, Yuan Luori was lying in bed, his whole body wrapped up like a zongzi, only revealing his eyes and mouth. Zhen Li was sitting by the bed, using a safety peeler to peel an apple. When he had peeled away half the flesh, he struggled with a plastic sawing knife to cut the remainder of the apple into small pieces, which he arranged on a plate. He said to Yuan Luori, "Eat something."

Yuan Luori didn't even look at the apple. Zhen Li stared at the plate for a while, then asked, "Can I eat it?"

Yuan Luori: "..."

He didn't answer, so Zhen Li took that as agreement. He ate small pieces of apple one little bite at a time. There were faint tearing marks at the corners of his mouth from eating the bubbles.

"This apple is very sweet," Zhen Li said as he ate. "Why don't you take a bite, too?"

With him munching on the apple, even if Yuan Luori didn't want to eat, when he heard the sounds of chewing, his mouth still watered reflexively.

But at this point, Zhen Li had already eaten all the fruit off the plastic plate.

Yuan Luori: "..."

"I don't understand what you're so sad about," Zhen Li said. "Isn't getting the System removed a good thing? It's like having a ticking time bomb in your head that can issue missions any time

and threaten to kill you if you don't do them. Now that the bomb has been deactivated, you're free, right?"

Yuan Luori's lips moved.

Zhen Li picked up Yuan Luori's food box. Inside was food provided by the Protection Organization. There was a dish of red-braised pork. Zhen Li began to eat, saying, "The meat is a little old, not tender enough. Last time I had red-braised pork, it melted in the mouth, and it was fatty but not greasy. That's how it should be. The Protection Organization's dining hall needs improvement."

Yuan Luori: "..."

As he ate, Zhen Li said, "Do you think that because your power has been taken away, you've become an ordinary person, and you can't control other people anymore?"

Judging from Yuan Luori's last display, Zhen Li thought he was kind of an idiot. He relied vainly on violence to control others. His worldview was still at the adolescent level. He thought everything could be resolved with a fight. If it couldn't be, then it would be two fights.

"But I think that losing your abilities and living in accordance with order is a sort of protection. Weren't you being controlled in the Clearing League before? Isn't it a good thing to live here properly, cooperate with the Protection Organization's work, be a healthy and happy person?" While advising him, Zhen Li didn't forget to say, "You didn't eat this piece of potato while it was hot, and it's gone stale now."

Yuan Luori: "..."

"Anyway, even if you clear entirely, you still can't attain total freedom. The black-cloaked man told me that he's the only clearer. He cleared, but he's still being hunted by the System. I think that if we cleared, our fates wouldn't necessarily be good, either. The black-cloaked man removing the System for us is a good thing," Zhen Li said.

Yuan Luori: "!!!"

"The Protection Organization told me to come advise you to cooperate with their work, to tell them about the leveler abilities you're familiar with, and to operate the studio with me, undertaking the mission of attracting the notice of the Clearing League. The Protection Organization will protect us. You really did do a very wrong thing at the amusement park, but luckily you didn't cause any serious injuries. The Protection Organization promises that if your actions are good, you can redeem yourself."

While Zhen Li spoke, he also ate a tangerine from Yuan Luori's table. The tangerine was separated into wedges, which was rather convenient. It wouldn't impact the wounds at the corners of his mouth.

Seeing that while Yuan Luori was still not reacting, there was a trace of radiance in his eyes, Zhen Li continued, “Oh, right, there’s something I almost forgot to tell you. Your idol had me open the studio. Your idol wants to deal with the Clearing League and wreck the System’s plans.”

Yuan Luori: “...”

He quickly sat up and roared at Zhen Li, “Why didn’t you say so sooner?!”

“Huh? You’ve been sedated, how come you’re still so excitable?” Zhen Li said in surprise.

“Shut up, I can control poison myself. Even though my abilities have been removed, I still have my resistance to drugs. I was just pretending to be sedated!” Yuan Luori snatched the box of food from Zhen Li’s hands, saying, “Stop eating! Leave some for me! I’m starving to death!”

He looked down and saw that Zhen Li had already eaten most of what was in the box. There were only onions remaining, which Zhen Li didn’t like.

“You really can eat!” Yuan Luori said angrily.

Everyone watching the surveillance feed: “...”

Director Xiao coughed lightly and said, “Cen Xiao’s method really was effective. Yuan Luori really has become more cooperative. Let’s go have a talk with him, probe for some information, and advise him to cooperate with our work.”

Several Protectors saluted at once.

Director Xiao said, “Captain You, Yu Hua’s investigation has concluded. The Xuyang District’s work will continue under your charge. I hope that, as before, you will face the enemy with high level of professionalism.”

“Yes, sir!” You Zhengping said.

Director Xiao said, “Captain Lian, as the person responsible for the investigative work, your orders now are to complete the wind-up. Break Yu Hua’s phone again and return it to its original location. After this item has been complete, you can hand things over to Captain You. Next, the organization will have other important work to hand over to you.”

“Yes, sir!” Lian Yufan said.

“Wait,” You Zhengping said grudgingly when he saw Lian Yufan get out a little hammer and prepare to smash the phone, “can’t you not smash the phone, just return it like this?”

“When Yu Hua discovers that the phone has been restored, how are you going to explain?” Lian Yufan asked.

You Zhengping said, "I can that say I found it and secretly bought a new one and restored the old phone's data from the Cloud to recover the contents."

"As long as you can make it plausible, it's all right," said Director Xiao.

The phone was saved through You Zhengping's persistence and returned to its original location by Lian Yufan, wearing the handsome uncle mask. Hearing that the phone didn't have to be broken again, Cen Xiao was relieved. That phone contained his sweat and blood!

When Lian Yufan was about to leave with the phone, Director Xiao suddenly said, "Wait."

Director Xiao walked away from the desk and carefully examined You Zhengping and Lian Yufan's pants. "Captain You, when did you get those black stains on your pants? During the battle?"

Due to the addition of the unstable factor of Yuan Luori to the crisis test, to ensure that You Zhengping as captain could enter the battle at any time, Lian Yufan had deliberately chosen pants and shoes similar to You Zhengping's, to help conceal his identity.

The black marks on the light gray pants were very light. In motion, they seemed like shadows from folds in the pants. They couldn't be seen clearly without a close look.

You Zhengping had long ago forgotten that he'd ruined this pair of pants in the wash. When he saw the stain, he dimly recalled it.

"You two, switch pants," Director Xiao said seriously. "Xiao Lian, I believe you bought those pants recently. You must still have the receipt and the tag? When you're dropping off the phone, throw the label into the trash at Xiao You's house, and drop the receipt on some table or countertop."

"Is that necessary?" Lian Yufan didn't especially want to wear You Zhengping's pants.

Director Xiao sternly said, "It is. Zhen Li saw your battle. If he noticed the stain, then sees that his employee's family member You Zhengping is wearing pants with the same stain, he might suspect. Our actions up to now have entirely concealed our identities. Even if Zhen Li is willing to cooperate, I still don't want him to learn your true identities.

"If Yu Hua discovers that the stain on those pants has vanished, Xiao You, you can use the receipt as an excuse, say you threw away the pants from before and bought new ones.

"In a fight with the Destroyers, safeguarding our identities benefits our ability to win through the element of surprise. Unless absolutely necessary, we can't reveal anything. You two have to be more careful after this."

The two of them accepted the lesson and unwillingly switched pants.

When the summing-up meeting ended, Director Xiao went with Cen Xiao to persuade Yuan Luori, You Zhengping went to the Xuyang District Public Hospital to pretend to be hospitalized, while Lian Yufan, while the melancholy husbands were in the hospital, went to return the phone and place important evidence of buying the pants in Yu Hua's home.

—

Yu Hua had been feigning unconsciousness. His feelings while he feigned unconsciousness were complicated.

The Protectors were very careful. Apart from when the battle had just ended and You Zhengping had checked the state of Yu Hua's injury in concern, in the ambulance and during the handover process, they had always spoken in the language of the police, to avoid the wounded person hearing some secret information while half-conscious.

He lay in bed until his whole body was numb, then, within the span of time when the doctor had said he would awaken, he suitably opened his eyes.

It was already late at night. The nurse on duty saw that he was awake and quickly called a doctor. But Yu Hua "weakly" asked in concern, "Where's my husband?"

"Mr. You is also only unconscious. He's in another observation room," the nurse said.

"I want to go see him." Yu Hua struggled up, acting like an ordinary person dizzy from being unconscious too long.

"Be careful. Wait for the doctor to come examine you, make it's all right for you to start walking around. Don't worry, Mr. You isn't seriously injured, either," the nurse said.

Yu Hua patiently waited for the doctor to examine him, announce that his heart rate, blood pressure, and other vital signs were normal and he could drink some water and get up and move around to boost his circulation, speed up his metabolism to try to metabolize the remaining poison as quickly as possible.

Yu Hua drank a big cup of water, got up supporting himself against the wall, and slowly went to You Zhengping's observation room.

His husband was sleeping peacefully, his face a little pale due to slow circulation from being unconscious too long.

Yu Hua sat at his bedside, considerably tucking the covers around You Zhengping's feet. He noticed that the pants he was wearing didn't have the stain on them.

Instantly, Yu Hua felt a profusion of emotions. His fingertips sought out You Zhengping's face, carefully confirming.

This really was Xiao You's face. There was no disguise.

Yu Hua recalled everything about when they had left the house. Unfortunately, he had been too concerned about the activities at the amusement park and hadn't observed what Xiao You had been wearing. He only had an approximate idea of what shirt he had been wearing.

The pants really didn't have the stain on them, but that couldn't explain why the head of the Protectors had been wearing pants with exactly the same stain on them. It didn't eliminate the possibility that while he had been unconscious, that person had switched pants with Xiao You.

So it was very likely that Xiao You was now wearing someone else's pants.

When he thought of this, Yu Hua's expression gradually became stern. Who was that handsome uncle, after all? Cen Xiao? Or someone else?

No, he still didn't have practical evidence. He couldn't determine whether Xiao You was a Protector.

Yu Hua shook his head and put his hand on Xiao You's tightly-shut eyes.

When he had escaped before, Yu Hua had used the moment the powerful light had shielded his exit to leave behind a temporary mark in the two Protectors' eyes.

This was a harmless golden mark. The marked person would have a small golden light in their pupils that would dissipate naturally after twelve hours.

Now over eleven hours had passed since the fight at the amusement park. If he pried open Xiao You's eyelids, he could confirm whether the light was there.

But...

Faced with the truth, Yu Hua shrank back. If Xiao You really was a Protector, how should he act around his husband?

Yu Hua looked at the time. There were still fifty-seven minutes until the light disappeared. If Xiao You opened his eyes before that, it meant that he would have to face this fact. If Xiao You woke a little later, it would mean that this time he wasn't supposed to know.

Time passed minute by minute and second by second. You Zhengping, also feigning unconsciousness, was also restraining himself. He knew his husband was beside him, but he couldn't find a suitable opportunity to wake up. He didn't know how to wake naturally.

Fifty-six minutes later, You Zhengping's eyelids trembled twice. With his eyes closed, he said, "...water..."

Yu Hua quickly found a paper cup, poured warm water for him, and helped You Zhengping up to drink it.

You Zhengping drank the water and blearily opened his eyes, looking at Yu Hua.

Yu Hua stared into his eyes and saw that there was no light in his pupils. He relaxed slightly.

But when his gaze moved to the hospital's electric clock, he found that he had spent two minutes finding the paper cup and the water dispenser.

You Zhengping had awoken fifty-eight minutes later, and Yu Hua had missed the optimal chance to confirm his identity.

—

Yu Hua: My feelings now are about the same as a wife's on finding signs that her husband is cheating on her. I'm very scared and worried, and I hope that he isn't and it's all a misunderstanding. In short, very complicated, sigh.

## CHAPTER 28

When You Zhengping had drunk the water, he didn't know what he ought to say, so he stared blankly at Yu Hua, his expression foolish.

You Zhengping had been like this when they had been dating, always zoning out looking at Yu Hua. Yu Hua had felt awkward at the time and had pretended not to notice You Zhengping looking at him. He would either look at the directions on his phone, or crouch over his computer pretending to be busy with work, or send his subordinates messages, resolving some small issues there was no need to deal with outside of the working day, giving himself a very awesome and professional look.

He enjoyed You Zhengping's gaze but was unwilling to confront his own true inner vanity, so he could only cover up his expression with other things, looking unflustered, making You Zhengping praise him even more adoringly: "You're so professional!"

At times like these, Yu Hua would usually answer modestly, "Just trifles, nothing important."

He would give a subdued and restrained smile, but inside he would be as pleased as though a hundred fireworks were going off in his heart.

Now, seeing You Zhengping's expression just the same as it had been at the beginning, Yu Hua's hand holding the paper cup tightened, and the cup wrinkled.

Yu Hua tossed the paper cup in the garbage and stroked You Zhengping's forehead. "Are you dizzy?"



“A bit.” You Zhengping wasn’t lying. Anyone who’d spent an hour not moving while pretending to be unconscious would be a bit dizzy.

“I’ll call the doctor.” Yu Hua pressed on the call button at the head of the bed, and soon the doctor on duty came over.

As usual, there was an examination; as usual, there was nothing much the matter. He could leave the hospital in the morning. One week of light foods to reduce the burden on the liver and kidneys, and that would be it.

Both of them knew why they were in the hospital, and both knew they had to pretend not to know anything and ask about it, but they were both unwilling to be the first to speak.

The first to speak would be the first to pretend to be clueless and lie to his husband. Neither wanted to actively dupe the other. They were each waiting for the other to ask first, but this led to neither of them speaking.

The atmosphere in the hospital room became awkward. You Zhengping looked at Yu Hua, licked his dry lips, and was about to say something, when the hospital room door opened and Cen Xiao walked in.

“You’re finally awake.” Cen Xiao was carrying health-restoring congee. “Have some congee to warm up your stomachs.”

Yu Hua’s gaze fell on Cen Xiao’s pants. These were army green slacks, and he was wearing black sneakers, different from the handsome uncle.

Naturally Cen Xiao had changed into different clothes from the ones he had been wearing at the amusement park, and he had taken off the nanotech mask, restoring his own features. He had been worried that You Zhengping wouldn’t be able to lie to Yu Hua, so when the interrogation had ended, he had rushed over to the hospital.

As he carried over the congee, he said, “You two really are unlucky. You arrange to go on a nice date, and you run into wanted criminals being arrested. Of course that’s because you chose a bad place. That amusement park that a bird wouldn’t shit on is very dangerous.”

With Cen Xiao leading the way for the two of them, You Zhengping said, “What wanted criminals?”

“Don’t you guys remember what happened at the amusement park?” As he spoke, Cen Xiao deliberately avoided You Zhengping, fixing his gaze on Yu Hua.

Yu Hua took the bowl of congee, tested the temperature, then fed You Zhengping a spoonful. As he fed him the congee, he said to You Zhengping, “I don’t know what happened. It feels like one second we were at the amusement park with bubbles all around us, and the next second I was waking up at the hospital.”

“Me too.” You Zhengping avoided his husband’s line of sight as he ate.

When these words had been spoken, Cen Xiao could explain. He told the two of them that the drug squad had been carrying out a secret operation to arrest a gang of vicious drug dealers. The bubbles hadn’t been let out by the already closed down amusement park; they had been the doing of the criminals. There was a hallucinogen in the bubbles, so whatever they had seen before they had fainted or while they had been unconscious, it had all been a hallucination.

“Bubbles can hold drugs?” Yu Hua asked.

“I’m only an auxiliary police officer. This is as much as I can know about. The rest is confidential. Modern technology develops so fast, any kind of biological weapon is possible, right?” Cen Xiao said.

He was only responsible for explaining this much. For the rest, he didn’t know anything, and if he was asked, then it was confidential and he wasn’t allowed to talk about it.

“Oh, I see,” said Yu Hua. “Before I fainted, I vaguely saw Xiao You...like some kind of trained soldier, aiming a weapon like a cross between an arrow and a gun at me. That must have been a hallucination.”

“A hallucination, definitely a hallucination.” At Yu Hua’s questioning gaze, Cen Xiao’s forehead broke out in cold sweat.

You Zhengping gave a dry laugh. Hugging Yu Hua’s arm, he said, “Of course it was a hallucination. How could I hurt you?”

“Of course you wouldn’t,” Yu Hua said confidently.

Hearing his firm tone, You Zhengping suddenly felt distressed. He quickly picked up the bowl of congee and said, “You’ve been feeding me this whole time. You haven’t eaten any yourself.”

Yu Hua took the bowl and said as he ate, “You and Cen Xiao are both auxiliary police officers. Did you have any general idea about this business?”

“Hahaha, how could I?” Cen Xiao scrambled to say before You Zhengping could open his mouth. “I only found out when the police bureau notified me that you’d been injured.”

Since they had both been injured simultaneously, the police bureau or the hospital would have to notify their relatives or friends. As You Zhengping’s best friend and an irregular employee of the police bureau, it was very suitable for Cen Xiao to be notified.

“Really? You’ve always worked in the same place, even after changing jobs. I thought that if you knew something, then Xiao You would know it, too. I’ve always thought the two of you were hiding some little secret from me,” Yu Hua said casually.

Cen Xiao sucked in a breath and smiled awkwardly, saying, “Haha, when you say it like that, I feel like you’re jealous.”

“I’ve always been a little jealous,” Yu Hua said directly. “I thought you knew.”

Cen Xiao truly couldn’t bear the pressure inside the room. Just helping his brother cover some things up, he was already feeling guilt and shame towards Yu Hua. As a primary party, he didn’t know how much of that You Zhengping would have to bear.

“I’ll leave you two to rest. Call the doctor if you need anything. I’ll come to pick you up from the hospital in the morning and take you to sign confidentiality agreements at the police bureau on the way.”

Cen Xiao left, and only the melancholy husbands remained. You Zhengping swallowed and said to Yu Hua, “I didn’t think you’d be jealous of Cen Xiao, haha.”

Yu Hua stroked his head and gently said, “How could I be? I was joking.”

Liar! You Zhengping accused inwardly, but on the surface he still had to act like he didn’t know. “I knew you wouldn’t be. I’m a little tired. I’m going to sleep. Why don’t you go back to your hospital room?”

“You know that we aren’t in the same hospital room?” Yu Hua asked uncertainly, tilting his head.

You Zhengping: “!!!”

“Isn’t there only one bed in this room?” You Zhengping said dryly in explanation.

“You’ve observed it pretty carefully,” Yu Hua said, getting up. “I’ll go and rest, too. Press the call button if you need anything. See you tomorrow.”

He bent down and kissed You Zhengping’s face, then quietly left the observation room, considerably closing the door.

As soon as Yu Hua left, You Zhengping fished out his phone at top speed and sent Cen Xiao a message: *I’m so sad.*

Cen Xiao: *What’s the matter? Yu Hua looked very concerned about you.*

You Zhengping: *He trusts me so much, but I’m always lying to him. I feel awful. If this continues, I might not hold out and tell him the truth.*

Cen Xiao: *Many people working for State Security or the Intelligence Department will go their whole lives without telling their family their identity. Some people are only identified years after their death.*

You Zhengping: ...

Cen Xiao: *You're not only part of the security department, you're also a special ability user. Could an ordinary person accept that? He doesn't even know what a special ability is.*

You Zhengping: *I don't know what the best thing to do is.*

Cen Xiao: *Keeping the secret is a way to protect him.*

You Zhengping: *How long do I have to conceal it?*

Cen Xiao: *...I don't know. My parents don't even know what I do. They think I laze around all day. When I switched to the auxiliary police, they were beside themselves with happiness and said that while I didn't have a regular position, at least it was decent work.*

The two of them sighed at the same time and automatically deleted their chat log. They didn't keep talking.

The next day, the melancholy husbands were released from the hospital and taken by Cen Xiao to the police bureau where they were instructed regarding confidentiality and signed an agreement.

The police told the two of them that the hospital fees and other losses would be undertaken by the government, and another hundred thousand yuan award would be deposited in their account.

This award came from You Zhengping's private savings. He had finally found a reasonable method for subsidizing his household. At first he'd been planning to deposit a million yuan award, but Director Xiao hadn't agreed. There was no precedent for this. So You Zhengping could only get a hundred thousand.

"With this money, we don't need to worry about the loan this year, and you can take your time developing the studio, and if our jobs really don't suit our tastes, we can quit," You Zhengping said happily.

"That's right, it really is a lot of money." Yu Hua looked at the new sum in his bank card and for some reason thought of the hundred million he had hidden in Zhen Li's account.

The police told Yu Hua and You Zhengping that it was best to rest quietly for a few days, not to engage in too much activity, not to stay up late.

Yu Hua called and asked for some days off. President Zhen and Director Yuan were being held at the Protection Organization's base, anyway. The company wouldn't be open for business.

Zhen Li took the call under observation from the Protectors and very happily gave him the days off. He also said he wouldn't be deducting his wages, but he couldn't give him the bonus for full attendance.

The two of them returned home only after a day of bustle. Yu Hua didn't cook in the evening. They ordered take-out.

After a night of rest, early the next morning while You Zhengping was still sleeping, Yu Hua got up and slowly did the housework.

While cleaning up garbage, he saw the receipt and the label. His eyes flashed faintly. His mood, which had been gloomy for the past couple of days, finally relaxed a little.

He went through the cabinet and didn't find the stained pants; his heart sank again.

You Zhengping walked out of the bedroom, yawning, and stretched in the direction of the balcony. Seeing Yu Hua crouching in front of the cabinet, he indolently said, "Didn't the doctor tell us to rest? Don't do the housework for now. We just got a reward, let's get an hourly worker in to clean for the next few days."

"Doing housework isn't hard labor, and I don't feel comfortable asking someone to do it." Yu Hua clutched the receipt and the label in his hand. "Breakfast is ready, restorative red date congee, and I made some chicken broth with the oil cooked out. You can have one bowl, but not more than that."

He was standing in the living room wearing an apron, holding a cleaning rag in his hand, and smelling of cooking. This was home.

Seeing him, You Zhengping felt that the fight the day before yesterday was like a dream, and this, right here, was reality.

You Zhengping went over and encircled Yu Hua's waist, dropping his head on Yu Hua's shoulder and rubbing. "Let's eat together."

"All right. My hands are dusty, I'll wash them first. You wash up and brush your teeth. Be sure to do a good job," Yu Hua said, smiling faintly.

You Zhengping stealthily kissed his face, clutched at his head, and obediently went to wash up.

Yu Hua saw his husband go into the master bedroom's bathroom, then quickly went over to the second bedroom's bathroom, closed and locked the door, tore the receipt and the label into bits, threw them into the toilet, and flushed.

Seeing the bits disappear along with the water, Yu Hua covered his forehead and crouched down. What was he even doing?

When he had showered, You Zhengping went to the kitchen. Not seeing Yu Hua, he called to him twice. Only then did Yu Hua slowly get up and wash his hands, then go out to eat breakfast with You Zhengping.

The congee had been cooked for a long time. It was savory, but the texture wasn't especially good, and the taste was very dull. You Zhengping didn't like to eat food without meat. Even for breakfast he had to eat a meat-filled bun. Today, pretending to be treating his injury, he had a hard time swallowing. Luckily Yu Hua had made chicken broth. You Zhengping alternated a mouthful of congee with a mouthful of broth, using the broth to get the congee down.

Though it was chicken broth, Yu Hua still only let him have one bowl. After the meal, You Zhengping felt that he'd eaten emptiness. It seemed like he had eaten a lot, but it also felt like he hadn't eaten anything.

This was the price of his lie, then. You Zhengping sighed.

After eating, Yu Hua continued cleaning the room, while You Zhengping lounged on the sofa playing games. He saw that the trash had already been taken out and wanted to know whether Yu Hua had found the receipt and the label, but he couldn't come out and ask. He felt nervous and played his usual game until his head was empty. When he came around, his character in the game had been beaten to death, and he was roundly cursed out by his teammates playing with him.

Yu Hua saw him holding his phone and not letting go and pretended he was going to clean the bedroom. He went in with the vacuum cleaner, looked under the bed, and found that the box with the phone had once again turned up.

Yu Hua opened the box in happy surprise, saw the perfectly intact phone, and felt a mixture of complicated emotions. He was happy that the phone had not only been returned to its rightful owner, it had also been repaired; he was concerned, because apart from Xiao You, who would have been considerate enough to repair the phone for him?

He restrained himself and put the box back in its hiding place, pretending he hadn't found it. He stuck his head out of the bedroom and said to You Zhengping, "We need to buy some things for the house. I'm busy cleaning. Could you go out and buy some stuff for me?"

"No problem!" You Zhengping was hungry less than an hour after eating. He'd just been considering how to sneak out and get some snacks. Yu Hua words suited him perfectly.

Yu Hua put together a list. When he had watched You Zhengping go out, he brought out his "time replay" ability.

It was already more than twenty-four hours since they had been released from the hospital, exceeding the effectiveness range of the time replay. Yu Hua could only see back to yesterday morning, when the receipt had already been on the table. Presumably the Protection Organization had snuck into his home while he had been unconscious.

Yu Hua was silent for a moment. He got a household medicine chest out from the storage closet and took out a bottle of vitamins.

He poured a vitamin out onto his palm and squeezed his fist, turning the vitamin into poison.

This was Yuan Luori's ability. After removing the power of his System, Yu Hua kept this ability.

Yu Hua didn't want it to hurt others. Yuan Luori's poison could control the awakening of his abilities. As long as it was used purposefully, he could awaken the abilities he wanted.

He took the "vitamin," used the trace of poison to control the power hidden in his body, then used that power on the time replay, extending the playback time to forty-eight hours.

This time, Yu Hua saw the Protector with the handsome uncle's face come to his home, put away the phone, drop the label and the receipt, then leave.

During the playback, the Protector was still wearing the light gray pants with the stain on them. The corners of Yu Hua's mouth twitched as he stared at his pants.

You Zhengping took some time out of buying things to secretly go to a fast food restaurant and eat some barbecue. Then he cautiously put some mint-flavored gum in his mouth, worried that Yu Hua would find out he had been sneaking greasy food.

The guilty You Zhengping smelled smoke as soon as he walked through the door. He was surprised; could there be a fire?

"Yu Hua? Yu Hua?" You Zhengping anxiously looked for Yu Hua and the location of the fire.

He followed the smell to the apartment's largest bathroom and saw Yu Hua crouching inside it with the fan turned on, a stainless steel pan by his feet, and a burning pair of pants in the pan.

"What...are you doing?" You Zhengping noticed that those pants were the light gray ones that Lian Yufan had bought, which he had worn home. He became alarmed at once. What had Yu Hua discovered?

"Oh, it's nothing." Looking at the fire in the pan, Yu Hua was unusually calm.

He stare at the firelight from the pants, then used water to douse the flames and tossed the ashes into the toilet.

"Why, why did you burn those pants?" You Zhengping stammered.

Yu Hua sighed. “We went out on a date for once and ran into such an unlucky circumstance. I thought that the clothes we wore that day were inauspicious, so I thought of burning them to improve our luck. I didn’t think that the fire from burning just one pair of pants would be so big. It’s too dangerous. I’m not going to burn the rest. I’ll wash them and then donate them.”

“Oh, all right. That’s, that’s pretty superstitious of you.” You Zhengping looked at the scorched black stainless steel pan and actually felt relieved.

It was a pretty good thing that those pants had been burned now.

—

Author’s Note:

Yu Hua: The little home wrecker’s pants are getting burnt up!

## CHAPTER 29

It was already dark when You Zhengping woke up. He blinked, not quite understanding how things had happened.

He had bought everything according to Yu Hua’s shopping list, come home and seen Yu Hua burning the pants. Yu Hua had said he had thought they were inauspicious. He didn’t want to use the clothes they had worn to the amusement park again.

This part You Zhengping could understand. Many of his elders had this habit, and some even wanted you to step over a brazier afterwards; they said this removed the bad luck.

Though Yu Hua was a graduate of an institution of higher learning who had grown up receiving an education in scientific socialism, there were still certain things he clung to. You Zhengping was very receptive of this.

Furthermore, after burning the pants, Yu Hua had realized that doing this was too dangerous; it was easy to start a fire. So he had put out the flames and cleaned up the ashes, and he had checked the house for sparks, thoroughly checking to make sure that every place was safe.

After clearing away the smell of smoke inside, Yu Hua had put the clothes the two of them had worn that day in the washing machine, planning to wash and disinfect them, then put them in a vacuum-sealed bag and donate them. You Zhengping also understood this.

Everything was very reasonable and very normal. The unusual thing had happened after the washing machine had started running.



You Zhengping had given the shopping list and the goods to Yu Hua, but for once, Yu Hua hadn't checked whether everything on the list had been bought. He had fixed his gaze firmly and unwaveringly on You Zhengping.

"What-what is it?" Faced with Yu Hua's gaze, You Zhengping retreated towards the back of the couch, feeling unexpectedly panicked.

Yu Hua, always tidy to the point of obsessive-compulsiveness, casually tossed aside the things You Zhengping had bought. He put one hand on the couch, leaned down, and gently sniffed You Zhengping's lips.

"You've been sneaking food," Yu Hua said confidently.

"Your...sense of smell is very good. I even had gum," You Zhengping said guiltily.

He struggled to shift backwards. The couch Yu Hua had bought when they had been decorating was large and sturdy. There room for You Zhengping to wriggle for a long time.

Seeing You Zhengping dodge, Yu Hua bent his knee and moved forward. He took You Zhengping's wrist and pressed his lips to it, sniffing gently. "We decided we were going to take care of our health, eat light foods. We decided on a diet as dull as water. But you went out to sneak food."

"Just, just a bit of barbecue, I didn't even get full." You Zhengping felt his hair standing on end. Gooseflesh trembled on the arm Yu Hua had kissed.

"Aside from the barbecue, is there anything else?" Yu Hua asked.

"I also had a bottle of coke." Under Yu Hua's gaze, You Zhengping threw down all his defenses and confessed everything. "I often drink coke when I'm on duty. It's all because Cen Xiao makes me. He says everyone's happily staying up late and getting bald together, and there I am sneakily taking care of myself ahead of time. They made me get into the habit of drinking Coca-cola, it's all their fault, I was forced!"

Yu Hua sighed faintly. With one hand on the couch, he released You Zhengping's wrist with the other hand and brushed aside the hair in front of his forehead.

With his fingers tangled in the luxurious black hair, Yu Hua sighed. "Such thick hair."

"Right, right, it's Cen Xiao's fault, all of those underlings are good for nothing!" You Zhengping nodded his head like a chick pecking grain.

The hand left his hair and pinched You Zhengping's chin. Yu Hua closely examined You Zhengping's face. After gazing at it for a moment, he suddenly said, "You're really handsome."

It was no wonder that when You Zhengping had been struggling and calling for help in the car that time, Yu Hua hadn't been able to resist going over to put a stop to the activity in the car. He had been walking hesitantly towards the restaurant where his blind date had been arranged when he'd been attracted by a heart-wrenching cry for help. Yu Hua had been planning to look on coldly, then leave, but he had seen a young man full of vitality sticking his head out the car window.

Yu Hua had thought then, if he didn't do something to help this young man, he might regret it.

When the young man had indicated that he and his friends had only been playing around, and had shown him countless photos of friendly play, Yu Hua had felt faintly lost, thinking that he must have appeared to the young like a humorless idiot who had taken frolicking and laughter for a crime, and had even wanted to call the police.

The young man truly was very handsome, so handsome that you would be captivated with one look.

"Th-thank you?" Hearing Yu Hua call him handsome, You Zhengping first thanked him politely, then said, "You're more handsome than me."

The only person in the world You Zhengping would admit to be more handsome than himself was Yu Hua.

"What are you thanking me for?" Yu Hua laughed. The coldness in his eyes gradually warmed over. The arm propped on the couch switched to encircling You Zhengping's waist.

Without the support of his arm, Yu Hua's body pressed down on the couch.

You Zhengping had been right; Yu Hua was more handsome than him. Since they were using their faces to do battle, what right did he have to blame him for using his face to blind others' eyes?

The hand holding You Zhengping's chin changed positions, and then, and then they...well...exercised.

The time had gone from morning to evening. You Zhengping squeezed his arms, thinking that not only was Yu Hua's back strong, his arms were also unexpectedly quite strong. When he had easily picked You Zhengping up, You Zhengping had been scared, worried he might fall at any moment.

"Hehe...hehe..." You Zhengping laughed to himself from time to time, simply lying in bed not wanting to get up, lazily waiting for Yu Hua to finish making a midnight snack and come get him out of bed.

After getting up to some mischief, the two of them had napped for a while. About when it had just gotten dark, Yu Hua had called out quietly in vexation: "The clothes are still in the laundry!"

He had quickly gotten up and dressed, rinsed the already wrinkled clothes again, then dried them. Then he had used a clothes steamer to iron out the wrinkles and hung them out on the balcony to get rid of the water vapor from the steaming. When they were completely dry, he had arranged them.

Having arranged the clothes he was going to donate, Yu Hua had told You Zhengping that he was going to make a midnight snack. While it would still be light food, he could make You Zhengping some beef stew with tomato, and he could let him eat the pieces of beef from the soup.

You Zhengping crossed his arms under his head, feeling pleased.

In fact, when one form of appetite had been satisfied, another wouldn't be so strong.

For example, in times of great stress, some people would choose to use binge eating to alleviate it, while some would use the method of frenzied shopping.

In the morning, You Zhengping had felt he hadn't had enough to eat, but after a round of exercise, while he felt somewhat hungry after the activity, his mental state was full. He didn't especially want to eat meat.

As he thought this, he fell asleep again in spite of himself. After all, he had taken out an overdraft on his strength. He had to sleep to get some rest.

When Yu Hua finished cooking, he gently opened the door and saw that You Zhengping was still asleep, his sleeping countenance lively and comfortable. He couldn't quite bear to wake his husband, so he sat at the bedside, watching You Zhengping's sleeping face.

All the little details of married life surged up to his heart. Yu Hua felt a sense of peace. He slowly left the bedroom and went to the study. He turned the desk calendar to today's date.

Since his special abilities had awakened, he hadn't kept up with his desk calendar diary. At first he had been afraid of crushing the fragile pen. Then he had felt that no matter what he wrote, he couldn't avoid the issues of the System, the levelers, the mission, the undone seal, and so on. The calendar was a means for Yu Hua to record his true feelings. He was planning to wait until he was old, then take it out and use it to remember his and You Zhengping's youth together. Yu Hua wasn't going to write anything contrary to his wishes in it.

Today, Yu Hua's mood had finally recovered, and he felt he could write the diary once again.

He turned to the back of the calendar page and wrote in very small characters:

*—XX/XX/XX, Xiao You and I are staying home and resting off injuries for certain confidential reasons. Lately I've been busy with all kinds of things. The pace of life has been fast. Today the pace has slowed down for once, and I decided to do a general cleaning.*

*With time, even though I clean the rooms each day, some hard to spot dust will still gather in corners. It breeds germs.*

*There are not perfect people in this world, nor people who always live in the sun. There will always be times when you have to hide certain feelings in the dark. But as long as you sweep regularly, keep your life and mentality clean and tidy, you can still hold your head up and conduct yourself well.*

*Xiao You secretly ate barbecue outside. I was a little angry, and more angry that he's been drinking coke with Cen Xiao and the others where I can't see.*

*While the harm of coke is small, it accumulates over time, and one day it will turn into a hard to ignore calamity. It has to be dealt with as early as possible.*

*In order to punish Xiao You for secretly drinking coke, I decided to make him exercise with me. I'm very fond of exercise, but this time I went a little overboard. I made Xiao You beef stew to restore his strength.*

*PS: Due to certain confidential reasons, I have burned Xiao You's pants. Must remember to buy some new ones when I get paid.*

After writing in the diary, Yu Hua's feelings became a good deal happier. He returned to the bedroom and kissed You Zhengping awake. He quietly said into his husband's ear, "Get up and eat."

You Zhengping opened his eyes and put his arms around Yu Hua's neck, dazedly saying, "Don't feel like moving."

Yu Hua simply picked You Zhengping up and carried him to the dining table.

His arms were sturdy and strong, his steps firm as he lightly went from the bedroom to the dining room. You Zhengping's head had cleared on the way. He squeezed Yu Hua's arm. As he scooped meat out of the stew, he exclaimed in admiration, "Your arms are so strong."

Yu Hua drank a mouthful of stew and smiled faintly. "A regular routine and a healthy diet, reinforced with exercise. As long as you have those, your physical condition will be very good."

"After this, I pledge not to lie around in bed, not to drink coke, and not to eat junk food," You Zhengping said amenably.

"It doesn't have to be that absolute," Yu Hua said. "As long as you don't go overboard, once in a while is all right. I'll eat with you."

You Zhengping was instantly delighted. He ate the beef stew with tomato in satisfaction. How could Yu Hua be so nice? He truly was too blessed!

—

His superiors had only given You Zhengping three days of vacation. Three days later, he had to return to his post and finish the work handover with Lian Yufan.

Yu Hua, on the other hand, could rest for seven days. And if the Protection Organization didn't let Zhen Li go, he could have an even longer vacation.

On the fourth day, You Zhengping, glowing with health and carrying a food box, went to report at the police bureau. After signing himself in, he secretly removed to the Protection Organization base. Before starting work, he opened the fragrant box of food to show off to everyone. "These are the self-control snacks Yu Hua got up early this morning to make me, healthy and delicious!"

The food box contained Yu Hua's secret recipe beef jerky, crispy chicken breast cutlets, fall-of-the-bone pickled pepper chicken feet, and small pieces of fried milk. Unlike the chicken legs last time, it was all snacks you could eat to have something to chew on between proper meals. It was all food that wouldn't take up space in your stomach and could be digested quickly, the sugar and fat giving a strong sense of fullness; it was a magic weapon against weight gain.

You Zhengping was young and liked to eat. Yu Hua was worried about him eating his way to high blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar, so ordinarily all the food he made him was focused on being healthy, with low fat, salt, and sugar contents. It was tasty but somewhat bland.

Now Yu Hua was aware of You Zhengping's relative consumption capability. Special ability users consumed more each day than an average person could imagine.

The average person could consume between 1,200 and 2,000 calories per day. If they did more manual labor, then they would consume more, but they still couldn't have too many carbs and too much fat without putting a burden on their metabolism and leading to such irreversible illnesses as diabetes.

But special ability users were different. To maintain their special ability, their daily caloric intake exceeded 10,000 calories. Following a fierce battle, their consumption would be even more difficult for a human to imagine. This frightening consumption capacity definitely couldn't be supported merely with food. You Zhengping and the others relied more on absorbing all kinds of energy from the atmosphere, for example, sunlight, heat, gravitational potential energy, and so on.

Even though they could use the external world's energy, this still operated on the basis of their own bodies' strength. They could absorb the caloric value of their food directly, without going through their metabolisms. The higher the caloric value, the better food was for them.

Food intake alone wasn't enough, either; the Protectors also secretly injected themselves with high-energy mixtures, or else they really would have been too hungry.

Yu Hua understood some of this, so he was gradually changing tactics when it came to food. Proper meals still had to have suitable nutritional value. Even if the caloric value wasn't a concern, they still needed to replenish high-quality protein, vitamins, fiber, and other nutrients. You couldn't eat junk food just because you weren't worried about getting fat.

But for snacks, Yu Hua could adjust his tactics. Deep-fried take-out snacks were mostly made using recycled oil, while the ones he made himself were definitely made with fresh oil. They were healthy and sanitary and could safely be eaten.

When the food box was opened, the aroma wafted around. Everyone who smelled it swallowed involuntarily.

At this time, apart from You Zhengping's squad, Lian Yufan's squad was also at the Xuyang District base. They sniffed enviously, saying, "Oh, that smells so good."

Lian Yufan's squad was still reserved, but You Zhengping's squad didn't stand on formality. The squad's spiritual leader Cen Xiao handed down his command: "Get it!"

His teammates surged forward at once, holding down You Zhengping and snatching his snacks.

"You aren't allowed to take it, it's all mine!" You Zhengping guarded the food with his life.

But Cen Xiao said with a malicious smile, "Everything I see is mine. Will it answer if you call it?"

"It will!" You Zhengping said. "The food box has my name on it!"

"Well, not once it's out of the box!" Cen Xiao said rudely. The squad descended like locusts and ate up all the snacks.

All of Lian Yufan's squad simultaneously swallowed their saliva, breathing in deeply of the fragrance to satisfy their craving.

"What are you sniffing? What a sorry picture!" Lian Yufan walked into the office carrying a box of files. First he reprimanded his subordinates. Then, grim-faced, he said to You Zhengping, "Captain You, I'm handing over the documents and investigation materials. I've put all of the personal information concerning Yu Hua inside. I guarantee that there are no backups or copies. My squad and I have all sworn not to mention intelligence concerning Yu Hua. Please receive this handover!"

You Zhengping got up, put his empty food box on the desk, and took the box from Lian Yufan's hands. After a conscientious check, he signed the handover receipt.

Now that Yu Hua had been entirely cleared of suspicion, the leadership authority for the Xuyang District had returned to You Zhengping's hands. The handsome uncle mask also belonged to him again.

Lian Yufan's squad also got down to business and returned the Man-in-the-Street masks Numbers 1-6, which they had taken from You Zhengping's squad. Everyone accepted them gladly. Only Cen Xiao hesitated, then said, "I think I'll keep using the plain face I got later."

You Zhengping looked at Cen Xiao in surprise.

Cen Xiao said, "I got a little friendly with Zhen Li while using Plain Face Number 1. That face is fairly suitable for keeping up a connection with Zhen Li. He's already agreed to be the organization's informer, so it would be good to leave a mask he's familiar with."

That made sense. You Zhengping nodded in agreement. After this, Cen Xiao would use the Plain Face Number 1 mask.

When the handover was finished, everyone cleared the smell of snacks out of the conference room and waited for Director Xiao to arrive and announce personnel adjustments and plans.

While waiting, You Zhengping asked, "What has Yuan Luori given up?"

He had been on vacation for three days and couldn't receive excessively long messages. He had had to wait patiently until he came back to the base to ask.

Cen Xiao said, "He gave us a list of several Destroyers he's familiar with, and he told us about the System behind them. Yuan Luori understands the System better than Zhen Li. He's helped us answer the question of why the Destroyers' technology has declined."

When they had questioned Zhen Li before, the Protectors had wondered why the Destroyers' control system had changed from a floating interface to a cell phone control. Zhen Li had just become a leveler fifteen years ago and had used the phone from the start. He hadn't experienced the floating interface era and didn't know anything about it.

Yuan Luori, however, had told the Protectors that this was because the first clearer had appeared fifteen years ago and the System's difficulty level had decreased. Then the control interface had degenerated into the manually-operated one.

"According to the information supplied by Yuan Luori, we have sufficient evidence to suspect that the black-cloaked man who appeared at the amusement park was that first clearer. It's very likely he's also the direct cause of Destroyers not coming to our world for fifteen years." Cen Xiao handed the minutes of Yuan Luori's interrogation to You Zhengping. "We are inclined to see the clearer as being opposed to the System, and opposed to the Destroyers who came to our world before. As long as he acts appropriately, he may not be an enemy, and may even become a helper. Our leaders believe that while temporary collaboration is possible, we can't

entirely trust him. In the end, we have to remain on our guard against the Destroyers. Their attitude towards the black-cloaked man inclines more towards control than collaboration.”

You Zhengping quickly skimmed the interrogation minutes as he listened to the commentary. He pointed to one line in the minutes. “What’s wrong with Yuan Luori’s eyes?”

The line was: *Yuan Luori reports that he is unable to see objects clearly. His vision is blurred.*

“An eye exam was performed. He has a high degree of myopia and astigmatism. He’s already been prescribed glasses,” Cen Xiao said. “When the black-cloaked man simultaneously cut off his three linked lines of sight and ruined his foundational power, his eyes couldn’t take the strain of the backlash from his ability. That he wasn’t blinded is already a good thing. We consulted an ophthalmologist. In his situation, laser surgical correction can’t completely restore his vision. At most it can be restored to 6/90. It’s better to just wear glasses.”

You Zhengping wanted to say, “how awful,” but he remembered Yuan Luori’s arrogant appearance at the amusement park that day, and Yu Hua lying injured on the ground. By the time the words came to his lips, they had changed to, “He deserves it!”

“After the black-cloaked man did all this to him, how come the interrogation minutes are still overflowing with unreserved praise for the clearer?” You Zhengping asked.

Cen Xiao laughed. “The mentality of a worshipper, I guess. My idol abuses me a thousand times, and I treat him like my first love.”

“He’s wrong in the head.” When he understood the general situation, You Zhengping put down the interrogation minutes.

Soon, Director Xiao came into the conference room. Seeing the young squad, he said, “I’ve received a notice from the World Protection Organization Joint Conference. The European Protection Organization just took two Destroyers alive. Before they could learn anything from them, they self-destructed. Based on the abilities and battle methods they described, one of these Destroyers’ abilities closely coincide with one that Yuan Luori mentioned. We suspect thee two are also with the Clearing League.”

The Protectors’ expressions became grave. It wasn’t only the Xuyang District. Destroyers were appearing throughout the world.

Director Xiao said, “At present, the only surviving members of the Clearing League are Zhen Li and Yuan Luori. Their Systems were fortunately removed by the black-cloaked man, and that saved their lives. We have to use them as bait to attract the attention of the other Destroyers, so we must send someone to protect them.

“Captain Lian Yufan, the organization has resolved that you are to enter Zhen Li’s studio in the form of an employee to observe and protect these two important informers at close range.”



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Author's Note:

Zhen Li Studio's four members: useless president; near-sighted janitor; most powerful Destroyer, HR director, clearer, and Protector's family member Yu Hua; and elite Protector Lian Yufan.

Small, but still perfectly functional.

## CHAPTER 30

Choosing Lian Yufan to enter the studio was the result of careful deliberation on the part of Director Xiao and the other leaders.

The battle with Yuan Luori at the amusement park had been a training drill and a test. When the poison bubbles had covered the sky, the only ones with the capability to remain conscious had been You Zhengping, Cen Xiao, and Lian Yufan. Of these, You Zhengping's combat effectiveness and combat awareness were outstanding among the younger generation; there was a vast difference between him and the other two. Cen Xiao fell into the category of good luck, having been rescued by Zhen Li; luck was also an aspect of capability. Lian Yufan, however, had a very clear line of thought in battle; his abilities and combat methods were better suited to battlefields he had prepared for in advance.

Comprehensively analyzing the three men's temperaments, the organization's leaders unanimously believed that Lian Yufan was best suited to act as the bridge between the Zhen Li Studio and the Protectors.

In fact, when the investigation into Yu Hua had concluded but Director Xiao had retained him in the Xuyang District, Lian Yufan had guessed this outcome.

The Xuyang District was You Zhengping's jurisdiction; there were also quite a few veteran Protectors attending to it. Unless they encountered a calamity, there wasn't room in a single district for two captains, especially him and You Zhengping.

The leaders also couldn't demote Lian Yufan to deputy-captain. Therefore, he could only have been retained to carry out a special assignment.

Hearing this resolution, You Zhengping frowned. He very much wanted to be the one handling this assignment, but he understood that he was the Xuyang District's captain. His family was all here, and he had an official job and identity in the Xuyang District. He wasn't suited for an undercover mission. And Yu Hua was at the studio, so he especially shouldn't join it to keep his feelings from impacting his assignment.

Lian Yufan accepted the assignment. He asked, "How should I deal with Yu Hua?"

“Wait for a suitable opportunity to arise, then find an excuse to dismiss him,” Director Xiao said. “I’ll have the psychologist constantly follow up on Yu Hua’s psychological state. When his psychological state can withstand the stress, you’ll have Zhen Li fire him.”

Lian Yufan nodded. He had no more objections to the assignment.

During this undercover assignment, he would have close contact with Zhen and Yuan. Using a nanotech mask was unsuitable. The Protection Organization’s plastic surgeon made a few small adjustments to Lian Yufan’s face, making him look slightly different from before.

Lian Yufan was twenty-six years old, unmarried, had never dated. His father had died young, and his mother had sent him to study at a military academy after remarrying. At the military academy, Lian Yufan’s special ability had awakened, and he had been taken to the training camp. The Protection Organization had altered Lian Yufan’s records in the household register; he now had no connection to his parents. He hadn’t returned home since entering the training camp at twelve. He only sent a letter to his mother each month. His mother didn’t even know what he had grown up to be like.

The surgeon compared his appearance with his photograph when he had just entered the training camp, changing the obvious characteristics he had had as a child. Now there weren’t any particular similarities between Lian Yufan and the photograph taken in his youth.

He looked in the mirror, touching a teardrop beauty mark at the corner of his right eye. Dissatisfied, he said, “Isn’t this kind of girly? Why do I need a mole?”

The surgeon explained, “A beauty mark can easily change the disposition of the whole face, give a person a completely different feel. Many people who go on TV dramas get this change.”

“You’ve watched a lot of those melodramas, have you?” Lian Yufan picked unhappily at the beauty mark and was quickly stopped by the surgeon.

“All the changes I’ve made to your face are reversible. When the assignment is over, I’ll change it back,” the surgeon said.

Only then did Lian Yufan stop picking wildly. Very unsatisfied, he went to the room where Zhen Li was imprisoned.

Zhen Li and Yuan Luori were locked up separately. Yuan Luori was currently receiving medical treatment from the base. He had been beaten into a dreadful state by the melancholy husbands. It wasn’t enough to rely on his own healing capacity. The organization had had to urgently transfer over a Protector with healing abilities to treat him.

Yuan Luori received treatment under everyone’s surveillance. Zhen Li was at his leisure. He didn’t conceal the fact that he had a large wardrobe; he had openly displayed the wardrobe in front of the Protection Organization. It had dazzled everyone’s eyes. They had allowed Zhen Li to change his clothes every day.

“Hello, I’m Lian Yufan of the Protection Organization,” Lian Yufan said, walking in the door and politely introducing himself. “In the future, I will be your colleague. I hope you can cooperate with our secret assignment.”

Even though the two of them had met several times, and Lian Yufan had even once beaten Zhen Li up, that had all been the handsome uncle’s face, so it would be You Zhengping’s blame to bear now. It was nothing to do with Lian Yufan.

“This is my resume. Please arrange a formal interview and prepare a fairly high position for me that allows for activity,” Lian Yufan ordered in a polite tone.

Zhen Li: “...”

He ate an entire organic apple in a couple of bites, took Lian Yufan’s counterfeit resume, mobilized his scant brain cells to consider it for a long time, then said, “I don’t know what you can do. Why don’t I call Director Yu and ask?”

Lian Yufan narrowed his eyes. “...You’re the studio’s president, why do you need the human resources director to assign someone a job? Can’t you just notify him? Or is it that...Yu Hua is also a Destroyer, and he’s more powerful than you and Yuan Luori, so you have to listen to his orders?”

His suspicions about Yu Hua hadn’t disappeared. Even when he had wrapped up the case and reported, Lian Yufan had still left that 1% possibility.

Zhen Li felt panicked. Luckily, after several doing it several times, his acting skills had progressed remarkably. Without displaying his emotions, he shook his head and said, “That’s not it. When I suspended my university education and opened the studio, I was only thinking that a popular online livestream would make a lot of money. I’m not very clear on how to allocate personnel in a standard company, so of course I have to ask a specialist. Yu Hua worked at a well-known enterprise for five years. I think he must have a good understanding.”

“Don’t ask him for now.” Lian Yufan restrained Zhen Li from making the call. “When Yuan Luori’s wounds are healed and the studio opens for regular business, just tell him you’ve employed a new public relations director and have him put the employment contract on file.”

“Public relations director? Why do you want that position?”

Lian Yufan swept a cold gaze over Zhen Li. “If a Destroyer attacks your studio, given your current disposition of employees, who will cover up the news for you?”

“You.”

“You know Yuan Luori’s character, and you still let him livestream. If he has a fight with someone, or even a clash with law enforcement, who will settle it for you?”

“You.”

“You’re trying to get famous online by livestreaming. If a stalker fan spies on you and accidentally discovers the existence of Destroyers, who will take the stalker fan to be instructed concerning confidentiality and sign a confidentiality agreement?”

“You.”

“So you tell me, what position am I suited for?”

“Public relations director.”

Zhen Li was forced to admit that what Lian Yufan said made a lot of sense. The Protection Organization’s spy inside the studio really was very suited to be a public relations director!

The only problem was, did he really not need to notify Yu Hua ahead of time? If he acted first and reported later, would the great master give him a beating like he’d given Yuan Luori?

Zhen Li was in a very awkward position, but he couldn’t afford to offend Lian Yufan. He snuck a look at Lian Yufan, getting Lian Yufan to ask callously, “What are you looking at?”

Lian Yufan subconsciously wanted to touch the beauty mark, thinking that Zhen Li was glancing at him because of it. He was very unsatisfied with this beauty mark. He looked at Zhen Li coldly.

Zhen Li retracted his neck. The studio had four people, one president and three directors, and the president’s position was the lowest. He couldn’t offend any of the directors.

Though when he thought of the environmental maintenance director Yuan Luori, Zhen Li cheered up again. Yuan Luori seemed to be in a more miserable position than him, and in the future there would be someone to clean the office. That was great.

With this bit of inner happiness, Zhen Li left the base before Yuan Luori.

He hadn’t livestreamed for three days. Zhen Li had nearly a million fans on the livestreaming website. Suddenly disappearing would attract notice. So as not to raise suspicions, the Protection Organization let Zhen Li return to the studio to make an appearance.

Yuan Luori was receiving brainwashing-style training, being force-fed a common sense education, and receiving electrotherapy treatment. It would be a few days before he could return. Zhen Li went to the studio alone. The studio was covered in dust. He opened the blinds. As he happily cleaned up, he freely imagined that after this there would be someone else to clean the room.

When the studio was more or less clean, Zhen Li wrapped his foot up in gauze as tightly as a zongzi and cheerfully turned on the livestream. He picked up a piece of durian layer cake and started eating towards the camera.

Since he hadn't said in advance that he was going to livestream, there weren't many people there. There were very few comments in the barrage.

"Hello, everyone," Zhen Li said, waving his hand. "This past weekend I went out to the amusement park and accidentally sprained my ankle. I've had to take some time off these past few days."

[Other people livestream on the weekend, but you rest. That's unprofessional.]

There were few comments. Zhen Li chose some of the representative ones and answered, "Well, with Director Yu not willing to work overtime and Director Yuan not cooperating, if things go on like this, the studio will close down sooner or later."

[Why isn't Director Yuan livestreaming with you today?]

"Oh, Director Yuan, he's near-sighted now, he's shut himself up," Zhen Li explained. "Soon there's going to be a new public relations director joining the studio, though he won't participate in the livestreams. You may sometimes hear his voice. He's also a graduate of a top three school. He's quite capable."

[His education history and abilities aren't important, the important thing is how he looks.]

"He's very handsome, especially the beauty mark at the corner of his eye, truly captivating." Zhen Li looked at the corner of his own eye in the livestream camera and sighed. "I'd wanted to save up some money and get a beauty mark. With him coming, our personas have coincided. I'm disappointed."

[Hurry up, we want to see what the public relations director looks like.]

Having explained to the fans why he had been offline lately and eaten in front of the camera, Zhen Li turned off the livestream, planning to get off work and go home.

As soon as he walked out of the office building, he saw two auxiliary policemen on police-issue motor scooters patrolling outside the building. They were riding the motor scooters very fast. One of the auxiliary police officer's wheels rolled over Zhen Li's gauze-wrapped foot.

"Sorry." The auxiliary police officer hurriedly stopped the scooter and apologized. "Was your foot already injured? I'll take you to the hospital!"

"No need, no need," Zhen Li refused quickly, waving his hand. "I'm just... Huh? Director Yu's husband?"

He had recognized the other auxiliary police officer as You Zhengping and immediately stood up straight, looking at You Zhengping with the respectful bearing of someone appealing to a sister-in-law.

You Zhengping nodded. "Thank you for letting my husband take a vacation."

"No need for thanks, I've been slacking off, too," Zhen Li said.

Naturally, You Zhengping's companion was Cen Xiao. It wasn't a coincidence that the two of them were passing by here. They had planned it.

They had been keeping an eye on Zhen Li's livestream and waiting outside of the office building, then had rolled over Zhen Li's foot just after he had left the building. Cen Xiao was of course perfectly well aware that Zhen Li's sprain was fake. He was deliberately using this as an opportunity to have a natural interaction with him and indirectly observe the situation at Zhen Li's studio.

"How about this, I can see you're having a hard time walking, so I'll take you home." Cen Xiao patted the back of the motor scooter's seat. "On the way, I can have a look at your injury, and if anything is wrong, I'll take you to the hospital."

"O-okay." Zhen Li couldn't refuse in front of You Zhengping. He had to mount Cen Xiao's motor scooter.

When You Zhengping had watched the two of them leave, he took a routine turn patrolling the streets, wiling away the time until he got off work. He went to the police bureau to hand over the motor scooter and change to ordinary clothes, then quickly ran home.

Yu Hua had a prior record of breaking furniture when he was home alone after You Zhengping had gone to work. You Zhengping was worried that Yu Hua's mood would be bad while he was staying home alone, so after work he hurried home to keep his husband company.

As soon as You Zhengping walked through the door, he heard the *bang!* of a gun. He was so startled he nearly opened a space and released his special ability on the spot. You Zhengping was feeling some stress after the successive events of the last few days. He was unusually sensitive towards this type of sound.

Fortunately, he controlled his nerves in time and looked towards the source of the sound. He saw that it was the TV making the sound. Only then did he relax slightly.

"Are you back?" Yu Hua, wearing an apron and holding a large spoon, stuck his head out of the kitchen. "It's about another ten minutes until the food will be ready. Why don't you rest a bit?"

Yu Hua's hands smelled of cooking, and he was holding the spoon. It was inconvenient for getting close to You Zhengping.

But You Zhengping wasn't so fastidious. He went over and hugged Yu Hua. The gunshot just now had really scared him a little, making him recall how Yu Hua had looked fallen on the ground at the amusement park, when You Zhengping hadn't known whether he was dead or alive.

"Be good, go change clothes." Yu Hua couldn't hug You Zhengping back. He could only kiss his husband's face and order, "And go wash your hands and face."

This was Yu Hua's household rule: wash your hands frequently.

Reluctant to let go, You Zhengping hugged him for a while longer. When he felt his husband's heartbeat, he finally let Yu Hua go.

He changed into house clothes and carefully washed up in the master bedroom. Then he went to the living room and looked at the time. It was precisely 19:00.

Ordinarily, Yu Hua would have turned on the news broadcast at this time. He was fairly attentive towards the major events happening in the country. After each council of leaders, he would download what the leaders had said and study it seriously. He was a rather old-fashioned person.

But today Yu Hua was watching a TV drama, and of a type he had never watched before.

Yu Hua liked watching serious history dramas, spy dramas, dramas about resisting Japanese oppression, dramas set during the Republican era, dramas about fighting corruption, and other TV dramas of that kind. You Zhengping liked fantasy, xianxia, wuxia, exciting animation, and similar shows. They'd never dabbled in melodramas, idol dramas, or slice-of-life dramas.

But today the TV was playing a popular romantic drama called *The Fatal Housewife*. While he was waiting for dinner, You Zhengping looked up the plot online. This was a drama with a female main character. The main character was a housewife who discovered her husband was cheating on her. She tried holding back and pretending she didn't know, but finally she had realized that her husband was a scumbag and come up with a plan to kill him. The gunshot You Zhengping had heard when he'd come in had been the sound of the husband being killed.

You Zhengping: "..."

He quickly backed out of the show and checked the viewing history. He found that the style of the shows Yu Hua had watched had changed a great deal.

The records of the dramas with male main characters had been forced down to the very bottom. The recently viewed shows respectively were *The Allure of Leaving Home*, *A Husband and Wife's Universe*, *The Wife's Revenge*, and so on. Squeezed in among them was also a drugs crackdown drama.

You Zhengping searched through these dramas' summaries and found that they were all about the reactions of a wife to finding out her husband was cheating. There were ones who had made concessions for the overall good and taken their husbands back, and there were those who had secretly investigated and found that their husbands were scumbags and decided to get revenge. There were also stories where the mistress and the wife teamed up to get rid of the scumbag.

Even the one drugs crackdown drama had a segment about a wife finding out a certain leader was involved in a crime and using any means necessary to cover up for her husband, even going down the path of no return.

You Zhengping: "..."

"Time to eat," Yu Hua said in the dining room.

You Zhengping quickly changed the TV to the news channel, heard the familiar sound of the news broadcast, and felt calm.

For dinner, Yu Hua had made hand-pulled noodles with bone broth. This was genuine pure bone broth that had been cooked all day to thicken. The noodles were full of the flavor of the bone broth. Yu Hua had cooked the bones so that the meat became melt-in-the-mouth soft and fell off, producing a layer of delicious gravy, making an excellent savory dish of boneless meat.

You Zhengping forced down the questions in his heart and slurped up the bone broth and hand-made noodles. When he had gobbled up a whole bowl, Yu Hua ladled out another one for him, warmly and understandingly saying, "There's still some in the pot, slow down. Eating so fast is hard on your stomach."

"When I walked in the door, I saw you playing that TV drama. What dramas have you been watching today?" You Zhengping asked, seeming casual.

"*The Fatal Housewife*," Yu Hua answered frankly. "It was just to have something to watch. When I was fired before, I watched everything I could watch. There haven't been any dramas I like recently, so I watched some fairly well-known ones."

"Oh." You Zhengping accepted this explanation and talked about what had happened today. "Cen Xiao and the others stole all the snacks you made again, I was so mad!"

Yu Hua's hand, doling out food for You Zhengping, paused slightly. In a peculiar voice, he said, "When I make you food to take to work, there's usually a share for them. Your friends are my friends."

He naturally put the food in You Zhengping's bowl, as though the pause just now hadn't happened, and he asked casually, "How much does Cen Xiao eat compared to you?"



“He eats even more than I do!” You Zhengping said.

Cen Xiao was also a special ability user. Yu Hua inwardly noted it down, then smiled and said, “Your relationship is so close. How does the old saying go? So close that you could wear a single pair of pants.”

“Don’t mention it, I really have worn his pants,” You Zhengping said. “We’re about the same size, and when we lived in the same dorm, we’d sometimes put on the wrong clothes.”

“Really?” Yu Hua’s smile became even more radiant.

Yu Hua’s expression was very ordinary, but You Zhengping felt a chill go up his spine.

A light went off in his mind. He thought about how Yu Hua had revealed in the calendar diary that he was jealous of Cen Xiao, about the viewing history he had just looked through, and about the bizarrely burned pair of pants.

Seriously, why would Yu Hua, who liked to watch the news broadcast, do a dangerous thing like burning those pants because of bad luck? That was totally unreasonable.

Unless Yu Hua had discovered that the pants had been changed but hadn’t said anything about it!

And just now he had suddenly mentioned he and Cen Xiao being close enough to wear the same pair of pants...

You Zhengping was astonished. Yu Hua couldn’t suspect that he and Cen Xiao...

This was truly an injustice throughout the ages!

—

Author’s Note:

Yu Hua: I want to find that pair of pants, give them a thorough cleaning, hide them in the cabinet, not let other people wear them. But where are the pants? I have to investigate.

Yu Hua, watching TV: I have something on my mind that I can’t talk about. Let’s see how ordinary people (in a TV drama) handle secrets.

## CHAPTER 31

When they had finished dinner and Yu Hua had cleaned the kitchen, he went to the sofa to watch TV. The weather forecast had just ended. He turned on the internet TV and chose to watch *Deception from Love*. This was a story about the female main character’s husband cheating on her and seizing control of her family fortune. The female main character was in the

dark about it for the first couple of dozen episodes, and in the latter couple of dozen episodes she got revenge.

You Zhengping, who had been indolently leaning on Yu Hua's shoulder playing a game: "..."

He switched to lying down, slipping from Yu Hua's shoulder to his lap. With his head pillowed on Yu Hua's sturdy thighs, he absent-mindedly kept playing.

As he played, You Zhengping snuck glances at Yu Hua's expression, seeing him studiously watching the drama with a grave expression, all but taking notes.

When Yu Hua saw that the female main character's husband was not only cheating, but also plotting to steal her family fortune along with his mistress, he subconsciously stroked You Zhengping's hair.

You Zhengping couldn't keep playing. He cast aside his teammates, dropped his phone, and rubbed his head against Yu Hua's lap. He put his arms around his husband's waist, planning to bring the jealousy issue out into the open.

Feeling Xiao You hug him, Yu Hua paused the TV, bent his head, and lowered his gaze to look at his husband. His eyes were full of tender emotion.

While the atmosphere was ripening, You Zhengping's phone rang. Yu Hua picked it up and, after a glance, passed it to You Zhengping.

When he took it, You Zhengping's mind buzzed. The call was from Cen Xiao.

*It's eight in the evening, a time when a bit of something might happen between a married couple, and you're calling me? Weren't you taking Zhen Li home to indirectly probe the enemy?*

You Zhengping cursed inwardly, but he was worried that Cen Xiao and Zhen Li had run into a new Destroyer, so he quickly picked up the phone. When he heard what Cen Xiao had to say, his face instantly turned green.

"What's wrong?" Yu Hua asked, seeing his husband's expression.

"Cen Xiao...took a passenger on his police-issued motor scooter, and, as a police employee, he violated the Xuyang District Traffic Rules and Regulations. He not only had a passenger, the passenger was injured, so the situation is serious. A fine alone isn't enough to express the government's condemnation. The two of them have been taken by the traffic police to sign letters of admonition," You Zhengping said.

"Carrying an injured passenger?" Yu Hua asked, frowning.

"It's your boss, Zhen Li," You Zhengping said.

As he spoke, Yu Hua's phone also rang. He looked—of course it was Zhen Li.

"Great...Director Yu, I'm with the traffic police," Zhen Li said.

"You're an adult. You have a duty and an obligation to be responsible for your own conduct. When you sign the letter of admonition and pay the fine, they'll let you go. Why did you call me?" Yu Hua didn't stand on any ceremony with his boss.

"That's not it," Zhen Li said quietly. "When we were arrested, someone filmed it and posted it online, and now some fans are squatting at the traffic police's door, waiting for me to come out so they can film me. Won't this impact my ability to earn money later?"

Yu Hua: "..."

On the other end, Cen Xiao said to You Zhengping, "I'm a police employee, the traffic police say they need to see my superior."

You Zhengping: "..."

Oh, yes, when they had changed professions, he had taken on the rank of the captain of the auxiliary police squad.

He and Cen Xiao were police officers. Like the traffic police, they belonged to the police bureau's inner organization. They were colleagues. But the organization wasn't the same.

It was up in the air whether Cen Xiao violating a regulation would be a major issue. Rather than going to their direct superior, it was better to go to the squad captain You Zhengping, tell him to restrain his subordinate, not let this kind of thing happen again.

"You wait, I'll be right there," the melancholy husbands said in unison.

The melancholy husbands, who had just been lounging on the couch preparing to enjoy a sweet and stimulating night, had to accept their fates, get dressed, go outside, and clean up after their colleagues.

Yu Hua drove, taking You Zhengping to the gates of the traffic police unit. There were indeed over twenty people scattered in small knots outside the door. There were also people holding cameras who looked something like paparazzi.

Zhen Li had recently become an internet celebrity. He didn't have a management company. He was all on his own. His popularity was abundant, but he had also gotten in quite a few people's way. Now that he was involved in a scandal, while it wasn't a major issue, it was still an entertaining piece of news. There were people who wanted to become popular by reporting on it, and there were people who wanted to take the opportunity to drag him down. In the System's survival game worlds and in the ecology of ordinary internet celebrities, it was all war.

Yu Hua scanned the surrounding crowd, realizing that he would have a hard road ahead of him to launder money, no easier than resisting the System. After all, he was already a familiar hand at dealing with the System. Practice makes perfect, and he had had thousands of years of it, but he was a newbie when it came to using levelers to make money.

He straightened out his clothes in the car, making himself look like a solemn social elite. When he had ensured that he wouldn't be made a fool of because of his clothes, he picked up a peaked cap and put it on You Zhengping's head, quietly saying, "I'll get out first and lead those people away. You get out of the car when they're not paying attention. Remember to pass on those words to Zhen Li."

"Fine." You Zhengping looked up at Yu Hua and suddenly thought that his current grave, composed look was extremely handsome.

"Why are you looking at me like that?" Meeting his eyes, Yu Hua's heart heated up.

"It's nothing," You Zhengping said, smiling. "I was just thinking, it seems like you take this job pretty seriously. Your whole manner is different. It's kind of attractive."

"Only kind of?" Yu Hua raised his eyebrows.

"Very attractive." Under cover of the car and darkness, with no one outside watching, You Zhengping leaned close and quickly kissed the corner of Yu Hua's eye. He suddenly loved those self-confident eyes.

"Wait till we get home," Yu Hua said a little disapprovingly. "There are too many people here."

There was opposition in his voice, but the corners of his mouth turned up uncontrollably.

Yu Hua used all his self control to manage his expression, then got out of the car, his face solemn.

Anyone who would come to a police bureau to lie in wait for Zhen Li naturally knew all the circumstances. As soon as Yu Hua got out of the car, they recognized Director Yu, who rarely showed his face but still had more of a presence than Yuan Luori with his perfunctory daily livestreams.

The people scattered all over with their phones and cameras surged up, surrounding Yu Hua. The average person faced with an attack like this would have made a fool of himself, but Yu Hua had seen every kind of monster; twenty-some people couldn't make him lose his composure.

"You're Director Yu, right? Have you come to pick up Zhen Li?"

"Zhen Li is an internet celebrity with a million fans, but he's violated traffic regulations and set a bad example for minors. Is he still qualified to keep his internet fame?"

“When Zhen Li sprained his ankle and stopped livestreaming for three days, was it really only a sprained ankle? An injury can be announced right away, why did he have to wait three days?”

“The person who violated the regulations along with Zhen Li was a police employee. Does this mean that Zhen Li has led a police employee astray?”

A few people charged to the front and asked difficult to answer questions. Nothing Yu Hua said now would be of any use. These were all malicious leading questions. If he didn’t answer, that was no problem, either. They could misinterpret silence as guilt.

“Ah! It’s Director Yu! Director Yu has come to pick up President Zhen!”

There were screams at the periphery. These were not very rational fans.

Yu Hua swept his gaze over the crowd and calmly said, “I’m only the Zhen Li Studio’s human resources director. I have no authority to answer your questions on my boss’s behalf. Please wait for him to come out so he can explain things to you himself.”

While he drew everyone’s attention, a person wearing a black cap furtively got out of the car and silently snuck into the traffic police unit.

“In reality, our work isn’t so bound by dogma. If you encounter a genuinely handicapped individual or need to take steps as soon as possible, these matters have their relative importance, and violating discipline can be understood. We would perform a concrete analysis of the concrete problem. But look at what you’ve done. If you’re taking your friend home, can’t you get him a cab? Do you absolutely have to use a police-issued single person vehicle to take him? Examine your conscience. Is his ankle that badly sprained?” As soon as You Zhengping came in, he heard the captain of the traffic police unit speaking sincerely to Cen Xiao.

“You’re right, you’re right.” Cen Xiao nodded repeatedly.

“We’re colleagues, I don’t want to be so harsh, but your conduct in this amounts to poking holes in our new policy! If we can’t set an example internally as a warning and as instruction, won’t everyone think that police employees are privileged? Then what becomes of the deterrent abilities of law enforcement personnel? What becomes of the credibility of the government?” The captain was a fifty-something veteran. His speech was bitterly resentful.

“You’re right, you’re right.” Cen Xiao had turned into a nodding machine, not daring to say a single extraneous sentence.

“Captain, hello, I’m Cen Xiao’s direct superior.” You Zhengping took off his cap, took out his auxiliary police ID, and passed it to the captain. He very politely said, “Sorry, since there are people outside and I’m not on duty, in order to maintain police discipline, I didn’t put on my uniform.”

“You’re his superior?” The captain looked at You Zhengping’s ID. “It’s one thing for him to take a passenger, but the passenger was also some internet celebrity, leading to that crowd outside. That makes this harder to handle.”

You Zhengping recited what Yu Hua had told him: “I understand. In the old, worn-out view, Comrade Cen Xiao’s conduct is perhaps only a trivial matter, but in reality it will have an adverse impact on our execution of police duties. We will post Comrade Cen Xiao’s disciplinary action on our official account and publicize the letter of admonition to set a good example and demonstrate our serious view of this matter.”

Hearing that You Zhengping’s speech was more rigorous than his own, the captain couldn’t resist seeing him in a favorable light. “...Not bad, young fellow. At such a young age, you’ve made a thorough study of policy.”

It was all line after line of official language.

You Zhengping laughed and showed a young man’s helplessness, awkwardly saying, “I really do feel very sorry, but I don’t know how to express it. I had to crib.”

His manner in owning up was excellent. The captain calmed down and said, “Enough. Just post the disciplinary action. It’s enough for the young man to understand his mistake. Don’t think that your uniform is dashing, don’t think that police-issued equipment is for showing off. They represent the responsibility to set an example, do you understand?”

These last sentences were addressed to Cen Xiao. Cen Xiao nodded his head like a chick pecking grain. “I understand, I understand.”

Seeing that the captain was willing to let Cen Xiao go, You Zhengping had Cen Xiao sign the letter and complete the formalities. At the same time, he said to the captain, “That internet celebrity Zhen Li, I know him, too. This matter needs not only an official statement, the internet streaming media should also display the proper attitude. Shall I go advise him to cooperate, stream a video to explain himself?”

“Go ahead,” said the captain.

You Zhengping went to Zhen Li. Seeing that it was the great master’s husband, Zhen Li’s legs trembled. He exerted his willpower to keep himself from kneeling and fearfully said, “I’ve made trouble for you.”

You Zhengping had had dealings with Zhen Li while wearing the handsome uncle Protector’s face. He knew this person was a coward, nothing like a Destroyer. He hadn’t noticed that his attitude towards Yu Hua was overly reverent.

“It wasn’t your fault, it was that brat Cen Xiao’s own mistake. You’ve just been dragged into it,” You Zhengping said. “It’s already happened, and I know you’re in an awkward position, but you still have to account for yourself. I hope you can explain things to the people outside.”

“How should I explain?” Zhen Li asked.

You Zhengping got out the script Yu Hua had jotted down. “Yu Hua wrote this. Hurry up and memorize it, then go out and broadcast a statement. Though you can’t read it off the script.”

“No problem!” As soon as he saw the script, Zhen Li found his backbone. He and the great master had communicated in writing several times. He was rather familiar with this method.

He made an “ok” hand gesture towards You Zhengping, bent his head, and quickly memorized the script.

The captain also came over to check the script. Seeing the forceful handwriting and the contents, he said in praise, “Beautiful handwriting, and the contents are precise and accurate. Did you write it?”

“I asked someone to write it,” You Zhengping disclaimed credit.

Everything was prepared. The formalities were completed. Cen Xiao also read the script after Zhen Li. Carrying the signed letter of admonition, the three of them left the police bureau.

Seeing Zhen Li come out, the people surrounding Yu Hua immediately ran over, repeating the questions they had just asked.

Zhen Li had been rather panicked, but he felt he had found his bearings now that he had memorized the script. He said to all the people questioning him, “Everyone, please keep calm. There are so many of you, I can’t answer all of you at once. We’re going to impede official business if we block the door like this. There’s a small public square up ahead, let’s go there, all right?”

His manner was excellent. Faced with aggressive and malicious questions, he hadn’t gotten angry; instead, he had subtly pointed out the reprehensible behavior of the people surrounding the police bureau.

Everyone had to go to the little square. In the process of removing, there was time for Zhen Li to turn on his phone and livestream.

He didn’t use any filters. He held the phone away from himself using a selfie stick, getting the people chasing him with questions into the frame, too. Then he admitted his mistake towards the camera, saying that his awareness of the law was weak and he had violated traffic regulations. He hoped that his fans wouldn’t imitate his behavior and take his example as a warning.

Also, he expressed his apologies towards the police employee who had been implicated. He had only been helping him, but he had been dragged into trouble and been chastised along with him, receiving an admonition.

At the same time, Zhen Li was very grateful to the traffic police for correcting his mistaken behavior in a timely manner, rendering instruction and precautionary measures before disaster could strike. He was very grateful to these lovely and venerable people.

Finally, Zhen Li was only Zhen Li, an ordinary person who liked to dress up and eat good food. Zhen Li felt very honored to have attained the liking of so many people because of his hobbies. When his ankle was better, he would try even harder to make better videos to pay everyone back.

After this heartfelt, formal, and polite explanation, the people who had appeared in the frame asking questions didn't dare to speak again. Zhen Li had said everything; what else was there for them to ask?

Zhen Li posted the recording from just now online. It was forwarded by the Xuyang District traffic police unit to encourage and praise his attitude of acknowledging his error and improving on it. You Zhengping also contacted the manager of his department's official account. They acted in concert with the Xuyang District traffic police, forwarding the video.

The people waiting for Zhen Li came up empty-handed, lost interest, and left. Yu Hua, hiding behind Zhen Li, laughed gently.

It was 9 PM, a high traffic time. The topics #PresidentZhenApologizes# and #NoPassengersOnScooters# at once surged to popularity, making the Zhen Li Studio even more popular.

Zhen Li signed autographs for his real fans and explained that this had nothing to do with Director Yu. The fans left satisfied. At last, only four people were left in the little square.

Cen Xiao dropped to the ground. Taking no care for his image, he said, "That was exhausting. I'm hungry."

Yu Hua, who had silently acted as the man behind the scenes the whole time, swept his gaze over Cen Xiao's pant legs. He proposed, "It really has been tiring, so let's go eat a late night snack. My boss is buying."

Zhen Li: "..."

"There's...no need for that." You Zhengping instinctively sensed Yu Hua's hidden resentment towards Cen Xiao and was afraid this late night snack would be a Hongmen Banquet<sup>13</sup> and tried to prevent it.

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<sup>13</sup> Reference to a well-known historical event during the Chu-Han Contention (206-202 BC) in which one insurgent leader invited his rival to a banquet that was intended as a trap.



“There is,” said Cen Xiao, who knew nothing. “There’s no need for Zhen Li to buy, I’ll do it, it’s all my fault.”

While everyone was discussing whether to go have a late night snack, someone walked out of the traffic police unit and trotted over to the small square. Seeing Zhen Li, he puffed, “Why didn’t you call me about this?”

This person was the newly hired public relations director Lian Yufan. He had seen the video of Zhen Li being taken to the traffic police unit and hurried over. He hadn’t expected that the matter would have been handled already.

“And who is this?” Yu Hua had never seen Lian Yufan’s real face.

Zhen Li swallowed. “This is our newly hired public relations director Lian Yufan. Since you were still on vacation, I didn’t tell you. I was waiting for you to get back to go through the hiring formalities.”

“Oh, I see.” Yu Hua lowered his head to look at Lian Yufan’s pants. He was wearing a pair of light gray pants. Though it was late at night and there wasn’t much light, Yu Hua still saw the stain on the pant leg.

*Oh, I see.*

Lian Yufan had grabbed a pair of pants at random when he had seen the news. He hadn’t paid attention to which pair it was, and he definitely hadn’t expected Yu Hua to be here.

Cen Xiao and You Zhengping weren’t on very good terms with Lian Yufan. They had also just seen Lian Yufan with the beauty mark, and their expressions both became wondering. You Zhengping, unaware of the impending crisis, said maliciously, “What a bewitching beauty mark, Director Lian, hahaha.”

Reasonably speaking, Lian Yufan shouldn’t have recognized the two of them. While he was very angry, he had to maintain his smile.

Yu Hua, however, put an arm around his husband’s waist and gently said, “I didn’t know you liked beauty marks.”

As he spoke, he pointed at the corner of his own eye and politely said, “Since we’re future colleagues, we’re all friends here. How about we go have a late night snack together?”

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Author’s Note:

Zhen Li: I’m tired today, I don’t want to eat with my subordinates, and I really don’t want to be the one footing the bill. I still owe a hundred million.

Cen Xiao: I'm safe.

You Zhengping: Those pants, those pants, Lian Yufan, change out of those pants right now!

Yu Hua: Whose pants do you want to change?

Lian Yufan: What is this whole mess?

## CHAPTER 32

When his husband hugged him, You Zhengping felt a chill spread from his waist to his limbs. A wild animal's instinct told You Zhengping that something was wrong.

Why would he feel such a sense of crisis?

He had always trusted his sixth sense. In actual combat exercises, this sort of feeling had many times helped You Zhengping discover traps and escape being blown sky high. He quickly used his brain, wildly glancing all around out of the corner of his eye, and finally saw Lian Yufan openly wearing those light gray pants.

When he heard Yu Hua invite Lian Yufan to eat, You Zhengping immediately hiccuped, forced a smile, and shook his head, refusing. "There's no need, is there? We don't know each other very well..."

"What do you mean, we don't know each other well?" Yu Hua said, smiling. "You're my family member, you and Cen Xiao have been best friends for years, Cen Xiao knows my boss, and Director Lian is a new staff member who came over on purpose to take care of things for Cen Xiao and President Zhen. Our connections are clear. We can sit down to a late night snack together to get closer. It can count as team building for our new company. Right, President Zhen?"

"Right, right!" When the great master spoke, Zhen Li didn't care not to follow his lead. He nodded in agreement and said to Lian Yufan, "Director Lian, thank you for taking the trouble to come. Let's go eat."

"Why don't we call Director Yuan, too? Does he know about Director Lian?" Yu Hua took out his phone, pretending he was asking a casual question.

"Well... Director Yuan...does he...know?" How would Zhen Li know whether Lian Yufan had said mentioned this to Yuan Luori? He quickly shot a glance at Lian Yufan, deliberately avoiding You Zhengping and Cen Xiao's gazes. As far as Zhen Li knew, You and Cen were ordinary people!

Lian Yufan, however, calmly said, "I've heard President Zhen mention this Director Yuan, but I've never seen him."

What he meant was that Yuan Luori had no idea about any new employee. Zhen Li said, "If you didn't reach out to him, then he doesn't know. After all, I haven't mentioned it."

“Then I’ll call him.” Yu Hua quickly dialed the number, not giving anyone a chance to stop him.

Yuan Luori’s phone was currently in the hands of a specialist. His System had been deleted by the black-cloaked man. To determine the truth of this, the Protection Organization was performing a comprehensive analysis of it.

“His phone is off,” Yu Hua said, hanging up. “It seem that we won’t be able to invite Director Yuan tonight. Let’s do it another time if there’s a chance.”

Lian Yufan deliberated stood closer to Yu Hua, stepping forward with the stained pant leg. He extended a hand towards him. “Director Yu, we’ll be colleagues from now on.”

You Zhengping saw his movement and was so scared his heart nearly stopped beating. In a flash, he appeared in front of Yu Hua, taking Yu Hua’s place in shaking Lian Yufan’s hand, saying, “I’m Yu Hua’s husband. You’ll be working together at the same company now, so I’d like you to look after him.”

As he spoke, You Zhengping avoided the others’ gazes, wildly throwing looks at Lian Yufan, blinking so hard he was about to go cross-eyed, mouthing the word “pants.”

Yu Hua saw You Zhengping scramble to shake hands with Director Lian first. With a faint warm smile, he said, “My husband is very concerned about me. It’s a little embarrassing.”

Lian Yufan threw off You Zhengping’s hand, ignored his looks, pushed him aside, and took another step towards Yu Hua. It was as if he was scared Yu Hua wouldn’t see the pants.

You Zhengping, having been pushed aside: “...”

If he had the chance, he was definitely going to break Lian Yufan’s legs!

Cen Xiao, who had worked with You Zhengping for many years, grasped his meaning. He said, “Eating a late night snack together is a great idea, but I have to change out of this uniform. When I’m not on duty, I can’t wear the uniform to dining, karaoke, or dancing establishments. Could you all come with me while I change?”

His civilian clothes were at the police station, and he had to return the police-issue motor scooter. During this process, many things could be done.

Cen Xiao went on ahead on his motor scooter, and Yu Hua and You Zhengping took Zhen Li and Lian Yufan. You Zhengping would sit in the passenger’s seat, and the other two in the back.

You Zhengping quickly ran to the side of the car and opened the driver’s side door for Yu Hua.

Yu Hua looked at his husband and got into the driver’s seat.

You Zhengping quickly opened the door to the backseat, invited Zhen Li to get in, then pushed Lian Yufan inside, simultaneously saying in his politest voice, "Please get in, Director Lian."

Lian Yufan: "..."

When Lian Yufan had taken his seat, he received a message from Cen Xiao: *Take it easy, I'm having a new pair of pants sent to the police bureau. Find an excuse to go to the bathroom to change.*

When they reached the police bureau, Lian Yufan cooperatively said, "May I use the restroom?"

"Of course," You Zhengping, as an auxiliary police squad captain, quickly said. "I'll take you."

Yu Hua looked at You Zhengping and politely said, "My new colleague is inconveniencing you."

"Not at all." You Zhengping smiled stiffly.

Lian Yufan got out of the backseat, and You Zhengping followed from the passenger's seat. Yu Hua, sitting in the driver's seat, shouldn't have had an opportunity to notice the pants.

Yu Hua watched through the front windshield as Cen, Lian, and You went into the police bureau, a thoughtful look on his face.

Seeing there was no one in the car, Zhen Li quickly said, "Director Yu, Lian Yufan is..."

"Shh." Yu Hua put his index finger to his lips, preventing Zhen Li from speaking with his gesture.

From this movement alone, Zhen Li understood that Yu Hua knew what was going on. He quickly added, "Yuan Luori doesn't know yet, I can't get in contact with him, we..."

As before, Yu Hua prevented Zhen Li from speaking. He opened the driver's side window and put his arm on it, sticking his head out slightly. There was a faint night breeze blowing. He looked at the sky and said, "It's so late, and there are still sparrows flying around. Don't birds have poor eyesight at night?"

Sparrows? Zhen Li doubtfully looked outside and saw a sparrow flying up to the car and landing on Yu Hua's arm. Yu Hua stroked the sparrow's head, took out a "vitamin," and fed it to the sparrow. The sparrow, which normally wouldn't have approached a human or taken food from one, obediently ate the medicine. Its eyes wavered, and it fell asleep.

Yu Hua got out of the car with the sparrow in one hand and opened the trunk. At some point, a birdcage had been placed in the trunk of the car.

Zhen Li: "!!!"

The foundation item that Yuan Luori had used to link his vision had been a birdcage. When Yu Hua had removed the power of his System and severed his vision link to the three animals, the birdcage should have turned into a useless basket. The Protection Organization had found a broken birdcage while cleaning up the battlefield and brought it back to the base for research. After confirming that the said birdcage had in fact become a normal basket, they had destroyed it.

Why would the birdcage be here? Zhen Li got out of the car and looked at it closely. This wasn't Yuan Luori's broken birdcage, it was a new one.

Yu Hua put the sparrow in the birdcage. The sparrow was sleeping peacefully. The instant his hand touched the birdcage, Zhen Li saw a faint energy ball soak into the birdcage.

Zhen Li understood. The birdcage was like the phone, only a vehicle for the System's power. The important thing wasn't the vehicle; it was the power Yu Hua had removed! If Yu Hua could take away Yuan Luori's vision link ability, then naturally he could also reassign it.

And now, he had put the sleeping sparrow in the new vision linking birdcage, and he was shutting the trunk!

Zhen Li's heart trembled fiercely as the trunk lid came down. Was Yuan Luori...still all right?

After closing the trunk, Yu Hua handed Zhen Li a piece of paper. This paper was identical to the the public relations script that You Zhengping had given him before, but the writing was different. If Zhen Li burned or tore this paper along with the public relations script one day, no one would suspect the contents of this paper. They would think it was the public relations script.

But the first sentence written on this paper was: *Take the birdcage after we eat.*

Afterwards came Yu Hua's orders for Zhen Li. He wanted Zhen Li to use the sparrow to send Yuan Luori some information so that Yuan Luori wouldn't be unprepared and take Lian Yufan for a normal person and speak out of turn.

Zhen Li memorized the contents and carefully put this paper together with the public relations statement from before, then put them into his pocket.

They didn't get back into the car. Yu Hua stood leaning against the car, looking towards the police bureau's gates, quietly waiting for You Zhengping to come out. There was a hint of gloom in his eyes.

Zhen Li couldn't understand the great master's despondence, but he could see how important You Zhengping was to him. In spite of himself, he asked, "Director Yu, why do you need to go to so much trouble? Really, you could very easily..."

He didn't know how to express his idea. Zhen Li thought that Yu Hua was the mighty and unrivaled clearer. With his strength, even the System had to give way to avoid conflict. That being the case, why did Yu Hua had to go to such pains to conceal his identity. In reality, couldn't he openly work with the Protectors, or even order the Protectors to do things with no problem?

"Because I'm only an ordinary person," Yu Hua answered.

He had spent fifteen years in this world as an ordinary person without powers or items. Relying only on the body and intelligence of an ordinary person, he had studied, worked, married, bought an apartment, lived a commonplace but peaceful life. He had gone to sleep every day with no need to worry that someone might try to kill him while he slept. When he opened his eyes, there was no need to worry about whether he could survive the next world.

He lived steadily and practically. The System's assignments, the arrival of the levelers, for Yu Hua, these were temporary deviations of his peaceful life from its orbit. When he had eliminated the levelers threatening this world, gotten rid of the System, his powers would vanish. Then Yu Hua would once again be an ordinary person, and the Protectors would retire, each finding new work. Everything would return to its original orbit, just like before.

If anyone knew his identity, even when the dust settled, he might still be unable to return to his original orbit, losing the tranquility of the last fifteen years.

In the same way, if he knew You Zhengping's identity, he would inevitably have dealings with the Protection Organization and perhaps protect them. That way, he could also lose his original life.

He was an ordinary person. He could only be an ordinary person. He had to be an ordinary person.

Yu Hua opened his palm, then tightly closed it, as if using all his strength to grasp his sole obsession.

—

As soon as they came into the restroom, You Zhengping pushed Lian Yufan against a wall and angrily said, "Why did you keep those pants? Why didn't you throw away something that could expose your identity like this? Even if you had a reason for keeping them, you still shouldn't wear them at random!"

"I deliberately threw them in among my clothes," Lian Yufan said sternly in the face of You Zhengping's fury. "I wanted to make myself choose these pants to wear at random, so I might wear them any time."

"What are you counting on? Counting on them to reveal your identity?" You Zhengping said.

“Yes!” Lian Yufan said firmly. “I’m counting on the fact that they can reveal my identity at any time, reveal that I was the Protector at the amusement park that day!”

Cen Xiao stood to one side with his arms crossed. He was calmer than the lovesick You Zhengping. Pulling Captain You away, he said to Lian Yufan, “Why do you have to run that risk?”

“Because there’s still a Destroyer out there whose identity we don’t know, hiding in some unknown place!” Lian Yufan said. “That day in the amusement park, everyone saw how powerful the black-cloaked man was. Ask yourselves, if we faced him head-on, would we be able to stand up to him for a single battle?”

The two of them were silent. Cen Xiao thought about it for a while, then said, “If we understand him ahead of time and set traps, concentrate our forces, we may have hope.”

Lian Yufan said, “You say we need to understand him, but right now he’s in hiding and we’re out in the open. I can’t relax this way. So I kept these pants, which can clearly identify me. As soon as someone notices there’s something wrong with these pants and thinks that I may be a Protector, then he might be the black-cloaked man.”

“You want to use yourself as bait? That’s dangerous,” Cen Xiao said.

“I know it’s dangerous, but if I can make him slip up, I believe it’s worth it,” Lian Yufan said firmly.

“I accept your explanation, but why did you keep flashing those pants around in front of Yu Hua just now?” You Zhengping said, clenching his teeth. “He’s so attentive, he’ll definitely recognize those as my pants. Are you trying to bring about a crisis in my household?”

You Zhengping couldn’t tell his comrade in arms that his husband had lately been indulging in revenge dramas about wives tearing apart their husbands and he was afraid these pants would bring about a murder case.

“It’s precisely because he’s attentive that I made him look,” Lian Yufan said. “The investigation is over, but I’ve still been unable to let go of my suspicions of Yu Hua. Today really was a coincidence, but I was using my movements to attract his notice just now, and if he doesn’t notice, then there’s a problem!”

“You’re pretty persistent. So why did you agree to change pants?” Cen Xiao held back You Zhengping, who was angry enough to start throwing punches.

After putting on the new black pants, Lian Yufan said, “Because the difference in color is very obvious. If he doesn’t mention it after coming home, then he’s hiding something.”

He left, wearing the new pants, and Cen Xiao took You Zhengping after him.

“I know what he’s doing is very disturbing for you,” Cen Xiao said, consoling, “but there’s some sense in it. Why don’t we cooperate with him and try one more time?”

If they tried one more time, his household might collapse... You Zhengping couldn’t tell Cen Xiao that Yu Hua was currently in a paranoid state of mind; everyone looked like an adulterer to him.

Anyway, Lian Yufan had already walked out of the police bureau. He went up to Yu Hua and politely said, “Boss, Director Yu, I’m sorry for making you wait.”

You and Cen came running over right after him. You Zhengping nervously kept his eyes on Yu Hua, not knowing whether he should hope he noticed the pants or hope he didn’t notice.

But Yu Hua paid no attention to Lian Yufan. He looked down at his phone and said, “Where are we going to eat? What are we eating?”

“Let’s eat at a seafood stall!” Zhen Li suggested. “On a summer evening, you should eat seafood and barbecue and drink some iced beer.”

It was the beginning of June, so even at night it was warm. Eating indoors was in fact kind of stuffy.

The five of them accepted President Zhen’s proposal and went to a night market’s food stalls, chose one, sat down, and ordered quite a lot of high-calorie food. Of the five of them three were special ability users who weren’t afraid of getting fat, one was Zhen Li with his alternate dimension stomach, and only Yu Hua persisted in not using special abilities to consume food, persisted in relying on his body’s digestion, persisted in using exercise to maintain the physique that fascinated You Zhengping. He was worried about getting fat and couldn’t eat a lot.

Everyone ordered a pile of skewers and seafood and gorged themselves, while Yu Hua reservedly took a vegetable roll and ate it slowly. The others held up large glasses of beer, but Yu Hua still had to drive and only asked for a cup of plain water.

“Hey!” Lian Yufan “accidentally” dropped a crayfish on his pants, attracting Yu Hua’s attention.

Cen Xiao and You Zhengping bent their heads and ate wildly, deliberately not looking at Lian Yufan. Zhen Li gave his new director a napkin and said, “How lucky that the pants are black. You should be able to wash it off.”

Hearing the word “black,” Yu Hua didn’t comment. He elegantly picked up some roasted enoki mushrooms and put them in his mouth, pretending he hadn’t heard.

Lian Yufan’s suspicions became even stronger. He said, “Director Yu, are there wipes in your car? I want to try rubbing it off.”



Yu Hua sighed. He had convinced himself to pretend not to have seen, pretend not to know, but Lian Yufan kept provoking him, and he truly was having a hard time bearing it.

“I didn’t bring any wipes,” Yu Hua said calmly. “Director Yuan, I remember you were wearing light gray pants before. Why are you wearing black ones now?”

“What? Oh, that’s right, I’ve just noticed you’ve changed your pants. When did that happen?” Zhen Li asked belatedly, as the only person who wasn’t in the know.

“Oh, I noticed at the police bureau that there was a stain on my pants, so I borrowed a pair from Officer You,” Lian Yufan said.

The originally restrained Yu Hua suddenly picked up You Zhengping’s glass of beer and drained it in one gulp. Looking directly at Lian Yufan, he said, “Then he must have borrowed them from Cen Xiao, because those aren’t his pants. I buy all of his clothes, and I didn’t buy those.”

You Zhengping put down the lamb skewer he had been chewing on and stared blankly at Yu Hua.

“Oh, I see,” Lian Yufan said, not giving up. “I thought they were Officer You’s. We’re about the same height and build. At the police bureau just now, he said he also has a pair of light gray pants like mine.”

“Now that is a coincidence.” Yu Hua refilled the glass and gulped down a big mouthful of beer.

“Stop drinking, your alcohol tolerance isn’t high.” You Zhengping was getting more and more panicked. He took Yu Hua’s hand, keeping him from drinking anymore.

Yu Hua held You Zhengping’s hand in response. His face was slightly red from the stimulus of the alcohol. With eyes that were slightly hazy from tipsiness, he looked at You Zhengping as though waiting for him to speak.

“I...”

You Zhengping was about to speak when he saw Yu Hua kiss the hand he was holding tightly and gently say, “How about I go learn embroidery?”

You Zhengping: “?”

“I can’t buy you limited edition pants, but when I’ve learned embroidery, I can embroider a different design on all your pants. Each will be unique,” Yu Hua said drunkenly.

Lian Yufan, Cen Xiao, and Zhen Li: “...”

They’d had enough!

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Author's Note:

Lian Yufan: I have a question. Why is it that every time I investigate Yu Hua's identity, I get force-fed dog food?

Cen Xiao: Even if you don't investigate, you still have to eat it. Get used to it.

## CHAPTER 33

Lian Yufan's thought process was simple. There were only two possibilities for Yu Hua's identity. One was Destroyer. If he was a Destroyer, Yu Hua couldn't really have fainted at the amusement park that day, and he would have noticed the pants the handsome uncle Protector was wearing; perhaps You Zhengping's identity had already been exposed. If this were the case, in order to conceal his identity, even if he clearly saw Lian Yufan's attempts, Yu Hua would still act as though nothing were the matter, pretending he was blind and didn't see anything wrong with the pants.

The other possibility was that Yu Hua really was in fact innocent. Based on his investigation of Yu Hua, Lian Yufan had concluded that he was an extremely attentive person. He would already have noticed the receipt, and the fact that Lian Yufan's pants were in fact You Zhengping's. Under those circumstances, how could an ordinary person not get angry? How could he not make a scene? No man could hold out.

As for whether You Zhengping's marriage would fracture from this probing or how You Zhengping should deal with this situation, that was outside the scope of Lian Yufan's jurisdiction.

This was the sort of person Lian Yufan was. During actual combat exercises, in order to accomplish the mission, he could shoot the hostages or his teammates "dead." He was rational to the utmost, and also unfeeling to the utmost. Even though he had been lectured by Director Xiao, he still couldn't stand the sight of You Zhengping's clingy behavior.

Lian Yufan thought that a Protector had to put everything at the back of his mind. Love? Marriage? Family?

Sorry, Protectors didn't have a right to those.

Cen Xiao was sitting next to Lian Yufan. He raised his glass to liven up the atmosphere. "We didn't have anything to do with each other before, but for all sorts of events, we've become connected. While the events themselves are a little awkward, it's still a wonderful kind of fate. A toast to our fate!"

As he spoke, Cen Xiao's other hand was under the table. He stuck out his index finger and fiercely poked Lian Yufan's thigh.

Cen Xiao's ability was fire. It was the most commonplace and also the strongest and most difficult to deal with power. Heat concentrated at his fingertip, burning Lian Yufan's skin. The smell of burning flesh was covered up by the mixed smells of the food stalls.

"!!!" Lian Yufan used all his willpower to force down the pain of his leg being burned, and he also had to force himself to raise a glass and touch glasses with everyone else. His facial muscles began to twist.

Seeing him gulping down the beer, Cen Xiao relaxed his finger and took a lighter out of his pocket. He held it in his hand and absent-mindedly played with it.

Lian Yufan saw the lighter now lit, now extinguished, and understood Cen Xiao's threat. He didn't dare to mention the pants again. He put his head down and drank.

Yu Hua's performance was flawless. While he had openly revealed that he was somewhat jealous, he hadn't lost his temper in front of his new colleague. He had chosen a gentle and even sweet way to resolve this matter, displaying the intelligence and self-restraint of a grown-up person.

There was nothing for Lian Yufan to probe. Everyone drank together until after 11 PM. When the crowd at the night market was gradually thinning out, everyone had had enough to eat and drink and went home.

Yu Hua, who had been planning not to drink, had broken his rule, so there was no one to drive. Cen Xiao, Lian Yufan, and Zhen Li took a taxi home, while You Zhengping and Yu Hua called a substitute driver.

Because of Cen Xiao's special ability, alcohol dispersed as soon as it entered his system. His alcohol tolerance was bottomless. He was the most sober person present. He first saw Zhen Li off home, then went with Lian Yufan to the new apartment he had rented.

Lian Yufan's apartment wasn't far from Cen Xiao's house. The two of them got out of the taxi together.

When they got out, it was already midnight. Cen Xiao saw there were no people around and warned, "Stop harping on about it. You Zhengping found a husband to take care of him and attend to his needs, and that's not easy. It's a hard-earned blessing. You're free to suspect Yu Hua, but please don't test their relationship like this. Please choose some gentler and more subtle methods of observation."

"A hard-earned blessing?" Lian Yufan's hands were in his pockets. He looked at Cen Xiao quietly in the night. "You think people like us have any blessings to speak of? Or rather, insisting on choosing to marry, is that to satisfy your own demands, or can you actually give another person a real family? In the past, how many Protectors' relatives have died violent deaths? Have you looked at the numbers?"

“...Yu Hua and You Zhengping are different.” Cen Xiao didn’t know how to refute Lian Yufan. Apart from You Zhengping, who had gotten married because he’d been forced on a blind date by his family, the rest of their squad had never even dated. It wasn’t because they didn’t have the buds of those sorts of feelings, it was because they didn’t dare.

Precisely because they didn’t dare themselves, they especially admired and envied You Zhengping’s courage and wanted to protect that love. Seeing the couple on good terms, seeing You Zhengping happily flinging dog food around every day, it was as though they were seeing their own future.

But Lian Yufan didn’t think like this. He coldly said, “What’s the difference? Do you really think I don’t know why he got married? You Zhengping can’t control his special ability. Yu Hua is merely his stabilizer. Do you really believe in that family member protection policy Director Xiao was talking about? Don’t joke! Director Xiao is afraid that Yu Hua will leave You Zhengping after learning about his identity, and You Zhengping’s special ability will be unstable again, and we’ll lose a powerful soldier!”

“Your way of thinking about these things is too extreme, too utilitarian,” Cen Xiao rebutted, frowning.

Lian Yufan shook his head. His views were different from Cen Xiao’s. Neither could convince the other. The two of them parted on bad terms.

Meanwhile, the melancholy husbands returned home with the help of the substitute driver. You Zhengping led the rather clingy Yu Hua through the door, then helped him change his shoes and clothes.

Yu Hua didn’t smoke and rarely drank. His alcohol tolerance was average. You Zhengping knew that his husband perhaps wasn’t drunk to the point of being unable to look after himself. It was only that he was tipsy and wanted to act childish, for once being unreasonable with the alcohol acting on his emotions.

It had always been Yu Hua taking care of You Zhengping to the point that he couldn’t look after himself. You Zhengping had rarely served others and wasn’t very practiced at it.

Fortunately, he was strong enough. He easily carried the tall and sturdy Yu Hua to bed over his shoulder. Showering wasn’t exactly possible. He could get a wet towel and wipe Yu Hua’s face.

You Zhengping arranged Yu Hua on the bed, got up, and was about to go into the bathroom when Yu Hua grabbed his wrist.

“Where are you going?” Yu Hua asked, eyes fixed on You Zhengping as though after he was going to run away.

“To get a wet towel. Look at you, your face is covered in sweat,” You Zhengping said. “You’ll be more comfortable sleeping when I’ve wiped your down.”

You Zhengping poured some water for Yu Hua to rinse his mouth with. Eyes fixed on him, Yu Hua obediently rinsed. His mouth felt a good deal fresher.

“Good.” Imitating how Yu Hua had taken care of him before, You Zhengping stroked his hair.

Yu Hua didn’t fuss anymore. He watched You Zhengping go into the bathroom.

When You Zhengping got there, he stared blankly at the towel rack.

Yu Hua did things in an orderly manner. The towels were divided into face towels, body towels, feet towels, and hair towels. Furthermore, You Zhengping and Yu Hua’s towels were separate. There were eight types of towel altogether in eight different colors, which each got washed and disinfected and hung up neatly on the towel rack. When You Zhengping got up to shower, Yu Hua would give him one or two towels and tell him which was for what, and You Zhengping could blindly follow the directions.

But today, Yu Hua was drunk for once, and You Zhengping looked in despair at the eight towels that he couldn’t tell apart. What now? Which one was for wiping your face? Which one was Yu Hua’s?

You Zhengping thought that if he mistakenly took one of the body or hair towels, that would be all right, but if he managed to take a foot towel, then when Yu Hua woke up in the morning and saw, wouldn’t he be angry enough to wash his face right off?

“Never mind, my chances are two out of eight, it’s not so bad.” You Zhengping pointed a finger at the towels and counted off: “Where I point is where I pick, and I pick you<sup>14</sup>!”

He picked the towel that the “you” fell on, quickly soaked it in warm water, and wrung it out. He went back to the bedroom with the towel and saw Yu Hua struggling with a needle over You Zhengping’s pajamas, which had been put at the head of the bed.

You Zhengping: “...”

While he had been picking a towel, Yu Hua had already embroidered the letters “YH” on his pajamas in ordinary cotton thread.

Yu Hua looked at the “YH” from the left and from the right and felt satisfied with it. He rubbed the letters with his fingers. He gazed at the letters with deep affection, as though looking at You Zhengping himself.

“Ah!” You Zhengping sighed lengthily, went over to Yu Hua holding the towel in both hands, and wiped his face for him.

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<sup>14</sup> 点到谁就是谁就是你! - a counting game; I considered and rejected numerous English counting games as substitutes. Unsurprisingly this is a very culturally specific phenomenon.

You Zhengping's movements weren't very practiced and he used a little too much strength. Luckily Yu Hua was very well-behaved. He lifted his head and submitted to having his forehead, temples, eyes, ears, nose, mouth, carotid artery, and other important areas wiped. He exposed his softest parts to You Zhengping, calmly placing his life in his husband's hands.

You Zhengping changed the water several times, roughly wiping Yu Hua's chest, belly, limbs, limbs, and other vital places, at the same time helping Yu Hua change into his pajamas.

When he was finished with all of this, You Zhengping's forehead was covered in sweat. He said to Yu Hua, "Go to sleep, I'll go shower."

"Okay." Yu Hua nodded obediently.

Seeing how docile Yu Hua was being, You Zhengping's heart suddenly felt soft. He was used to being taken care of by Yu Hua and enjoyed the feeling of his daily life being attended to. This time, his first time seeing Yu Hua somewhat weak and in need of someone to take care of him, You Zhengping felt glad.

You Zhengping often had a fearful feeling that he loved Yu Hua, needed Yu Hua, each and every bit of his life was occupied by Yu Hua, and away from Yu Hua, he might not even be able to pick up his own chopsticks. You Zhengping thought that in terms of strength he was rather powerful, but in mental terms, Yu Hua was far more orderly than he was.

Now that Yu Hua was as soft as a newborn kitten, constantly clinging to him, disrupting the regular pattern of their life, what he felt wasn't irritation, but the happiness of being depended on.

You Zhengping showered quickly. When he came out, he saw that Yu Hua wasn't asleep. He was hugging You Zhengping's pajamas, not letting go.

"Why don't you give those to me?" You Zhengping pulled without being able to snatch them.

"They're mine." Yu Hua stubbornly clutched at the clothes he had embroidered his name on.

You Zhengping thought about it, then took a set of clothes from the wardrobe, a plain t-shirt and long pants. He gave them to Yu Hua. "Let's switch."

Yu Hua did indeed put down the pajamas. He picked up a needle and started to embroider the new clothes. He wasn't practiced at it and his technique was lacking. But luckily Yu Hua was earnest and careful, and "YH" wasn't any sort of difficult design. Using ordinary cotton thread, he could embroider it quite neatly.

You Zhengping put on his pajamas and noticed that the places Yu Hua was embroidering were very circumspect. On the pants, he chose the inside of the leg and the inside of the waistband.

On the shirt it was the underarm. All of them were places where you wouldn't see it if you didn't look closely.

Though he was drunk enough to be a little willful, Yu Hua was still rather reserved. He hadn't embroidered the letters on the chest.

When he was finished embroidering, he touched the pant leg in satisfaction and smiled faintly.

You Zhengping saw Yu Hua's movements and felt a little hesitant. He drew close, put his head on Yu Hua's arm, and quietly closed his eyes.

Yu Hua naturally hugged You Zhengping and the clothes together and patted his husband's shoulder. He quietly said, "Let's sleep."

But You Zhengping opened his eyes in the dark and confidently said, "While you were doing your general cleanup these past few days, you saw the receipt and the label, right?"

Both of them had gone through rigorous training and could see in the dark as clearly as though it were day. All the same, they had chosen to wait until the lights were off to speak openly. Night was like a natural protection that could hide countless secrets and breed endless courage.

"I saw." Yu Hua hugged You Zhengping tighter, his words containing a double meaning.

So what if he was a Protector? When Yu Hua had eliminated the System, the Protectors could also attain peaceful and happy lives. They wouldn't have to shoulder this sort of fate anymore.

"Why didn't you ask me about it?" You Zhengping asked.

Yu Hua said, "In fact, there are only the following possibilities. First, you're not very careful. You ruined the pants and were worried I'd regret the money. After all, our finances have been a little tight recently. You didn't want me to worry, so you secretly bought an identical pair. That's normal.

"Second, you and Cen Xiao often work together and often swap clothes. Your builds are similar, and it's normal for you to accidentally wear the wrong clothes. After putting on the wrong pants, Cen Xiao thought he had gotten them dirty and bought a new pair to make it up to you. You didn't make a big deal of it, just tossed the receipt and the label somewhere. That's also normal.

"Third, the simplest, you don't like frugally wearing pants that won't be washed clean, but you like the color, style, and fit of the pants, so you bought new ones."

Hearing Yu Hua thinking of excuses for him, You Zhengping buried his head deep in his husband's embrace. Yu Hua was too good. Didn't even need You Zhengping to think of reasons. He came up with three options for him, and You Zhengping just needed to pick one.

Yu Hua didn't even ask him which reason it was. Instead, he asked, "Have you been uneasy about the TV dramas I've been watching lately?"

"You noticed?" You Zhengping nodded, his soft hair rubbing against Yu Hua's chest.

"All your thoughts are written on your face. How could I not guess?" Yu Hua said. "I was randomly watching dramas about husband and wife relationships. When I'd watched them, I thought they were ridiculous. What kind of normal life is that for a couple? The dramas about mother-in-laws bullying their daughter-in-laws are more realistic."

"Are you going to watch that next?" You Zhengping thought that was a scary image.

"No, I'm planning to understand something of the internet celebrity circle, the variety show circle, and the entertainment circle," Yu Hua said. "President Zhen got on the popular searches today. The studio's future course of development will certainly be connected to this. This is a knowledge blind spot for me. I'll have to understand it from several aspects."

Hearing him constantly talk about his future plans for the studio, You Zhengping couldn't help thinking, it would be a good thing if there were no Destroyers, and Zhen Li really was a minor entrepreneur, Yuan Luori an employee with potential signed by the studio, and Lian Yufan an irritating colleague. And himself really an insignificant auxiliary police officer, patrolling on his motor scooter every day, stopping when he passed by Yu Hua's office building, drinking a mouthful of water and lifting his head to look at the floor Yu Hua worked on, his mind quickly wandering away from his work.

Yu Hua went on, "My new colleague today is really obnoxious. He kept trying to spoil our relationship. He must be jealous of you or me."

"Hm?" You Zhengping raised his head and saw that Yu Hua's expression was serious.

"There are some people who are jealous of others for things that they themselves can't have, or rather, can't do. They think everyone is like them, unable to attain happiness," Yu Hua said.

You Zhengping blinked, remembering each time Lian Yufan had gotten the better of him at the nationwide competition with his reasoning grades. But You Zhengping hadn't been jealous of Lian Yufan. You Zhengping had followed his heart to make decisions every time.

You Zhengping thought, following Yu Hua's theory, was Lian Yufan actually jealous of him? Why would he be jealous? Lian Yufan had been the one to get first place.

"He kept mentioning the pants, so I was mad," Yu Hua said frankly.

"Oh, no wonder you broke a rule and drank," You Zhengping said. "Weren't you drunk? Why is your train of thought so clear now?"



Yu Hua said, "A little drunk, but not totally out of control, either."

Yu Hua hadn't used his abilities or his power to resist the alcohol. His performance had been authentic. He had wanted to act a little childish, to force You Zhengping to take care of him. In the dark, he had gradually recovered his intellect.

"Are you going to keep squabbling over the pajamas with me?" You Zhengping poked Yu Hua's chest.

"I wanted you to cheer me up," Yu Hua said boldly. "I'm unhappy. You have to cheer me up."

"Yes, yes, I will, I will!" You Zhengping shifted positions, hugging Yu Hua's head. "I'm a little happy."

"I have a bit of headache." Yu Hua pinched the bridge of his nose. "Ordinarily I'm asleep by eleven, and now it's nearly one."

"Then hurry up and sleep," You Zhengping said.

"No." Yu Hua squeezed his wrist. "I don't want to sleep today."

Having missed the ordinary time to go to sleep, not only were you not sleepy, you instead became more clear-headed. Forcing yourself to sleep would make it very hard to fall asleep. The best solution was suitable exercise.

After exercising with Yu Hua for a while, You Zhengping fell deeply asleep. He'd been uneasy lately and hadn't been sleeping well. Now, having had something to drink and spoken openly with his husband, his feelings had eased a great deal, and he slept very soundly.

But Yu Hua was of the type that couldn't fall asleep until he had completely digested alcohol. He stayed lying down for a while, heard his husband sleeping deeply, then got up and went to the study. He opened today's desk calendar page and wrote in his diary.

*—XX/XX/XX, Indulged for once today and had some beer.*

*I've always done my best to avoid using substances that can easily lead to addiction, such as cigarettes and alcohol, including coffee, tea, and so on. Products like that would somewhat stimulate the nerves and disturb my peaceful life.*

*But sometimes, enjoying a glass can have its appeal.*

*Xiao You spent ages choosing and still ended up choosing that foot towel. Fortunately, I washed and disinfected all the towels this morning. I've always washed things carefully, so there's no need to worry too much.*

*From this, it's clear that Xiao You's luck is really bad. That makes sense. If he had good luck, he wouldn't have run into me on his first blind date and from then on been tied up with me, gradually drawn in by my arts.*

*But my luck is good. That was my first and probably only blind date. In my peaceful life plan, I didn't make space for another person. I just wanted to work a conventional job, abide by the social order, pass an indifferent and normal life like every normal person. But on that blind date, which was like an assignment, I grasped that fleeting color.*

*He's open and sincere, accepts everything about me without reservation, my obsessions, my jealousy, the desire for control that even I can't accept. He takes all the adversity with a smile and sincerely feels that it's a blessing.*

*If thinking of an excuse to trick me with will upset him, then I'll help him think of a reason. If Director Lian troubles him, then I'll...*

Yu Hua paused. He was silent for a long time before finally writing a line.

*—Forget it. Then I'll make work unpleasant for my new colleague.*

—

Yuan Luori at the moment: I'm not only nearly-sighted, I'm blind! Help!

Zhen Li: Didn't you say I was supposed to take the cage when we finished eating skewers? Great master, you got drunk and forgot to give me the cage. What about the cage?!

The sparrow in the cage: *zzz, sleeping serenely.*

Lian Yufan: *entirely unknowing, has just escaped a calamity.*

## CHAPTER 34

Yuan Luori looked in the mirror, pulling at the loose shirt he was wearing. It felt uncomfortable.

He was an assassin, a killer. He preferred dressing in dark, skintight, flexible clothing that was convenient for hiding, not this kind of colorful shirt that showed his waist when he lifted his arms and his shoulders when he put them down. With a loose shirt like this, it was easy to let a corner trail out if you were hiding in the shadows. No assassin would wear it.

The pants were all right, black and tight, easy to move in, though there were tears in the knees and thighs that showed skin. Yuan Luori tried to cover up a few times without success. He had to let it go.

It didn't matter. This was only temporary. For the sake of leaving the Protection Organization's cage, wearing some unsuitable clothes meant nothing!

Yuan Luori had had enough of it here. Each day it was sleep, eat, be questioned, memorize all kinds of laws and statutes and ethics and norms. Even when he was washing his face, the

speaker in the room would be playing “Ideological and Moral Education,” all about respecting the old and cherishing the young, fraternal affection, observing the social order, observing social morality, establishing proper values, having a healthy state of mind...

Wait! Stop! He couldn't think about it again. If he thought about it again, he'd have it memorized!

The Protection Organization had gone to great pains in order to put Yuan Luori, a Destroyer with a poisonous prior record, into ordinary circulation in society. Apart from questioning him every day, they played the speeches of important leaders even when he was asleep. It was simply the brainwashing method of education.

To force Yuan Luori to learn of his own volition, the Protection Organization had promised that once he tested up to standard, he could leave to carry out the mission of an informer. The test was separated into written and oral, including all kinds of legal common sense, moral common sense, and the analysis of social phenomena. After going through this test, Yuan Luori could have gone to be a public servant.

Yuan Luori had only to think of leaving the Protection Organization's base and helping his idol the clearer, and his heart would fill with motivation. Levelers struggled on the verge of death. Those who survived all had some particular stand-out aspects. If he focused the power of his survival instinct on studying, he was really unstoppable. In only half a month, he got a high grade!

The Protection Organization indicated that he couldn't be proud of these grades. If Yuan Luori's present plight were judged based on *Penal Law*, he was being released on parole for good behavior. But he had to reinforce his studies, constantly consolidate all the knowledge he had learned before. Within a year of joining the studio, he would have monthly, midterm, and end of term tests. If he failed to meet the minimum standard on one test, then his informer's identity would be revoked, and he would only be able to return once again to his informer's position when he tested 75% or above.

According to *Criminal Law*, releasing poison in a public area without bringing about dangerous consequences carried a fixed-term sentence of three to ten years. Yuan Luori had not caused major human casualties. Adding in that he was willing to become an informer and cooperate with the organization's work, they had discretion to handle him leniently.

The Protection Organization had discussed it and resolved to have Yuan Luori take tests for three years. After three years of force-fed learning, presumably he would have become a person willing to observe rules and regulations.

Yuan Luori was driven to the studio by a car from the Protection Organization. The person who drove him was Lian Yufan. Lian Yufan was also his custodian, responsible for watching and guiding Yuan Luori.

Lian Yufan asked, “How are your eyes? Have you experienced blindness again?”

“Hmph.” Yuan Luori disdained to speak to Lian Yufan. He was the great master clearer’s subordinate. He had been forced to undertake a collaboration with the Protectors, but his soul was free. He looked down on the Protectors.

Lian Yufan: “...”

Fine. If you do go blind, no one will find a doctor for you.

After the team building event (eating barbecue), Yu Hua had found a way to give Zhen Li the birdcage, and Zhen Li had used the bird cage’s vision to pass a few orders to Yuan Luori:

*First, don’t let the Protection Organization know that Yu Hua is aware of special ability users. The reason isn’t important. Just don’t mention it.*

*Second, the great master will secretly monitor the studio’s progress. Yuan Luori should listen to Zhen Li’s orders. If he does well, he might have a chance to see the great master.*

*Third, Yu Hua’s memory has been wiped. He doesn’t remember anymore that Zhen Li and Yuan Luori are special ability users. In the future, treat Yu Hua like an ordinary person who doesn’t know anything.*

*Fourth, now that you don’t have a System, you’re an ordinary person, but you’ve attained your freedom. Live well, strive to improve, take root in reality, be an ordinary, hard-working, mediocre (importantly: resigned to your fate) social animal, and learn to enjoy (be forced into enjoying) one final world.*

After receiving instructions, Yuan Luori became a good deal better-behaved. Wearing the glasses of the appropriate prescription that the Protection Organization had provided for him, he made a concentrated effort to study, and at last once again saw the light of day ten days later.

Wearing attractive, fashionable modern clothes, he walked into the studio. The organization of the inside of the studio had changed.

The approximately 300 square meters of space were broken up by cubicles, separating out four little partitions less than 10 meters square. Zhen Li, Yuan Luori, Lian Yufan, and Yu Hua could work separately without bothering each other. The remaining 250 squares meters of space was entirely used for livestreaming. A huge mirror had once again been set up, and better and clearer livestreaming equipment had been arranged in a suitable position. There was also a phone to screen setup to throw the livestream image onto a big screen, to make it more convenient for everyone to directly watch the outcome of the livestream and follow the barrage comments.

This had all been planned by Yu Hua over the last few days. He had been considering how to engage in a battle of wits with the Protectors, worrying about his marriage, disdaining Yuan

Luori, creating a purchase plan and a refitting plan according to the studio's particular qualities. After returning to work, his first order of business had been to reequip the office to have it all fitted up before the day Yuan Luori tested up to standard.

Seeing the tiny office, Lian Yufan couldn't resist wiping away sweat and letting out a hot and bitter tear.

He, the mighty Protector district captain, public relations director of a studio of Destroyer informers, had spent ten days undertaking the work of redecorating!

Yu Hua was too stingy. To save money, they had to do all the work themselves. He couldn't stand to hire decorators. He'd gone online and bought material that was high in formaldehyde content but durable, borrowed some tools relying on connections from his previous job, given each person at the studio a mask, and the president and two directors had transformed into decorators and performed a large-scale construction project in the three-hundred square meter space.

He had rationally and scientifically assigned everyone work, handed everyone a set of tools, clearly written out the price of the decorating tools, and requested that everyone sign an agreement that if they damaged the tools or building materials, they would pay out of their own pockets in compensation.

Captain Lian Yufan had been up mountains and down into the sea, been stabbed and shot, studied the designs of precision weapons, understood the arrangements of battle formations, learned strategic distributions through practical experience, done fieldwork solving cases through inference. Even if there came a day when the world no longer needed the Protection Organization, given Lian Yufan's personal abilities, countless military and police units would fight over such a talent.

The only thing he hadn't done was decorating.

Yu Hua was different. When he had just gotten married, You Zhengping had produced a big heap of plans for their future apartment. In order to satisfy You Zhengping's every brainwave, Yu Hua had investigated and studied with the designer, gone deep into the building materials market to understand the behavior and price of all kinds of decoration materials. He had kept a close eye on the whole decoration process. During rest periods, he had humbly learned from the designer, and had even taken a hand himself, resulting in practiced decorating abilities.

"Can't we outsource it?" Lian Yufan asked in a state of collapse when he had read his assignment.

In a businesslike manner, Yu Hua took out the studio's financial statement and unfeelingly said, "Due to the fact that the studio is currently short on capital, we are unable to hire many people. I wear several hats. Apart from human resources, I also attend to financial affairs logistics, legal tasks, technology, operations, and other such work. In order to ensure that the studio's

operations are open, fair, and impartial, I've prepared a detailed account. Take a look at the current decorating expenses. Do we have the surplus to hire anyone?"

Lian Yufan's pupils quivered as he asked Zhen Li in disbelief, "The whole studio only has 80,000 yuan in ready money?"

Zhen Li nodded. "That's right. I don't have any money. The platform gives me half the money from the fans' tips, but that money goes to the rent and to pay the two of you. This 80,000 yuan comes from Director Yu to pay for equipment and decorating. It's really too shabby to keep using a phone to livestream. Oh, right, because Director Yu produced the 80,000 yuan, I gave him 5% of the stock."

Lian Yufan took the itemized bill and the transfer of stock ownership form and saw that the 80,000 yuan had been produced under You Zhengping's name, so the 5% of shares was written there in black and white in You Zhengping's name. In other words, You Zhengping was also a named shareholder of this crappy studio; he was Lian Yufan's boss.

Yu Hua explained, "You've met You Zhengping. He's my husband. That officer who's about the same height and wears about the same size pants as you do. This money came from their workplace, and I borrowed his money. Of course I would have him become a shareholder."

Lian Yufan: "..."

Of course he knew where this 80,000 yuan had come from. It came from the 100,000 yuan of his own subsidy that You Zhengping had given Yu Hua under the guise of a reward, using the public security bureau. Yu Hua had used it to invest in the company and tricked the boss out of 5% of the shares.

Lian Yufan remembered that in Yu Hua's psychological consultation records, it mentioned that he had chosen this job because it had a high degree of freedom, and he could make the decisions. The boss was stupid. It would be easy to scoop up the company, turn the studio into his own enterprise.

Then Zhen Li, smiling, said, "Right. Thanks to Director Yu, we've saved a good deal of money. We have to thank Director Yu."

A true example of saying thank you to the scammer after you'd been scammed!

"I can provide money to employ people," Lian Yufan said. Who didn't have a bit of money?

"There we run into the problem of transferring stock ownership," Yu Hua said in a businesslike way. "I personally have a very favorable view of this studio's prospects and I'm unwilling to hand over any of the 45% of the shares that my husband and I hold. As for President Zhen's 55%, President Zhen, if you transfer another 10% or more, then you won't be the certain head of the studio anymore. Are you certain you want to sell shares for the sake of hiring some people? When breaking new ground it's normal to do things yourself."

“Right, and I can’t sell anymore shares. We’ll have investors later. The next step will be to dilute the shares. I can’t go under 55%.” Zhen Li followed Yu Hua’s lead, with “Director Yu is an expert, listen to him” written all over his face.

Was selling 5% of the shares for the sake of 80,000 yuan very wise, then?

Seeing that Lian Yufan still wanted to resist, Yu Hua simply took out the contract that Lian Yufan had been hired with and pointed to the terms in it. “Though our company has hired you as public relations director, these terms clearly state your duties. The last one clearly states, ‘During the entrepreneurial period when staff is scarce, the duties of the public relations director will include but not be limited to all work assigned by the president and shareholders.’ If you won’t participate in the decoration, this company has the right to dismiss you and request that you compensate us for the loss.”

Yu Hua had been the one to draw up the contract. Lian Yufan had signed it without even reading. As a Protector, as a watcher, naturally he wasn’t afraid of Yu Hua pulling tricks with the contract. But Lian Yufan hadn’t expected Yu Hua to turn around and teach him a lesson in the might of official power.

“Are you sure that contract is in accordance with *Labor Law*?” Lian Yufan asked, pointing to the contract.

Yu Hua smiled politely. “During the decorating period, the Zhen Li Studio won’t livestream. President Zhen is losing 1,000 to 5,000 daily in livestream tips. I’m planning on taking ten days to decorate. If the studio’s employees don’t cooperate and the decoration period exceeds my estimates, who will bear the losses? There’s an advertising company that’s inclined to have President Zhen advertise for them, but if they give up on it because President Zhen’s decorating drags on, the loss from a million fans’ advertising fees could come up to a six-digit number. Who will bear that loss?

“If you won’t cooperate with the company’s work, then our poor studio isn’t big enough to contain a venerable deity like you. We’ll ask you to leave and pay proportional compensation. Is there anything wrong with that?

“*Labor Law* provides restraints and protections for both sides. If you don’t take your work seriously in accordance with the contract terms, it shows that you haven’t performed up to standard during your trial period, and we can revoke the employment contract. We’re willing to pay some severance. If you don’t agree, then you can request a labor arbitration.”

Of course, Lian Yufan couldn’t really kick up a fuss with Yu Hua, and there was Zhen Li cooperatively picking up an electric drill and preparing to decorate. What could he do?!

While Yu Hua wasn’t paying attention, he surreptitiously threatened Zhen Li: “As the boss, you can’t just listen to your director. How can you let him wield all the power in the company?”

“But I don’t understand these things.” Zhen Li blinked adorably. “I’ve never done any work like this. Of course it’s better to find a specialist. Yu Hua is an employee I selected very carefully. You can see that he understands everything. What kind of boss wouldn’t want an employee like that? In fact, I don’t have money and I don’t have experience, and now I don’t have special abilities, so shouldn’t I make money to survive in this world? It doesn’t matter if Yu Hua turns me into a figurehead. As long as the studio succeeds and I make money to buy lots of pretty clothes and good food, the rest is meaningless.”

Lian Yufan clenched his teeth. “I don’t care if you’re stupid, but don’t forget your mission!”

“The mission requires expanding my popularity, and Yu Hua does that well, too. You saw me get on the popular searches the other day. People came right away to ask me to advertise for motor scooters. They said that if I posted a video making fun of my error and at the same time promoted their high safety factor scooter, the advertising fees would be high,” Zhen Li said, seeming stupid but in fact making sense. “If you can promote the studio’s fame, then you can order me around, too.”

The subtext was, *If you can’t, then don’t get in the way of Yu Hua’s work, we have to rely on him to get famous.*

Lian Yufan could only resign himself to his fate, pick up a saw, and get to work, but the quality of the tools Yu Hua had borrowed for free really was too poor. It broke after just a few uses.

Lian Yufan had a repairing ability. He had been planning to repair the tool while no one was paying attention, but it was as though Yu Hua had eyes in the back of his head. Each time when a tool had just broken, Yu Hua would float over and sigh. “Another loss to compensate for.”

Over the last few days, Lian Yufan hadn’t done much work and compensated quite a bit of money. He could have gone to the Protection Organization for money, and the organization could have made it up, but how could Lian Yufan feel comfortable speaking up about that? He could only clench his teeth and pay out of his own pocket.

“I suspect that all the tools you’ve borrowed are defective!” Lian Yufan said.

He hadn’t thought that Yu Hua wouldn’t answer very frankly: “Of course they are. Do you think we can borrow good ones for free? And I took that into account calculating the damages. I didn’t make you pay the full price, only half the price.”

These ten days of decoration were ten days of history written in blood and tears for Lian Yufan.

At the end of ten days, he wasn’t tired in body, but mentally he was extremely exhausted, and he had paid quite a lot of money.

When they’d managed to complete the decorating, the whole room smelled of formaldehyde, making Lian Yufan’s head hurt. He criticized Yu Hua for not buying environmentally friendly



materials, and Yu Hua said that the company had no money, they needed to increase income and reduce expenditures. When that was what the company needed, he should be tolerant. Luckily it was summer, so they could open the windows.

Yu Hua used facts to teach Lian Yufan a lesson, give him ample knowledge of the palace intrigues of an office, of what it meant to leave someone dumbstruck with high-sounding reasons.

Having already driven him to this low, Yu Hua still turned to Zhen Li and said in astonishment in a “whisper” that Lian Yufan could hear: “Boss, is there something wrong with Director Lian? He seems like some spoiled rich kid from the social elite, why does he keep hanging around at our company? I’ve bled him for so much money, how can he put up with it?”

Lian Yufan: “...”

*So you know that you’re bleeding me?*

What could Zhen Li say when he was caught in the middle like this? He had to play dumb. “I don’t know. He came here of his own initiative, said he thought our studio had good prospects and wanted to work here. I even refused, but he insisted on coming, said lower wages were fine, so I had to hire him.”

Lian Yufan hadn’t thought of a reason for dropping out of the sky into the studio. A boss didn’t need a reason for hiring someone. He thought that as long as he worked well for Zhen Li, that would be all.

Now, Zhen Li could only make up a reason in the face of Yu Hua’s feigned ignorance to fob off both of them.

“I’d thought he was here to take over the company and would threaten my position in the company, so I’ve been needling him the last few days, trying to force him to retreat in the face of difficulties. But instead he endured it. It’s really very strange. Does he have some goal?” Yu Hua asked.

These words explained why Yu Hua had been openly making life difficult for his new colleague, and also put him in the favorable position of suspecting Lian Yufan’s goal.

Before, it had been Lian Yufan suspecting that Yu Hua was a Destroyer; now it was Director Yu suspecting Director Lian of hatching plots.

Zhen Li turned his head and looked at Lian Yufan, secretly listening with his ears pricked up. Then he looked at Director Yu’s encouraging gaze and tacitly understood how he was supposed to answer.

President Zhen touched his own narrowly rescued features and succumbed. “He must want to pursue me. I can’t think of another reason.”

Yuan Luori wasn't there. He could only protect his flat but quite graceful face by finding someone else to be in a ship with.

Having received a satisfactory answer, Yu Hua said with a faint smile, "Now I understand. I won't needle my new colleague from now on. Before, we were promoting you and Yuan Luori as a ship, and the outcome was bad. How about this? Since the public relations director is interested in you, we'll change ships. During the first livestream after the decorating is over, you can introduce Director Lian to the fans.

"You can use my previous persona wholesale. An elite director who abandoned a high-paying job and came to work at a worthless studio just for the sake of sheltering the beautiful president from the elements.

"When Yuan Luori comes back from having his eyes treated, we can have a love triangle. If the plot is more exciting, the fans will be more enthusiastic. I'll go write a script."

Hearing Yu Hua, Lian Yufan couldn't stand it anymore. He slapped the test and got up. "Director Yu writes such good plots. Why don't you include yourself in them?"

"You heard?" Yu Hua said in "surprise." "That's good. Whether you have that intention or not, please cooperate with the work in accordance with your contract terms. As for me, there's no need for me to take part. I'm a married man. I won't meddle in these affairs of yours."

—

Author's Note:

Yu Hua: You used your authority to bully my Xiao You, so I'll use my authority to bully you. You said that as a Protector, Xiao You had to cooperate with the work. Well, so do you. As a planted agent, you also have to make concessions to achieve your aims and cooperate with the work.

Yu Hua: You insisted on using those pants to pose as a home-wrecker, so I'll make you the third corner in LimingLuori.

Yu Hua: Every rock you bring over, I'll bring it smashing down right on your foot.

Current ranking at the studio: Yu Hua, You Zhengping (without his knowledge has obtained 5% shares and become a leader), Zhen Li, Yuan Luori, Lian Yufan.

Zhen Li (delighted): Before, I was in the worst position, and now I can order two people around, I'm so happy!

Yuan Luori: I've somehow become a minor leader.

Lian Yufan: Would the next Destroyer please hurry up, I can't hold out on my own!

## CHAPTER 35

While You Zhengping was only a patrolling auxiliary policeman in name, when he had no special assignment, he would still patrol along with the main force. This way, he could reasonably conceal his identity.

Their auxiliary police team isn't normally busy, so they had greater maneuverability.

At 11 AM, when You Zhengping finished his routine inspection assignment and returned to the bureau to wait for lunch, he saw Cen Xiao and the other Protectors gathered together, talking and laughing. Even Lian Yufan's group, which had later been incorporated into the squad, was happily getting along with the others, laughing at something unknown.

You Zhengping walked over and said with as much dignity as he could muster, "What are you doing? Our work is lighter than that of other police personnel, but we still can't make such a show of it. It makes a bad impression to get together and loaf around!"

He was after all an auxiliary police squad captain, amounting to being at the leadership level. When Cen Xiao had violated the new regulations by carrying a passenger on the motor scooter, You Zhengping had also been reprimanded. Since then, he had been especially attentive to police conduct and discipline. Even though their positions were different, if they wore these uniforms, they had to assume the corresponding responsibilities.

"We're not," Cen Xiao said, laughing and turning his head. "Boss, come here and watch, it's so much fun! Anyway, we're not slacking off, we're working! Hahaha!"

His unbridled laughter really didn't look like he was working.

"Who are you calling boss? A bandit like you can call me Captain You," You Zhengping said aloofly. "Anyway, it's almost time for the midday break, so I can watch with you."

He came over carrying a cup of water, glancing over as he drank. In an instant, he was startled by the picture on the phone into spraying water all over his teammates's heads.

"Control yourself, Captain You. Don't drink while watching the livestream!" His teammates all wiped their heads.

"Ahem!" You Zhengping quickly put down his cup. The livestream had scared him into splashing water all over the floor. Luckily, he'd been drinking warm water that Yu Hua had put into a thermos mug for him that morning, so it didn't burn anyone.

On the phone's tiny screen, three people were dancing. These three were all very familiar to You Zhengping. Naturally they were Zhen Li, Yuan Luori, and Lian Yufan.

Zhen Li was leading, using his dabbler's skills to teach the two new people.

Zhen Li said, "The next move I'm going to teach you is the foundation of all dance movements. It tests the strength of your back and legs, your flexibility, and your control of your leg muscles."

When he had spoken, he took a striding leap, bent his knees in midair, the muscles at the front of his calves pulled taught. He came down on the ground and slid over it for several meters. During this process, Zhen Li's waist was very supple. He made excellent use of his core strength. His movements throughout had been fluid and natural, his posture very precise.

"Did you see that clearly? The trick is that it's not your knees that touch the ground, it's the muscles at the front of your calves, which protects your knees. Our knees are non-renewable resources. We have to use our muscles to protect our bones and tendons," Zhen Li explained to the other two.

Barrage comments flew by following his move:

[If I saw that right, that move...]

[A sliding kneel, the most precise and excellent sliding kneel to protect yourself in a crisis!]

[Heavens! He's turned the sliding kneel into a cheat code to pass on to the two newbies. President Zhen is too selfless, too touching!]

[Yuan Luori is dancing, he's dancing! Before during the livestreams Yuan Luori sat there not moving like a sculpture, but this time he's participating in learning the sliding kneel (crossed out) the dance movement. He must have been moved by President Zhen's passion!]

[Heavens, how can Luori-xiaogege's waist be so flexible and so attractive? I just had a look at my cat, and Luori-xiaogege's waist is really just like a cat's!]

[Thin waist, long legs, cold and aloof, Luori really is a black cat in person.]

[Yuan Luori is very good-looking, but...]

[Here it comes, Luori-xiaogege's cheat code—looking for his contacts!]

[Yuan Luori: Look at my gorgeous sliding kneel! Oh no, where are my contact lenses? Where have they gone?]

[I was wrong. I thought before that Yuan Luori wouldn't learn dancing with President Zhen because he was reserved, because he thought it was beneath his dignity, because he disdains dancing. Now that I've seen him flailing around over the floor, I realize that Yuan Luori was worried that if his movements were too strong he'd knock out his contact lenses. Director Yu, I'm begging you, buy our Luori-xiaogege some better contact lenses. When I see his misty, helpless gaze, I feel awful.]

[Why are you asking Director Yu and not President Zhen?]

[Because Director Yu can do everything.]

[Because Director Yu is cool and unmoved.]

[Director Yu: Space for rent for a contact lens ad. Look at our adorable and helpless Yuan Luori-xiaogege. Nice Mr. Advertising Company, hurry up and save him!]

[You're all only looking at Director Yuan and President Zhen, what about Director Lian? A beauty with a teardrop beauty mark!]

[A wooden beauty, you mean. What's so interesting about just standing around there? Watching Yuan Luori looking for his contact lenses is cuter.]

[Don't worry, Director Lian will succumb in the end. Didn't Director Yuan just stand around before?]

[What are there so many hot guys in one little studio???)

[It must be because, for the sake of rescuing the studio from the verge of bankruptcy, the directors have to stand up and become idols!]

From outside the livestream image came Yu Hua's cold voice: "Yuan Luori, can't you get used to those contact lenses? You use those daily lenses like hourly lenses. Using up ten or more in one day wastes too much of our starting capital."

"Ordinary mortal, who are you to order me around?" Yuan Luori said staunchly.

So far, he had no idea that Yu Hua was the black-cloaked man, and he thought that all of Yu Hua's memories concerning levelers had been removed. He was only a pitiful wretch who knew nothing. Therefore, Yuan Luori maintained a superior attitude in the studio. Only such an attitude could dispel Lian Yufan's suspicions.

Yuan Luori was of a disposition to see the black-cloaked man as an idol, the Protectors as enemies, the levelers as the same class as him, and ordinary people as mud. If he found out too early that Yu Hua was the black-cloaked man, he would definitely act extremely respectful. Lian Yufan was a planted agent at the studio and would certainly have become suspicious. Yu Hua was currently hiding his identity, and Yuan Luori's aggressive attitude made Lian Yufan dismiss a good deal of his suspicions.

"Fine, I won't order you around," Yu Hua said politely. "But the studio really doesn't have the money to bear the cost of your contact lenses. For now we'll use your base salary for this month to buy lenses. Only if an advertising company chooses you to advertise for them will you get a bit of a commission from the advertising fees, let's say...10%."

When Yu Hua mentioned the commission, Zhen Li indicated in a timely manner that they were going to rest a bit and paused the livestream. He couldn't let the fans hear the contents of Yuan Luori's contract.

“What!” Yuan Luori knew that he was an ordinary person now and could only support himself by earning money. Hearing the huge amount Yu Hua was taking out of the commission, he said in astonishment, “Why should the studio take 90% of the money I earn with my sweat and blood?”

“Here is the contract you personally read and personally signed at the very beginning.” Yu Hua had been prepared. He got out a copy of the contract and passed it to Yuan Luori.

What had Yuan Luori cared then about an ordinary person like Yu Hua? He’d cared even less about laws and contracts. He hadn’t realized that what he had signed with his own hand was an indenture.

Lian Yufan had suffered deeply due to his contract during these past few days. Naturally he understood how important this was. He took Yuan Luori’s contract and fixed his eyes on it to read, saw that it was several times harsher than his own contract, and nearly laughed out loud. Enjoying Yuan Luori’s misery, he said, “According to this contract, within the next ten years, you can only take a ten percent commission from all the money you make for the studio, because the contract says clearly that you aren’t a natural person, you’re a ‘commodity’ meticulously cultivated by the studio. Your face and your name come entirely out of the studio’s operations. All you have to do is make money with your looks and give the studio 90% of it.”

Yuan Luori was no longer the assassin who didn’t abide by the laws. He had gone through the Protection Organization’s demonic training process and had some understanding of various kinds of law. He snatched away the contract and flipped through it. His vision instantly went black.

Not only did he have to hand over 90% of his earnings, he also had to compensate for losses.

If Yuan Luori wanted to break his contract early, he had to compensate the studio for the next ten years’ losses. Yu Hua had written out an extremely complicated formula for calculating losses. The formula used Yuan Luori’s present number of fans and rate of increase of popularity for its calculations. Inserting Yuan Luori’s current hundred-thousand plus fans into the formula, if he broke the contract now, he would have to pay the studio a penalty of over twenty million before he could go engage in other work.

“What kind of crappy contract is this?” Yuan Luori said angrily.

“This contract is entirely in keeping with the laws and regulations. If you have objections, you can go request legal aid,” Yu Hua said with a faint smile. “You would be responsible for the costs of requesting legal aid and for the cost of the lawsuit. During the lawsuit, because you would have caused losses for the studio due to your work, you would still have to pay compensation even if you won. Judging from the current trial periods, the sum of the compensation that you would have to pay would be...over a million.”

Yuan Luori: “...”

Lian Yufan put his hands on Yuan Luori's shoulder. He sighed. "Some people who once looked down on the law now see their disdain turn into a sword to stab them in the heart. Don't use the law to protect yourself if you have another way."

Director Lian seemed sympathetic, but in reality he was laughing inwardly. If he hadn't cultivated a polite false smile as a mask from a young age, he would have been rolling around on the floor laughing by now.

Yu Hua didn't give Director Lian a chance to enjoy himself. After chastising Yuan Luori, he said to Lian Yufan, "Director Lian, why weren't you cooperating with the work during the livestream just now?"

"I'm the public relations director. I'm not going to pander to the crowd with you!" Lian Yufan's smile stiffened. He stood on the same battlefield as Yuan Luori, resisting Yu Hua.

"Oh, very well." Yu Hua looked down and pressed some keys on his calculator. "Owing to Director Lian's lack of cooperation and resulting losses during the livestream, the required compensation is...not much, only three hundred thousand and change."

"What!" Lian Yufan nearly dropped his polite expression. This wasn't how he was going to spend the millions he'd saved through years of frugal living!

"This is the popularity I forecasted for the livestream ahead of time." Yu Hua got out yet another mathematical calculation that an ordinary person couldn't understand anything of. "Since you won't cooperate with the script, you've caused about this number in losses to traffic, and according to your contract..."

"Enough!" Lian Yufan got a headache at the mention of the contract. "It's fine, I'll do it, you're really at the top of the pyramid in capitalism."

Yu Hua said, "You flatter me. I'm only a perfectly ordinary human resources director, of the same rank as the rest of you."

"Aaaah!" Having finished reading the contract, Yuan Luori was so angry he tore the copy into pieces and threw it at Yu Hua.

Yu Hua was sitting at his desk. The scraps of paper fell on his cold and unfeeling face like snowflakes. Upon seeing this, Zhen Li quickly held Yuan Luori back. It seemed like he was pleading on Yu Hua's behalf, but in reality he was worried that the great master would get angry and kill Yuan Luori.

But Yu Hua's temper was very good. After 3,841 worlds, he wouldn't lose his temper over little things like this. He only calmly said, "Director Yuan, you seem to have forgotten your duties as environmental maintenance director. You have to clean up these scraps yourself. If you aren't competent to handle this work, then..."

He looked down and pressed a key on his calculator.

“I’ll sweep it! Can’t I sweep it?!” As soon as he saw the calculator, Yuan Luori’s vision went dark. He even started to regret tearing up the copy of the contract just now.

After a break, the livestream resumed, and the image had changed greatly. Director Yuan had his head down, sweeping, occasionally pressing down on the rims of his eyes to avoid his contact lenses falling out, which he would have to compensate for. Director Yuan, meanwhile, looking annoyed, was learning dance moves with Zhen Li. He was very, very unwilling.

Seeing this image, the barrage comments and the patrolmen’s dining hall instantly filled with merriment.

You Zhengping looked at Lian Yufan’s former teammates and saw them laughing each more cheerfully than the next. He suddenly remembered that Cen Xiao and the others were the same; they also laughed very happily if they saw him make a fool of himself. It was true that it was the happiness of all subordinates to make sport of their superiors in private.

The auxiliary police squad didn’t fit in with the other regular police personnel at the bureau. There was some resistance to this team of sluggish irregulars. Seeing them laughing without restraint, someone came over curiously to look at the phone and saw that they were concentrating all of their attention on watching three young internet celebrities dance. The senior policeman shook his heads involuntarily. He really couldn’t understand today’s young people.

“What’s so interesting about watching them parading themselves around?” a policeman in his forties or fifties said.

Thirteen young auxiliary policemen raised their heads simultaneously, looking at the old policeman in unison. Their gazes startled the old policeman into backing up two steps with his food tray, wondering whether these people would beat up an old man over some “idols.”

While the old policeman stood there uneasily, one of Lian Yufan’s teammates clapped and said, “Right, parading themselves around, that’s the phrase, I’m going to keep that as my screensaver, hahaha!”

Cen Xiao warmly put an arm around this teammate’s shoulders. He blinked and said, “Remember to send me one.”

The barrier between You Zhengping’s squad and Lian Yufan’s squad was thoroughly destroyed in this moment. They were one happy family.

The old policeman truly couldn’t understand these young people. He blankly took his tray to find a place to eat.



Just then, the alarm in the dining hall rang. Everyone immediately put down what they were doing and gathered quickly. This was the highest level of alert. It wouldn't be ringing if there weren't a mass event.

You Zhengping's squad also put away their phones and went to gather at the main entrance.

In less than a minute, the well-trained crowd was standing lined up at the gates of the police bureau. The captain of the criminal police said, "All police personnel who have experience with demolitions cases and those who are thirty years old and under and have perfect scores in sprinting, come with me."

You Zhengping's squad all had excellent physiques. They were the cream of the cream. They quickly followed the captain into the car. In the car, the captain said, "There's been an explosion in the Xuyang District Park. The fire department and the central bureau's demolitions group have already arrived. We're primarily going to assist. Those with experience will go with the demolitions group, the rest will help disperse the crowd."

The Protector squad had come into contact with instruction on all kinds of military weapons. You Zhengping immediately asked some very professional questions, such as whether the bomb was home-made or military issue, what the detonation method was, what the estimated force of the explosion was, and so on.

The criminal police captain looked at You Zhengping. "You're a specialist?"

"I understand a little," You Zhengping said modestly. "Cen Xiao is the authority here."

Cen Xiao was a fire-type special ability user and very interested in all kinds of heat weapons. He was dedicated to combining his special ability with these weapons to make them more powerful. He didn't do so lightly, and if he did, the might was astonishing. If not for the fact that You Zhengping could contain Cen Xiao's attacks with his spaces, it was hard to say who would be captain.

The criminal police captain quickly asked Cen Xiao some relevant questions. Cen Xiao not only answered fluently, he also pointed out the strengths and weaknesses of several kinds of bombs, and the means to respond to them.

"Very good," the criminal police captain said. "When we get to the park, you two come with me. The rest of you, help the armed police pacify the crowds."

The police car drove quickly the whole way and reached its goal in less than half an hour. The park was tightly surrounded by the armed police. Even the criminal police captain wasn't allowed in.

"Why aren't I allowed in?" the captain asked urgently. "During my service, I worked in the demolitions group. I have experience dismantling over twenty bombs."

Someone who seemed to be in charge saw the criminal police captain and You and Cen behind him. He frowned. "You can go in, but you have to sign a confidentiality agreement. No matter what you see, you can't talk about it."

"Yes, sir!" the criminal police captain quickly agreed, then said to You and Cen, "Since you aren't allowed in, you can go..."

"Not need for that. They can come with me," the superior said.

"Yes, Director Xiao!" Seeing that Director Xiao had asked the criminal police captain to sign a confidentiality agreement, You Zhengping and Cen Xiao knew that they didn't need to conceal their identities in front of him.

"What?" The criminal police captain saw these two auxiliary policemen who didn't do any proper work suddenly change entirely in bearing, instantly becoming two stern, well-trained soldiers. This even made the captain, who had over twenty years of experience in police work, feel terrified.

The criminal police captain followed Director Xiao into the park. The park's beautiful scenery had changed into a mess. It had been blown full of holes. There was a small boat floating in the park's manmade lake, with a wailing little boy in it who had a glass bottle tied to him. That little boy was...

Director Xiao said to You and Cen, "I don't know what means the Destroyer used. He can make any item explode. A few leaves fell just now, and this is the state of the park now. This Destroyer is very aggressive. He contacted us directly and told us that if the glass bottle tied to the little boy on the lake explodes, it can destroy everyone and everything within a fifty-meter radius."

This was You and Cen's first time encountering such an aggressive Destroyer, and he had taken a hostage. They felt helpless.

"His voice came through a voice-changing device, and he used a high tech method to disrupt positioning. We can't find where the Destroyer is located," Director Xiao said angrily. "He said that he wanted us to make a public announcement, use the media to force the black-cloaked man to make an appearance, or else he'll blow up that child! It's completely devoid of conscience!"

As he spoke, Director Xiao played the recording of the Destroyer's communication: "Ahem, hello, everyone. Can you hear my voice? This phone should be able to reach this world's special ability organization, right? The crowd that caught Yuan Luori, I mean. I don't know what you're called, and of course it's not important to me what you call yourselves.

"Let me introduce yourself. I'm one of the ten managers of the Clearing League. I've cleared 192 levels. You may not understand what 192 levels entails. I'll give you a frame of reference.

Yuan Luori cleared 37 levels, so I'm worth about five Yuan Luoris. Not so strong, but strong enough.

"Before, that individual who defeated Yuan Luori went through the System to tell us not to trample on law and order, not to hurt people. It really sounded scary. But, you know, his communication really saved me a lot of trouble. He doesn't want us to destroy this world, so doesn't that mean that if I kill people or have a large impact on society, he'll appear?"

"You see, when it comes to fighting, I believe I won't lose to anyone, but I just don't like trouble. It's hard looking for someone, especially looking throughout the whole world for someone concealing his identity.

"This right now is so convenient. As long as your government officially spreads this event on a large scale, the target of the mission has a chance of seeing the information no matter where he's hiding, and he can come to the location of the bomb to see me.

"We know that from the official perspective, you aren't willing to create terror, but that's all right. There's nothing that can't be solved with an explosion. If once isn't enough, then we'll do it some more times."

"Asshole!" You Zhengping punched a nearby tree.

Because of his assassin attributes, Yuan Luori preferred acting in the shadows. Even for the battle at the amusement park, he had chosen a remote location and method that would confuse people. He hadn't caused large-scale harm. You Zhengping and the others had never seen such an aggressive Destroyer before.

"I'll go rescue him," You Zhengping and Cen Xiao said in unison.

"Wait." The criminal police captain tugged on Director Xiao's sleeve. "Sir, that child, he, he's my son!"

"I know," Director Xiao said gravely, "that's why I allowed you to enter. Calming the child's emotions will ensure that our team members can smoothly complete the assignment."

As Director Xiao spoke, You Zhengping took the nanotech mask some team members had brought, tore off his police badge, and simultaneously reached out to touch Cen Xiao. Cen Xiao instantly disappeared.

He had used a space to wrap up Cen Xiao, so no one would see this teammate of his who had such a strong ability to control fire, creating an opportunity for a sneak attack.

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Author's Note:

Yu Hua: According to Yu Hua's Rule, the worse you've done, the more you suffer.

Yuan Luori: I released bubbles, now I'm blind.

Lian Yufan: I wore the wrong pants, now I've paid for a hundred pairs of pants.

Zhen Li (sweet fool): Huh? I've been fine, the great master is pretty nice to me.

Yuan & Lian: Because you have no power!

Zhen Li: So according to Yu Hua's Rule, this next Destroyer...

Yuan & Lian: My rank will increase!

## CHAPTER 36

"Don't be scared, Junjun, dad is here." The criminal police captain comforted the child according to Director Xiao's instructions. He wanted to ensure that You and Cen's actions wouldn't be hampered by the child's fear.

The little boy Junjun saw his dad on the shore and instantly began to wail loudly. "Dad! Dad!"

"Don't let him move," Director Xiao ordered. "At a time like this, the best thing he can do for the two of them is not to move."

The criminal police captain had weathered the elements, but seeing that his own son had become a hostage, he couldn't keep from trembling all over. His forehead was covered in sweat, but he had to endure his fear and call across the distance to his son, "Junjun, do you remember playing the 'wooden man' game with dad? Dad called '1, 2, 3,' and you closed your eyes and didn't move until I touched you. If you win, I'll take you out for hamburgers, fried chicken, and fries!"

Fortunately the criminal police captain's son was a sturdy child. While he didn't understand, he knew that his dad was prompting him. Crying, Junjun said, "I also want to drink coke."

"Yes, yes, I'll get everything! Don't move, I'm going to count. 1, 2, 3, wooden man!" the criminal police captain called in the steadiest voice he could manage.

The little boy obediently closed his eyes. His tears kept flowing, but he wasn't moving.

Seeing that the work of comforting was done, You Zhengping, standing on the shore, jumped up and strode towards the center of the lake over the water.

At this moment, the whole park was encircled by the Protection Organization. The criminal police captain was the only one not aware of the circumstances. He saw the ordinarily sloppy and indolent You Zhengping walking on water like a martial arts master in a TV drama, stepping on the surface of the lake as though it were level ground. His eyes opened wide in shock, but at the same time he felt a sliver of hope.

No matter what kind of people You Zhengping and Cen Xiao were, if they possessed this kind of power, his Junjun would definitely be all right.

At the moment You Zhengping stepped out onto the water, the phone Director Xiao was holding rang. This wasn't Director Xiao's phone. It had been left behind at the time of the explosion by the Destroyer who said he had passed 192 levels (provisional form of address Destroyer 192). He had stolen someone's phone and was using it to keep in long-distance contact with the Protection Organization.

The Protection Organization was using high-tech means to locate Destroyer 192, but a phone with the System app on it had strong disruptive abilities. They had no way to locate it. This made the Destroyers secure in the knowledge of their own safety.

Director Xiao picked up the phone, and the altered voice came through the speaker. "Ah, I already gave you a choice, and you still want to save him. Well, don't blame me for being rude."

As he spoke, the little sunshade cap on the boy's head exploded with a *bang*!

You Zhengping, still racing towards the center of the lake, couldn't get there immediately, but he stayed calm. When he had heard the phone ringing, he had already started to act.

His spatial ability had gone through many years of training. He could deploy three spaces that could hold a person.

Among them, there was a space that You Zhengping maintained constantly. Inside were hidden heat weapons, high-voltage stun guns, and some different types of energy, which made him into a walking weapons cache who could support his teammates at any time; no matter where or when, he could instantly transition into battle mode. Precisely because of this ability, You Zhengping had to maintain mental steadiness. At the least slip, the energy and weapons stored in the space would be released and harm the surroundings.

Before, You Zhengping had gone through all kinds of extreme sports and special training without being able to control his emotions, and Director Xiao had been prepared to abandon the walking weapons cache plan. Everyone hoped that You Zhengping could control this ability, but if he really couldn't, while they regretted it, they had to put a stop to the plan.

Yu Hua's unexpected appearance had let You Zhengping smoothly control his ability. This was the reason that the Protection Organization was willing to protect Yu Hua even if it meant making him a prisoner, and why they couldn't let the two of them break up. He was too important to You Zhengping.

You Zhengping's second space was mostly used to catch enemies (he had used it when dealing with Zhen Li) and conceal teammates for stealth activities. He didn't normally use this space, only releasing it during battles. The second space could move not more than a hundred meters away from You Zhengping; past a hundred meters, it would open automatically.

The third space was the one he had figured out the use of on his own during the fight with Yuan Luori. When You Zhengping had seen Yu Hua "injured" on the ground, he had wanted to

go up into the sky to fight a battle to the death with Yuan Luori, who had been floating on a poison bubble. To go up, You Zhengping had flattened the space that could only hold one person into a transparent flight of steps for him to put his feet on, creating a stairway to the heavens.

This space could only make a ladder two meters long, but while You Zhengping was in physical contact with it, he could constantly change its position and shape. When he had walked from the lowest to the highest step, he could raise the space, the highest step under his foot becoming the lowest. Cycling it like this, he could ascend to the sky.

This seemed to be an unscientific, irrational cycling of a natural resource, but in reality, as long as there was enough power to support it, it could be realized.

You Zhengping walking freely on the water as though it were level ground was also a use of the third space. This was a space that could change shape and remain invisible.

The instant the phone rang, You Zhengping was still over fifty meters away from the little boy. No matter what, he couldn't get there before the bomb went off. But when he heard the phone, You Zhengping made a movement as though he were throwing air.

Of course what he was throwing wasn't air; it was the second space, which held Cen Xiao.

Special ability users could absorb energy from the outside world; their instantaneous force far surpassed the average person's. Tossing a grown man at the speed of throwing a shot put wasn't a problem.

At the same time that the cap exploded, Cen Xiao had flown to the air above the boy's head. He didn't know what was happening outside the space, but Cen Xiao trusted You Zhengping.

What they had settled on beforehand was that no matter what, if You Zhengping opened the space, that was the moment for Cen Xiao to control the fire and heat from the explosion while protecting the little boy!

Cen Xiao was dizzy from flying through the air, but that didn't impact his ability to grab the little boy beneath him when the space opened. The little boy, after his father's comforting, didn't struggle or move around, letting Cen Xiao grab him precisely.

In the chaos, Cen Xiao wasn't sure where the explosion was, so he used his thoughts to tightly lock down the thermal energy and fire around him. No matter where the fire was, Cen Xiao had to immediately fling it under the nearby water!

The fire created by the cap exploding was used by Cen Xiao. He held the little boy tightly in his arms, and the cap only exploded when it had been flung three to four meters under the water by the fire. The underwater impact overturned the little boat, and Cen Xiao and the little boy both fell into the water.

“Huh?” There was some astonishment in the voice over the phone. “Truly worthy of the world that destroyed countless levelers, your abilities are strong, but...is it safe underwater? The radius of my bomb is fifty meters. With such a frightening impact, can you be totally certain of protecting the little boy?”

After falling in the water, Cen Xiao tore the glass bottle off the little boy and threw it at the water. You Zhengping arrived on time, caught the glass bottle, and used the second space that had just held Cen Xiao to collect the shining bottle that was just about to explode.

All weapons in You Zhengping's spaces would be reduced to a tenth of their power. The radius of the explosion was reduced from fifty meters to five. With You Zhengping's abilities, he could definitely withstand an assault like this.

But he did have to suffer some internal injury.

During the explosion, the vibration frequency of the second space was different from the air around it. You could clearly see a clear space the size of a coffin shaking violently, and You Zhengping, on the surface of the water, was using his own energy to compress the might of the explosion inside the space. It amounted to him bearing the entire five-meter radius explosion by himself.

The shaking continued for a minute before ending. You Zhengping coughed up a mouthful of blood. He couldn't maintain the third space and fell into the water.

Cen Xiao held the little boy with one arm and with the other hoisted You Zhengping over his shoulder, swimming at full force towards the surface of the water. The boat had overturned and couldn't be used again. It all depended on Cen Xiao now.

“Huh?” Destroyer 192 was once again astonished. “I was starting to take you seriously, but do you know what? In my game space, everything is a weapon.”

As he spoke, one of the goldfish kept in the lake swam up alongside Cen Xiao and touched Cen Xiao's waist with its mouth. The goldfish blew up like a balloon.

Cen Xiao was very sensitive towards fire power. He felt something was wrong when the goldfish approached and quickly wrapped it up in a fireball. But they were in the water, and Cen Xiao's power was extremely inhibited by the water. His reaction was fast enough, but the weakened flames couldn't entirely block the force of the goldfish, which was like a small-scale bomb. A fist-sized chunk of flesh was blown up out of the left side of his waist.

Fresh blood spilled out, attracting more goldfish. Enduring the sharp pain, Cen Xiao looked and saw that they were already surrounded by hundreds of goldfish.

“Wake up.” Cen Xiao raised the little boy to his shoulder so the child wouldn't choke and freed up a hand to pat You Zhengping's face. “Hold on a bit, work with me.”

The apparently unconscious You Zhengping slowly opened his eyes and got a petrol bomb out of his first space.

You Zhengping didn't look at his surroundings. He threw the petrol bomb right up into the air and detonated it. When the petrol bomb exploded, it would send a layer of flame shooting in all directions. Cen Xiao could precisely control these flames. Enduring the pain at his waist, he concentrated his mental energy and separated the flames into hundreds of parts, accurately attacking the goldfish in the water around him.

In order to attack a target in the water, a petrol bomb could include a reactive metal within the napalm. After combining with the water, it would expel hydrogen gas to intensify the combustion and wouldn't be obstructed by water.

With this assistance, Cen Xiao, as though he had received divine aid, at once locked on the hundreds of goldfish bombs, firmly controlling the flames and splashes around them.

Countless little splashes exploded at once. The little boy Junjun closely observed the criminal police captain's orders, not moving and not opening his eyes. Though he was afraid, he forced himself to bear it. And because of his cooperation, Cen Xiao and You Zhengping were able to put their powers to good use.

Destroyer 192 said, "Huh? That truly exceeds my expectations. You have some skills. No wonder you were bold enough to refuse my request. But..."

"No more 'but's," Director Xiao said coldly. "Your so-called game space is the manmade lake, right? Though I don't know what means you're using, only the items and living things in the lake will become bombs."

Director Xiao raised his hand slightly, and the center of the lake opened. A stream of water wrapped around You Zhengping, Cen Xiao, and the little boy, taking the three of them from the parted water to the shore.

As soon as they touched the ground, medical personnel immediately came up to treat Cen Xiao and You Zhengping's injuries. The criminal police captain, meanwhile, hugged the little boy, kissing his son's face. Now that the calamity was past, he said, "Good Junjun, you can move now. You've so brave, dad is proud of you!"

The little boy opened his eyes. Seeing his dad's familiar face, he couldn't hold back. He burst into tears with a howl. As he cried, he said, "I also want ice cream! Wah!"

"I'll buy you some, I'll buy you everything!" The criminal police captain kissed his son's face again and again.

"Director, you took your time. I'm in so much pain." Cen Xiao held his injured and water-logged side, his lips pale from blood loss.



"I was training you, giving you some practice in cooperation." Director Xiao crouched down and said, "Do you know what a Destroyer is now?"

"I understand," You Zhengping said, slowly opening his eyes as he lay on the ground.

Before, he and Cen Xiao had only heard of Destroyers but had never come in contact with them. They had been trained and thought they were very strong; they weren't afraid of any enemy.

But two encounters with Destroyers had made the young Protectors understand that however strong they were, it was still hard to protect everyone. The Protectors' power had to be ten, a hundred times more stronger than the Destroyers' to protect this world.

Having a space that could hold a person wasn't enough, and being able to control all the flames around you wasn't enough. You had to be as strong as Director Xiao, who could casually control all the energy within a district to do battle with the Destroyers and their endless combat methods.

"You weren't injured for nothing. I already know what type of ability Destroyer 192 has," Director Xiao comforted his two subordinates.

Director Xiao could very well have rescued the little boy in the lake. Water was his dominion. So why hadn't he acted? Because he couldn't tell what Destroyer 192's ability was, didn't know what means he was using to keep the park under observation, didn't understand how the enemy transformed living and inanimate objects into bombs.

He could have instantly moved the little boy from the center of the lake to the shore, but he couldn't have guaranteed that the shore would be safe. He had first had to send the two young Protectors, who seemed weak and lacking in experience. Only by presenting an appearance of weakness could he use the enemy's attack methods and words to determine his ability and succeed in rescuing the hostage.

Why did he need to be so cautious? Because life was paramount. A slight slip-up could lose a life. The Protectors had to be fully prepared.

When the criminal police captain had comforted the little boy, he handed the child over to the medical personnel to be examined.

Director Xiao said, "Captain Liu, you are one of the country's police officers, and the superior of several Protectors. Their activities require you to shield them. You may know their identities, but your child can't. We need to perform a memory wipe on him."

"I guarantee that I will fulfill my mission!" Captain Liu didn't ask anything. He was a veteran police officer. He knew that his superiors would tell him anything they wanted him to know without him asking, and that he couldn't ask about what he wasn't supposed to know.

“Sir, my child... Will the memory wipe hurt him? He’s so little...” Captain Liu was also a father. He couldn’t help worrying about his son’s health.

“No, we’ll only temporarily hold his memory. If one day he also becomes a soldier who protects our homes and defends our country, we’ll return his memory,” Director Xiao said, smiling kindly.

A young man in civilian clothes passed by Director Xiao and came up in front of the little boy.

When they saw this man, You Zhengping and Cen Xiao, who were lying on stretchers, ignored their pain and simultaneously got up.

The young man wore a peaked cap. He tipped the cap up and stroked the little boy’s hair, warmly said, “Your name is Junjun?”

The little boy Junjun looked up, but when he looked at this young man, his vision went blank. He couldn’t see the young man’s face.

It wasn’t that the young man didn’t have a face, it was that he saw it, but his brain couldn’t receive the information his eyes were sending him, like a TV without a signal or phone with a black screen. He couldn’t distinguish the young man’s face.

The young man pressed a hand to the little boy’s forehead and gently said, “Go to sleep. When you wake up, you’ll have forgotten everything that happened today. I’ll temporarily keep your memory, and if one day you possess the authority to retrieve it, I’ll personally return it to you.

“I hope that then, you’ll be able to see my face.”

His hand left the little boy’s forehead. There was a ball of white light in his palm. The young man clenched his fist, and the white light sank into his palm. A tiny star appeared on his wrist.

The young man pulled at his sleeve. If someone had looked closely at his sleeves, they would have seen that his whole arm was covered in tiny stars.

“Director Xiao.” The young man saluted.

“Destroyer 192 has a flamboyant disposition. In the future, he may make trouble in the Xuyang District many times. I’m afraid there will be many people aware of it. For now you’ll stay in the Xuyang District to support You Zhengping’s squad,” Director Xiao said.

“Yes, sir,” the young man agreed.

The young man walked up to Captain Liu and pointed at his own wrist. “Your son’s memory. I’ll keep it for now.”

“You, you...” Captain Liu desperately rubbed his eyes, but he couldn’t see the young man’s appearance.

“Shh,” the young man said. “There’s no need for you to remember me, so you won’t remember. Just remember this star and what happened.”

After saying a word to Captain Liu, the young man went over to You Zhengping and poked his forehead, pulling off the nanotech mask. “Did you get hurt? Useless!”

“Let’s see you try!” You Zhengping got up and said, “Ow! Ow!”

The impact from the explosion had injured the energy channels of his body. The slightest movement, and he ached all over.

“Luo Huai! Long time no see!” Cen Xiao happily opened his arms and hugged Luo Huai. “Ow! Ow!”

The hugging motion affected Cen Xiao’s freshly bandaged waist, hurting so much that he grimaced.

“What, do you have intermittent memory loss because I beat you two up too many times during training? Did you forget you were injured?” Luo Huai said, smiling.

“Pooh! I was the one wiping the floor with you. My memory is excellent,” You Zhengping said angrily.

Luo Huai said, “When your wounds are better, we’ll discuss who was beating up whom. It really has been a long time. Five years, right?”

“This injury is killing me. Make Lian Yufan hurry up and find Destroyer 192’s location. He’s the best at that,” Cen Xiao said.

At the mention of Lian Yufan, a trace of solemnity flashed across Luo Huai’s face. Then he resumed his smile and avoided mentioning Lian Yufan. “You two are in a sorry state right now. Hurry up and get treated. I’ll take you.”

You Zhengping typed on his phone while saying, “Wait, we can’t send messages once we’re back at the base. Let me account for myself first.”

He didn’t dare to let Yu Hua know he had been injured. He only sent Yu Hua a message saying that he would be working overtime in the evening and wouldn’t come home. Yu Hua, who was at the supermarket planning to make a large meal, slowly put down the pork ribs he was holding.

If Xiao You wasn’t coming home, then he could just eat something at random to fill up.

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Author's Note:

Right now, Yu Hua doesn't know yet that Xiao You isn't coming home because Destroyer 192 was making trouble.

Destroyer 192: Just you wait, I'll be back.

Yu Hua: What blind idiot is getting in the way of me making dinner for Xiao You?

## CHAPTER 37

You Zhengping didn't come home, so Yu Hua filled up on leftover mantou from that morning. Food wasn't a pleasure for him; it only provided the energy he needed to maintain his existence. Without Xiao You in front of him eating happily, all the gourmet foods in the world were meaningless to Yu Hua.

Since he had become an auxiliary policeman, it was a common occurrence for You Zhengping to work overtime. He had fewer scheduled shifts than a proper police employee, but he still had mandatory night shifts, and sometimes he swapped shifts at the last minute.

Yu Hua flipped through his calendar and noticed that You Zhengping's night shift was a little earlier than usual, but it was still within the normal range.

Since You Zhengping had started out as an auxiliary policeman, Yu Hua had been recording the pattern of his husband's shifts. He had done this before knowing that You Zhengping was a Protector, and he continued after finding out.

Before, the record had been so he could prepare night shift snacks ahead of time; he had also determined the number of people working the same shift to make snacks for his colleagues, too, so that it wouldn't make a bad impression for only Xiao You to have snacks; if people stole his food again, Yu Hua was worried that Xiao You wouldn't have enough.

Now the record was still for making snacks, but he had added another assignment: observing the movements of the levelers.

Using the energy from Yuan Luori's System, Yu Hua had once again suppressed 99% of his power, only leaving 1% power and three abilities.

The three abilities consisted of "time replay" (within twenty-four hours), creating images (five to ten minutes), and the ability to change vitamins into poison that attacked the immune system.

Leaving the poison ability was because Yu Hua knew that it could stimulate the energy in his body. It was for emergency use only. But Yuan Luori had passed too few levels, less than a hundredth of Yu Hua's number. The poison made with his power could stimulate 3% of Yu Hua's power at most. After that, there would be no effect.

The remaining 1% of power wasn't enough to let Yu Hua sense the whole world's protective screen. He couldn't immediately notice the arrival of a leveler.

By recording the pattern of You Zhengping's shifts, he could determine something about the levelers' movements from them.

You Zhengping suddenly swapping shifts today made Yu Hua develop a sense of wariness. First he searched the news online. Because the Protection Organization had blocked off the media, the news that a bomb had gone off in the Xuyang District's Central Park hadn't gotten out.

Yu Hua turned on his computer and logged into the Xuyang District's district life forum and quickly skimmed the most recent posts and comments. Going through the babble of countless people's replies, he quickly gathered what had happened today.

At the same time, on his phone, he sent tomorrow's work plan to the Zhen Li Studio group of four so the other three could prepare in advance. He received instant replies.

Zhen Li replied first with "copy," Yuan Luori replied "scram," and Lian Yufan was slow to respond.

There were many posts on the district life forum. Using software he had made himself, Yu Hua could open a hundred of today's posts at once and shrink the hundred web pages on the computer screen. The business laptop's 14-inch screen was thickly covered in writing. The web pages' scrollbars quickly slid down. The average person would have gotten dizzy looking at a single web page, but Yu Hua could take in all one hundred posts at a glance.

Today there had been 3,587 new posts added about life in the Xuyang District. Eliminating the advertisements, there were still 2,014 remaining. Excluding ads, there were 54,229 replies. There was ridiculing, venting, anecdotes, and other sorts of replies. Though Yu Hua could read a hundred posts simultaneously, it was still a very large volume of work.

The software worked automatically. It quickly opened the posts and scrolled through the page, opening a new page as soon as the previous one had been skimmed through. There were one-hundred pages on the screen the whole time, letting Yu Hua reading through the posts as quickly as possible.

Half an hour later, the last message in the work group was still Yuan Luori's "scram." Lian Yufan was silent. Maybe he had seen it and not responded, or maybe he didn't have his phone.

Yu Hua divided his attention. With his eyes fixed on the screen, his fingers quickly typed on the phone to ask Lian Yufan whether he had received the plan.

Twenty more minutes passed, and Lian Yufan answered: I'm asking for the day off tomorrow, deduct my wages as you like.

In the way of the rich and arrogant, he was too lazy to argue with Yu Hua over a few hundred yuan for full attendance.

Meanwhile, Yu Hua hit “enter” on the computer, pausing the software’s automatic function. He enlarged four pages.

These four were chat posts. Yu Hua expanded them to cover the whole desktop, then refreshed them and skimmed them again. He found that some of the replies were missing. These replies had been deleted by the administrator.

The approximate contents of the replies had been “I’m planning to take the kids to the park this weekend,” “When I passed by the park today, I was there were a lot of people surrounding it,” “The park is going to be renovated, it’s already closed,” “There’s nowhere for public square dancing now that the park is closed.” All of them were messages related to the park.

Yu Hua used the search function to search the district life posts for “park” and found that apart from the notice issued by the government that the park was being renovated, there were no other posts mentioning the park.

He opened a chat post at random and used a fake IP to anonymously post the reply “Did something happen at the park today?” After posting, he refreshed repeatedly and found that the reply had been deleted within three seconds.

“The park?” Yu Hua’s fingers gently counted out on the tabletop.

Yu Hua was a minor expert in date locations in the Xuyang District. When he and You Zhengping had been dating, he had gone to a lot of effort to find spacious places for their dates where they could avoid Cen Xiao and the other third wheels. He had researched all suitable and unsuitable date locations. The woods in the Xuyang District Park held a special significance for Yu Hua. His and You Zhengping’s first kiss had been there.

Their first date had changed from a candlelight dinner to a barbecue in Cen Xiao’s backyard. Yu Hua hadn’t been in a very good mood that day. Anyone would have been unhappy if their perfectly good date plan had fizzled out, their first date with someone they had a good impression of turning into a barbecue party. He had assisted in the barbecuing, listening to You Zhengping fooling around with Cen Xiao and the others.

Back then, Yu Hua and You Zhengping had been at the stage of mutually working out dating. They hadn’t been as familiar with each other as they were now. Yu Hua couldn’t display that he was unsatisfied. Being very scheming, he had “accidentally” let You Zhengping see the date plan he had stayed up late working on. In the long schedule, from 6 AM to 10 PM, each span of time had been planned out from great to small without omission; it was a plan that he had poured all his heart’s blood into.

The scheming Yu Hua had been unwilling for his heart’s blood to go to waste like this. He had never been devoted to selflessness; if there was payment, there had to be reciprocation. As he had barbecued the skewers, he had examined his blind date out of the corner of his eye, wanting to know what You Zhengping would do when he had seen that plan.

You Zhengping had calmly put down the phone and pretended not to have seen. Then he had gone over to Cen Xiao and kicked him aside, saying, "Do you know that you're going to burn to death like that?"

Then he had held down Cen Xiao's head, planning to dip his third wheel underlings in mashed garlic and barbecue them. The scene had been very chaotic.

In the end, it had been Yu Hua who had appeared as the crowd-pleaser, easing relations between You Zhengping and the underlings. Ultimately, both You Zhengping and Cen Xiao had thought that Yu Hua was too nice.

Yu Hua had taken that opportunity to ask for a second date, and he had left it up to You Zhengping to decide where.

You Zhengping had consulted with his underlings for three or four days and had found that no matter where they went, there was some flaw. His head had swelled, and he had realized how hard it had been for Yu Hua to make that plan.

Finally, everyone had chosen the park. The scenery was good, there were restaurants nearby, and they could rent a local barbecue. Most importantly, the area was large, convenient for Cen Xiao and the others to follow in secret to avoid no one being there to take care of it if You Zhengping lost control of his special ability.

Yu Hua and You Zhengping had gone out in a boat in the park, and Cen Xiao and the others had also rented some boats and followed nearby; the melancholy husbands had gone for a walk, and the underlings had pretended to be passing by.

Finally, in the late afternoon, Yu Hua had taken You Zhengping by the hand, and the two of them had gone into the woods, avoiding the underlings' lines of sight. They had hidden behind an enormous old tree and gently kissed in the light of the setting sun.

You Zhengping had thought that he would be so excited that his special ability would riot, but instead nothing had happened. The evening breeze had gently caressed his face. When he opened his eyes, he had been met with the sight of Yu Hua's clear eyes. You Zhengping's heart had beat rapidly. He had opened his arms and hugged Yu Hua, initiating a deeper and longer kiss.

That day, the back of a single sheet from the desk calendar hadn't been enough to record Yu Hua's feelings. He had used up the earlier pages with comparatively few notes, voluminously filling up three pages with writing. And that had been barely enough to record his feelings at the time.

And now? Was the park really being renovated, or had something else happened to it?

Yu Hua tucked away a bottle of vitamins and went to Zhen Li's house. He took the black cloak that Zhen Li had stashed at the bottom of the wardrobe.

The whole way, he maintained an illusion, not letting the security cameras and people around him see him. Wrapped up in black clothes, Yu Hua came to the park under cover of night. He saw that the buildings around the park were shielded with blue sheet metal, and there were people standing guard every ten meters.

The people standing guard wore civilian dress. Their carriage was as upright as a javelin. They looked like people who had received specialized training.

Yu Hua looked for a place where the guard was relaxed and lightly jumped in. Because he was protecting himself with the illusion, an ordinary person's naked eye couldn't see him. Yu Hua easily snuck into the park.

The park was built around the lake, so the first thing to meet the eye was that enormous manmade lake. Yu Hua came to the side of the lake and saw the remnants of little boat that there hadn't been time to clear away completely yet floating in the lake, and the scorch marks from the explosion on the guardrail around the lake.

There had been a fairly severe explosion here. There had been more than one explosion point.

Several dead goldfish were floating in the clear water of the lake. The moonlight flashed off their scales in a deathly radiance.

Yu Hua avoided the patrolmen inside the park and came to the woods where he and You Zhengping had gone on their date. Many trees had fallen in the woods. Yu Hua found the old tree that had witnessed their first kiss. The old tree had been split down the middle and fallen. The trunk had been burned to charcoal. Only the enormous roots remained relatively intact.

Yu Hua crouched down and put his hand on the growth rings on the old tree's cross section. He closed his eyes and felt the pulsation deep underground.

"Still alive." He opened his eyes, relaxing slightly.

This old tree had a history. The park's location had formerly been the house of a feudal official of the last dynasty. In that tumultuous era, the official's whole family had fled from calamity, and his mansion had been picked clean. The courtyards had been burned, and after the fire, a sapling had grown up to represent the new era.

Over a hundred years had passed, and the sapling had become an old tree. Its thick, solid trunk had recorded the city's trials and tribulations, and it had witnessed Yu Hua and You Zhengping's story.



Yu Hua got out the medicine bottle, poured out ten vitamins, and squeezed them in his hand. The vitamins turned into poison that could instantly destroy a person. These ten vitamins, ground into powder and added to water, could have destroyed the ecosystem of a small river.

Yu Hua swallowed all ten down in one go. The poison damaged his seal, and his power rose to 3%.

From a branch of the old tree, he plucked a still indomitably living leaf. He placed the leaf on the old tree's growth rings. He lightly tapped the leaf's central vein with the tip of his index finger, and an energy full of life force poured into the tree's roots.

The old tree's burnt black trunk was once again washed with green. The fallen trunk stood up once more with the aid of that tremendous power. The split apart thick tree trunk slowly fused together.

At the same time, all the other trees in the woods that had fallen but were still struggling to live stood up along with the old tree. The grass on the ground that he been burned by the wild flames also once again grew green.

It wasn't that Yu Hua had the power to bring the dead back to life. It was that the life force of these plants was indomitable. They hadn't yet died. As long as you gave them enough energy, awakening that vast vitality, then they would be revived.

Yu Hua felt around on the old tree's upright trunk and found the crooked characters "You Yu<sup>15</sup>."

These had been carved by You Zhengping after their kiss. The park didn't permit carving writing into trees. Because of those two characters, You Zhengping had paid a 2,000 yuan fine and had been forced to write five thousand characters of self-criticism. The self-criticism had been posted on the park's notice board for a whole month.

Of course, given You Zhengping's writing level, he couldn't have written five thousand characters of self-criticism. Of course it had been ghostwritten by Yu Hua. The signatures on the self-criticism had also been both Yu Hua and You Zhengping's names.

Yu Hua's fingertips brushed the two characters that had been paid for with two thousand yuan and five thousand characters of self-criticism. He gently said, "You have to live on, to witness our whole life. Even when we pass away, you still have to live on, until these two characters have been worn away by the passage of time."

The noise of the tree coming back to life had been huge. Soon there were people coming to the woods. Yu Hua hid in the night and avoided them.

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<sup>15</sup> This is 忧郁, melancholy, as referenced in the footnote in Ch. 4.

3% power was enough to let him completely blend into the surroundings. The Protectors may have been able to detect unusual energy ripples; the ordinary people currently guarding the park couldn't sense them.

The park was being patrolled by the Protection Organization's irregulars. They looked in disbelief at the blackened woods that had been restored in one night. They quickly phoned Director Xiao, reporting the marvel of spring coming to the withered trees.

Director Xiao was currently at the base analyzing Destroyer 192's abilities for the Protectors. "We must have taught you during training that there are numerous types of attacks among Destroyers, and an endless stream of all kinds of magical items. It's hard to guard against. But all their items and supporting powers encircle a core, and that core is their origin ability."

"The origin ability is in fact hardly different from the Protectors' power. For example, Cen Xiao's fire ability. He can use petrol bombs and other heat weapons to assist in increasing his power, and all the supporting items are chosen according to the core fire power. For another example, Lian Yufan has a repairing ability, so he'd developed a habit. Every time he inspects the surroundings before a battle, he'll first destroy certain articles with destructive power and keep a very light part of these articles on himself, so he can mount an unexpected attack at any time.

"The Destroyers are also like this. Their items are separated into healing, escape, and assistance types. Healing and escape correspond to medical treatments and means of transportation, though they're more powerful than our current level of technology. The speed of healing and of escape are both faster. But as long as we stay alert, don't slacken because they've been seriously injured, we can avoid the Destroyers suddenly recovering or suddenly diving into the earth or substituting themselves or another means of escape. Over the years, the Protection Organization has come to quite a few conclusions about these two types of items. I trust that everyone is proficient in this information.

"The assistance items, no matter what form they take, are certain to benefit the use of the Destroyer's origin ability. For example, Yuan Luori's poison bubble item and crossbows are like this. Zhen Li isn't strong. If he had Yuan Luori's strength, the items he would have chosen would definitely have been of a sort that could turn articles into food or act as armor."

Everyone listened closely to Director Xiao's lecture and compared it with their combat experiences. They nodded their heads. The contents of Director Xiao's narration had been passed down through the Protection Organization for many years; countless Protectors had earned it with iron and blood.

Lian Yufan was also participating in this meeting. He was sitting next to Cen Xiao, very far away from Luo Huai.

Seeing that Luo Huai had also come to the Xuyang District, Lian Yufan's chest had felt blocked. If this Destroyer's ability to harm ordinary people hadn't been so strong, and if his ability hadn't

been very useful, he might have withdrawn from this activity with the excuse of protecting Yuan Luori and Zhen Li.

Lian Yufan didn't want to work with Luo Huai. He was afraid he wouldn't be able to control himself after seeing Luo Huai; he wouldn't be able to resist wanting to snatch one of the stars from Luo Huai's wrist.

Director Xiao continued, "For a long time, there's been a question that has troubled the Protection Organization. We've been unable to determine the limit of the Destroyers' items, because each Destroyer produces a completely different number of items. There are some whose items seem bottomless, and some who have no more strength to fight after a few items.

"Now, Yuan Luori and Zhen Li's cooperation has finally helped us answer this question. The reason is points.

"The greater the number of levels passed, the more points the Destroyer accumulates, and the number of items they can equip is also greater. Yuan Luori can approximately recall the range of points necessary to equip various sorts of items. With the intelligence he has supplied, we can roughly guess Destroyer 192's accumulated points, and the number of items he can equip. This way, if we can only determine his origin ability, then we can succeed in capturing him."

"Sir, was the reason you didn't step in today for the sake of probing Destroyer 192, figuring out his origin ability?" You Zhengping asked.

Director Xiao nodded. "Destroyer 192 has the following distinctive traits. First, he had only one means of attack, the ability to transform items into bombs. We haven't observed a limit in the number yet, but all abilities must have a limit. I suspect that his limit is the range of the explosions. He can produce any number of bombs at once within the limit of that range. For example, if his largest explosive range is a radius of a hundred meters, he can divide it into a hundred small-scale bombs with one meter ranges, or put it into one large-scale bomb with a hundred meter range.

"Second, he wasn't on the scene himself, but he could observe what was happening there. However, he couldn't 'see' You Zhengping's space. Admittedly, the spaces possess the ability to hide themselves, but they can be detected by focusing an energy probing instrument. This shows that Destroyer 192 can only use his eyes to 'see.' His sight can be blinded.

"Third, there was a sentence he said during the conversation: 'In my game space, everything is a weapon.' This sentence reveals the true nature of his ability.

"In summary, according to my analysis, Destroyer 192's true ability is..."

Director Xiao hadn't finished when he received the emergency communication from the park. He deliberately didn't continue, letting the young Protectors analyze for themselves. Seeing that You Zhengping, Cen Xiao, Lian Yufan, and Luo Huai all looked equally thoughtfully, he

understood that they had all guessed Destroyer 192's ability based on the fundamental information.

"The trees in the park have been restored," Director Xiao related in disbelief. "We're going to the park to investigate as quickly as possible!"

You Zhengping and Cen Xiao stood up simultaneously. That old tree had left a deep impression on You Zhengping. When the two heavily injured people had heard that the old tree had been damaged, they had both been very upset.

After all, of that 2,000 yuan, 500 had been borrowed from Cen Xiao.

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Author's Note:

Destroyer 192: Haha, ordinary mortals, I'll show you my frightening strength!

The young Protectors: Director Xiao, is this person very strong?

Director Xiao: I don't know why, but the Destroyers who have reappeared after fifteen years... They're not only weaker than before, they're also more arrogant.

Yu Hua: It must be because the System was weakened and the difficulty level has decreased. That's given them the mistaken idea that they're very strong.

## CHAPTER 38

Everyone put on the Protectors' specialized masks for going out and hurried to the park. When they were in the verdant woods, their faces all filled with disbelief.

The woods that two hours before had been in total disarray were now more even lush than in the past. The remains of the scorched vegetation had been absorbed by the soil, providing enough nutrients for the grass to grow some centimeters taller than before.

They didn't know whether this was returning energy or new energy. Lian Yufan pressed his palm to a tree and quietly felt the energy flow.

"It's not a restorative energy," Lian Yufan said. "The nature of restorative energy is to look back, to regress, a sort of energy that goes against the current. The energy remaining in these trees is full of vitality. It's life energy."

"So who did this?" Luo Huai said in wonder.

Luo Huai went up to the old tree and poked the trunk with a finger. A white light appeared in his palm. Luo Huai pressed the white light to the center of his forehead and quietly read the tree's memory.

He “saw” a black-cloaked man standing in the woods, putting his hand on the old tree’s age rings. Through the old tree’s “memory,” Luo Huai felt the power of the life force surging through it. When the woods had come back to life, Luo Huai wanted to continue watching, but he felt a mighty force of refusal.

It was the tree instinctively forbidding him to read. If he pried and collected the memory by force, his mind would be injured.

Luo Huai placed the white light back in the tree, returning the memory, and said to everyone, “A black-cloaked man restored this place. That’s all I saw. The tree won’t let me see the rest.”

“There are memories that you can’t collect?” Lian Yufan asked in a not very pleasant voice.

Luo Huai quietly looked at Lian Yufan and gave no explanation.

It was Director Xiao who said, “Luo Huai can in fact read and collect the memories of others, but if a person doesn’t want to forget a segment of memory no matter what, if the intensity of their wish reaches a certain level, then Luo Huai can’t collect it. If he collects a memory by force, Luo Huai’s own mind will be controlled by that consciousness.”

“So if a person’s memory has been collected, they didn’t resist very hard?” Lian Yufan whispered.

Director Xiao didn’t want to get too involved with this topic. He said, “If this was done by the black-cloaked man, then that’s good news for us. If the target of the Destroyers’ mission really is what he says, someone who cherishes life and is willing to respect the social order, then at present we only need to concentrate on dealing with Destroyer 192.

“The most pressing matter is to locate Destroyer 192’s whereabouts. Captain Lian, you’re an expert in investigation. What ideas do you have?”

Lian Yufan forced his train of thought aside. He considered and said, “I’ve already seen everyone who approached the manmade lake and the little boy Junjun during the day. The flow of people through the Xuyang District Park is very large. It’s hard to fix on one particular person out of over a thousand. We have no time—the fastest way to investigate now is to lure the snake out of its hole.”

“What are you planning to do?” You Zhengping asked.

“We have Yuan Luori and Zhen Li in our hands. Arrange for them to make it appear as though they’ve contacted the black-cloaked man, with one of our people disguised as the black-cloaked man. Destroyer 192’s character is aggressive and extreme. He believes he won’t lose to anyone in a one-on-one fight. He’s too self-confident. So when the black-cloaked man appears, he’s likely to be present,” Lian Yufan said.

“That makes sense. We can choose a remote place, where people are as scattered as at the amusement park. That amusement park is a good place.” You Zhengping thought that the amusement park had been through it before and would be good to offer up again.

But Lian Yufan said, “Destroyer 192 has the ability to control things from a distance. The more remote the place, the more cautious he’ll be. If we choose a place like the amusement park where he can’t hide himself among the crowd, then it’s possible he won’t appear nearby. If we want to lure him in, it’s better to choose a place with many people where it’ll be easy for him to make a big scene, where he can take small children hostage. The safer he feels, the more likely he is to appear. It’s best to choose a school, a mall with a playground, or some such place.”

“Impossible,” You Zhengping opposed resolutely. “We can’t disguise or protect that many people, and we definitely can’t use children as bait.”

He and Cen Xiao had been seriously injured rescuing one child. If a whole bunch were taken hostage, the Protection Organization would be unable to operate.

“I know,” Lian Yufan said, looking at You Zhengping. “I’ve always liked to use numbers to weigh the value of lives. A hundred lives have more weight in my eyes than a single life. If there was another choice, I wouldn’t propose this method. But Destroyer 192 has already acted in a location with a thick concentration of people. He doesn’t care about their lives. Today he used a child’s life to threaten us, tomorrow he can use ten, a hundred, a thousand. Rather than let him act without even knowing concretely where that will be, at least we can limit the range of his activities!”

You Zhengping bit his lip. He was opposed to Lian Yufan’s idea, but he had to admit that he was right. If today’s emergency at the park happened again, no one would be able to bear it.

“Luring the snake out of its hole is a good idea,” said Director Xiao. “We’ll prepare in advance to be able to protect the residents to the greatest extent. I remember that the Xincheng Mall’s movie theater and food court are being renovated. Adding in the economic slump, there won’t be many people there in the morning on a working day.”

“They are being renovated. They’ll only reopen for business next month,” said You Zhengping.

Since the two-person world at the amusement park had turned into a twenty-some-odd person world, You Zhengping had wanted to arrange a two-person date. He had taken careful notice of the movie theaters and knew that Xincheng Mall, which was near his home, was being renovated.

“We’ll find a celebrity to do a giveaway event at the Xincheng Mall to attract the majority of the people there. Then we’ll have Yuan Luori and the fake black-cloaked man arrange to meet at a location close to the event,” Director Xiao said. “The largest explosive range we know for Destroyer 192 is fifty meters. Assuming this range can broaden two or three times, that’s 150 meters. I’ll send people to put down an energy field at a radius of 200 meters to restrict the explosive range.”

This energy field was a repulsion field formed by ten or more Protectors simultaneously releasing disruptive energy. Within that field, any ability would be affected by the repulsive force and its range controlled, but its force wouldn't be weakened.

For example, if Destroyer 192's attack radius was fifty meters, inside the repulsion force field, the spread of the explosion would be blocked by countless force fields. The range of dispersion would be contained to ten meters, but the force wouldn't change. This would mean that the people at the heart of the explosion would have to bear over ten times the force. This was an enormous trial for the Protectors.

The park had been an emergency. Even if they had set up an energy field, the little boy would still have been at the heart of the explosion, so it had been up to You Zhengping and Cen Xiao, who had been on the scene and who had abilities most suited for rescue, to act. If the Protection Organization proactively set a trap, they could calculate the bearings in advance and establish a repulsion field.

That was what Lian Yufan meant when he said that the range could be controlled.

That was the order that Director Xiao gave to the Protectors. Everyone raised objections to perfect the plan, and in the end, the only questions that remained were: who would be the celebrity who lured people in at the mall, and who would impersonate the black-cloaked man?

The celebrity lure would have to bear enormous stress. It wouldn't be fair on anyone. And the black-cloaked man might end up in a face-to-face battle with Destroyer 192. No one whose strength a little lacking could stand up.

"I'll be the black-cloaked man," You Zhengping volunteered. "I had direct contact with the black-cloaked man last time. I heard him speak with my own ears and saw his bearing. I can mostly imitate him. My first space can store weapons and energy, so I can feign having many different kinds of abilities. Yuan Luori and Zhen Li both said that they haven't seen the target of the mission. They only heard the System that issued the mission say that this person is incomparably strong, almost all-powerful. I think I'm the special ability user best suited to pretend to be all-powerful."

"That truly is the optimal choice," Director Xiao agreed. "And the celebrity..."

"Actually, we don't need to find a celebrity," Lian Yufan said after a hesitation. "It's best for this assignment to be carried out by someone aware of the circumstances. Zhen Li...is a good choice. Many celebrities are only popular within a certain circle, without high public awareness. Rather than finding an especially well-known person, we should instead find someone who will most easily attract the eye of passersby. Zhen Li's potential in that respect is very high."

Hearing this, the Xuyang District squad's members simultaneously remembered how Lian Yufan had looked learning the sliding kneel with Zhen Li during the day. They instantly fell silent.

“Isn’t Zhen Li the first Destroyer we captured? When did he become a celebrity?” asked Luo Huai, who had just arrived in the Xuyang District and had only read the materials.

“Destroyer 192 must know what Zhen Li looks like, right? Will that alert him in advance?” Director Xiao asked.

“He can put on makeup to change his appearance,” Lian Yufan said. “The black-cloaked man didn’t remove Yuan Luori’s disguise skills. I’ve seen his skill at applying makeup. He can make you look like a different person. We can choose some famous TV or movie star to imitate. It’s best for it to be one that will have an extreme visual impact and be able to attract the notice of the largest number of customers. We’ll also have irregulars pose as mall employees to rope customers into the event. If we can gather 90% or more of the customers at the center of the event, the repulsion field will be able to protect them completely.”

With this planned out, You Zhengping could just about force himself to accept it. This was much better than coming to the rescue again if Destroyer 192 chose another heavily-populated area.

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Yuan Luori had no place to live. When he had come to this world, his identity had been a tramp living in the gutter. While following Zhen Li, he had posed as an elderly man and lived on the park benches. When he had joined the studio, because Zhen Li was poor, he’d had no money to rent an apartment for his employee, and he was unwilling to let Yuan Luori stay in his basement. So he had spent over a hundred yuan to buy Yuan Luori a folding bed. He had him stay at work overnight; it amounted to included lodging.

Yuan Luori actually didn’t feel that it was a hardship. As an assassin, in order to conceal himself, he had often stayed under the eaves of houses, under beds, in the trucks of cars... In sum, he had stayed everywhere. As long as there was a bed, he was comfortable. And the office’s bathroom had a water heater and a shower head, so he could take a shower. Wasn’t that better than living in the park?

Also, he was the studio’s environmental maintenance director. He cleaned the office an hour before working hours every day. By sleeping there, he could save on travel time. He could get up and go right to sweeping. By the time his three other colleagues came to work, Yuan Luori already had the room cleaned up.

After reviving the woods in the park, Yu Hua saw that there were more and more Protectors arriving, so he left the park and went to the studio. He had come to find Yuan Luori.

Yuan Luori had been sent by the Clearing League to test the waters. He knew quite a few of the league’s people. Yu Hua wanted to use the identity of the black-cloaked man to question him about Destroyer 192’s habits, make Yuan Luori lure 192 out so Yu Hua could get rid of him and



prevent 192 making trouble that would force Xiao You to work overtime again, ruining the couple's leisurely evening mealtime.

In the moonlit office, Yuan Luori was curled up asleep under the folding bed. He had tucked a doll representing himself into the bed. There was a copy of *Criminal Law* next to the pillow.

When Yu Hua saw Yuan Luori not sleeping in his bed, he paused his hand on the way to shaking Yuan Luori awake.

Though he wouldn't be controlled by the System again, wouldn't complete missions again, Yuan Luori still maintained an assassin's habits. Zhen Li had bought him a bed, but he didn't dare to sleep on the bed. He used a life-sized doll as a diversionary tactic, while he himself slept soundly under the bed.

This was what a leveler was like. Even if they cleared, they still couldn't live ordinary, peaceful lives.

Zhen Li was lucky. He had only gone through four levels, and his nature was adaptable. Before encountering excessively difficult worlds, he had returned to a peaceful life. He could happily enjoy his good food and pretty clothes, livestream and be an internet celebrity. But Yuan Luori's luck wasn't so good.

How could a few days heal the torment of thirty-seven worlds?

And what about Yu Hua with his 3,841 worlds? Did he really understand what "ordinary" was?

Eleven years after coming to this world, Yu Hua had been exerting all his energy to disguise himself, but he had never been able to sleep peacefully, had never been able to make a single friend, had never been able to trust anyone.

Only when he had met You Zhengping four years ago had Yu Hua understood what disorder was, had understood what playful fun was.

Xiao You was fireworks to him.

At this point, Yu Hua resolutely stuck out his hand and sent the folding bed flying. Yuan Luori was instantly startled awake. He drew a dagger from his waist and stabbed in front of himself. Opening his eyes wide and blearily said, "Who's there?"

As he attacked, two soft, clear contacts fell down.

Yu Hua: "..."

He even wore contact lenses to sleep, afraid of not being able to see when he woke up. It was unclear whether the lenses didn't fit, or whether Yuan Luori instinctively rejected them. If he made a slightly strong movement, his lenses would fall out.

In the moonlight, with his near-sightedness and astigmatism, Yuan Luori really couldn't see clearly. He had his eyes opened wide, but all he could see was a smear...no, two smears (doubled by astigmatism) of black, so he involuntarily squinted and stretched his neck out faintly, trying to see who it was.

Yu Hua: "..."

If Yuan Luori couldn't adjust to his contact lenses, he might keep sticking his neck out. His posture would get worse, and Yu Hua wouldn't be able to sell him off for a good price.

Recently, a talent competition had been interested in Zhen Li, wanting to invite him to participate in their show. Zhen Li was the company's mainstay, making a steady flow of income on his livestreams, and advertising companies were gradually coming to them. The hundred million was just around the corner. Yu Hua thought that Zhen Li was very suited to being an internet celebrity and didn't want to sell him to the show. So he had recommended Yuan Luori.

Yuan Luori wasn't as popular as Zhen Li. The show group didn't especially want to sign him. Yu Hua was currently haggling with them, planning to use all kinds of means to build Yuan Luori's popularity to wrap him up and sell him to the show group. Yu Hua would do some false accounting again, deposit some hundreds of thousands from his own hundred million into the company's account. This way he could launder the money bit by bit.

At a time like this, he couldn't develop a habit of craning his neck. Yuan Luori had to wear his contact lenses properly!

While he considered the company's future, Yu Hua divided his attention. When he had just drawn back his train of thought to speak to Yuan Luori, he suddenly heard movement outside the window. He quickly ducked into the door of the bathroom.

"Where did you go?" Squinting, Yuan Luori waved his knife around. He couldn't tell whether it was his astigmatism that made him unable to tell where the person had gone, or whether they had really disappeared.

Just then, another black-cloaked person climbed in through the office's window. It was You Zhengping disguised as the black-cloaked man.

The studio was on the twenty-first floor. Neither You Zhengping nor Yu Hua had taken the stairs. They had used their special powers to climb up. Also, neither of them had concealed his figure. They had guessed that Destroyer 192 would be secretly watching the Zhen Li Studio, which was so conspicuous. They were deliberately giving him an opportunity to see that a black-cloaked person had come to see Yuan Luori in the middle of the night.

Neither had thought that the other would come, especially not that they would come one right after the other.

Yu Hua: "..."

Who knew what Destroyer 192 would make of seeing two black-cloaked people climb into the studio one after the other.

Yu Hua didn't know the true identity of the black-cloaked man in front him, but he could guess that this was some Protector, so he hid behind the door to listen in and probe the Protection Organization's plans.

You Zhengping knocked Yuan Luori's dagger out of his hand. Imitating the black-cloaked man's deep and resounding voice from the amusement park, he said, "Quiet down, it's me."

The owner of this voice had removed Yuan Luori's System's power and beaten him almost into blindness. Naturally Yuan Luori remembered it. Hearing that his idol had come, he instantly no longer cared whether he could see. He executed a practiced and elegant sliding kneel towards the black figure, sliding right up to You Zhengping. "Great master, is that you?"

You Zhengping and Yu Hua: "..."

Zhen Li's livestream dance teaching was pretty effective.

"The Clearing League has sent a new leveler. He is arrogant and has violated the rules I set down. He must be killed without pardon!" You Zhengping said, imitating the black-cloaked man's tone.

"Clearing League" and "leveler" were the terms that Yuan Luori and Zhen Li used. The Protectors called them "Destroyers." In order to match his identity, You Zhengping had deliberately used their terminology.

During the questioning before, Yuan Luori had revealed that he worshipped the black-cloaked man. You Zhengping knew that he would listen to the black-cloaked man's orders.

"What? Is there someone who still dares to jeopardize public safety? What has he done?" Yuan Luori said angrily.

"About the same as you. He placed bombs in a central park with over a thousand visitors and damaged a public installation. He also kidnapped a little boy."

"How can you call that the same as me? My circumstances are comparatively light, a fixed-term imprisonment of between three and ten years. He created enormous losses to public property. That's at least ten years, with the most serious penalty being death!" Yuan Luori protested, firmly unwilling to be associated with Destroyer 192.

The melancholy husbands: "..."

He hadn't memorized *Criminal Law* for nothing.

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Author's Note:

Yuan Luori: My punishment is to be near-sighted and astigmatic, and to study for three years. His punishment has to be worse than mine!

## CHAPTER 39

“Of course he can't be let off lightly.” You Zhengping remembered the miserable state of the park and the little boy Junjun's crying and thought that Destroyer 192's death wouldn't be regretted. “He violated the rules I set down. He will die!”

When he said the word “die,” You Zhengping threw out his hand, and the black cloak floated slightly, revealing his hand and the edge of his shirt.

Yuan Luori was near-sighted and couldn't see it clearly, but Yu Hua, hidden behind the door, saw perfectly. He had already been wondering whether this disguised Protector was his Xiao You and carefully watching the fake black-cloaked man's every move. This throwing out gesture and the indistinct edge of shirt made Yu Hua certain that this was You Zhengping.

“Yes, he must be gotten rid of, what can I do to help you?” Yuan Luori asked piously.

You Zhengping looked at Yuan Luori's squinting expression and simply couldn't connect this person with the arrogant Destroyer at the amusement park. Destroyers who had the power of their System removed and lost their protective umbrella each had a stronger desire for survival than the next. Faced with the black-cloaked man who had beaten him up, he could still fawn and flatter. He truly was flexible.

“Do you think that other levelers will take notice of you after coming to this world?” You Zhengping asked.

Yuan Luori said, “They definitely will. Zhen Li and I are the vanguard sent on by the Clearing League. No matter who comes here, they're sure to want to get information from us. Especially since you used my System to speak to the Clearing League. The Clearing League must think that I know something of your abilities and habits, perhaps even your true identity, so they'll have to come to me or Zhen Li. The new leveler has already taken action. He must be secretly monitoring me. Has he already found out that you came to see me?”

“I deliberately let him find out.” Hearing Yuan Luori's verdict, You Zhengping relaxed.

“If he's found out...then he'll definitely be very cautious, because he can't be certain that you're the target of the mission. He won't show himself lightly. He'll probably use long-distance means to contact me,” Yuan Luori said, thinking about it.

The Destroyer didn't have a low IQ. His biggest shortcoming was that he underestimated this world's people, feeling he was superior to them. Before, Yuan Luori had underestimated the Protectors, too, so he had been trounced by You Zhengping at the amusement park. After being trained, he had improved a great deal.

Yuan Luori's answers were about what the Protection Organization had anticipated. You Zhengping said, "You can reveal some suitable abilities to mislead him. Just tell him I've arranged to meet you at 10 AM tomorrow at the Xincheng Mall movie theater."

"What important business do you wish to meet with me about?" Yuan Luori asked.

You Zhengping lowered his voice and laughed darkly. "Of course it's about the ten years minimum to death sentence maximum."

Hearing that there was someone who might be more unfortunate than him, Yuan Luori was very expectant. He said, "Then I'll tell him that one of this world's power sources is under the Xincheng Mall, and you're planning to take the power source and use this world power to defeat the whole Clearing League in one blow, and I'm being forced to help you."

You Zhengping said, "...That sort of reason works. No need to exaggerate so much."

"You can leave it to me!" Yuan Luori nodded forcefully.

When You Zhengping had delivered his orders, he was worried that if he stayed in front of Yuan Luori too long he would reveal himself, so he left behind one of the Protection Organization's communication earpieces and quickly jumped out the window.

Yuan Luori squinted, "watching" the black figure leave. He was inwardly cheering himself on when he turned and nearly bumped into another black-cloaked man.

Seeing You Zhengping leave, Yu Hua had come out from behind the door and quietly stood behind Yuan Luori.

Yuan Luori: "!!!"

He looked at Yu Hua, then turned to glance out the window. All at sea, he asked, "Have you returned? What other orders do you have?"

Yu Hua: "..."

He hadn't even realized there were two people. Yuan Luori's eyesight made one doubt whether he could complete tomorrow's mission.

"Your story before was full of holes. It won't fool the new leveler," Yu Hua said. "Though you should say so at first, and when he questions you and refuses to believe you, change to your second story."

“Your considerations are thorough,” Yuan Luori said, squinting. “What is the second story?”

Yu Hua said, “Tell him that I’m meeting you because he was too arrogant today, and I want to set a trap to kill him.”

“Isn’t that the truth?” Yuan Luori said in surprise.

Yu Hua laughed coldly. “Only a combination of truth and falsehood will trick him. What you’re going to say is that I value your ability to release poison within a large radius. I arranged to meet you at the Xincheng Mall movie theater so you can release a poison from the sixth floor. This is a virus that I obtained in a previous world. It’s highly infectious, and I’ll be able to control every person infected with it, and by the time he notices it, he’ll already be surrounded by the crowd controlled by me. There will be no escape.”

“But didn’t you tell the Clearing League before that they can’t violate the law?” Yuan Luori asked uncertainly. “If I say that, will he believe it?”

“He’ll believe it,” Yu Hua said, smiling. “On the contrary, if you were to tell him that I was a person who cherished life and wanted to protect the world, he wouldn’t believe that.”

Yuan Luori smacked his head, pouring some legal common sense out of his brain and remembering his own previous thoughts. He deeply acknowledged Yu Hua’s words. After receiving the mission, the Clearing League had gathered together to analyze what kind of person the mission target was. Deep, frightening, cruel, powerful... None of their guesses had included the mission target caring about the lives of the natives.

Levelers saw a world’s ordinary people as natives, unimportant NPCs. They saw any enemies with super powers, like the Protectors, as minor bosses. They saw the mission target as a formidable opponent who could threaten the existence of a life as mighty as a leveler’s. No leveler would think that the target of the ultimate clearing mission would protect ordinary people.

It had been for the sake of threatening the Protectors that Destroyer 192 had planted bombs in the park, to make the Protectors help him find the mission target. It hadn’t been to threaten Yu Hua.

“I understand what to say,” Yuan Luori said, nodding.

“How are you going to explain that I came twice in a row?” Yu Hua asked.

Yuan Luori considerably found an excuse for Yu Hua. “You thought that the new leveler would contact me when you left for the first time. After I had revealed the energy source plan, you would hurry back, and only tell me the real plan the second time. The new leveler would have contacted me unilaterally and would have used up his only opportunity to make contact. This way, I couldn’t tell him the true plan. But you didn’t expect that the new clearer would be very

cautious and wait a long time after you left the second time to contact me and the new clearer would get all of the information.”

Yu Hua nodded faintly. He didn't hate Yuan Luori for ruining his date all that much. He tapped Yuan Luori's eyes with a finger, and Yuan Luori instantly saw a light in front of his eyes. The world became clearer.

“I've placed a layer of optical energy in front of your eyes, making a pair of contact lenses that won't fall out. The effect lasts twenty-four hours, so you can act tomorrow. Later, if you behave well, I'll completely heal your eyes.” Yu Hua's gaze swept over *Criminal Law*, which had fallen on the floor.

The punishment the Protection Organization had set for Yuan Luori was three years of tests (using the tests to substitute for a prison sentence). *Penal Law* also provided that good behavior or rendering meritorious service could result in a reduced sentence. Yu Hua was a member of society who abided by the law. When Yuan Luori's prison sentence was over, Yu Hua would naturally observe the law and give Yuan Luori an opportunity to mend his ways and start afresh.

The feeling of being able to see the world clearly again was too good. Yuan Luori was overjoyed. He said thank you over and over again. In the process of lowering and raising his head, the black-cloaked man had vanished.

Yuan Luori turned on the lights in the office, replaced the folding bed, picked up *Criminal Law*, sat in the cubicle that belonged to him, and began to read with relish.

The Protection Organization had given him many books. Apart from *Criminal Law*, there was also *Civil Law*, *Penal Law*, and other legal texts closely linked to social rules and regulations and public life. But Yuan Luori only liked *Criminal Law*.

For him, *Criminal Law* wasn't a dry and dull legal text. It was a recollection of the past.

Yuan Luori had experienced thirty-seven worlds and had seen every sort of leveler. These people's ideas had long ago been turned around by the System's training. All their conduct was recorded in *Criminal Law*. When Yuan Luori recited an article from *Criminal Law*, it was as though he saw the end of some leveler he had once met.

He also turned on the office's livestream, euphemistically calling it reading late into the night. In fact, Yuan Luori's peaceful profile attracted quite a few fans to come and read along with him.

After about half an hour, Yuan Luori's phone rang. He saw that it was a hidden phone number and temporarily turned off the livestream. He picked up the phone.

As expected, the person on the phone was Destroyer 192. Using all kinds of methods, implying and suggesting, lying and hoodwinking, he “tricked” Yuan Luori into telling him all the information everyone wanted him to know.

This was an unopened world. The Clearing League hadn't made inquiries about the scope of authority in this world. The levelers outside this world couldn't exchange information with ones in the world. Destroyer 192 had observed for several days before guessing that there was such a thing as the Protection Organization in this world. But he didn't know who the mission target was, and he didn't know that the mission target could turn the energy of their Systems into an afternoon tea.

When he learned that the mission target had threatened Yuan Luori, Destroyer 192 hung up the phone and considered what he should do.

This was a trap, and it was also an opportunity. He had to get rid of the mission target before Yuan Luori released his poison, or else when all the people in the city had been infected, he would have nowhere to hide.

As he pondered with a grave face, someone walked by and slapped his ass, ambiguously saying, "You're in luck. There's a rather rich merchant who's taken a fancy to you. He's requested you to come drink with him."

Destroyer 192 had deathly-looking mascara around his eyes and a piercing in his lip. His shaggy hair fell over his ears. He swept an indifferent gaze over the person who had slapped him just now.

When a leveler entered a world controlled by the System, he could directly take over the identity of one of the world's natives, occupying that person's soul; he would also have ability to inspect that person's memories and a portion of what would happen to them in the future. But as for an unopened world, the System couldn't control it entirely, and levelers who were thrown in had only two choices.

One type was when the System constructed a fake identity, made up a person with no friends or family or spouse, forcing a person with simple social connections into the world. Zhen Li and Yuan Luori both belonged to this type. The other type was to throw the leveler at random into the body of a person who had just died. Because this person's soul had already vanished, the leveler couldn't access their memories. Destroyer 192 was of this type.

He had just been thrown into the body of an employee of a place of ill-repute, recently dead of illness, more commonly known as a rent boy.

This body's physique was very poor, riddled with disease. Destroyer 192 had been forced to use large numbers of points to get medicine to improve his physical condition from the System. Only in this way had he healed the body's illnesses and improved its stamina.

Then he had discovered that this crappy body was unregistered. It had no ID card. He couldn't access its memories. He didn't even know this person's name.



He lived in the crappy dormitory of a certain house of ill-repute. He only knew that others called him Xiao Mu. He was a poor unregistered individual.

At the start, he hadn't known how dangerous this world was. He had had to pretend to be sick and observe from the shadows. After a few days, he had seen that this world was very safe, and he had seen Zhen Li and Yuan Luori's videos on a coworker's phone. He had guessed that the two of them may have been captured.

His ability was explosive games. He could designate a certain area as his game space and turn everything he touched in that space into bombs. He could also interact with all the energy sources in the space.

Destroyer 192 had stealthily used his ability to investigate, shifting from one area to another. Finally, in a certain police station, he had found about a dozen unusual energy sources!

This world had special ability users. They were hidden throughout the world. These people were certainly very powerful, and that was why the System had been unable to open this world, and all the people who had taken opening assignments had died.

He had released his ability on a small scale in the Xuyang District Central Park first in order to search for the mission target, and second to test the Protection Organization's bottom line and abilities.

If the Protection Organization and the mission target thought that this was the only ability he had, then they were completely mistaken. Destroyer 192 smiled in satisfaction.

Seeing his arrogant smile, the person who had nabbed a customer for him slapped the back of his head. "The hell are you smiling about? Hurry up!"

Destroyer 192 looked at this person with the look of one seeing a dead man. He thought, *Patience, I must have patience. I have to conceal my identity for now. No one can know that I'm living here. This club is full of mixed company, but it's the best place to hide. When I've killed the mission target, I'll blow this place up.*

He unwillingly got up and went over to the bulky rich merchant, knocking back a bottle of 100 proof baijiu.

During the day he had caused a sensation with his bombs, but at night he still had to accompany customers in drinking. In order to accomplish his mission, Destroyer 192 endured this.

His alcohol tolerance was excellent. He got the rich merchant thoroughly plastered, carried him to a hotel, and knocked him out. He went through the night to Xincheng Mall to investigate the surroundings and prepare ahead of time.

His ability required him to touch the objects inside this space ahead of time so he could turn the area into his explosive space. The Xincheng Mall was closed now. Sneaking in in the middle of the night would definitely attract suspicion. Destroyer 192 didn't want to alert the enemy in advance.

He looked at the Xincheng Mall from afar. After pondering for a moment, he smiled.

Apart from his ability, he also had an initial item. No one knew how powerful his initial item was.

Destroyer 192 took out a neckband and turned it around in his hand. When he had turned it for a while, the single neckband turned into three. This was the largest number of neckbands he could produce. When he had passed two-hundred levels, he should be able to produce four.

He put one neckband around his own neck. Where would he put the other two?

When Destroyer 192 returned to the hotel, there was one neckband remaining in his hand. The other one had been hidden somewhere. He put the sole leftover neckband on the rich merchant's neck and smiled grimly.

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The next morning, Yu Hua got a call from Zhen Li. "Director Yu, a mall has invited me to dance at their three year anniversary. The appearance fee is very high! Can I go?"

"Go ahead. Make some more money and pay my salary," Yu Hua ordered.

He put down the phone and saw that the other side of the double bed was empty. Xiao You hadn't come home last night.

He had to take care of this new leveler as soon as possible, or else how many nights would he have to spend alone?

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Author's Note:

Yu Hua: Nights spent alone are cold and lonely.

## CHAPTER 40

Zhen Li's first time getting an invitation to an event, the organizers had offered a good deal of money, much higher than the fee for an ordinary minor internet celebrity. Zhen Li was very excited. He came to the studio at 6 AM to do his makeup in front of the livestream, talking to the early-rising fans watching. He said, "I'm going to Xincheng Mall today to do a sales promotion, fans in the Xuyang District can come see."

Yuan Luori, kneeling off to the side wiping the floor with a cleaning rag, looked quietly at Zhen Li when he heard about the Xincheng Mall. “Your event is at the Xincheng Mall?”

“Yes, a very well-known mall in the Xuyang District!” Zhen Li said happily. “We’ve got a bit of fame now, too. Do you want to come with me? While they didn’t invite you, you can help me carry my luggage. The mall supplies clothes, but they’re a little ugly, so I’m planning to bring my three favorite outfits.”

Yuan Luori’s gaze fell on the suitcase at Zhen Li’s feet. He couldn’t resist saying, “Bring some cheap ones.”

“How could I do that? The mall is giving me so much money, I have to show good faith. I’m bringing my three favorite outfits.” Zhen Li gave Yuan Luori a brilliant smile. He thought it was really wonderful that he had stayed in this world. He was good-looking, had clothes, and could eat a lot, and there were fans who liked him, and a mall spending money to invite him to participate in an activity.

Yuan Luori looked at his stupid smiling face and remembered that the great master clearer had said that this was a confidential operation and he couldn’t tell Zhen Li. He guiltily broke out in cold sweat. He wiped the sweat off his forehead with the cleaning rag. “Go ahead. Director Yu said that as long as no one is here today, he wants me to fulfill the responsibilities of an environmental maintenance director and polish the floor.”

“Huh?” Zhen Li said disappointedly. “If Director Yu ordered it, then there’s nothing to do. I did want to take you along. That way, I could split you off a bit of the money from the mall and call it your cut.”

Zhen Li thought Yuan Luori was very pitiful. 90% of his income was taken away. He was so poor he couldn’t even buy a decent handkerchief and had to wipe his sweat off with a cleaning rag. He’d wanted to share some of the money with him, but Yuan Luori didn’t accept his good intentions.

“He has to wipe the floor. I’ll go with you today.” Yu Hua had heard their dialogue as soon as he walked through the door. He continued, “Have you done your makeup? If you’re ready, we’ll head out.”

Then Yu Hua picked up Zhen Li’s makeup box and suitcase, scaring Zhen Li into leaping out of his chair. “No, no, I won’t trouble you, I’ll carry them myself.”

Yu Hua had only been going through the motions. Seeing that Zhen Li knew his place, he nodded appreciatively.

Seeing the three of them interact, the barrage on the livestream was about to go mad from hilarity:

[This is my first time following a livestream like this. Watch Yuan Luori-xiaogege studying Criminal Law in the middle of the night, get up early and watch President Zhen do his makeup and Director Yuan wipe the floor. Is your studio trying to force your fans into the habit of early rising and diligent study?]

[President Zhen's makeup is very cheap, can't the studio get a better makeup company to sponsor them?]

[So your studio's environmental maintenance director is really a janitor? So what's the public relations director? Does he hand out flyers in the street?]

[I'm not very clear on what environmental maintenance and public relations directors do, but the human resources director is definitely in charge. After all, President Zhen is going to carry his own bags.]

[I'm dying from laughter. Has anyone else been following the Zhen Li Studio like a daily skit show?]

[Daily skit show +1]

...

[+ID card number.]

To constantly follow the new leveler's status, Yu Hua had decided to personally go to Xincheng Mall with Zhen Li.

Before leaving, Yu Hua marked down an absence and deduction of wages for Lian Yufan on the attendance sheet. Their studio was rather hard up, and Lian Yufan didn't rely on the salary from the studio for support himself. Yu Hua could deduct whenever he liked to avoid Lian Yufan getting too much money and going out to buy pants.

At eighty-thirty, the two of them arrived half an hour before the mall opened. Yu Hua casually looked around and saw countless familiar faces among the employees.

There was Cen Xiao's Plain Face Number 1 mask, Lian Yufan's Plain Face Number 1 mask, and You Zhengping's handsome uncle mask. The masks and the true identities were all old acquaintances.

Yu Hua hadn't known before that You Zhengping, Cen Xiao, and the others were Protectors. He hadn't equated these faces with the people themselves. Naturally he couldn't have distinguished the identities behind the masks. Now that he had a goal, he compared some particular habits and could tell at once whose face was whose.

Plain Face Number 1 was Cen Xiao; he liked coke, chicken legs, and barbecue. Plain Face Number 3 was Shi Yongfu; he liked instant noodles, hotpot, and hot and spicy skewers. Plain

Face Number 4 was You Zhengping's underling Xiao Ruo; he liked custard tarts, durian layer cake, and half-baked cheeses...

As Yu Hua's gaze swept over each mask, he recalled a familiar face and a menu. Since he had resigned from his original company, he hadn't invited Xiao You's friends to come to their house. When this was over, he would make some good food to reward everyone. They were all brothers who had stuck with You Zhengping in the face of death. As Xiao You's family member, he had to thank them properly.

"What are you looking at?" Seeing Yu Hua constantly examining the people inside the mall, Zhen Li's gaze following his. He saw Cen Xiao's Plain Face Number 1, and the overflowing smile he had worn since early morning instantly froze.

Among all these Protectors' masks, the one he had the strongest impression of was Plain Face Number 1. After all, at the amusement park, he had desperately eaten bubbles to rescue that face.

Zhen Li took a big stride towards Face No. 1, took out an autograph card, and gave it to Cen Xiao. Looking woebegone, he said, "You must be a fan of mine. I'll give you an autograph."

Cen Xiao looked at the meticulously made-up Zhen Li. A wine red suit accompanied by an extraordinarily beautiful face were very eye-catching. He thought that a handsome young man like this was enough to attract the majority of the customers. He took the autograph card and said, "Yes, I'm your fan."

Hearing Cen Xiao acknowledge with his double meaning that there was an operation today, Zhen Li, looking sorrowful, said, "So it's your superiors who invited me to do the sales promotion event?"

"Yes." Cen Xiao nodded remorsefully.

"Will today's sales promotion be very warm? Will it set fire to the whole audience?" Zhen Li was about to burst into tears.

Cen Xiao remained remorseful. "Yes, there will be many people at the event, and we want to invite a special guest. Maybe there will even be large-scale fireworks."

Fireworks... Zhen Li instantly understood the meaning behind Cen Xiao's words. The Protectors wanted to set a trap to capture a Destroyer with extremely strong destructive force and had asked him to be the bait. Zhen Li remembered Yuan Luori's sympathetic expression this morning. Gritting his teeth, he asked, "Does our environmental maintenance manager know about this?"

Cen Xiao patted Zhen Li on the shoulder and nodded seriously. He took a tissue out of his pocket and wiped away the tears about to drop from Zhen Li's eyes. Sympathetically, he said,

"I think he does know. Don't cry. You'll ruin your makeup if you cry, and then you won't be able to be an appropriately eye-catching figure."

Zhen Li snatched the tissue out of Cen Xiao's hand and trotted over to Yu Hua. He quietly said, "Director Yu, did you know about this?"

Yu Hua calmly said, "I only found out this morning that they had invited you."

The subtext was that he had known the rest!

*In the whole world, I'm the only one being kept in the dark!* Zhen Li hugged his suitcase inconsolably. How was he going to protect his three favorite outfits?

Soon it was nine o'clock. The customers came into the mall one after another. Zhen Li stood on a stage at the center of the first floor lobby, singing a song according to the script, attracting people's gazes.

Zhen Li had a good voice. Though he hadn't been specially trained, his singing still sounded good, and his pitch was accurate. Adding in that he was very good-looking, quite a few customers were lured over. After the opening song, Zhen Li read the contents of today's event off a card. He said that starting at ten, there would be a lottery drawing every hour on the hour. The customers were asked to write down their cell phone numbers and put them in a box. At ten, he would personally pick three customers who would receive cell phones.

The lottery-drawing could attract at least 90% of the people. The customers excitedly wrote their phone numbers on the slips of paper and threw them into the lottery drawing box. It would soon be ten, and most of the customers who had put down their numbers had stayed on the first floor to watch Zhen Li's performance. There were only a small number of customers with clear motives who quickly went to specific counters to shop.

A fat middle-aged man put his slip of paper into the lottery drawing box, then left the first floor, headed for the second. He strolled around the second floor, then quickly went to the third.

The group observing behind the scenes was secretly keeping an eye on all the customers. A customer like this middle-aged man, who only strolled without buying anything, attracted the observation group's notice. The Protection Organization's irregulars quickly scanned his distinctive facial features and found the middle-aged man's identity in the internet network's information.

The middle-aged Chai Mou was fifty-one years old, married, with one son and one daughter and over a hundred million in assets. Last night he had taken a room at a certain five-star hotel with a male employee from a certain house of ill-repute. Only Chai Mou's information had been recorded. The young man hadn't put down his information.

"Send someone to the five-star hotel to get last night's security camera footage," Director Xiao ordered. He sat at the rear, overseeing and controlling the whole operation.

The special duty group acted very quickly. In less than twenty minutes, they transferred over the hotel's security recordings. It was still fifteen minutes before ten. Yuan Luori, standing outside the mall, pulled down his cap and went in, planning to go to the sixth-floor movie theater.

The middle-aged Chai Mou was also on the sixth floor at this moment.

"Director, should we arrest him?" Luo Huai's ability wasn't suited for combat. He had stayed with the observation group as reserve personnel.

"Not yet," Director Xiao said, watching the hotel security recordings sped up 32 times. "I think things aren't so simple. Pause 1! Pause 4!"

Director Xiao called two of the security recording images to a pause. One was an image of a young man helping Chai Mou into a hotel room. The other was a high-definition image of Chai Mou leaving the hotel lobby the next morning.

"When Chai Mou entered the hotel, he didn't have anything around his neck. But when he left the hotel today, there was something there," Director Xiao said.

In the screenshot from this morning, Chai Mou's shirt collar was very tight, but it still faintly revealed a smear of gold, as though he were wearing a gold chain. But last night, the drunken Chai Mou's shirt collar had been wide open, and there had been nothing on his neck.

"Find a recording of that young man leaving the hotel!" Director Xiao ordered. "Hurry!"

As it got closer and closer to ten, the observation group searched the recordings inside out without finding an image of the young man leaving.

Close to the arranged time, You Zhengping, wearing the handsome uncle's face, returned to the support group to put on the black cloak. As he put it on, he said, "Either Chai Mou is an ordinary person, last night was too intense, and the young man hasn't gotten out of bed yet, or the young man jumped from the hotel's seventeenth floor last night!"

Hearing the word "intense," Luo Huai quietly turned his head to look at You Zhengping.

"What are you looking at? Watch the security footage!" You Zhengping said angrily.

You Zhengping, wearing the black cloak, was planning to take the elevator inside the movie theater to the sixth floor. The movie theater was under renovation, and the elevator was closed off. Coming from that direction could create the impression of appearing out of thin air.

There was a wireless earbud in his ear under the black cloak. The command post could pass him information any time.

At 9:50, Yuan Luori arrived at the door of the sixth floor movie theater. Because it was being renovated, there were no guests on the sixth floor, only that middle-aged man, Chai Mou.

Yuan Luori stared at the middle-aged man, inwardly analyzing the possibility that this was the new leveler. But just at that moment, the middle-aged man's steps slowed as he stared at Yuan Luori. He shook his head, patted himself, and said uncertainly, "Where is this? What am I doing here?"

Chai Mou went up to Yuan Luori and lecherously examined his face. Smiling, he said, "Young man, what time is it? Where is this? I..."

"Scram!" Yuan Luori yelled impatiently, having watched Chai Mou's expression change and felt a sense of danger.

Having run into a snag, Chai Mou wanted to get angry, but Yuan Luori looked ready to fight, so he rubbed his nose and, picking the path of least resistance, quickly went towards the stairs to go down.

Chai Mou saw Xincheng Mall's logo and clutched at his head. "Weird, why would I be here? Didn't I find someone to drink with me last night? And then what? Why is it so hot in here?"

His forehead was covered in sweat. He unbuttoned his collar. Director Xiao, closely watching the surveillance footage, had the image enlarged, but saw that the gold item around Chai Mo's neck had disappeared.

"Destroyer 192 has a special ability. He can control others or switch bodies with them. He uses gold items worn around the neck to control or switch!" Director Xiao said confidently.

"What's the difference between controlling and switching?" Luo Huai asked.

Director Xiao said, "Based on our understanding of Destroyers, they have many abilities that can only function if they've personally touched something. By controlling Chai Mou, he could merely take him hostage. But if he changed bodies with him..."

"Chai Mou just went around the whole mall touching things!" Luo Huai warned. "Everything he touched can be turned into a bomb!"

"But Chai Mou has already left the mall, and the real Destroyer 192 isn't necessarily inside. If we activate the repulsion field now, he won't step into the trap!" Director Xiao said, frowning.

"I remember all the place he touched!" Luo Huai quickly opened a plan of the mall on a computer and made several marks showing the places that Chai Mou had touched. "Apart from the lottery drawing box, everything he touched was one of the mall's major load-bearing walls. If they explode, even if the repulsion field is active, this building will still collapse instantly!"



In their original plan, Destroyer 192 would want to turn the mall into his game space, so he would first have to go into the mall the designate the range. The best outcome was for the Protection Organization to fix on their target while Destroyer 192 was preparing, but they hadn't expected that Destroyer 192 could casually switch bodies. He was very cautious.

"It's too dangerous. Should we suspend the plan?" Luo Huai said.

"We can't suspend it." You Zhengping's voice came over his earpiece. He had heard Director Xiao and Luo Huai's analysis in the command room. "Even if he explodes it, as long as we activate the repulsion field in time, the explosion won't hurt ordinary people. If the building collapses, that'll be my loss!"

"The ten o'clock lottery drawing is about to start. Ninety percent of the people are gathered on the first floor. Have Zhen Li draw it out, keep the crowd collected on the first floor. If the repulsion field is concentrated on protecting the customers, it'll be fine," Cen Xiao said.

"But Chai Mou put a slip of paper into the lottery drawing box just now. If I were Destroyer 192, I would have put the most powerful bomb inside that box. The more people there are, the more hostages he'll have!" Luo Huai warned.

"Uh...there's no need to worry about that, actually." There was a hint of a laugh in Cen Xiao's voice over the earpiece. "Zhen Li just went to the restroom and took the opportunity to eat the lottery drawing box and the slips of paper inside it. We're using the backup lottery drawing box now."

While Cen Xiao had watched Zhen Li eat all of it, he had been a little worried about his stomach. Zhen Li had said that was it was fine. When a person was extremely hungry, he could eat paper and cardboard boxes. They belonged to the category of food. If it was food, his alternate dimension stomach could tolerate it.

It was just a little choking. Zhen Li had drunk water desperately, pouring the wads of paper into the alternate dimension stomach.

Now, however Destroyer 192 detonated the bomb, the paper box would only explode inside the alternate dimension stomach. Zhen Li wasn't entirely sure where the alternate dimension stomach sent the food, but at any rate it wouldn't explode in this world.

"Lian Yufan," Director Xiao said gravely, "do you know how much a six-story commercial building weighs? The impact of thousands of tons is enough to flatten your pitiful special ability. You'll have to bear with the pressure from the collapse of the building and the impact of the explosion entirely with your flesh and blood!"

"Director, if Destroyer 192 can change bodies, if we miss this opportunity, he'll definitely become more vigilant. It'll be harder for us to catch him. If a person like this hides among the crowd, the outcome will be unthinkable," Lian Yufan said solemnly. "Don't worry, the lives of

the thousand and more people in the mall are much more important than my life. I'll definitely be able to bear it. This is the most efficient and most optimal option."

"I trust that your idea about the number of lives will persist." Director Xiao ordered, "You Zhengping, move!"

Director Xiao nodded in gratification. After their experience in actual combat last time, the new generation of protectors already possessed an initial ability to alter their plans according to the situation on the battlefield. They would become stronger.

You Zhengping was already hiding behind the door of the movie theater. He had heard everyone over his earpiece and knew that this battle couldn't be lost. When he received the order, he move rapidly, appearing behind Yuan Luori just like a demon.

As the same time, outside the mall, a little husky with a shining coat, wearing a gold band around its neck, was adorably wagging its tail towards some children.

The three children, on seeing this adorable and well-behaved doggy, couldn't resist leaving the protection of their parents to chase after.

The little husky went to a place without people and suddenly fell down. The three children surrounded the husky, wanting to see what was wrong with the doggy. Just then, a hand reached out from behind them, and the three children silently fell unconscious.

The young rent boy Xiao Mu walked over, tapped on the three children's little backpacks, tied the three children together, and put them over his shoulders.

He kicked the unconscious husky at his feet. The dog was dead.

This three-month old little husky had contracted canine parvovirus. Last night it couldn't hold out any longer and had died. The pet shop had put the little husky's body outside, and Destroyer 192 had taken notice of it and put a neckband around its neck. This was so he could use the cute little animal to attract children.

He bent down, about to take the neckband from the husky's neck, then hesitated and let it go.

His ability to switch bodies was limited. It could only be used once a week. He couldn't use the rich merchant Chai Mou anymore. If he removed the band from the little husky's neck now, he would have no line of retreat.

Destroyer 192 hid the little husky's body in a corner. He did a visual estimate of the height of the movie theater. With the three children over his shoulder, he equipped a jumping item and leapt right onto the theater's window.

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Author's Note:

Zhen Li: When I equipped the alternate dimension stomach because I wanted to eat without getting fat, but now it seems to have become an absorption ability.

Cen Xiao: Well done.

Zhen Li: (wildly eating wads of paper) It's for the sake of my three outfits. If there really is a bomb in the lottery drawing box, I couldn't protect my suitcase! TAT

## CHAPTER 41

At 10:05, five minutes past the arranged meeting time, Yuan Luori was patiently waiting for the black-cloaked man.

Zhen Li's voice came over the public broadcasting system from the first floor to the whole building. He loudly said, "Congratulations to the customer with the cell phone number ending 6919, you've been selected, please come up to the stage to receive your phone."

Zhen Li was stalling and only drew the first winner after five minutes. He had eaten the paper slips and lottery drawing box from before. The box now was the fresh one Cen Xiao had prepared. He had written some numbers at random, not knowing whether they were right or not. At any rate, if a customer's phone number just happened to match, then they would be the winner, and if he called out three times without anyone coming for the phone, one of the members of the Protector squad would come to get it.

Zhen Li called three times. The customers standing at the foot of the stage looked at each other helplessly. You Zhengping's third underling, Xiao Ruo, who liked to eat sweets, went up on stage. "It's mine."

When he had been caught at the very beginning, Xiao Ruo had been there, too. Zhen Li recognized Plain Face Number 4. He handed over the phone with a dry smile and said, "Congratulations, Customer 6919! Let me ask, how do you feel about winning?"

Xiao Ruo knew that Zhen Li had to draw out the lottery drawing for as long as possible to gather even more customers together and avoid anyone going to the sixth floor movie theater and getting in the way of You Zhengping's operation. As everyone looked on enviously, he said, "Happy. I'm just so happy. Recently, I helped a brother save money to buy his husband a phone. When I saw him buy the phone, I was so envious. Why wasn't there anyone scrounging food and drink to save up to buy me a phone? Now I've finally realized my wish. It's great!"

"...I didn't scrounge food and drink, and also, I feel like there's some grief in your words," Zhen Li said.

Yu Hua, at the foot of the stage, heard Xiao Ruo and frowned faintly. Why were Xiao You's brothers still concerned about the scrounged food and drink? Was he not making enough snacks?

Seeing that everyone's gazes, including Cen Xiao and the other Protectors's, were focused on Xiao Ruo, Yu Hua quietly left the lobby. For the sake of security, he also sent Zhen Li a message to say that someone wanted to interview today, and as the human resources director, he had to go lead the interview.

Yu Hua began to walk. When he had only gone two steps, he was stopped by Lian Yufan in Plain Face Number 2.

"Sir, there are still two phones to be chosen, won't you wait for the next drawing?" Lian Yufan asked. He was wearing an employee's uniform.

Lian Yufan wasn't suspicious of Yu Hua. He was worried that if Yu Hua went upstairs, it would get in the way of You Zhengping's battle.

Yu Hua currently didn't recognize Lian Yufan in his mask. He explained, "I'm Zhen Li's agent. I didn't take part in the lottery. I have an interview at eleven. There's someone applying for the position of public relations director, so I'm going to have a look at him."

Lian Yufan said, "...So your company doesn't have a public relations director."

"No, we do have one, though he's rather obnoxious and often abandons his post and refuses to comply with discipline. I'm planning to find a more obedient one. The money from this event of yours is just enough to pay a severance."

Lian Yufan: "..."

Yu Hua lightly raised his eyebrow at Lian Yufan. Maintaining a polite smile, he left the mall.

Seeing that he really was leaving, Lian Yufan relaxed and didn't stop Yu Hua again. As for the bit about firing him...he'd see about that later!

After leaving the mall, Yu Hua went to a corner unobserved by security cameras and set up an illusion. For five minutes, he wouldn't be seen by passersby.

He snapped his fingers lightly, and the black cloak appeared on him.

After using the poison to force 3% of his power to unseal, Yu Hua could use his summoning ability. With the limit of his power, he could only summon three inanimate objects, and the inanimate objects had to have belonged to Yu Hua and been marked in advance.

Naturally Yu Hua had marked this cloak. After summoning it and quickly changing into it, he also summoned the silver mask and covered his face.

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While Zhen Li had been drawing the winner for the first phone, five minutes before Yu Hua changed clothes, Yuan Luori and You Zhengping had arrived on the roof of the movie theater according to plan. Yuan Luori took out a bubble machine he had bought and passed it to You Zhengping.

Naturally this wasn't an item from the System. Yuan Luori had withdrawn some of his scant earnings ahead of time to buy it at a toy shop next door. And there wasn't poison inside the bubble machine, only plain soapy water, entirely for the use of fooling Destroyer 192.

You Zhengping knew the bubble machine's history and accepted it with the proper attitude. After inspecting it, he said, "Well done. Did you put in the virus I gave you?"

"Of course I did. When are you going to remove the restriction you put on me?" Yuan Luori also recited his lines.

They wanted to trick Destroyer 192, so naturally Yuan Luori had to pretend he was being forced. Only if he were being forced would he have a reason to reveal information about the black-cloaked man to Destroyer 192 and request 192's help.

"When the virus has spread over a wide radius, I'll remove the restriction. Otherwise, you'll only die after ten years of your whole body rotting painfully," You Zhengping said fiercely.

"That's truly worthy of the ultimate boss that the System wants to root out! You're so vicious!" Yuan Luori said "hatefully."

They had guessed that Destroyer 192 would be listening in from some location and were deliberately talking about the System. Levelers carrying the System couldn't talk about the System to anyone but other levelers and the mission target. If they so much as thought of revealing anything, they would self-destruct. Yuan Luori saying this was him giving Destroyer 192 evidence that the person in front of him really was the mission target.

In reality, Yu Hua had removed his System long ago. He could have picked a person at random off the street and told them the System's secrets without self-destructing.

"I still don't know the speed and range of dispersal of your bubble machine." You Zhengping turned the bubble machine over in his hands, inwardly wondering why Destroyer 192 wasn't here yet. He couldn't really set the machine off? It would only spurt ordinary bubbles. If he set it off, the plot would be revealed.

"In half an hour, the whole Xuyang District will be wrapped in bubbles," Yuan Luori said nonsensically. At most his bubbles could have encircled the amusement park. They weren't so powerful. But showing off was free, anyway, so he could make himself sound more awesome.

Yuan Luori looked at the black-cloaked man worshipfully, thinking that after they had disposed of the new leveler, he would have to ask his idol how many levels he had passed. He examined

the black-cloaked man closely and gradually discovered that there was something very slightly off about him.

Today's black-cloaked man seemed to be five or six centimeters shorter than the one at the amusement park.

Last night, Yuan Luori had been half blind, his eyes full of shadows. He hadn't been able to see the black-cloaked man clearly. Today, Yu Hua had temporarily restored his vision, so Yuan Luori could see the faint difference.

"Half an hour for just the Xuyang District. I suppose that will do." You Zhengping was still pretending. He couldn't think of any more excuses, so he put his finger on the button of the bubble machine and acted like his was pressing it.

He didn't believe that Destroyer 192 would let him press it.

While You Zhengping pressed the button, he released his senses entirely, eyes darting all around and ears wide open, constantly alert. He knew that everything around him could become a bomb.

As expected, when he was just about to press down, a roughly 30-kilogram object flew off the roof towards You Zhengping.

You Zhengping stared at it. The flying object was an elementary school student wearing a backpack!

In that instant, You Zhengping's eyes reddened. Destroyer 192 was using a child as a hostage again!

When the Protectors had been working out their plan, they had been worried that Destroyer 192 would take children hostage. Their analysis then had been that with a whole mall full of people, perhaps Destroyer 192 wouldn't go to the trouble of finding other hostages.

Though everyone had overlooked one thing—Murphy's Law.

The more you were afraid of something, the more likely it was to happen. The Protectors had been worried about hostages, so Destroyer 192 really had gotten a double guarantee!

"192 has appeared, activate the repulsion field!" You Zhengping only had time to say this before the child flew up in front of him. Not caring that the child's little backpack was exploding, he wrapped his whole body around it.

The child was too close to the backpack. Even if You Zhengping put her in his second space for protection, the backpack would also enter the space with her. Even though the force of the explosion would have been reduced to one tenth, the flesh and blood of a small child might still not be able to endure it.

The only thing to do was to use his space to separate the child from the backpack! If the child had been flying facing You Zhengping, he could have created a small sealing space in his arms, and taken the unconscious child into it. Meanwhile, You Zhengping would have used his arms to control the power, precisely separating the child and the backpack.

But how could Destroyer 192 give You Zhengping the opportunity? Naturally he had sent the child flying with his back towards You Zhengping. Time was tight. You Zhengping had no time to turn the child around. He had to hug the exploding backpack and open a space in his arms, completely wrapping himself and the bomb inside the space and leaving the unconscious child outside.

Everything happened too quickly. Yuan Luori had lost his ability. The only thing he could do was throw himself forward to catch the child before he fell heavily on the ground.

This was a little girl wearing a small dress. She was sleeping peacefully, like a little angel.

Yuan Luori saw that the child was all right and relaxed slightly. Only then could he worry about his idol. "Great master, how are you?"

The space opened next to him. You Zhengping's black cloak had been destroyed. With a bomb going off in his arms, though You Zhengping had been wearing a bulletproof vest to protect his chest and abdomen, his arms had had no protection.

He had used his special ability to trap the whole might of the explosion in his arms. The bulletproof vest had been blown up, and the fire-resistant combat fabric of his sleeves had been turned to ashes. You Zhengping's arms were bloody and blackened, letting off the scent of roasted flesh.

His arms, thighs, and neck had all been burned to varying extents. Only his face under the nanotech mask was still all right. This was only because You Zhengping had thought that with Yuan Luori right next to him, he had to hide his identity, so he had spared a bit of power to protect his head and face.

Yuan Luori said, "You're not the great master, you're a Protector!"

Destroyer 192 said, "You're not the mission target, you're the spatial ability user from the park!"

Yuan Luori, who hadn't cared about anyone's lives at the amusement park, was holding a little girl in his arms. Destroyer 192, meanwhile, had a child tucked under each arm, one boy and one girl, even smaller. It was obvious that their backpacks had also been turned into bombs. And this Destroyer was indeed the young rent boy who had gone to the hotel with the rich merchant last night.

“Yuan Luori, you’ve fallen to the level of joining hands with this world’s natives.” There was deathly black around Destroyer 192’s eyes. He laughed mockingly. “The mission target was never here. You tricked me.”

Enduring severe pain, You Zhengping saw that Destroyer 192 was carrying two more children, and his heart filled with regret.

He was still too weak. If he could control all the power in the area at once like Director Xiao, if he could have precisely used his spaces to separate the child from the explosion at a distance, he wouldn’t have been so seriously injured and wouldn’t have left Destroyer 192 two other children to use to threaten him.

If he had been on his own, he wouldn’t have lost to Destroyer 192, but...

Director Xiao had been right. Destruction was simpler than protection. The Protectors had to be ten times, a hundred times stronger than the Destroyers to be able to protect this world.

Not being able to control his ability at long range and having to touch things in order to open his second space was the weak spot in his ability.

His arms hurt so much. With such a heavy injury, even though special ability users’ healing capacity was stronger than an ordinary person’s, it would still take a month to recover. Would he not be able to see Yu Hua during that month? Would he have to think of another way to trick his husband?

Yu Hua was at the mall today, too. He was on the first floor. Destroyer 192 couldn’t be allowed to release his power, or else Yu Hua would also be in danger.

The repulsion field had been activated. Destroyer 192’s expression changed slightly. He felt that vast power. This was an energy field formed by ten senior Protectors at all corners of the mall building simultaneously releasing their power. Inside the repulsion field, You Zhengping felt quite a bit of his strength restored.

His squad and Lian Yufan’s put together made fourteen people in all. The number was more than enough to form a repulsion field. But Director Xiao had still had older Protectors transferred from all over because the young people couldn’t release their powers at such a distance.

“An energy field? Your plan is truly thorough!” Destroyer 192 raised the two children. “Disperse the repulsion field at once, or else I’ll kill these two children.”

He laughed arrogantly. “Yuan Luori, oh, Yuan Luori. So you want to work with this world’s natives. If the mission target were here, I’d be worried that the hostages would have no impact on him. I only brought the children as insurance against the battle drawing in the world’s natives, to use them as a shield to prevent this world’s super power users from getting in the



way. But if my opponent is only a native, then that's much easier. The hostage move is extremely effective against them.

"I'll only give you three seconds to consider. In three seconds, I'll kill one. Three..."

Hearing Destroyer 192 counting down the seconds, You Zhengping's thoughts flew. He remembered Lian Yufan.

The repulsion field could contain the range of the explosion within a one-meter diameter. As long as there was no one around and someone to hold up the mall building, ordinary people wouldn't be hurt. If they dispersed the repulsion field, then the bombs Destroyer 192 had planted would be enough to instantly take all the lives in this mall and the adjoining office buildings. But if they didn't disperse it, two children would die.

If he had been Lian Yufan, he wouldn't have hesitated. Lian Yufan used numbers to weight the value of lives. It was too easy to choose between two lives and over ten thousand.

What should he do? You Zhengping was a mess of wounds. He remembered that when he and Lian Yufan had fought over the mask, he had said that he would become stronger, strong enough to not have to make a choice, strong enough to be able to say, "I want it all," strong enough not to have to abandon anyone.

"Two..." Destroyer 192 counted precisely.

You Zhengping's injured leg couldn't hold him up. He went down on one knee, slightly reaching out a hand towards Destroyer 192.

"One..." Destroyer 192 smiled. "It doesn't matter if you hesitate now. When one dies, you'll listen to me."

As he spoke, the backpack of the boy he was holding with his left arm lit up. Just then, You Zhengping had fully raised his right hand. He stuck out his middle finger and put the fingertip to the pad of his thumb, flicking lightly, as though flicking someone's forehead.

As the "one" in Destroyer 192's count trailed off, a space just large enough to contain the backpack flew from You Zhengping's fingertips. This space was hard for the average person's naked eye to see. As he flicked his finger, the little space flew quickly. At the moment the backpack lit up, it wrapped around it just in time.

The Destroyer was surprised by this sudden change. He loosened his left hand slightly and took a step back. Because of his movement, the little boy fell on the ground. Luckily the child was light and the height was only one meter. The little boy only got a few small scrapes.

You Zhengping didn't hesitate. After flicking out the first space, he quickly flicked out a second one. These were both his second space, he had split one space that could hold an adult human into two small ones, forming and catapulting the spaces with his fingertips,

successively releasing two high-speed, invisible spaces, trapping the two backpacks-turned-bombs inside them.

“Don’t think I don’t know that the bombs exploding inside the spaces will also hurt you!” Destroyer 192 said savagely, dropping the little girl he was holding with his right arm.

192 controlled two exploding backpacks, and You Zhengping bore two attacks. He had already been seriously injured and now received another critical hit. He couldn’t hold out any longer. He fell down.

“Haha, don’t think that I have no way to destroy this building with you using the repulsion field,” said Destroyer 192. “Even if the explosions are contained within one meter, the load-bearing walls still won’t be able to hold up, and this building will collapse! As long as the building collapses, even if you don’t report it on the news, the general public will still know about this, and the mission target will appear!”

“Go ahead, then!” You Zhengping propped himself up on his elbow, looking fiercely at Destroyer 192. “If you blow it up, then I’ve lost!”

Lian Yufan had promised that this building wouldn’t collapse. He could definitely keep his promise.

Destroyer 192 had looked down on the Protection Organization’s people all along. Now, goaded into anger by You Zhengping, he sneered. “Do you really think I wouldn’t dare?”

He got out a cell phone, opened the map of the game space, chose the Xincheng Mall area on it, and pressed “detonate all.”

You Zhengping’s wireless earpiece, which transmitted information to him, had been destroyed by the explosion earlier, but Yuan Luori still had the earpiece You Zhengping had given him before! He had kept up a dialogue, letting the Protection Organization know everything that was happening on the roof.

“He’s detonated!” Yuan Luori warned.

In the control room, Director Xiao ordered, “Release the salute!”

Zhen Li, who was following the course of events, heard the order and said, “Now let’s set off some fireworks to celebrate Customer 6919 winning the phone!”

At the same time that Destroyer 192 detonated the bombs, Cen Xiao, who had come to the fourth floor and was standing at the very center of the building, opened his eyes wide. At every explosion point that Luo Huai had indicated, the Protector squad had placed a burning incense stick. With the incense flames as a power conductor, Cen Xiao could instantly sensed the burning.

When the dozens of ignition points simultaneously lit up, the sandalwood incense sticks began to burn fiercely. With the help of the repulsion field and the incense flames as a guide, Cen Xiao absorbed the flames from each explosion point, preventing the customers from seeing fire.

The salute rang out. Countless colorful streamers scattered onto the prize-winning Xiao Ruo. While the customers didn't understand why one measly phone was worth such a celebration, they all still applauded.

Everyone's gazes were attracted by the colorful streamers. Lian Yufan, with his back against the first floor's main load-bearing wall and his hands palms flat against the wall's surface, instantly transmitting all of his power to every corner of the mall.

The repulsion field contained the explosions within one meter, Cen Xiao absorbed the fire and heat, while Lian Yufan instantly repaired each place in the building that had been damaged by the explosions!

The weight of over a thousand tons of reinforced concrete instantly fell on Lian Yufan's back, which was pressed to the load-bearing wall. He seemed to hear his own spine shattering.

Despite this, Lian Yufan stuck close to the load-bearing wall, tightly clenching his teeth.

You Zhengping had said he "wanted it all," and he had accomplished it; Lian Yufan also had to accomplish what he had said.

Being paralyzed from now on didn't matter. After all, there were so many people in this mall. Their lives mattered much more than his own!

The salute stopped, and Xiao Ruo stepped off the stage of the customers' applause. Behind him, Zhen Li announced that he would now begin to choose the second winner.

On the roof, Destroyer 192 stared blankly at his phone. "The explosions succeeded. Why didn't the building collapse?"

You Zhengping held himself up on one arm and spat out a mouthful of black blood. Coldly, he said, "Since we Protectors dared to lay a trap for you, we certainly won't let a single one of your stratagems succeed!"

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Author's Note:

Yu Hua right now: *changing clothes...*

Yu Hua: In fact, I had my hand on the outside wall of the mall while I was changing clothes. I was going to act as soon as the explosions went off. But the Protectors work too well together and didn't give me the opportunity. Next chapter it's my turn to kick some ass.

Yuan Luori: I remember that in the amusement park, it was You Zhengping beating me up first, and then Yu Hua. Today it's the same. First You Zhengping strikes, then Yu Hua beats the dog's head while it's in the water.

Messrs. Melancholy: So you see, the arrangement of our surnames makes sense! It's the order we beat people up in!

## CHAPTER 42

There were cameras inside the mall and on the roof; the control room had seen Lian Yufan and You Zhengping's injuries.

In the surveillance image, You Zhengping was propping himself up on his elbow, struggling to confront Destroyer 192. Lian Yufan had his head down, his back rightly pressed to the load-bearing wall, hands flat against it; he looked like he was deep in thought, but in reality his spine had been broken, and if he didn't maintain this posture, he would fall down at once.

"Director Xiao..." Luo Huai said in concern, seeing the state the two of them were in.

Director Xiao raised his hand lightly. The squad's main combat force was exhausted. It was in fact time for him to act.

Director Xiao in fact had the power to subdue Destroyer 192, and there had in fact been no need to let the Protectors be so seriously injured in this battle. But he was getting old.

Director Xiao was forty-three years old now, and the marks of time were already climbing from the corners of his eyes. Right now, he could still be the young Protectors' backup force, explain the inside story to them. But what about when he was fifty-three, sixty-three?

While he could still be the young Protectors' mainstay, however much he regretted it, however much it pained him, he still had to let the young people act, so that power could continue.

In the surveillance image, Destroyer 192 said to You Zhengping, "Do you really think I only planted bombs in this mall? Since I have to fight the mission target alone, how could I not keep some room to maneuver? Do you still remember the goldfish in the manmade lake?"

You Zhengping's gaze froze. Of course he remembered.

The Protection Organization had determined the Destroyer 192's ability was a sort of game space. It could turn all the inanimate objects the ability user touched within the space into bombs. But that couldn't explain why the goldfish had exploded at a touch. The goldfish were living beings.

You Zhengping, who had participated in the battle on the surface of the water at close range, had considered this question, but he hadn't come up with an answer. Only now did a reasonable explanation for this phenomenon occur to him—there were two types of bombs.

One type was the type they were familiar with: inanimate objects that Destroyer 192 had touched. The other type was a transmitting bomb, which could use its impact to transmit vibrations into the bodies of living beings.

Simply explained: when the little boy's cap exploded, it was thrown into the water by Cen Xiao. But in fact that cap's ability to injure had been very low. Its true use had been to disperse vibrations and make living things vibrate internally at a high frequency; in this way, they became small-scale bombs and exploded. The goldfish in the manmade lake had only become bombs that attacked Cen Xiao because of the impact from the cap.

If You Zhengping had guessed right, then the living being on the scene that would become a bomb was...

"You're the goldfish," Destroyer 192 sang, pointing at You Zhengping. "I placed special bombs on the three children's backpacks. I was originally planning it as a fallback, but now you've taken the force of all three bombs."

He took out his phone and opened the "Explosion Game" interface. It showed that there was one living bomb on the roof. It was You Zhengping!

The expressions of everyone in the observation room grew grave. Luo Huai said nervously, "Director, if You Zhengping really does get turned into a bomb, then even with the repulsion field, he'll still..."

None of them had expected such a thing to happen. Director Xiao was enraged. The water vapor in the air over the roof trembled violently.

"You're all very powerful," Destroyer 192 said complacently. "No wonder no one has ever accomplished a world-opening mission. Too bad. You can't kill me, I'll succeed in escaping, and this special ability user will die!"

He had left himself a retreat. He would use the neckband to change bodies and escape. He wasn't afraid of death at all.

"It's the neckband, isn't it..." Director Xiao stared fixedly at the surveillance image, gathering his power. If he could only prepare in time and destroy the neckband before Destroyer 192 changed bodies, then, having no way to escape, the Destroyer wouldn't dare to harm You Zhengping. Then they could negotiate.

While Director Xiao was considering his opportunities to act, the surveillance on the roof suddenly went black.

At the same time, all the special ability users on the scene felt a mighty force envelop the mall. The repulsion field collapsed instantly. Following that power, there also came a chilling fury.

Zhen Li's fingertips froze in the process of drawing the second winner. He wasn't a person with especially staunch willpower. He was so frightened by this fury that he could barely stand up. His knees went weak, and he knelt down, hands shaking even more uncontrollably.

The Protectors who had experienced the fight at the amusement park were all familiar with this power. It was the black-cloaked man!

*He's even stronger than at the amusement park!* Cen Xiao thought inwardly.

Cen Xiao was on the fourth floor. When he felt that power, he immediately bolted towards the roof. He couldn't let anything happen to You Zhengping.

Instantly, all the squad members apart from Lian Yufan ran towards the roof. Director Xiao and the other Protectors who had set up the repulsion field also rushed there.

The billowing fury made Zhen Li, far off on the first floor, lose his footing, never mind Yuan Luori, who was on the roof directly facing the black-cloaked man.

Yuan Luori, who had always seen the clearer as his idol, had thought that he had passed at least five hundred levels. But now, directly facing the black-cloaked man, he wondered, could a mere five hundred levels really give someone such frightening strength?

"Are, are, are you the mission target?" Destroyer 192 said, shaking.

192 had always thought that he was a gamer who used shock tactics; in the Clearing League, no one could match his destructive power. But now, feeling the mission target's power, which was as vast as the cosmos, Destroyer 192 felt that he was only a tiny speck of dust in that cosmos.

How could he defeat this?! Destroyer 192 quickly grabbed his neckband. He wanted to run away at once.

But there was a pair of hands faster than he was.

The black-cloaked man, who had been standing next to You Zhengping, had at some point appeared behind Destroyer 192. No one had seen how he had moved, and no one had heard a sound.

Everyone could only see him lightly reach out his hands and grab 192's neckband. At that gesture alone, it seemed that fate had clutched Destroyer 192 by the throat. He couldn't escape this body.

Items, abilities, medicines... All gaudy combat techniques were merely for show when faced with absolute power. The black-cloaked man's light cut had broken the link between the two neckbands.

Power from the neckband entered Destroyer 192's body. The neckbands were connected to the soul. Destroyer 192 instantly felt as though his soul was tearing, like he was breaking down and evaporating.

"I said that whoever broke the law would be killed without pardon. Why do you never listen?" The black-cloaked man's voice was very soft, his words seeming to tail off in a light sigh.

He picked up 192's phone and used the System app to open the Clearing League's communication group. He even opened a group video.

Last time he had used Yuan Luori's System to speak to the Clearing League. This time he went directly to a video, letting the Clearing League's people see Destroyer 192's miserable condition.

After turning on the video, the black-cloaked man pushed Destroyer 192 in front of the camera with his hand on his head and quietly said, "Let them hear you cry."

Then the black-cloaked man pressed down. A force like a tearing explosion went from the top of 192's head to the soles of his feet. His arms instantly exploded from within. Just as the pain came, his arms were instantly restored. Not a drop of blood spilled. Only the flames were visible.

But Destroyer 192 knew that the black-cloaked man was actually using his own life force as fuel, drawing out his healing ability by force, making him heal himself at the moment of injury.

He seemed to be healing now, but essentially he was burning up his life force. When his personal base life force was exhausted to the point that he couldn't heal anymore, he would die miserably on video.

Destroyer 192 wanted to run away, but his soul was fixed in this body. He couldn't budge.

After doing all of this, the black-cloaked man walked towards You Zhengping amid the sounds of 192's screams.

The heavily injured You Zhengping, holding himself up on his elbow, shifted away twice. He could also feel the black-cloaked man's frightening fury. He wanted to run away, but he couldn't. He could only look on as the black-cloaked man walked up to him, sat in a kneeling position, lifted You Zhengping's head with both hands, and pillowed it on his knees.

You Zhengping: "???"

Wasn't there something wrong here?

The black-cloaked man reached out a hand and touched You Zhengping's nanotech mask. Softly, he said, "Faced with a self-aggrandizing idiot like this who views human lives as trash, you've done very well to protect the city's peace."

He was being praised? You Zhengping, who had thought there was going to be a great battle, was dumbfounded.

This black-cloaked man was not only praising him, he was also stroking his face!

No one but Yu Hua was allowed to stroke his face, let him go! You Zhengping thought he was struggling fiercely, but in reality it was very slow.

“Don’t move. You’ve been very gravely injured. I’m going to heal you,” the black-cloaked man said.

The black-cloaked man’s hand swept over You Zhengping’s arm. You Zhengping felt a mild, cool spring breeze blow over the burned places. He felt like he was soaking in a hot spring. It was so comfortable he wanted to close his eyes and go to sleep.

Now that he was no longer in pain, he could relax. You Zhengping narrowed his eyes and thought vaguely that last time, Yu Hua must have been healed by this power, too.

“The external injuries are fixed. Now I need to remove the transmitted vibrations. Bear with me.” As he spoke, the black-cloaked man waved his sleeve and covered You Zhengping’s eyes.

Bear, bear what? The healing process felt very good. You Zhengping only felt drowsy. He didn’t resist when his eyes were covered.

Next, You Zhengping felt icy cold lips touching his, and the transmitted vibrating energy was cancelled out by something.

Huh? Hey! What was this? You Zhengping pushed aside the sleeve covering his eyes and rolled away from the black-cloaked man, quickly leaving the pillow of the black-cloaked man’s warm knees.

He stared in wide-eyed alarm at the black-cloaked man, but he saw that the black-cloaked man ignored him now that he had healed him. He got up, went to Destroyer 192, and closed the Clearing League group video.

Just then, Cen Xiao, who had been on the fourth floor and closest to the roof, arrived. He quickly went to You Zhengping, swept his eyes over his teammate, and sighed in relief. “No injuries.”

“How many people have been injured?” the black-cloaked suddenly asked.

Likely his imposing manner was too strong. Cen Xiao answered unconsciously. “Everyone did very well under the protection of the repulsion field. There’s only one Protector who broke his spine. He may be paralyzed.”



The black-cloaked man lifted the half-dead Destroyer 192's finger and used it to jab the System interface a few times. He used a large number of points to get a healing pill, which he gave to Cen Xiao. "This will heal him."

You Zhengping could enjoy Yu Hua's personal healing, but forget about the other Protectors.

When he had gotten the healing pill, the System had lost any value. The black-cloaked man removed all of the System app's energy. This was an energy ball five times larger than the one from Yuan Luori's System.

Throwing away the phone, the black-cloaked man went to Destroyer 192, who was still constantly being injured, healing himself, and being injured. He lifted his neckband and squeezed lightly. The neckband broke. Destroyer 192's eyes lost the look of life. He fell down heavily.

Just then, the main force of the Protectors was hurrying over one by one. The black-cloaked man looked at Director Xiao and the others, leapt off the roof, and vanished without a trace.

Though they all wanted to pursue and attack the black-cloaked man, everyone now instinctively turned towards You Zhengping. Pinching his arms and handsome uncle nanotech mask, they all said in amazement, "What about your injuries?"

You Zhengping was still stunned from having been kissed. Hearing everyone question him, he didn't speak.

But Yuan Luori, who had witnessed it all, said in a profoundly affected voice, "My, my idol healed him, and, and also..."

You Zhengping's head cleared instantly. He took a stride towards Yuan Luori and made a throat-cutting gesture at him. The look in his eyes was fierce.

"And also removed the bomb for him." Under threat from You Zhengping, Yuan Luori swallowed the words "stole a kiss."

"The black-cloaked man destroyed the surveillance cameras. What happened before we got here?" Director Xiao asked.

"It was...like Yuan Luori said. He beat up Destroyer 192, threatened the Clearing League, then left after he healed me," You Zhengping summarized absently.

Seeing that he looked like something had scared him, Director Xiao frowned. "First go back to the base to rest, then tell us in detail."

The Protection Organization's people stuffed the soulless corpse of Destroyer 192 into a bag. Outsourced employee Captain Liu of the criminal police led some auxiliary policemen from Lian

Yufan's squad. They picked up the three unconscious children, planning to return them to their parents after their injuries had been seen to. They would also have to think of an explanation.

While everyone cleared the battlefield, Cen Xiao quickly ran downstairs. He saw Zhen Li climb to his feet, leaning on the lottery box for support, and staunchly draw a number. The mall's employees were still asking how he felt. Zhen Li waved a hand and said he was fine. He could fight on.

Lian Yufan was leaning against the wall as though abandoned by the world. He wouldn't fall, and without anyone to help him, he couldn't move.

Cen Xiao went over to him and put the white pill in his mouth. "Take this."

Lian Yufan thought it was only an anti-inflammatory and struggled to swallow it. In less than three seconds, he felt his whole body filled with energy and his broken spine restored. A dozen seconds later, all of his injuries had healed.

"That was..." Lian Yufan left the load-bearing wall, roughly inspected his body, and found that apart from his special ability being seriously depleted, he was entirely unmarked.

"An army from the heavens." Seeing that he had recovered, Cen Xiao laughed easily. "Tell you back at the base."

Everyone left the mall during the lottery drawing. Before leaving, Cen Xiao and Yuan Luori waved to Zhen Li from afar.

Zhen Li: "..."

Why were they all leaving? Were they leaving him alone to dance all day? What about the rest of it? Was no one going to look after him?

Though everyone had left, Zhen Li still dutifully brightened up the atmosphere, desperately drawing out the time. He still remembered some phone numbers from when he had eaten the paper. When he pulled out the second slip, Zhen Li stared at the blank paper and forced himself to remember. "Customer with the phone number ending in 6788, congratulations, you've won!"

There was no one to support him this time. The person who had won was a genuine customer. It all relied on which phone number Zhen Li could remember.

A middle-aged man went up on stage to receive the prize. This time, Zhen Li gave him a perfunctory "congratulations" and chased him off. He didn't even let off a salute. This made the prize winner unhappy. He muttered about how different his treatment was.

While Zhen Li struggled to maintain enthusiasm at the mall, everyone else had already returned to the base.

You Zhengping, hiding the parts about the head pillowing and the kiss, related everything the black-cloaked had done. Yuan Luori also related, though he spent most of his time praising his idol, saying his idol was so awesome, and since his idol was so law-abiding, he had to finish memorizing all the laws and hoped that the Protection Organization would supply him with some other legal texts.

Yuan Luori and Zhen Li, the two former Destroyers, had put in quite a lot of effort in this operation. Director Xiao sent people perform a study on Yuan Luori and found that his state of mind was very good. He was even more willing to uphold the law than the average citizen. He could study on his own without any need for supervision or tests. He basically been fundamentally transformed.

Everyone also inspected Lian Yufan and You Zhengping's conditions. Lian Yufan had only been healed of his injuries, but You Zhengping had not only been healed, his power had also been raised quite a bit. Before, his power had been much less than Director Xiao's. Now, looking only at power alone, he was about equal with Director Xiao.

Director Xiao couldn't understand this. He could only explain it as the transmitted vibration having raised You Zhengping's power, a case of good fortune coming in the wake of surviving a great disaster.

But You Zhengping himself knew that his power had substantially increased when the black-cloaked man had kissed him. He felt guilty. Excusing himself by saying he wanted to test out his increased special ability, he went to the underground training room to be alone.

He spent two hours alone in the training room. When it was time for diner, Cen Xiao came to get him and saw You Zhengping wearing the nanotech mask and looking closely in the mirror.

"Time to eat... Why are you still wearing your mask in the training room?" Cen Xiao asked.

The nanotech masks needed to be cared for. Normally they took their masks off after returning to the base.

"Am I very handsome?" You Zhengping said, pointing at the handsome uncle's face.

Cen Xiao said, "...If that mask were a little younger, that would be fine, but now... Do you think his mess of crow's feet are attractive, or the deep laugh lines?"

"That's right, I also think that it's handsome enough and refined enough, but it wouldn't be so very alluring, right?" As he spoke, You Zhengping unconsciously touched his lips.

"What's wrong with you? You've been acting weird ever since we got back to base. Are you hiding something from me?" Cen Xiao asked.

"No, no, no!" You Zhengping said, waving his hands. "I told Director Xiao everything I could."

“Oh, so there’s something you couldn’t, right?” Cen Xiao instantly understood You Zhengping’s subtext.

You Zhengping said, “...Scram, beat it! Go eat! How can you make so much trouble all day?!”

He stiffly muddled through and went to eat with Cen Xiao. Director Xiao said that after being observed tonight, he would be examined in the morning, and if nothing was wrong, he could go home, and he could take three days off. If no new Destroyer appeared, he didn’t need to come to work.

When he had been injured, You Zhengping had thought that he wouldn’t be able to see Yu Hua for a month. When he heard this news, he was very glad, thanking the black-cloaked man in spite of himself.

When he thought of the black-cloaked man, You Zhengping instantly recalled that ice cold kiss, and instantly went stiff all over. Even his food lost its flavor.

Cen Xiao kept an eye on his friend and saw his face change from red to white. It was a marvel.

—

After You Zhengping and the others retreated to the base, it began to rain. In the rain, a three-month-old husky was shaking itself out. Destroyer 192 was in ecstasy. It hadn’t expected that at the last moment, it would leave that body and succeed in escaping!

“Awoo, awoo,” it howled cheerfully in the rain.

As it was howling, a man in a suit and leather shoes came up behind the little husky and grimly said, “It seems that when you switch bodies, your temperament is influenced by the body. Not quickly taking off the neckband and fleeing, playing around in the water at a time like this—has your IQ fallen a great deal?”

“Awoo?” The little husky opened its blue eyes wide and saw a tall man.

He bent down and reached out his hand, squeezing the scruff of the little husky’s neck and lifting it. He smiled brilliantly towards the husky. “Did you think you escaped relying on your own powers? I let you go.”

“Awoo! Awoo! Awoo!” The canine sense of smell was very acute. The little husky had used its instincts to sniff out that the man in front of it was the black-cloaked man who had beaten in to the point of wishing for death.

“I suddenly thought that it would be such a pity for you to die like that, so I spared you.” The man reached out two fingers and snapped the neckband on the husky’s neck.

There was another neckband in his hand. It had been taken from Destroyer 192's body.

The two neckbands disappeared simultaneously. The little husky was instantly dumbfounded.

Its System was gone, and its neckbands were gone. He had turned into a dog that could only live a dozen years!

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Author's Note:

Yuan Luori: Destroyer 192 must be sentenced to at least ten years, with death as the maximum penalty!

Yu Hua: Yes, ten years of torture, followed by death.

Destroyer 192: ...

## CHAPTER 43

It rained harder and harder, and there were fewer and fewer customers at the mall.

Zhen Li changed outfits three times while performing, doing his best to attract the customers' notice, but in the end he still lost to the weather and the working day.

When a mall with a movie theater that's being renovated puts on a lottery drawing event on a working day, in an afternoon of pouring rain, and invites a minor internet celebrity to carry it out; when the biggest prizes are cell phones that run out between 10 AM and 11 AM, and the remaining hourly prizes are exercises bracelets or mall gift certificates, who's going to stick around waiting for the results of the lottery drawing?

At 7 PM, President Zhen concluded a full day's activity and returned to the studio on his own, carrying his luggage.

He needed to put his makeup box back into its original place, write today's program and earnings on the records form, and eat a bowl of the instant noodles Director Yu had used company funds to purchases. He hadn't eaten anything today. He was ravenous.

These instant noodles had always been in Yuan Luori's sole possession. He lived in the studio and had no money. At night, he relied entirely on instant noodles for survival. Ordinarily, he didn't let anyone touch these nearly expired noodles (the supermarket gave a discount on goods about to expire). Zhen Li had always wanted to stealthily eat a bowl.

Today, Yuan Luori had been taken to the base. The location of the Protection Organization's base was a secret. It wasn't easy to get in and out. Each time they went to the base, Zhen Li and Yuan Luori were knocked unconscious or drugged to sleep on the way, and when they left, it had to be along with the Protectors, too. It wasn't like they could go report and then leave. Yuan Luori would probably be staying at the Protection Organization's base tonight.

Thinking about that bowl of instant noodles, Zhen Li got out of his taxi and quickly ran to the office building through the rain. His running steps were particularly quick. He hardly got dripped on.

He took the elevator to the twenty-first floor. The lights were off in the studio. Zhen Li got out his keys to open the door but found that the door was unlocked. Could Yuan Luori have gotten back early? Then had his plan to secretly eat instant noodles fallen through?

It was already 8 PM when Zhen Li arrived at the studio. Because of the rain, the sky was entirely dark. It was pitch black inside. When he was just about to turn on the lights, a streak of lightning flashed by outside, lighting the room through the window.

Under the window was the little bench they rested on when they were tired from dance practice. It was about sixty centimeters high, a long bench arranged against the wall. Yu Hua had said that this way they could economize on space in the dance practice room. Lian Yufan had said that he was stingy. He had personally made the wooden bench from building materials left over from decorating. There wasn't even a proper lounge chair!

In the illumination from the lightning, Zhen Li saw someone sitting next to the window. This man's long legs were slightly apart, his elbows on his thighs, all ten fingers laced together in front of his nose, revealing a sinister pair of eyes.

*"Ka-boom!"* The huge clap of thunder and the man suddenly appearing in the quiet room scared Zhen Li. His knees went weak, and he slid down a wall and sat. Trembling, he said, "Who, who are you? A new leveler?"

"Zhen Li, are you as blind as Yuan Luori?" the man said somberly.

Another flash of lightning. This time, Zhen Li clearly saw that the man sitting under the window was Yu Hua, who never stayed at work past 6 PM!

Yu Hua was soaked through with rain. His suit jacket had been carelessly tossed on the bench. His white shirt stuck tightly to his body, outlining the muscles of his chest and abdomen. His hair was plastered to his ears, water dripping off of it drip by drip. The dripping rainwater was soaking into the cheap material of the bench.

"What, what did you come here for?" Zhen Li asked, shaking in the dark. He didn't dare to turn on the lights.

"I wanted to be alone to consider some things," Yu Hua said.

The reason he didn't want to work late was that he wanted to hurry home to make dinner for Xiao You. Tonight, Xiao You had sent a message saying he was out of town on a mission and would stay the night and only come home tomorrow. Yu Hua didn't especially want to stay alone in his deserted house tonight, so he had come to the studio.

“Alone... Then I’ll put down my box and make myself scarce,” Zhen Li said obligingly.

Zhen Li quietly went to the small storage cubicle, put down his box, then stealthily took a bowl of instant noodles from a cardboard box. He silently hugged the wall, preparing to leave the studio.

During this process, Zhen Li was so scared he didn’t dare to breathe, afraid that the great master would hear his breathing, get annoyed, and do away with him so he could be “alone.”

Holding his breath, he finally found the doorknob. The light of success was ahead of him; go on!

Zhen Li cheered himself on, took a step forward, and suddenly stepped on something fluffy and furry. At the same time, he heard a delicate cry of “awoo.”

“*Ka-boom!*” Another flash of lightning. Zhen Li focused and found that he had stepped on a tiny husky. It was curled up licking its own tail.

Like Yu Hua, the little husky was dripping wet. The man and the dog must have been out in the rain a long time to get like this.

“Sorry, it’s too dark in here, I didn’t see.” Zhen Li thought that the little husky was a pet the great master had bought as a gift for his husband, so its position would be higher than his, so he spoke respectfully.

“No need to apologize. Go ahead and step on him a couple more times,” Yu Hua said. “He’s Destroyer 192.”

Zhen Li: “...”

He thought that he and Yuan Luori had it bad enough. One had nearly been disfigured, and the other had become half-blind. He had never thought that there was no such thing as the most miserable; there was only more miserable. Destroyer 192 hadn’t even gotten to keep his identity as a human being.

Zhen Li was a tactful person. Even though he had a bellyful of questions, he didn’t dare to ask them when the great master was clearly in a bad mood. He once again put his hand on the doorknob and prepared to run away.

“Wait,” Yu Hua said suddenly.

“Yes.” Looking woebegone, Zhen Li stopped. In the end, he hadn’t been able to escape.

Yu Hua remained in his thoughtful pose. He considered, then asked, “How does it feel when you’re working with the Protection Organization?”

“In what sense?” Zhen Li asked.

“Just tell me about it,” Yu Hua said.

Zhen Li struggled to remember his impressions of the times he had worked with the Protection Organization. He thoughtfully said, “All those young men I can barely tell apart feel very easy to get along with. There’s something about them that’s the same as me. They’re also kind of...”

“Naïve?” Yu Hua said.

“Right, they’re kind of naïve. I know very well that my IQ isn’t high. These young Protectors clearly have high IQs, but they give off an unworldly feeling. Lian Yufan is an exception. I think he has a story,” Zhen Li said. “As for the older-looking Protectors, there’s a strong whiff of blood about them, and their expressions are pessimistic. They also have a touch of detachment from seeing too much of life and death.”

“Concretely?” Yu Hua said.

Zhen Li thought about it. “For example, that very ordinary-looking fire-using Protector. I think he’s very easy to get along with, and he’s concerned about me. Today when I was eating the cardboard box, he was afraid I would choke and kept tearing the box into smaller pieces and soaking them in water to get them soft.”

Fire-using... Zhen Li must have been talking about Cen Xiao. Having gone through the affair of the pants, while Yu Hua hadn’t awakened his “eyes of truth,” he could tell which familiar person was behind which mask.

“Then there’s that handsome uncle. His face looks very old, but from his hands and his body, he actually seems very young. I think he must be young under his mask,” Zhen Li said. “He’s a gentle person. At the arcade, he was always very concerned about protecting the audience. He waited until we got to the restroom to capture me.”

That was Xiao You. Hearing Zhen Li praising Xiao You, Yu Hua’s expression softened a little.

“But the real older Protectors are like that director. I’m a little scared of him.” Zhen Li shrank back. “Not just because he’s very powerful, but also because he’s always looking at me with a questioning and faintly hostile expression. No matter how much I cooperate with them, he still doesn’t like me.”

“The older generation of Protectors fought with the levelers from fifteen years ago. It’s a blood feud for them,” Yu Hua said.

Zhen Li nodded. “Right, right! Sometimes I think that if there weren’t the System’s mission target, if the Clearing League weren’t constantly coming to this world, that director and the



older protectors would have made the decision to kill me and Yuan Luori. Now, they're acting like they trust us, they're using us, but in reality they're always on their guards against us."

"You're actually quite discerning in this aspect," Yu Hua said.

Zhen Li laughed. "It must be the alertness of a prey animal."

"If..." Yu Hua only said one word and didn't continue his question. He didn't need Zhen Li to answer; he knew the answer already.

If he used the black-cloaked man identity to work with the Protectors, would the Protection Organization agree? The answer was that they would, but they would inevitably shadow him, observe him, and thus discover his true identity. However powerful he was, he still couldn't cover up seamlessly. The smallest leak would reveal him.

Then if his identity were revealed, would the Protection Organization still allow him and Xiao You to be together? The answer was no.

Even if Xiao You were willing, even if he still loved him, the Protection Organization still wouldn't tolerate a person who attracted Destroyers to attack this world to be with their elite soldier.

He was very powerful. He could take Xiao You away from this nation, run away with him to another country, but the Protection Organization was global. No matter where he went, he would be found by the Protection Organization. Even if he took Xiao You away from this world, Xiao You would be unhappy. There would be no way to live their life.

Moreover, what he wanted was a peaceful life. Was taking an unhappy person on the run through the whole world, the whole cosmos, really the peace he wanted?

When Yu Hua had arrived on the roof today and seen Xiao You riddled with injuries and turned into a living bomb, he had suddenly felt a trace of doubt about his own dreams and his own persistence.

Why had Xiao You been so seriously injured? Because he hadn't been able to come in time.

Why hadn't he been able to come in time? Because he had to hide his identity. He had to arrange everything. He had to leave the scene at an opportune moment. He had to make it look like he was somewhere else. He had to change clothes. He had to...

There were too many things he had to do. For the sake of concealing his identity, he had to attend to this, attend to that. He couldn't freely protect Xiao You.

Yu Hua had wanted to spend a peaceful lifetime, live quietly and die quietly in a peaceful world, a peaceful era, and before dying request that his ashes be scattered over the vast earth, drawing a perfect period at the end of his tediously long life.

But the peace he wanted had been created through the protection of countless people using their flesh and blood to build a wall; it was preserved by his husband risking his life.

The always resolute Yu Hua was in a daze. Was the ordinary life he aspired to really something he could achieve?

"I only want to sleep easily until daybreak." Yu Hua turned his face away, looking at the lightning and rain outside the window.

Blocking the elements was a fragile window that he could shatter with a touch of his hand. It was that window that was sparing him from being buffeted by the wind and rain.

Since he couldn't leave anyway, Zhen Li simply used the lightning to grope around and turn on the water heater and make himself a bowl of noodles. The seasonings in the instant noodles were released. The smells of the artificial flavorings spread through the steam, irritating the sense of smell.

Zhen Li swallowed. He hadn't eaten all day. He was really hungry. He wasn't planning on using the alternate dimension stomach for this bowl of noodles. He was going to use his own stomach to properly digest it.

"Awoo..." the little husky, which hadn't eaten all day, called weakly. It was also very hungry. Its fur was all wet, and it couldn't lick it dry no matter what. It felt cold and unpleasant. Was it running a fever?

"When you were hurting people, using the weak as hostages, did you think about how bad they felt?" Yu Hua said to the little husky.

The little husky instantly stopped calling. It thought that starving to death would be all right. If it lived, it would suffer.

"Live," Yu Hua said coldly. "Have a taste of being weak."

*Slurp, slurp.* Zhen Li began to eat the instant noodles with a fork. As he ate, he said, "Great master, when I do things, I don't think much about the future. It must be because my IQ isn't high enough to predict very far ahead. I take it a step at a time. I think living that way is pretty good."

"How can you be sure?" Yu Hua asked.

Zhen Li happily ate the instant noodles, feeling the satisfaction of his stomach filling up. He continued, "In my original world, I inexplicably died. After death, I entered the System and was forced to carry out missions. I had to struggle to the utmost and trick my teammates to survive. Me, I'm like the cannon fodder in a horror movie who dies at the very beginning. I have abilities, and I'm very vain."

Yu Hua said, "You do understand yourself."

Zhen Li said, "I couldn't foresee a way to pass a level, so I went one step at a time, and I encountered lower difficulty levels and luckily muddled through the first four levels."

"I was captured by the Clearing League's people and forced to come to an unopened world to test the waters. Isn't that a suicide mission? And I had no way to resist. I was forced to come here. As soon as I gathered up my courage to go outdoors, I was captured by the Protection Organization. I didn't know what to do then, but luckily, I met you, and you removed my System's energy."

"You made me launder a hundred million. I couldn't make that much money. I just had to brace myself and go forward. Now Yuan Luori and I have quite a few fans, the mall invited me to conduct an event, and the event fee is six digits, you know. I'm getting closer to a hundred million, and I can do what I like. Things have changed for the better."

"Also, you told me to disfigure my face. I felt awful, but I didn't dare to say anything. I had to obediently carry it out. Then I was kidnapped by Yuan Luori and tied up on the toilet for a night. It was as miserable as you could ask for. But afterwards, Yuan Luori joined the studio, and I protected my face by being shipped with him. The trouble was easily solved again."

Zhen Li had eaten up the noodles. He drank a mouthful of warm broth and said in contentment, "When you don't know what to do, hold out for a while longer. Maybe things will take a turn for the better."

"The philosophy of the mediocre," Yu Hua appraised dully.

"But, great master, mediocre is just what you want to be. This is how mediocre people live." Zhen Li burped. "Ordinary people's lives are full of all kinds of trifles, countless unsolvable troubles one after another. Life is made up of these irritations. If you don't want to worry about next month's mortgage, then you have to worry about whether you can pay it as an ordinary person."

The rain had gradually stopped. Yu Hua stood up and looked out the window. After thinking for a while, he said, "Are you advising me to take it a step at a time?"

"That's about what I mean," Zhen Li said. "You're a master planner, but when you meet something you really can't resolve, it's better to let things take their course. You don't have to insist too hard on being mediocre, but you also don't need to voluntarily tear your mask away and do everything perfectly. If you're discovered, you can think of something else."

Yu Hua didn't speak. He picked up his suit jacket and opened the studio's door. "The dog will stay in the office from now on. Use it to make some money on the livestreams. When it grows up, we'll breed it or sterilize it."

After laying down the little husky's future fate with a few sentences, Yu Hua left the studio.

He walked alone through streets that were quiet after the rain. The streetlights shone on Yu Hua's face.

Zhen Li's words had shown him the reasoning of a mediocre person. He relaxed slightly in his insistence.

The thing was already past. He would leave it as it was for now. Next time, his plans would be more thorough. He would do his best not to involve the people around him, not to let Xiao You be hurt.

He would consider what came later when it came.

Having learned something about being an ordinary person, Yu Hua returned home. He washed and ironed his clothes, brushed the mud off his shoes, and swept away all the traces.

When he was finishing sweeping, he summoned the black cloak and the mask, which had been stored in Zhen Li's wardrobe. He looked at them, then put them in a twenty-inch code-locked suitcase he usually used for business trips. He put the suitcase on top of the wardrobe.

The code was the date that he and You Zhengping had gotten their marriage certificate. Xiao You knew the code. If one day, You Zhengping, who never did housework, opened that suitcase, that would be the moment he would be found out.

Since being chosen by the System and becoming a leveler, Yu Hua had never trusted fate. He had firmly believed that he controlled his own fate. And he had at last succeeded in defeating the System and clearing. He had even personally determined which world he would die in, when he would return to peace. These things weren't fate; they were his plans.

But now, Yu Hua put the evidence that could easily reveal his identity in an obvious place, leaving everything up to fate to determine.

That night, Yu Hua went to sleep hugging Xiao You's clothes. His sleep was unusually easy.

At daybreak, Yu Hua for once got up late. He was only awoken by the sound of the door opening at 8 AM.

He got up and looked towards the door. The travel-worn You Zhengping had hurried home. Without even taking off his shoes, he charged into the bedroom. Seeing Yu Hua's calming face, he instantly felt at ease and leapt into Yu Hua's arms, rubbing his lips against Yu Hua's pajamas. He seemed to have been tremendously wronged.

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Author's Note:

Yu Hua's worries: When my identity is revealed, would it be better to run away to a world that's easier to control? Or to take over the Protection Organization and become their leader? If I become their leader, Xiao You will be my subordinate, he would be respectful towards me. How could we maintain our conjugal relationship? Would he eat the food I cooked?

Yu Hua: Frustrating...

## CHAPTER 44

Feeling You Zhengping's movements, Yu Hua froze.

No one in the world understood better than Yu Hua the reason You Zhengping was behaving like this. It was his fault.

When Yu Hua had carefully avoided everyone's gazes, slowly changed into the black cloak, and flown to the roof, the first thing he had seen had been Xiao You, seriously injured, and he had heard Destroyer 192 mention that Xiao You had become a human bomb.

His fury had instantly gone to his head. Yu Hua had forgotten that he had to be a normal person, forgotten that he had to seal his power. He had released a portion of the System's energy, his unsealed power rising from 3% right to 20%.

The frightening abnormal energy that the Protectors had felt had been released when Yu Hua had undone the seal. Even undoing the seal was that terrifying.

He had viciously tortured Destroyer 192, then as quickly as possible had picked up Xiao You and healed him and gotten rid of the transmitted vibrations. At the same time, he had been unable to resist giving him a tender kiss.

If Xiao You hadn't quickly gotten away, Yu Hua wouldn't even have realized what he had done.

Power made a person lose himself. Yu Hua had understood this when he had passed his five hundredth level. In that world, he had done something he regretted, and from then on he had resolved that he wouldn't become a slave to violence.

But when his power had been unsealed to 20%, Yu Hua had once again felt that wild arrogance. At the time, he had only wanted to trap Xiao You forever under his wing, not let him go to work, forbid him from taking part again in the battle between the Protectors and the Destroyers.

Only when Xiao You had rolled out of his embrace had Yu Hua realized that what for him was a tender gesture was an injury to Xiao You, who dearly loved his partner.

Then Yu Hua had quickly used Destroyer 192's System to get a healing item, absorbed his System, and once again suppressed his power.

Unfortunately, Destroyer 192 was truly too weak. A mere 192 levels of energy was just enough for Yu Hua to seal 5% of his power. He still had 15% remaining.

Yu Hua had had to distribute even more of that power to healing abilities, then quickly flee before the Protectors' main force arrived.

Suppressing the arrogant thoughts brought on by the sharp rise in power had exhausted Yu Hua's mental energy. He had been temporarily unable to think about how he had kissed Xiao You. He had deliberately avoided it.

But starting to worry about how he should treat Xiao You when his identity had been revealed, as well as the suitcase on top of the wardrobe, had involuntarily revealed Yu Hua's thoughts. He hoped that Xiao You wouldn't feel sad because a stranger had stolen a kiss from him, hoped that Xiao You would know that the one who'd kissed him had been Yu Hua. That was why he had chosen to trust fate.

Seeing Xiao You rubbing his lips against his pajamas as though he had a grievance, Yu Hua couldn't even say the words "What's wrong?" This time, he couldn't pretend to be clueless.

Fortunately, You Zhengping wasn't planning on talking about it. He was a strong person and had decided to bear it himself.

He kissed the second button of Yu Hua's pajama top and quietly said, "I haven't seen you in two days. I missed you."

Yu Hua sighed and put his arms around You Zhengping. Also quiet, he said, "I missed you, too."

The strong-willed Protector You Zhengping, who yesterday on the roof had risked his life to protect children, who had understood a new use for his spatial ability at the moment of crisis, who had forced himself to meet Destroyer 192 head-on even when covered in wounds, had returned home today and only wanted to curl up in Yu Hua's arms, seeking consolation.

You Zhengping kicked off his shoes and climbed under the covers, guiltily saying, "I didn't change my shoes when I came in. I got the floor all dirty."

He pursed his lips, deliberately drawing out the "floor all dirty."

Yu Hua ran his hands through the thick hair in front of You Zhengping's forehead, intimately rubbing his nose. In a soft voice, he consoled him: "It's no problem, I'll just wipe it a few more times."

You Zhengping looked up at Yu Hua carefully. Pursing his lips, he said, "Today is a working day. It's almost time for you to go to work..."

Yu Hua decisively felt around the head of the bed, found his phone, and called Zhen Li. "Hello, President Zhen? There's a talent show that would like to invite you and Yuan Luori. I'm going to their company today to discuss it, so I won't be at work. Since I'll be out on business, please put me down for full attendance and provide me with a food and travel allowance."

Yu Hua, who sounded more like he was in charge than his boss, hung up and waved the phone at You Zhengping. "I don't need to go to work today."

You Zhengping said, "...But you have to go discuss..."

"I was lying." Yu Hua pecked You Zhengping's lips. "I'm already settled things with the talent show. I don't need to go. In a few days, when I've thoroughly reviewed the contract, I can give it to Yuan Luori to sign."

You Zhengping: "..."

No wonder a talent like Yu Hua had insisted on working at Zhen Li's crappy little studio. This studio's personnel, from the boss down to the employees, were all so easily tricked!

Seeing You Zhengping's "I've encountered a menace to society" expression, Yu Hua drew close to his ear and quietly said, "I've sold Yuan Luori at a good price, and the studio can deduct 90% of it. We can take 45% of the studio's earnings. When we get it, I'll buy you a better watch."

You Zhengping remembered how Yuan Luori had kept his mouth shut about the "stolen kiss" and "head pillowing" in front of Director Xiao and felt slightly remorseful. He quietly said, "I have no use for a very good watch. You don't need to sign such a harsh indenture."

Hearing Xiao You speak for Yuan Luori, Yu Hua's cold blood abated somewhat. He pinched Xiao You's face. "Since you're interceding for him, then I'll work out a new contract with lighter terms."

"All right," You Zhengping answered quietly. Putting his arms around Yu Hua's neck, he said, "I've worked two days and two nights in a row. My superior has given us three days off. So... should we exercise?"

They were both deeply devoted to exercise. Once they started, they lost track of time, dizzily going through hundreds of push-ups and stretching the insides, outsides, fronts, and backs of their leg muscles. After the exercise, they were wiped out. You Zhengping went right to sleep.

Yu Hua also dozed for a while. When he woke, he saw that it was already midday, and Xiao You hadn't even had lunch yet. So he got up to cook, carefully covering Xiao You with the quilt. While the summer was hot, it was still necessary to protect one's back and abdomen.

Soon the aroma of food floated into the bedroom. You Zhengping was woken by the smell, opened his eyes, saw that Yu Hua's part of the bed was empty, then moved over to lie on Yu Hua's pillow, wrapped up in his husband's smell.

He remembered that at yesterday's meeting, Lian Yufan had warned him that Yu Hua was a cold-blooded control freak and told him to take note of his partner's mental state.

You Zhengping had been unhappy at the time and had retorted, "Yu Hua is gentle and considerate. He's very nice. Are you jealous of our wedded bliss?"

"Gentle, considerate, very nice?" Lian Yufan rolled his eyes. "If you insist on lying to yourself and others, there's nothing I can say. If it hadn't been for you protecting those three children putting your ideas into practice, I wouldn't have taken the time to warn you."

The two of them, having just found a bit of fellow feeling after working together, once again nearly came to blows, only stopping because Cen Xiao and Luo Huai broke it up. This time, Cen Xiao pulled back Lian Yufan, while Luo Huai was the one dragging You Zhengping away.

Following Director Xiao's instructions, Cen Xiao and Luo Huai separated the two of them and took them to different break rooms.

Cen Xiao said in frustration, "Why are you always needling You Zhengping? He loves Yu Hua so much, can't you leave him in peace for two days?"

Ordinarily, Cen Xiao wouldn't have said this to Lian Yufan. It was because during this operation, Cen Xiao had seen another side of Lian Yufan, the side that could carry his ruthlessness and reason to the highest degree. It was admirable. But whenever he met You Zhengping, Lian Yufan would lose the rationality he was so proud of, entirely turning into a person who would wreck others' marriages for no reason. Cen Xiao couldn't understand what Lian Yufan was thinking.

Lian Yufan looked at Cen Xiao and raised his eyebrows. "A common special ability user like you is truly blessed."

"Why are you talking about me?" Cen Xiao said wearily. "Do you feel unwell if you aren't bothering our squad?"

"That's right, unwell. Every time I see You Zhengping happily showing off his married life, I get annoyed, and when all of you wish him well, I could die of it." Lian Yufan took a bottle of baijiu from the refrigerator and started to drink alone.

"If you keep talking, I'm going to hit you." Cen Xiao also poured himself a cup. "If you're jealous of someone's emotional life, then go try dating. Though with your personality, I figure no one would want you."



Lian Yufan didn't say anything. He only drank silently. The mission had ended, and they were resting now. They could drink appropriately, relax their nerves. But Lian Yufan wasn't drinking to relax. He was knocking back one cup after another, only wanting to numb himself.

Soon two bottles of baijiu were empty. Seeing Lian Yufan going for a third bottle, Cen Xiao quickly blocked him. "Stop drinking."

Lian Yufan was clearly somewhat drunk. He hugged the bottle, not letting go. He looked at Cen Xiao, narrowing his bleary eyes, and suddenly said, "I envy you, but I don't envy You Zhengping."

"What is there about me to envy?" Cen Xiao tried to pull the bottle out of Lian Yufan's arms. "A single dog, and my tiny above-board salary has to go to help a person in a relationship pay fines, buy phones!"

Lian Yufan looked directly at Cen Xiao. "I envy that you can get into a relationship without worrying. You can pair up with anyone you want. But not me, and not Luo Huai, and not You Zhengping, either."

"Why not? You Zhengping is married," Cen Xiao said carelessly.

"Being married is no good, either. I told you, if not for You Zhengping having a hard time controlling his special ability, he wouldn't have been able to get married," Lian Yufan said, lowering his eyes.

Cen Xiao's hand paused in the process of snatching away the bottle. "Why not?"

Lian Yufan's gaze was a little misty. He licked his lips and quietly said, "Have you heard of the Protector Perpetuation Program?"

"What's that?" Cen Xiao had never heard this name.

"You haven't heard of it because there are many fire special ability users. They can be easily replaced and aren't qualified to know about this." Lian Yufan clutched the bottle tightly. "Powers like mine, Luo Huai's, You Zhengping's, are unique, hard to replace. When we die, there may not be Protectors of the same kind again. We have a duty to leave behind optimal Protector genes."

At these words, a faint chill went up Cen Xiao's spine. He shook his head. "There's no evidence to show that a Protector's offspring will necessarily have special abilities."

"If a special ability user marries an ordinary person, their children won't necessarily be special ability users. But a special ability user with another special ability user, their offspring have a ninety percent chance of being special ability users, and they can completely inherit one parent's ability. The Protector Perpetuation Program means that Protectors with unique abilities have a duty to marry other special ability users and leave behind children with the same special

ability.” Lian Yufan opened the third bottle. His hand shook as he poured. “My father was a Protector with a repairing ability.”

The materials had shown that Lian Yufan’s father was dead, and that his mother had remarried and had had no contact with Lian Yufan for many years, as if she had forgotten she had a son.

“But your mother isn’t...” Cen Xiao said hesitantly.

“She’s an ordinary person. My father rescued her during a Destroyer’s attack, and they fell in love and decided to get married. My father only found out about the Protection Perpetuation Project when he submitted the marriage application to the organization.” Lian Yufan slowly drank the liquor in his cup. “You know what technology was like over twenty years ago. It was very backwards. Many things relied on tradition. The organization didn’t agree, but they still got married. But there was a requirement. If they hadn’t produced a child who inherited my father’s ability before he was thirty years old, then my father would have to take part in the Protector Perpetuation Program.”

“Luckily, you inherited his power,” Cen Xiao consoled.

Lian Yufan looked at Cen Xiao. “My special ability only awakened when I was ten years old. I was only born when my father was twenty-five.”

In other words, when Lian Yufan had been five years old, his father had been thirty, the arranged time, and he still didn’t have a child who had inherited his power.

“When I was born and showed no signs of a special ability, my mom broke down crying in the hospital room. She gave the organization a guarantee that there were five years left and she would keep trying.” Lian Yufan’s arms began to tremble uncontrollably. “She got pregnant again half a year after I was born. She was too anxious to have the next child. This led to her giving birth prematurely and being unable to conceive again.”

Cen Xiao gripped Lian Yufan’s arms, stopping the trembling for him.

“It’s also possible for a special ability to only awaken after you grow up. So my mother put all her hopes on me. She was desperate to raise me according to special ability user norms, but the arranged time came closer and closer, I was about to turn five, but I was still ordinary, and my mother’s mental health was getting worse and worse. One day while I was sleeping I felt that I was choking. When I opened my eyes, I found that she was holding my throat. She told me that there are people whose special abilities awaken on the point of death, and she wanted to try.” As Lian Yufan spoke, tears rolled down his face, but he seemed not to notice.

Cen Xiao didn’t know what to say. He could only hold onto his hands.

Lian Yufan threw off Cen Xiao’s hands. Intoxication was making him talkative. “I don’t hate her. She only loved my father too much, didn’t want to lose him, didn’t want him to have a child with someone else, whether it was done artificially or...another way. She hoped that I was a

special ability user, but my power awakened too late. My father died in battle when he was thirty. He didn't betray his marriage, but my mother and I still lost him.

"In another five years, my special ability awakened, but by that time, my mother had already gone into a mental sanatorium. Her constant obsession and the passing of her husband made her lose control of her mind. In the end, she couldn't take it. I remember that when my special ability awakened, I was really glad. I ran to the sanatorium to see her. I wanted to tell her the good news. But when I arrived, I saw Luo Huai."

Luo Huai had snatched away all of Lian Yufan's mother's memories concerning the Protectors, concerning her husband, concerning her son. All the happy and painful memories were removed. When Lian Yufan arrived at the sanatorium, it had been his first time seeing his mother smiling so happily. And the reason for that happiness was that she had forgotten him.

He unconsciously pushed the liquor bottle onto the ground. The bottle broke, and the remaining liquor slowly flowed out. Lian Yufan's fingertips touched the shards of the bottle, and the bottle was repaired, turning into an empty liquor bottle.

"The bottle can be repaired, but the liquor won't come back." Lian Yufan smiled bitterly. "How old is You Zhengping?"

"Twenty-five," Cen Xiao said quietly.

"A good age. My father was twenty five when I was born. He naively thought that he still had five years." Lian Yufan shook his head. "You Zhengping won't be happy. The organization hasn't told him about this because it's waiting for the day his emotional state stabilizes."

"You were warning You Zhengping to take note of Yu Hua's mental state because..." Cen Xiao was fearful from what he was hearing.

"Yu Hua is a control freak to start with. During the investigation, I could see it from his diary and all kinds of small details. Do you think he would allow You Zhengping to take part in the Protector Perpetuation Program? Even though technology has advanced now, he still wouldn't agree," Lian Yufan said. "When the time comes, I'm afraid Luo Huai will have to step in again."

Hearing this, Cen Xiao was at a loss. He could only change the subject in a flurry. "Luo Huai was only carrying out his assignment. Don't be so hostile towards him."

"Luo Huai?" Lian Yufan sneered. "He's different from me. He's a perfect child of the Perpetuation Project. His special ability awakened from birth. When I was ten and my ability had just awakened, he had already been carrying out assignments for years. All of you shouldn't get too close to Luo Huai, either. There may come a day when he puts his hand on your shoulder not out of friendliness, but because he's silently carrying out his assignment."

Lian Yufan was always on his guard against Luo Huai, avoided him as much as possible. He was afraid of one day forgetting everything he cared about.

While Lian Yufan and Cen Xiao drank, Luo Huai was counseling You Zhengping in another break room. "Don't blame Lian Yufan. The fact that he has a bad outlook on all Protectors' marriages is my fault."

"If he has a bad outlook, he can take it out on me. Why does he have to go after Yu Hua every day?"

"Because one day, I may erase all of Yu Hua's memories about you," Luo Huai said quietly. "Like I erased all of his mother's memories about him."

You Zhengping's breath caught. He looked at Luo Huai in disbelief. He hadn't expected Luo Huai to say these things.

Luo Huai briefly recounted how he had taken Lian Yufan's mother's memories. You Zhengping was also hearing about the Protection Perpetuation Program for the first time.

"My mother was a special ability user, and she wasn't like Lian Yufan's father. Even if his father hadn't passed on his ability, the damage wouldn't have been so great. But my mother's power promoted social stability. She had to produce offspring before she was twenty-six... It seemed there was no better way for it, so I was born, perfectly," Luo Huai said to You Zhengping in quiet melancholy.

"But...we're all the same age. You would have been only ten when you took his mother's memories. Why were you the one carrying out the assignment instead of your mother?" You Zhengping hugged his arms involuntarily.

"Because she...had borne too many memories. Her mental state was unsteady to begin with. After I was born, she was affected with severe postpartum depression. When drugs and counseling had failed over and over, she avoided everyone and killed herself." As he spoke, Luo Huai was as calm as though he were relating someone else's story. "After I snatched away Lian Yufan's mother's memories, I didn't take on another assignment. There were no Destroyers for fifteen years. I was happy during that time, happy and blessed. The organization agreeing to your marriage, apart from being for the sake of stabilizing your emotions, must have been because they thought no more Destroyers would appear, and the young people could have it easier. The Protector Perpetuation Program was stopped over a decade ago, but now that Destroyers have appeared again, I don't know whether they'll start it again."

Only special ability users could see Luo Huai's face clearly, but right now, You Zhengping felt that his face was very blurred. It was as though he was about to disappear.

"Captain You, I wish this world had no Destroyers, no Protectors, no special ability users, only ordinary comrades in arms," Luo Huai said gently. "If such a day comes, perhaps Lian Yufan won't be so obsessed, and I...won't have to bear so many painful memories."

You Zhengping opened his mouth, but no words came out. He was very concerned that the Protector Perpetuation Program would make Yu Hua go mad, but this had yet to happen. Perhaps there was a chance; perhaps the project wouldn't restart. But Luo Huai and Lian Yufan's tragedies had already happened. There was no way to recover time that had passed, and the harm done to them couldn't disappear.

In fact, every time Lian Yufan insisted that a Protector's marriage couldn't be happy, what he was saying was, "I couldn't be happy."

The next morning, You Zhengping had come home, thrown himself into Yu Hua's arms, forced himself to pretend nothing had happened. He had enjoyed Yu Hua's embrace, for once acting like a spoiled child and making Yu Hua skip work to stay with him.

The aroma of food from the kitchen reminded You Zhengping that everything he had now might be transient.

It would be better if there were no Destroyers.

He got out of bed and went to the kitchen. He hugged Yu Hua from behind, gently kissing his husband's sturdy back.

*We'll definitely be happy*, You Zhengping thought inwardly.

—

Author's Note:

Yu Hua: It would be better if there were no System.

You Zhengping: It would be better if there were no Destroyers.

The author: You two will definitely be happy.

—

Chapter Explanation:

First, Lian Yufan is talking about things from twenty to thirty years ago. Technology and ideas were both very backwards.

Second, due to all manner of humanitarian considerations, this project was stopped fifteen years ago, or else You Zhengping wouldn't have gotten married without knowing anything about it.

Third, the main reason Luo Huai's mother killed herself was that she had taken in too many memories and negative emotions. Luo Huai is the same; his emotional state also borders on collapse.

Fourth, not all Protectors had to undergo this project, only the ones with unique abilities, because they were too unique. For other types, it was enough for the ability to awaken among ordinary people.

## CHAPTER 45

Yu Hua never thought that he was unhappy. Every day since meeting You Zhengping, he had been very happy.

While there were in fact many stumbling blocks on the road ahead now, he could lift his foot and kick them away. How much strength would it take?

Of course, the process involved a lot of trouble. It also made Yu Hua very worried. For example, at first when his power had suddenly increased, he had been unable to have intimate contact with Xiao You. For another example, he had accidentally broken the phone Xiao You had given him. Also, he had fretted about how to make (launder) the money to support Xiao You. Or, for another example, after finding out Xiao You's identity, he had to worry about how to be a better family member to a Protector. Finally, there was the problem of getting those pants back... Ahem, never mind about the pants.

In sum, all of Yu Hua's worries and vexations came from considering how to treat You Zhengping better. It was all troubling, but as soon as he remembered that all his worries were for the sake of a better future, even the worrying was happy.

In fact, when he had found out that Xiao You was a Protector, when the surprise had passed, Yu Hua had been rather glad.

He had thought that he had been silently doing battle with both the Destroyers and the Protectors. He hadn't known that he and Xiao You were fellow travelers. At the amusement park, when he had been considering how to teach Yuan Luori a lesson, Xiao You had also been beating up Yuan Luori out of anger that Yu Hua had been injured.

It was tiring going ahead on your own. With someone to accompany you, you wouldn't be lonely.

When Yu Hua had seen Xiao You injured, he had been genuinely enraged, distressed, sad, and even fearful when it was over. Apart from that, up to today, the rest had all been happiness.

Even when he had accidentally kissed Xiao You under the black-cloaked man's identity, it had quietly raised his expectations. Would Xiao You realize that he was the black-cloaked man because of that? Would Xiao You get suspicious and secretly go through his phone, his pockets, his nightstand, the underside of the mattress, the safe, the bank card history, the

browser records, and the suitcase on top of the wardrobe? With this small expectation, Yu Hua was once again happy.

“We’re very happy now.” Yu Hua wiped his somewhat oily hands. He turned, kissed You Zhengping’s forehead, and smiled in satisfaction.

Seeing Yu Hua’s totally unknowing look, You Zhengping gradually steadied in the midst of his distress.

Lian Yufan’s mother’s pain, Luo Huai’s pain—he wouldn’t let that happen to Yu Hua.

The Protector Perpetuation Program had been built on the basis of the Destroyers running wild and the need for people to stand up and do battle with them. In the fifteen years that there had been no Destroyers, the Protector Perpetuation Program had gradually stopped.

As long as there were no Destroyers, this program would never have a chance to start again.

You Zhengping thought that his generation was blessed. From Zhen Li and Yuan Luori, they knew that the Destroyers had a System behind them, and the System was the true mastermind. And the System had taken heavy damage in a fight with a powerful “clearer” (Zhen Li had mentioned him to Yuan Luori), so there had been no Destroyers in their world for fifteen years. Now, the damage to the System hadn’t been repaired yet, and it was going to do battle with the black-cloaked man again. As long as they could use the black-cloaked man to get rid of the System, then they really could deal with all the Destroyers once and for all!

You Zhengping clenched his fist. He loved the world and was willing to protect it with all his strength, but he was also human. He had selfish desires. He hoped to attain happiness.

Lian Yufan’s father had been unable to give both sides what they wanted, leading to Lian Yufan’s pessimism and rationality. But You Zhengping’s ideal had always been “I want it all.” He would put that conviction into practice at all times.

Having worked it all out, You Zhengping wasn’t sad anymore. Sitting at the dining table holding his face in his hands and watching Yu Hua being busy in the kitchen, his heart was full of their little home.

Actually, a Protector’s physique really was a good thing. He had spent all morning in excessive exercise, but his back didn’t feel tired at all. The small muscle strains and abrasions from the exercise had healed completely within a few minutes. There was absolutely no need to worry about not being able to get out of bed.

Back when he had been unable to control his special ability, he had worried that if he took the lead in exercise, he would hurt Yu Hua, so he had quietly lain there unmoving, letting Yu Hua help him stretch.

As they had spent more time together, they had gotten used to this method of exercise. Even though You Zhengping could control his special ability now, he was still too lazy to take the lead.

And Yu Hua was fit. During exercise, he was always powerful and precise. You Zhengping could only keep up with the intensity of his exercise because he was a Protector. If he were to take the lead, he wouldn't be able to do as good a job as Yu Hua.

Yes, it was quite harmonious.

You Zhengping's legs swung under the table. Watching Yu Hua arrange four dishes and a soup on the table, he breathed in the fragrance in satisfaction. Today's lunch was Yu Hua's secret recipe sweet and sour spareribs, secret recipe beef stewed in soy sauce, secret recipe lightly fried pork loin, and some brightly colored vegetables whose names You Zhengping didn't know (he could precisely distinguish among meat smells, but vegetables were all the same); the soup was clear eel soup. Each dish was very large and full of food.

"You've made so much food in just an hour?" You Zhengping picked up a piece of sparerib. It was so fragrant he nearly cried.

"I prepared some of it last night. You sent a message last night saying you were going to rest today, so I was planning on making you something good to eat," Yu Hua said. When he had been upset last night, he still hadn't forgotten to take care of the food. He had stewed the beef, made gravy, and cooked the soup.

"It's so good!" You Zhengping ate with such relish that he nearly bit through his tongue. He gave an "ow" and stuck out his tongue. There was blood on it.

Yu Hua quickly poured him a glass of cool water and sighed. "Why are you in such a rush? No one is fighting over it with you."

"Because it's so good," You Zhengping said. "I haven't eaten your cooking in two days."

"Only two days." While Yu Hua said this, inside he was bursting with happiness.

"I can't stand not eating it for a single day." You Zhengping put his arms around Yu Hua's waist. "My life depends on Chef Yu's secret recipe home cooking."

"Then I'll make some snacks that you can carry with you. You can put them in your pocket and sneak a mouthful when you're taking a break from your assignments. You're not allowed to take them out and show them off, or else they'll all get stolen," Yu Hua said, smiling faintly.

The amount of snacks he made for You Zhengping had always been very large because he knew that You Zhengping wouldn't be able to resist showing them off at work, and the jealous underlings would definitely steal them. These snacks were set aside for being stolen. This time,



to preserve the life of You Zhengping, who was away from him too long, he wanted to preserve the snacks; naturally other people couldn't be allowed to know.

"Yes, yes." You Zhengping nodded repeatedly.

Since he had already bitten his tongue, Yu Hua forbade You Zhengping from eating too quickly. If he picked up the meat too quickly, Yu Hua would cough gently, and from time to time stick some of the green thing made of unknown vegetables into You Zhengping's bowl.

Pulling a long face, You Zhengping said, "I don't want to eat vegetables. The green looks very environmentally friendly."

"There are many nutrients in vegetables that meat doesn't have. You can't only eat meat," Yu Hua said.

"All right." You Zhengping pursed his lips. "It's all out of love."

When they had eaten, Yu Hua turned on the news channel out of habit, listening to it as he washed the dishes. You Zhengping, rubbing his full belly, sprawled on the couch and called, "I have three days off, and the day after tomorrow is Saturday. Let's go see a movie! We won't take anyone, just the two of us."

Yu Hua turned off the tap and thought that these words sounded familiar. Last time when they had gone to the amusement park, You Zhengping had said the same thing. Yu Hua had counted then. Cen Xiao and five other children of a previous marriage had come, and Lian Yufan had brought six people. Lian Yufan had also forced Zhen Li to bring Yuan Luori. The amusement park's employees had also looked ready to fight; they must also have been You Zhengping's colleagues. Counting them all up, there were thirteen Protectors, two Destroyers, and twenty-one outside personnel; in total, that was thirty-six spinning third wheels. Yes, that was "just the two of them."

Yu Hua picked up a clean cloth to dry the dishes. As he dried, he asked, seeming careless, "What are Cen Xiao and the others planning to do during their three days off?"

"Who cares about them?" You Zhengping snorted. "A crowd of third wheels."

Yu Hua relaxed slightly. After drying all the dishes and cleaning the kitchen, he sent a message to Lian Yufan: *You're working overtime on Saturday.*

At this moment, Lian Yufan had just woken up. His hangover was giving him a headache and making him nauseous. While he was feeling awful, he read Yu Hua's message and instantly sent back an angry voice message: "Why would I have to work overtime? What is there at your crappy studio to work overtime for?"

Yu Hua had guessed that Lian Yufan would be angry. He didn't listen to the voice message but converted it to text. Lian Yufan's Mandarin was very standard. He had a Level 1-B certificate<sup>16</sup>. The accuracy of the speech to text conversion was very high.

Yu Hua quickly typed on his phone: *You weren't at work yesterday or today, two days in a row. Do you mean you don't need to work overtime to make it up?*

Lian Yufan was simply about to die from rage. After the operation, the others had easily gotten three days of vacation with the help of the criminal police captain who understood the situation. What about him? He was being exploited daily by the Demon King Yu! He angrily said, "I won't! Haven't you already deducted my full attendance bonus? I don't need this month's wages, go ahead and deduct, I'm not working today, tomorrow, or the day after tomorrow!"

In the afternoon, Yu Hua sat down on the couch to relax. You Zhengping saw him sitting at the edge of the couch and wriggled over to him like a caterpillar, putting his head on Yu Hua's lap, thinking that this was how his head should be pillowed.

With Xiao You's head resting in his lap, Yu Hua smiled at him warmly. At the same time, his fingers didn't stop. He coldly replied to Lian Yufan: *We have a new colleague. I'm planning to employ "him" as public relations director. You'll be competing with "him." "He" doesn't rest on weekends but stays at the office working diligently. You can come or not on the weekend, as you like.*

"What!" Lian Yufan instantly leapt out of bed. "He's hired another new employee?"

Ignoring his headache, he got dressed and went to find Yuan Luori, who was sitting quietly in the library, reading a complete set of legal texts while waiting for someone to take him back to work. He had just gone two steps when he stepped on something soft. The thing gave a "hmpf." Lian Yufan looked down. He had stepped on Cen Xiao's stomach. The ground was scattered all over with liquor bottles.

Cen Xiao and Lian Yufan had been drinking last night. Lian Yufan had passed out after three bottles. Cen Xiao, whose emotions had been complicated, had drunk the rest on his own after helping Lian Yufan to bed. Cen Xiao wasn't sure how many bottles of alcohol there had been in Lian Yufan's fridge, but at any rate the fridge was empty now. Baijiu, red wine, and beer had turned into empty bottles.

Because of his special ability, most of the alcohol Cen Xiao drank evaporated instead of being absorbed, so his alcohol tolerance was excellent. It may be a slight exaggeration to say he could drink a thousand cups without getting drunk, but he could drink a whole crowd under the table without a problem.

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<sup>16</sup> Grading from the Putonghua Proficiency Test or Putonghua Shuiping Ceshi (PSC), used in mainland China to test pronunciation in Mandarin/Standard Mainland Chinese. Level 1-B is 92% standard pronunciation.

Even so, because he had been in a bad mood yesterday, Cen Xiao had still gotten drunk. After putting the last bottle out of the way, he had gone straight to sleep on the ground. His body temperature was high, anyway. He wasn't afraid of getting cold. If he slept in the snow in winter, all the snow around him would have turned to steam by morning, saving work for the street cleaners. Before, whenever there had been snow on the training field, everyone would push Cen Xiao out on the field to sleep so they wouldn't have to sweep the next day.

"Did you drink an entire distillery?" Lian Yufan splashed his forehead with cold water and didn't wake Cen Xiao. He rushed to the library.

The library was deserted. Lian Yufan hit the door and said, "Yuan Luori!"

"Here." Yuan Luori crawled out from under a table, wearing a pair of black-framed glasses and hugging *Civil Law*. "Are you going to take me back?"

Yuan Luori was Lian Yufan's responsibility right now. Lian Yufan was going to drop him off at the studio when he left the base. Lian Yufan had gotten drunk last night and had only woken up at midday, so there had been no one to mind Yuan Luori. He was in a bit of a rush to get back to the studio. He had arranged with the livestream fans to livestream studying law again tonight.

"What are you doing under the table? The lighting is bad. Why don't you protect your eyes when you're already near-sighted?" Lian Yufan said, covering his forehead. He felt that nothing had pleased him since he'd been transferred to the Xuyang District.

"It's safe under the table," Yuan Luori said. "The near-sightedness isn't a big problem. It's more comfortable to wear glasses than contact lenses. They won't bounce out of my eyes."

Yuan Luori wasn't worried about myopia and astigmatism. The great master clearer had promised him that he would heal his eyes!

Yuan Luori had seen the black-cloaked man heal the handsome protector with his own eyes. He had determined that the black-cloaked man's healing abilities were absolutely more powerful than medicine from the System. He only had to wait patiently.

Though the great master's healing might require some intimate contact. Yuan Luori pursed his lips. Though this was his idol, he still wasn't especially willing.

"Yu Hua said that the studio has hired a new director. Do you know what Destroyer it is? Is Destroyer 192 still alive?" Lian Yufan asked.

Lian Yufan instinctively thought that any employees who could join this crappy studio were either his fellow Protectors who needed to do it for work or new Destroyers. Yu Hua had joined unknowingly, but at least he was a Protector's relative.

“There’s-there’s a new one? I didn’t know.” Yuan Luori pushed at his glasses. “I came to the base with you yesterday. My phone was confiscated in the car. I don’t have a source of information.”

The base still didn’t allow Yuan Luori to bring in his cell phone. Lian Yufan’s phone, which could communicate with Yu Hua, was special. Because he was in a special position as a spy, he could apply to have a phone with a location blocking ability. Even You Zhengping wasn’t qualified to have a phone that could communicate with the outside world from the base.

“That’s true.” Lian Yufan rubbed his aching temples. “Wait a moment, I’ll take you back to the studio in half an hour.”

While Lian Yufan washed his face, changed his clothes, and cleaned himself up, Yuan Luori found an employee to take care of the paperwork for borrowing the books, and to sign for goods received (the glasses). These expenses were undertaken by the Protection Organization. The organization had abundant funds. But the use of every sum of money had to be recorded in detail. This was to prevent corruption from breeding.

After painlessly knocking out Yuan Luori, Lian Yufan left the base with him. On the way, he sent Yu Hua another message: *I’m going to work now, and I’ll work normally on the weekend. I’m not going to give you an excuse to replace me!*

Yes! When he read the message, Yu Hua inwardly made a victory sign, but on the surface he maintained a steady appearance.

Xiao You had said that Cen Xiao wasn’t going to work and could go wherever he wanted to to have fun; Lian Yufan had agreed to work overtime on Saturday. This showed that the Protectors really didn’t have an operation on Saturday. He and Xiao You truly would have a two-person world.

A perfectly clean two-person world with just the two of them, no Cen Xiao or Cen Xiao’s wallet, no Lian Yufan or Protectors, and no Destroyers.

Countless date spots in the Xuyang District flew through Yu Hua’s mind in a flash. He combined them in his mind into the perfect date plan. Just then, You Zhengping reached out his arms to be hugged. “Whenever we’ve gone on a date before, you’ve been responsible for arranging the time, finding transportation, finding a good restaurant, finding a good movie, finding...somewhere to stay the night, haha. I was only responsible for being an idiot. This time, leave it all to me, all right? I’ll arrange it.”

Yu Hua immediately hugged his husband, who was for once being demanding. He lowered his head and brushed his nose. His eyes were smiling. “All right, this time I’ll listen to you. Whether your plan is good or not, you can’t go to Cen Xiao and the others for help.”

"As if I had any use for them!" You Zhengping said disdainfully. "I suspect all our dates before turned into such a mess in the end because of them. A pack of good-for-nothings, always in the way. I'll do better without their help!"

"All right, I'll leave it all to you," Yu Hua said virtuously.

You Zhengping loosened his hold, his head still lolling in Yu Hua's lap and rubbing.

Suddenly, a sense of familiarity came from the back of You Zhengping's head. He tapped the back of his head and blinked.

Why did this seem kind of...

Just then, the pressure cooker in the kitchen beeped. Yu Hua got up and said, "Your snacks need to be boiled and fried. When they've cooled down, it's best to put them in vacuum-sealed bags so they'll be convenient to carry along. No one will find them because of the smell."

As a virtuous wife, Yu Hua had all the necessary small household appliances. How could he not have a vacuum sealer?

Yu Hua got up and opened the pressure cooker. The aroma of meat burst out. You Zhengping was attracted by the smell and came over to the pressure cooker, circling like a greedy cat.

Every time You Zhengping circled, his arm unconsciously touched Yu Hua. Yu Hua helplessly said, "I'm making these for you to take to work. If you eat them now, they'll be gone by then."

"But I'm only going to work in three days. Even if you vacuum pack them, they'll still disappear. And you'll be wasting vacuum bags," You Zhengping said, blinking. "If you're going to make snacks, it should be the day before work."

"Aren't we going on a date the day before you have work?" Yu Hua tapped You Zhengping's forehead. "Do you have the mind of a goldfish? Only seven seconds of memory."

"Oh." You Zhengping looked covetously at the meat inside the pressure cooker, licked his lips, and pitifully said, "All right, then."

Seeing how aggrieved he looked, Yu Hua smiled in spite of himself and shook his head helplessly. "Fine, at worst I'll get up early to make more. Go ahead and eat these."

You Zhengping's eyes lit up. He was just about to reach out a hand to grab when Yu Hua lightly smacked the back of his hand. "Don't use your hands. Wash your hands, then use chopsticks. And you can only have one piece. I still have to fry the rest. After I've fried them, you can eat as much as you want."

You Zhengping exuberantly washed his hands over and over, picked up chopsticks, and ate a piece of meat. He was so happy his eyes narrowed.

Suddenly, he touched the back of his head and said uncertainly, “What was I just going to say? Did I forgot something?”

Yu Hua had already put on the pot, heated the oil, and begun to fry the meat. You Zhengping smelled it and really couldn’t concentrate. He put down his hand and fixed his eyes on the meat leaving the pot.

Yu Hua arranged the snacks on the coffee table for You Zhengping, once again ordered him to use chopsticks instead of picking them up with his hands, then went into the study with his laptop to work.

Since he was going to rest on Saturday, then he had to rest tomorrow as well (after all, Xiao You didn’t have days off often, he had to stay with him). Before that, it was best to finish taking care of business.

Yu Hua went through his online office to contact the group that was making the talent show and renegotiate Yuan Luori’s contract, changing the contract into one that wouldn’t earn that much money and wouldn’t be like signing an indenture, but would be very beneficial for Yuan Luori’s future development.

Yuan Luori being able to escape this calamity was owing to him helping Xiao You protect the fallen children on the roof. While Xiao You had been fighting Destroyer 192, he had been unable to spare attention to look after the children. Yuan Luori had stealthily picked the three children up right away and moved them far away from Destroyer 192, saving You Zhengping from worrying about trouble coming from that direction.

Since he had rendered meritorious service, Yu Hua would give the hero preferential treatment, give Yuan Luori a future. As for how he would develop on the talent show, that would rely on his own performance.

While You Zhengping happily ate snacks and Yu Hua was busy with work, Lian Yufan returned to the studio with Yuan Luori. As soon as he walked in, he saw Zhen Li stretching his leg muscles. There was no one else in the room.

“Where’s the new director Yu Hua hired? Is it a Destroyer?” Lian Yufan asked hastily.

Zhen Li: “...”

He stretched out a trembling finger, pointing to his feet. A little husky was tied to the chair leg. There was a full bowl of dog food in front of it; it hadn’t eaten a bit.

Lian Yufan said, “...This is the new public relations director?”

Zhen Li nodded. “If Yu Hua said it was, then it is.”

Lian Yufan: "..."

What breed of demon was Yu Hua?

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Author's Note:

Lian Yufan: What breed of demon *is* Yu Hua?

Yu Hua: The lovesick breed of demon.

Lian Yufan: I've never seen such a petty person.

Yu Hua: You may not know it, but everything you've encountered at the studio, all the stumbling blocks I've put in your way, every last bit of it, stems entirely from a pair of pants. So when are you going to return the pants to me?

## CHAPTER 46

The still hungover Lian Yufan's head hurt a lot. When he saw the new "public relations director," it hurt even more. He sat right down on the dance practice room's little rest bench and rapped twice on his forehead with his hand.

"Yu Hua told me to come to work. Where is he?" Lian Yufan asked.

"He's negotiating a talent show contract for Yuan Luori. He's gone out of the office," Zhen Li considerably explained for Yu Hua.

"For me?" Yuan Luori pointed at himself. He didn't know that Yu Hua was the black-cloaked man and hated this cold-blooded human resources director. Frowning, he said, "What stupid talent show? I want to study."

Zhen Li didn't try persuading him. When the time came, Yu Hua would have his own way of making Yuan Luori go, anyway. The only difference was whether he went obediently or against his will.

Lian Yufan drank a cup of water to revive himself and went up to the little husky. Naturally he didn't know that this husky was Destroyer 192. He only took it for a dog Yu Hua had bought.

"What did Yu Hua buy this thing for?" Lian Yufan poked the little husky's head. The little husky opened its blue eyes wide. Written in its eyes were the words "I don't want to live."

"It must be to attract fans during the livestreams." This was the excuse Zhen Li had thought of for Yu Hua after thinking all last night. "Cute animal livestreams are very well-received now, and huskies are particularly successful. Our studio is in its pioneering stage. We have to try everything once."

Lian Yufan said, “But this husky looks like it wants to die. It’s all sickly, and it won’t eat. How long will it live? Why didn’t Yu Hua buy one in better condition?”

Zhen Li knew that it was because Destroyer 192 didn’t want to live anymore after becoming a dog that it was refusing food like this, but he didn’t say anything. It was far too much of a coincidence for the dog Yu Hua had just bought to be Destroyer 192. It would make Lian Yufan, who had dispelled his misgivings, suspect Yu Hua again. He had to choose to keep silent.

Luckily, Lian Yufan thought of an answer himself. “It must be because the dog is sick and he got it for cheap. Yu Hua is unbearably stingy. He buys everything cheap.”

There was still an acrid smell floating through the studio leftover after the decoration. The couple of formaldehyde-absorbing money plants had been bought by Lian Yufan at his own expense when he really couldn’t stand it anymore. If not for the fact that everyone here was either a Destroyer or a special ability user with superhuman constitutions that couldn’t be harmed by formaldehyde, then Yu Hua’s actions would have amounted to slow murder!

Zhen Li didn’t want everyone to pay too much attention to the little husky, afraid that its identity as Destroyer 192 would leak out. So he mentioned how much money he had made yesterday. This was the greatest income the studio had had since it had been established. It was worth celebrating.

Since yesterday had been brought up, Lian Yufan said, “Yesterday went well thanks to your clever substitution, eating all the slips of paper and the cardboard box in time. There were so many people on the first floor then. If the slip Destroyer 192 wrote the phone number on had turned into a bomb, all our efforts would have been wasted.”

Hearing about the slips of paper, the little husky instantly looked up at Zhen Li with a vicious look. It had originally meant to use the customers at the first floor lottery drawing as hostages, but when it had opened the phone app, it hadn’t seen the largest bomb. It turned out that it was this waste of space, who had only gone through four levels, who had spoiled his plan!

The husky got up with difficulty and fiercely began to eat the dog food in the bowl. It wanted revenge, it couldn’t starve to death!

*Pooh, what kind of dog food is this? It tastes so bad!* Its senses of smell and taste were very sensitive. A single mouthful, and it could taste that there was meat gone off, illegally recycled cooking oil, and flavorings to cover up the odor of decay, as well as an appetite stimulant...

This must be shoddy dog food bought by that demon Yu Hua for the sake of torturing it.

*Yuck...* The little husky bore the disgust, eating the dog food with difficulty.

“I could only eat a little.” Hearing Lian Yufan praise him, Zhen Li felt awkward. “You’re the real hero. Weren’t you the one who repaired the mall building when it was blown up? I saw



yesterday that you were leaning against the wall the whole time without moving. Were you hurt?”

Lian Yufan was very contained. He thought it was what he ought to have done. “I was a little injured. My spine was broken, but the black-cloaked man used Destroyer 192’s System to get a healing pill. Your System’s technology is really advanced. I was completely recovered right after I took it.”

The little husky, having finished eating the dog food in the bowl, quickly lifted its head. *So the building didn’t blow up yesterday because of you!*

And then there was Yuan Luori. It had only been taken in because he had tricked it.

The three people in the studio, in addition to the black-cloaked man Yu Hua, were all his personal enemies!

“Aw-woooo!” the little husky howled mournfully. *I’ve fallen to today’s state of being forced to eat garbage dog food entirely because of you people!*

After crying out, the little husky threw itself forward to bite Lian Yufan’s neck...

It was tied on a leash. Within the radius of the leash, the only person it could touch was Lian Yufan, who was completely unguarded against this dog.

Lian Yufan’s reflexes were extremely good. How could he get bitten by a dog? He turned slightly and raised his hand. The husky bit his sleeve, tearing away a piece of fabric.

“This dog bites? Does it have rabies?” Lian Yufan calmly stretched out his arm and lifted the little husky by the scruff of its neck, instantly controlling the dog.

“I don’t think it has rabies,” said Zhen Li dryly, knowing the reason behind the attack. “Maybe it doesn’t like you.”

“I don’t think so. I had dogs when I was little. Dogs don’t hate me.” Lian Yufan saw that there was a little yellow duckbill muzzle on the table. He picked it up and put it on the little husky. “That will stop it from biting. It can wear a muzzle for now. We’ll take it off when it eats. Who bought these dog products? There’s a pretty complete set.”

“It must have been Yu Hua...” Zhen Li said.

Yesterday’s operation had ended before 11 AM. It had been after 7 PM when Zhen Li had come back to the studio. Yu Hua had been soaked through then, looking like he had spent a long time out in the rain. When Yu Hua had left, Zhen Li had seen articles for training a dog stacked in a corner and guessed that Yu Hua had braved the rain to buy them.

“And there’s a cage,” Lian Yufan said in satisfaction. “Put it in. That’ll keep it from going to the toilet everywhere.”

Seeing how practiced he seemed, Zhen Li said, “How long did you have dogs?”

Lian Yufan was silent. Then he said, “...When I was little, my dad often wasn’t home. My mother and I weren’t close, so I kept pets to relieve the loneliness. Later, while training with the Protectors, I also took part in training police dogs.”

“Do the Protectors need to train police dogs, too? This world doesn’t have animals with special abilities, does it?” Yuan Luori asked curiously. His parrot had been taken by the Protection Organization and investigated for a long time. Finally they had determined that it was an ordinary parrot. It had been taken to a zoo to be cared for.

“There were no Destroyers in this world for fifteen years in a row. Without Destroyers, the Protection Organization has no reason to exist. Five years ago, the organization told us that we could choose to train at a second job we liked during our spare time. So I went to the police dog unit to intern for a while, but later...” Lian Yufan didn’t continue. He looked at Zhen Li.

Later, Zhen Li had come, and Director Xiao had had Lian Yufan transferred from the police dog unit to come to the Xuyang District and investigate Yu Hua’s identity.

All Protectors had cover identities. People like You Zhengping were comparatively fond of play. They had gone through the back door to get jobs as temporary workers at the subdistrict office. Except for when the subdistrict office was especially busy, they wouldn’t use them. Lian Yufan, however, had gone to the police dog unit, had seriously studied how to be a trainer, had taught police dogs.

Five years ago, when he had received the notice that he could choose a second job, Lian Yufan had been truly happy. He had thought that it was all over, but...

“Let me train this dog,” Lian Yufan said towards the dog in the cage. “Huskies have low intelligence and a low capacity to be trained. They can’t become police dogs. If you want it to be a cute pet and attract livestream fans, at least it has to be clever and understand human speech. It’s not like you can livestream it biting people. I can’t train it to be a police dog, but an internet famous dog shouldn’t be much of a problem.”

Lian Yufan and Destroyer 192... This livestream combination was truly weird.

Zhen Li picked up a cup and drank a mouthful of water to steady his nerves. “I didn’t think you would worry about how many fans we have.”

Lian Yufan had never cooperated with their work. He didn’t have any sense of belonging to the studio. Though he was a beauty with a birthmark, his popularity was low. Any fans of his who appeared in the livestream met with major disappointment.

Lian Yufan scratched the little husky's head and said, "Although you're Destroyers, you don't have the System's power anymore and have to have jobs to scrape by in this world. I'm responsible for minding you, so I can't watch you starve to death or come to the ends of your ropes and go out robbing people. It's much better for you to be able to make money and support yourselves than for the Protection Organization to support you. The country doesn't have so much money that it can support former enemies."

Following the battle with Destroyer 192, Lian Yufan's view of Zhen Li and Yuan Luori had changed. He didn't even hate You Zhengping so much anymore, or else he wouldn't have warned him to pay attention to Yu Hua's mental state.

Fighting shoulder-to-shoulder was the best method for getting closer.

Lian Yufan pinched the center of his brow and earnestly wrote a training table for the husky Xiao Er and stuck it on the wall. Xiao Er was the name Lian Yufan had chosen for the husky.

He told Zhen Li and Yuan Luori, "I won't necessarily be able to train Xiao Er every second. When I'm not here, it'll be up to you two to help. This is its training table. When you're training a dog, you have to start when it's a puppy, particularly when it's between two and sixth months old. This husky looks three months old from its size. That's when its rate of growth and ability to learn are greatest. Making a foundation is very important. We can't relax."

Looking at the table, Zhen Li's head spun. What was all this fixed times for defecating, oral commands, biting, picking up, jumping... A course of study with rewards and penalties was carefully written on the table, what mild punishments to use if the dog didn't behave, how to reward it with food; it was very rational and scientific.

Zhen Li brought the table up in front of the husky. Taking pleasure in its misfortune, he smiled and said, "From now on, you're a social animal."

The husky Xiao Er was literate. When it read the assignments on the training table, it immediately lay down on its back in the cage. Because of the muzzle, it couldn't howl. It could only make a groaning sound.

It had not only become a dog, it was also going to be tortured by its enemies.

"You're staying in the studio overnight, so talk to it from time to time," Lian Yufan ordered Yuan Luori. "It's currently in its learning period. If you talk to it more, that will help the dog understand our speech and grasp oral commands faster."

After handing out assignments, Lian Yufan left to go rest. His head really hurt. Before leaving, Lian Yufan warned the two members of staff not to tell Yu Hua that he was skipping work. They had to count him as present.

Zhen Li took a picture of Xiao Er's training table and posted an update that said: Our studio has hired another new director. This is the new director's training table.

[Hahaha! Are you trying to kill me with laughter and inherit my credit card and checks? The new director has four legs. What is its job?]

[Apparently we have to wait for Director Yu to get back to determine its job. President Zhen let slip that Director Yu said that Director Lian isn't dedicated to his work, so he wants to replace him with Director Ha<sup>17</sup>.]

[What the hell is a Director Ha? Why is the public relations director a dog? What can it do in a public relations crisis?]

[It must be that it'll grovel when something goes wrong.]

The fans were very much looking forward to seeing the new Director Ha. Zhen Li said that when it was properly trained, it would appear on the livestreams. The fans thought they would have to wait a long time, but that night, when Yuan Luori was studying on the livestream, Director Ha appeared on camera.

In the livestream image, Director Yuan was sitting on the ground with *Criminal Law* placed on top of the husky's cage. He was reciting, "The crime of endangering public safety is the most harmful crime among ordinary criminal offenses. It is a wide concept, encompassing the crimes of setting off bombs and releasing poisons. Depending on the circumstances, the penalties are divided among three years imprisonment or less or short-term detention, between three and seven years of imprisonment, or ten years imprisonment or more with death as the highest penalty."

The husky Xiao Er: "..."

The three-month-old dog trembled all over in its cage. Yuan Luori's words made it remember its experiences on the rooftop in spite of itself. The black-cloaked man like an evil spirit had lifted him and turned on the video conference with the Clearing League, committing atrocities against his injured self, catching him between life and death; it had hurt so much.

This had all been because he hadn't behaved according to what the black-cloaked man had said. He had broken the law.

"Biting belongs to the crime of deliberately harming people. Depending on the circumstances, the lightest punishment is a short-term detention, while the heaviest is ten years or more imprisonment or death," Yuan Luori said. "So you can't go around biting people, understand?"

After being shut up in the cage, the husky's muzzle had been removed. Yuan Luori reached into the cage to poke the husky's head.

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<sup>17</sup> "Husky" is transcribed as 哈士奇 (hashiqi), so the name comes from the first character of that.

The frightened Director Ha didn't bite him. It raised its head and howled miserably: "Awooooo!"

"Uh...I'm not so familiar with civil law, let me flip through the book." Yuan Luori put down *Criminal Law* and found the *Civil Law* he had borrowed just that day. "As I thought, being noisy and disturbing residents belongs in the category of civil law. You need to compensate for losses. We're in a business district here, the second category of the five standard categories of environmental noise. During the day, the noise level can't exceed sixty decibels, and during the night, it can't exceed fifty decibels. Our studio is rented. If there are complaints from our neighbors, we won't only have to pay a fine, we may also lose the studio. The rental costs and decoration expenses were pretty high. If you howl too loudly... Well, I don't know how Yu Hua will take it out on you. After all, you don't even have a contract."

Director Ha: "..."

Hearing Yu Hua's name, it was scared to the point of collapse, but the instincts of a husky made it want to howl, so Director Ha bit the muzzle that had been dropped in the cage. It hit the cage with the muzzle, indicating that Yuan Luori should put the muzzle on for it.

While it could still howl that way, it would at least remind it not to.

"What? You understand so well?" Yuan Luori looked at the little dog in surprise.

"Bark..." Director Ha called quietly, looking askance at Yuan Luori's stupid look.

The audience for Yuan Luori's late night livestreams was mostly people studying to take graduate entrance exams, civil service exams, or certification exams. They wanted someone to accompany them in their studies, so they had found the studio. The number of people watching was very large, though no one spoke. Everyone was quietly reading.

Now, Director Ha's astonishing natural talents attracted everyone's notice. They expressed surprise one after another:

[Is this dog spiritually enlightened? Can it learn *Civil Law* better than me?]

[Director Yuan, please repeat, don't interfere with the children testing into university.]

[Studying late at night is bitter. Seeing that there's a fluffy dog to accompany me, I instantly feel healed.]

[I fervently request for Director Ha to appear in the late night livestreams after this.]

Through his studies and teaching the husky law, the not very popular Yuan Luori gathered some fame. #HuskyCivilLaw# climbed up the livestream channel's popular searches. Though its position was low, it was still enough to attract notice.

When Yu Hua got up the next morning, he received the news that someone had posted a recording of the livestream online. Yuan Luori hadn't managed to arrange a ship with President Zhen, but he had made sparks with Director Ha.

That made sense. The two of them had inadvertently violated the same laws. Only the degree of severity was different. Of course they would have a common language.

Cold-blooded Director Yu expressionlessly watched the recording and read the popular searches, then quickly contacted the talent show group to renegotiate Yuan Luori's position.

At first the talent show group didn't agree. At the beginning, they had had their eyes on Zhen Li. Yu Hua had insisted on changing to Yuan Luori. The talent show group, on account of the contract, had reluctantly agreed. But Yu Hua kept changing things. The internet celebrities under the Zhen Studio's banner weren't especially well-known, and they couldn't provide the talent show group with resources. Where did they get the capacity to make such a fuss?

Though after they had read Yu Hua's plan, the talent show group was forced to admit that this script was truly ideal. They really wanted to headhunt Yu Hua.

While Yu Hua was haggling with the talent show group, You Zhengping quietly looked at him through the study door. Seeing his husband seriously at work and probably too busy to attend to him, he smacked his own chest and quietly returned to the bedroom. He locked the door, took his hiking bag out from the bottom of the wardrobe, and took out a thick book.

This was the desk calendar diary that Lian Yufan had copied when he had been investigating Yu Hua. When the investigation had ended, it had all reverted to You Zhengping. You Zhengping had bound it into a book and hidden it at home, planning to indulge in it when he had nothing else to do.

Today he wasn't going behind Yu Hua's back to get out the desk calendar diary because he wanted to remember the past. You Zhengping really didn't know how to plan a date!

He had talked big, said to leave everything to him this time, told Yu Hua he was to sit back and enjoy it. Tomorrow was the date. What should he do?

You Zhengping had promised Yu Hua that he wouldn't go to Cen Xiao to ask his friend for help. He had to overcome this crisis on his own.

You Zhengping had spent half the night going through forum posts on his phone. His eyes were red from lack of sleep, but he still hadn't found a perfect date plan.

He hadn't slept all night. His eyes had been wide open until daylight. When he had gotten up in the morning, his pillow had been covered in hair.

When Yu Hua went to the study to work, You Zhengping finally had a brain wave and slapped his thigh. Didn't he still have Yu Hua's desk calendar diary?

In Yu Hua's desk calendar diary there were records of countless date plans. Though they had all fallen through, these plans fully embodied Yu Hua's preferences. He couldn't go wrong following them!

Of course You Zhengping didn't want Yu Hua to know that he had copied his diary. When he had secretly determined that his husband hadn't noticed him, he took the diary out for reference.

What he didn't know was that when he locked the door, Yu Hua had already silently appeared outside the bedroom door. He pressed his ear gently to the door and heard the sound of You Zhengping rummaging through the wardrobe. He laughed quietly.

Yu Hua returned to the study, flipped open the desk calendar, and briskly wrote:

*—XX/XX/XX, Xiao You has locked the door behind my back for the first time and is going through the wardrobe, looking for clues about me.*

*Last night, I frantically hinted to him that recently I've been enjoying a TV drama about a wife hiding a secret from her husband. He must have understood my meaning and knew to go searching behind my back.*

*I'm delighted. I'm looking forward to him personally prying away my disguise and finding the secrets hidden inside.*

*How will Xiao You treat me when the time comes? Will he be troubled, struggling between duty and affection? Will he choose to conceal it or expose it?*

*I feel a twisted sort of secret happiness. I don't know which outcome I'm looking forward to.*

—

Author's Note:

Yu Hua: When I think about how if Xiao You betrays me, naturally I'll be able to imprison him, threaten him, make it so he only looks at me, only eats my cooking. I might be insane.

Lian Yufan: You control freak. You've always been seriously insane, all right?

## CHAPTER 47

*—XX/XX/XX, I went back to the rental apartment near my company, closed the door, and sat on the floor laughing unstoppably.*

*After Xiao You carved our names into the tree on impulse, the park manager told him to pay a fine and write a self-criticism. I ghostwrote the self-criticism, and he called Cen Xiao to come help with the fine.*

*I admit that I deliberately didn't offer up the 500 yuan Xiao You was short, deliberately watched him worry about finding someone to borrow money from, deliberately watched Xiao You looking helpless under cover of writing the self-criticism.*

*On the surface I was worried and sad, stroking Xiao You's hair in consolation, but in reality I was laughing so hard that my abs are sore.*

*After living so many years, this is my first time finding such an inherent weakness in myself, but unexpectedly, I don't hate it.*

*Xiao You can always overturn my predictions, my perfections, adding a tint of amusing awkwardness to all my carefully planned perfect memories.*

*Starting from I don't remember when, my life had lost all surprise, until Xiao You charged into without any warning. He can always bring me new anxieties.*

*I'm even looking forward to seeing whether he'll bring even more interesting unexpected events on the next date.*

*—XX/XX/XX, As expected, it was another day for a multi-person date.*

*I've almost gotten used to Cen Xiao and the others coming along behind us on our dates like conjoined twins. I pretended not to notice, checked the traffic conditions, and drove to an area being directed by the traffic police. As expected, Cen Xiao and the others, who were riding motorcycles without helmets, were caught by the traffic police. While they were being fined, I slammed on the gas pedal and quickly left, throwing off the hangers-on.*

*I managed to get two hours alone, booked a little private room at a karaoke place with Xiao You. I can't sing, and while Xiao You is perfect in all things, he can't sing a scale. We waited together for a while and were both severely afflicted by noise pollution.*

*Finally I chose some slow songs and let the original songs play. Xiao You and I abandoned our duets, not challenging unknown territory again.*

*The atmosphere was very ambivalent with love songs playing. As I had wanted all along, I got a kiss with no one spying.*

*After leaving the karaoke bar, we passed a lovers' hotel. Xiao You stopped and looked at me. My heart beat like a drum.*

*I'd thought of myself as a person with little desire. I've been single for many, many, many years. I didn't think of forming an attachment. When I saw the look in Xiao You's eyes today, some indescribable images flashed through my mind.*

*Ah, well, I was too rash.*



*When will the next date be?*

—XX/XX/XX...

You Zhengping rolled all over the bed as he read the desktop calendar diary. Every date he and Yu Hua had gone on was so interesting. When he finished reading, he awkwardly picked at the ground with his toes, but he felt a sense of embarrassed pleasure rising in his heart.

Yu Hua was so proper on the surface, but internally he had a lot going on inside.

Unfortunately, the calendar diary only went up to before their cold war. That was where Lian Yufan's investigation had stopped. You Zhengping respected his husband's privacy and gave him his space. This part had been forced on him by his work, so he had had to read it. He wouldn't secretly read anything that came after; he could only endure his curiosity and control himself.

Time passed quickly as he read the calendar diary. Two hours flashed by.

"Xiao You, we're out of oyster sauce. Go down and get me a bottle."

The voice coming from outside the door startled You Zhengping into awareness. He stuffed the copied book into a backpack and made an inhuman leap to shove the backpack into the bottom of the cabinet. At the same time, he unlocked the door. The whole process took less than a second.

"All right, let me get dressed." You Zhengping put a piece of paper into his chest pocket, got his phone, then changed his clothes and shoes and went downstairs.

When he was gone, Yu Hua, who had been in the kitchen, walked out. He fixed his eyes in the front door for several seconds, then turned and went into the bedroom.

Yu Hua had given You Zhengping an opportunity to go out. What would Xiao You choose? What had been written on that paper he had put into his pocket?

Yu Hua lightly tapped the bedroom wall and used "time replay," ready to see what Xiao You had done when he had discovered his identity.

It would take five to ten minutes for Xiao You to go downstairs and buy oyster sauce. Yu Hua wanted to finish watching what had happened over the span of two hours before he returned, so he sped up the replay by fifty times. He closed his eyes. When he opened them again, his sight had turned into "super vision."

This was one the scraps of power he had unsealed last time. An ordinary person could understand and accept what they saw according to the speed of human events. Beyond that speed, the naked eye couldn't distinguish. "Super vision," however, could distinguish all

speeds that the naked eye couldn't capture. To eyes with "super vision," a vehicle traveling at a speed of 120 kph would seem as slow as a crawling snail. A quickly attacking fist would also be as sluggish as slo-mo.

Using the "super vision" ability, he could watch what had happened with Xiao You in three minutes, and he would feel that after speeding it up, the playback was still very slow.

When Yu Hua saw You Zhengping take the calendar diary out of his backpack, he knew he had guessed wrong. Yu Hua had found this copy of the calendar diary long ago while he was cleaning. Xiao You had no idea how to hide things.

He had known that this was the inevitable result of the investigation, and it was no problem for Xiao You to understand him better. He might have wanted to cover some things up while they were dating, but they were an old married couple who had been married for three years; he wasn't afraid of any shattered image.

At this point, he should have withdrawn his "time replay" and "super vision" abilities, but Yu Hua couldn't resist wanting to know how Xiao You would react to him when he read the contents of the calendar diary.

He saw Xiao You smiling sweetly, unable to resist rolling on the bed hugging the book after each section he read, from time to time writing something on the piece of white paper.

Yu Hua curiously approached the bed, crouched down, and fixed his eyes on the white paper. He saw what was written on it:

*1. Yu Hua likes to watch romantic movies, because movie theaters are dark and you can hold hands in the dark. He wanted to secretly kiss me when the main characters of the movie kissed. Unfortunately, every time the movie tickets were bought for a group of nine, and we watched The Avengers series of superhero movies. My underlings and I were filled up with righteous indignation while watching and kept yelling, "Hit them!", "Go on!", "Charge!" Yu Hua ate popcorn alone off to the side. It was very dull.*

*Preparations for tomorrow: pick out a sweet romantic movie, buy a little bag of popcorn. Be careful not to spill the popcorn or the coke while kissing. That would be disappointing. It's best if I initiate the kiss (underlined). Yu Hua seems to want me to take the initiative more.*

*2. No more having lunch at barbecue, malatang, hotpot, starch jelly places, or any kind of tasty food place like that with a lot of noise and people. Choose a Chinese restaurant or a Western restaurant with quiet and cozy surroundings, with tasteless dishes where there's only a tiny bit of food in the middle of a big plate, and you can't get full and nothing tastes good. Yu Hua is a little fastidious about food, he doesn't have any requirements for how the food tastes, the important thing is the surroundings.*

*Preparations for tomorrow: before going out, nibble something filling, like bread. I'll be eating air for lunch.*

*3. In the afternoon, go to high quality shops to try on clothes. Yu Hua is a little vain, he likes to try on respectable clothes from some famous brands, slim-fitting, that make your legs look long, but that are uncomfortable to move around in. He also likes watching me trying on clothes and buying lots and lots. I'll fulfill his requirements.*

*Preparations for tomorrow: find a reasonably-priced shop so Yu Hua's credit card doesn't get maxed out. After buying clothes, take the smallest steps possible. Don't jump around too much and tear the pants.*

*Remember at all costs: No arcades. Yu Hua is bad at games.*

*4. It's not important what we eat for dinner. The important thing is that the restaurant has to be dark, the kind that's suitable for candlelight. Hire a violinist to play classical music for Yu Hua while we eat. The main course for dinner will be music.*

*Preparations for tomorrow: when listening to classical music, pinch your leg. You absolutely can't fall asleep, absolutely! You Zhengping, you can do it!*

*5. Before leaving the house, hire an hourly worker to come over and to arrange ninety-nine roses in a heart shape on the bed in the bedroom, make the bedroom look romantic and sensual (though I'm not especially sure what sensual actually is), put in some colored lights arranged to write out "Messrs. YouYu." Yu Hua likes tidiness, and clean and safe surroundings. However high quality a hotel is, it still won't accord with his requirements. It's better to arrange things at home.*

*Preparations for tomorrow: stall for time as much as possible until it's dark before going home. It'll be dark inside when we get home. Before Yu Hua turns on the light, use a remote to light up the colored lights.*

You Zhengping returned home carrying the oyster sauce and saw Yu Hua sitting at the dining table, hands cupped under his chin, looking like his was deeply considering something.

You Zhengping sniffed. There wasn't the familiar smell of food from before. He looked into the kitchen. There were vegetables chopped on the cutting board, but they hadn't been cooked.

Had he been waiting for the oyster sauce? You Zhengping put the oyster sauce in front of Yu Hua. "I bought it."

Yu Hua picked up the bottle of oyster sauce with both hands, his palms gently massaging the glass bottle. His movements were careful, patient, gentle.

You Zhengping blinked. What was wrong with Yu Hua? He went over and gently blew into his ear, reminding him that his husband was over here. It wasn't that bottle of oyster sauce!

"I'll go cook right away." Yu Hua got up, holding the bottle, and looked deeply at You Zhengping. He smile warmly. "I'll make you something tasty."

Seeing his back moving busily in the kitchen, You Zhengping concentrated. He thought that Yu Hua's expression seemed very familiar. When had he seen it before? It seemed that he had seen it many times.

You Zhengping thought about it while he ate, while he played games, while his teammates cursed him. In the evening, while he was lying on his side in Yu Hua's lap as Yu Hua cleaned his ears for him, he was still thinking about it.

With his hand on Yu Hua's knee, You Zhengping suddenly remembered. The day before he had accompanied Yu Hua in exercise for the first time, Yu Hua had smiled like that. The day before he had kidnapped Yu Hua to go to the Bureau of Civil Affairs for a marriage certificate, Yu Hua had smiled like that. The day before their wedding, Yu Hua had also smiled like that.

"Don't fool around, I'll hit your ear." Yu Hua patiently cleaned You Zhengping's ear for him, one hand pressing down Xiao You's occasionally flailing arm.

You Zhengping lay on his side. Yu Hua's hand lay on his arm. He suddenly thought once again that this gesture was very familiar, so familiar that it seemed to have happened not long ago.

This time, You Zhengping couldn't remember no matter what. He was frowning with thoughtfulness until he went to sleep.

To save their strength for exercising after the date tomorrow, tonight the two of them didn't exercise, only kissed each other, said goodnight, and went to sleep.

You Zhengping had a bellyful of thoughts. His mind was in chaos. He kept thinking he should remember something, but also that he shouldn't remember it.

He fell asleep in a daze and had a disorderly dream.

In the dream, Lian Yufan was telling him that the organization had determined to adopt modern technology and use an artificial womb to produce the ideal offspring. They were making the Protectors with unique abilities contribute sperm. You Zhengping did everything he could to resist. He was absolutely unwilling. Director Xiao used his special ability to control him, forcing him to the contribution location.

Lian Yufan's expression was peaceful; clenching his fist, he said, "I'll have to be a good dad." Luo Huai was expressionless. In the dream, You Zhengping seemed to be unable to see Luo Huai's face; he only heard Luo Huai say happily that when the child was born, he could escape.

Escape? Escape what? When it was You Zhengping's turn, he resisted fervently, rolling on the ground making a scene, unwilling to contribute. So the organization used the more advanced virtual imaging technology to project a "Yu Hua" in front of him.

The fake “Yu Hua” was too handsome, and he knew how to seduce him. When You Zhengping almost couldn’t control himself, their base was attacked.

Cen Xiao came to the contribution room, picked him up, and ran. He said that the black-cloaked man had fought his way in. The black-cloaked man wanted to destroy the world.

Everything instantly turned upside down. The black-cloaked man lifted the whole base and turned it over. The subterranean magma bubbled out. The whole Xuyang District became hell on earth.

Director Xiao and the other senior Protectors made the young Protectors run away, taking the underaged young students who were training at the base with them, while the old farts brought up the rear.

You Zhengping crowded a few teenagers into his space. Cen Xiao went ahead, opening the way by controlling the fire. They thought that Director Xiao and the others were so powerful that they could hold out for at least half a day, give them the opportunity to run away.

But in less than a minute, the black-cloaked man, carrying a string of aged Protectors, blocked their way. The black-cloaked man said that these Protectors were still alive, and that he had knocked all the living beings in the Xuyang District unconscious and temporarily hidden them in a safe place.

The black-cloaked man said that he could let these people go, could even restore the wrecked city, but he had one condition. He wanted the Protection Organization to hand over You Zhengping.

You Zhengping bravely stepped forward to save everyone and was taken away by the black-cloaked man.

They arrived in a pitch-black space where night and day were indistinguishable and time didn’t pass.

The black-cloaked man put his hands around You Zhengping’s neck, but he didn’t apply pressure, his thumbs and forefingers rubbing You Zhengping’s skin like Yu Hua had stroked the oyster sauce bottle during the day.

The black-cloaked man said, “Human, you have betrayed me.”

You Zhengping struggled desperately. He said, “Ever since you saved me and Lian Yufan, the organization has changed its views towards you. We’re willing to work with you, and we can stop investigating you identity. We’re doing our best to trust you, why are you doing this?”

As he spoke, You Zhengping couldn’t resist starting to cry. He didn’t want to act so embarrassingly in front of an enemy, but he couldn’t control himself.

The black-cloaked man's embrace was very comfortable. When he was hugged, You Zhengping felt like he'd come home.

"Why are you crying?" The black-cloaked man's cold voice warmed. "It was you who betrayed me."

Long, narrow fingertips wiped away You Zhengping's tears. The black-cloaked man gently lowered his head and kissed his lips.

You Zhengping raised his hands at once and tore off the black-cloaked man's mask. He wanted to see clearly who this person humiliating him was!

The instant he was about to see the black-cloaked man's face, You Zhengping suddenly woke from his dream. His head was drenched in sweat and his whole body was weak, as though he had been seriously ill.

"What's wrong?" Yu Hua's bleary, concerned voice came from the dark.

"Don't turn on the lights!" You Zhengping released his senses, recalling the dark space in the dream. Why did it feel something like his bedroom?

"All right, I won't." Yu Hua sat up and hugged You Zhengping.

This embrace... You Zhengping pushed Yu Hua's chest, curling up in his husband's arms like a human ostrich.

Yu Hua held him, felt for a towel hanging at the head of the bed, and wiped the away You Zhengping's sweat.

Yu Hua's body was warm, and his fingers were warm. The black-cloaked man he had encountered in in his dream and on the roof had had ice cold fingers and lips, without human warmth.

The body temperature was different, and the feeling was also different. It was hard for You Zhengping to be sure.

So...it really had been just a dream? You Zhengping clutched his head.

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Author's Note:

Yu Hua: I've flashed the evidence around in front of Xiao You's eyes in every possible way, and Xiao You has dodged it precisely, turning a blind eye.

You Zhengping: I dreamed about the bad ending!

## CHAPTER 48

“He’s pushed too hard!” Lian Yufan angrily arrived at work and saw President Zhen, Director Yuan, and Director Ha gathered in a circle and went over to them. “What are you doing?”

“Oh, this is the contract Director Yu sent. I printed it out in triplicate.” Zhen Li took out a thick stack of A4 paper.

The contract itself didn’t have many pages, but the appendix concerning the talent show script was very thick. It had all been hammered out by Yu Hua word by word with the talent show group.

“I came because of this thing,” said Lian Yufan, who had been called to work on a weekend. “Director Yu called me at five-thirty this morning and told me to take you two and the official seal to their company to sign the contract. I’ll take a look at what it says.”

Three copies was just right for each person to get one. Director Ha didn’t get a contract. It stuck up its front legs and stood up, wanting to read.

Director Ha didn’t really want to know the contents of the contract, it was just that huskies naturally couldn’t resist getting in on the fun. If other people were together without taking it along, it felt bad!

“Awoo, awoooo,” it called in an undulating voice, batting Yuan Luori’s leg with its two front paws.

Lian Yufan said unhappily, “Did it use the toilet on time today?”

“Yes.” Yuan Luori, who was responsible for taking care of Director Ha at night and during the day, rubbed the dog’s head. “It’s pretty intelligent. It studied law with me at night.”

“Let’s put it in the cage for now. We’ll keep it in there temporarily to wear down its wild nature. Right now it doesn’t have any discipline.” Lian Yufan picked Director Ha up by the scruff of the neck, put it in the cage, and closed it. Then he patiently read the contract.

“This contract...” Zhen Li was the first to finish reading. He relaxed. “It’s pretty good. I thought Yu Hua was going to sell you off.”

Zhen Li looked at Yuan Luori. Before, the great master had appeared ready to get the hundred million by hook or by crook. Yu Hua held a contract he could use to sell off Yuan Luori; once Yuan Luori’s popularity was high enough, he could easily have sold him on at a high price. That way, Yuan Luori really would have been exploited by the other company until the contract ran out, and he would have had hardly any income. When that time came, Yuan Luori, who had lost his abilities and was near-sighted and astigmatic on top of it, would have been totally miserable.

“He’s making me take part in a talent show!” Yuan Luori, who hadn’t finished reading yet, said angrily. “Is that also being nice to me? I want to study law!”

“...When did you acquire that dream?” Zhen Li asked soundlessly.

“You didn’t read it carefully. The script is in fact very beneficial for you.” Lian Yufan had finished reading it, too. He explained to Yuan Luori, “Yu Hua isn’t making you join the group. He signed a contract for not joining, leaving you a lot of latitude.”

“What does that mean?” Yuan Luori’s studies had only reached Civil Law. He hadn’t yet attacked Contract Law.

In Yu Hua’s planned script, Yuan Luori played the supporting role of a character who unfortunately lost by a small margin. In the early stages, he would use his livestream popularity to increase volume and conversations. Then, when the show’s popularity soared, he would become a supporting character, helping promote whatever trainee the show group wanted to promote. When he had increased their popularity, he would retire after covering himself in glory, take his law books to test into university, and fulfill his dream of legal studies.

“This is a plan where both sides win,” Lian Yufan said. “You and the show group get mutual achievements. You bring popularity, conversation, and atmosphere for them, promote the people they want to promote, and they’ll help you establish your legal studies persona while spurring on the studio’s popularity and traffic. You’ll only be a walk-on on the show. You won’t join the group. You don’t have that dream.”

“That’s all right, then.” Yuan Luori pounded his chest.

Zhen Li said, “After signing, the show group will come film you and Director Ha studying together. They want to get a lot of material. Luckily they’ll edit it later for use. I feel that we may be able to get quite a lot of advertisements for pet products.”

Zhen Li thought that the great master had become quite a bit gentler towards the levelers. He was planning for their futures, not to dredge up a sum of money in three years and then leave.

“Yu Hua said that you’re the public relations director, so you should understand a lot of verbal traps. He’s making you take us to sign the contract to avoid us being tricked when we’re faced with the contract,” Zhen Li explained for Yu Hua. “He’s not deliberately putting pressure on you by making you work overtime.”

Lian Yufan smacked his forehead, looking speechless.

Zhen Li really was the most naïve Destroyer. He considered everything in the best light. Why did they absolutely have to sign the contract on a Saturday? And when Yu Hua had determined the contract himself, shouldn’t he personally check it? He must have deliberately made Lian Yufan work overtime!



Although... Lian Yufan looked at the sweetly foolish Zhen Li and at Yuan Luori, who couldn't even understand the script appendix. The two of them really couldn't go on their own. They would definitely be tricked.

Lian Yufan had backing. With him to oversee the situation, even if the other side went back on their word at the last minute and wanted to change the contract, he could invite someone in a higher position to supervise the fairness of the contract.

"Let's go, I'll take you." Lian Yufan rubbed his temples. He would take this as thanking Zhen Li and Yuan Luori for their efforts at the mall.

After agreeing, he viciously sent Yu Hua a message: *You win!*

Yu Hua put his phone away expressionlessly. Before going out, he also specifically asked You Zhengping, "What are Cen Xiao and the others doing today?"

You Zhengping said, "I told him to buzz off and leave us in peace. He's probably taken the others out for a drive."

Very good. The people who might get in the way had all been cleaned up. Yu Hua gave a restrained smile and held out a hand towards You Zhengping. "Then let's go."

You Zhengping, who had dark circles around his eyes, took Yu Hua's hand. After waking up from last night's dream, he hadn't gone back to sleep. He had closed his eyes and thought about the dream.

During their training, they had been given a simple understanding of psychology. The teacher had emphasized that Protectors should take their dreams seriously.

The theory of Protectors' dreams said that all thoughts could become brain waves, and that different people's brain waves mutually inferred with each other, forming a field of thought. Those with similar amplitudes of brain waves could feel a portion of each other's mental state. For example, when a person perished, their unknowing family member in another place would have feelings of irritation or worry, would burst into tears, or would get into fights with others. That was a response to the amplitude.

Protectors were extremely sensitive to energy. They could absorb the light energy, heat energy, and dark matter energy, and receive signals put out by the field of thought. At present, human technology had no way of detecting those signals, but a Protector's subconscious could sense their presence and manifest them in his dreamscape.

Because of this, the organization took the instincts or sixth sense of a Protector very seriously and requested that Protectors take each of their unusual dreams very seriously.

In fact, fifteen years ago, You Zhengping had had a dream.

On the night when all the adult Protectors had felt that world-destroying power, the underaged reserve Protectors hadn't yet had such acute senses. But You Zhengping had had a dream.

He dreamed that two powerful, steady, gentle arms were holding his ten-year-old self, quietly saying into his ear, "I'm here."

He had slept very deeply that night, and when he had woken up he had felt that his mind was especially active. He could have fought one against ten. He had made a clear contrast to the anxious-looking drill instructors.

At the time, You Zhengping hadn't studied the theory of Protectors' dreams. By the time he had taken that class at fifteen, the dream had become faint and blurred, and he hadn't asked the teacher to help him explain it.

The organization had warned the Protectors that if they had a strange dream, they had to report it to their superiors and describe it as clearly as possible so that experts could analyze it.

Even though this dream touched on the black-cloaked man and the Xuyang District's future safety, after thinking about it all night, You Zhengping had determined not to report it for the moment and secretly analyze it himself.

He had to use the theory of Protectors' dreams as a basis to determine which parts of his dream were his wishful thinking, which were early warning signs of crisis, and which were disturbances from the field of thought. Only after clearly distinguishing these could he better analyze the information his sixth sense was telling him.

Dream analysis was a heavily weighted subject on the reasoning test. Lian Yufan had gotten full marks in reasoning, but You Zhengping had failed each time. His dream analysis was especially rotten. The dream analysis teacher had angrily claimed that You Zhengping dreamed with his feet.

You Zhengping analyzed himself. He, Lian Yufan, and Luo Huai donating sperm was a result of his worries after hearing about the Protector Perpetuation Program. The black-cloaked man's face becoming Yu Hua's in the end was because after being kissed, he had formed a delusion. He had never dated anyone but Yu Hua. Of course he didn't want to have intimate relations with others. After being kissed by the black-cloaked man, he had deeply wished for the black-cloaked man to become Yu Hua. As for the black-cloaked man taking him prisoner and the Xuyang District being destroyed...

Ugh! You Zhengping clutched at his hair. His dream analysis grades had always been bad!

Another day he would go to the library and borrow the *Analytical Theory of Protectors' Dreams* textbook and past reasoning test papers to study the subject again. If he really couldn't analyze it himself, then he would tell the organization...then...then he would see!

“Do you want me to drive?” Yu Hua asked in concern, looking at his husband with his messy hair.

Because he was worried about the date plan, Xiao You hadn’t slept well in two nights. When cleaning up the bedding in the morning, Yu Hua had seen the pillow covered in hair and felt extremely distressed. If he had known that this would give Xiao You such a headache, he would have taken the lead.

It wasn’t that Yu Hua hadn’t thought that Xiao You might dream about him being the black-cloaked man last night, it was that he had already guessed wrong once. Yu Hua wasn’t the sort of person to fall into the same trap twice. So he reasonably thought that Xiao You’s nightmare and sleeplessness last night were all because he was worried about today’s date.

“No, no, no, I’ll drive!” You Zhengping said stubbornly, smacking his head.

He had promised Yu Hua a perfect date. How could that be affected by these trivialities?! He could worry about dream analysis once the date was over. Today he had to focus on the date!

You Zhengping arrived at the movie theater as though sleepwalking. The movie they had chosen started at ten and was an hour and a half long. When they were finished, it would be time to go eat lunch.

It was nine-thirty now. You Zhengping had Yu Hua sit in the rest area and wait patiently while he picked up the tickets and bought the popcorn and coke.

You Zhengping came to the self-service ticket machine to pick up the tickets he had reserved yesterday. It was the weekend, and there were quite a few people who had come to watch a movie. Standing in front of him was a bulky man over a meter ninety tall, nearly two meters. The man’s muscles were large but well-proportioned. He wasn’t one of those men with exaggerated muscles; he was more like a bodybuilder, his whole body full of the beauty of strength. His expression was cold. His bronze-colored skin had a metallic texture. Compared to him, You Zhengping, who was 181 cm tall, actually seemed frail.

The bulky man seemed something like the robot protagonist of a classic robot movie, and the movement of his head had a sort of sluggishness to it, like a robot turning its head. His eyes were fixed directly on the ticket machine, unblinking.

The mechanical-seeming man was very eye-catching. The lines of his muscles were very attractive. Many people were privately discussing him, and there was someone stealthily taking pictures.

You Zhengping was standing at the back of the ticket line. He noticed someone taking pictures and took a step back, doing his best to avoid being in the shot with the mechanical-seeming man so he wouldn’t seem like a little white rabbit compared to him. You Zhengping was tall and long-legged!

When he stepped back, he bumped into someone. You Zhengping had thought that he was the last one in line; he hadn't expected there to be someone behind him.

"Sorry," You Zhengping said.

"No, I should say sorry." This man about the same height as You Zhengping. His skin was white, his hair was long, and his features were no less exquisite than Zhen Li's. The difference was that Zhen Li's eyes were full of sweet foolishness, while this man's long and narrow phoenix eyes contained a hint of slyness. "I was looking for that tall one up ahead and accidentally bumped into you."

The phoenix-eyed man came up next to the mechanical man and stood on tiptoe to pat his shoulder. "What are you doing here?"

The mechanical man stifled raised his hand, pointing at the self-service ticket machine.

The phoenix-eyed man smiled faintly and held down his hand, quietly saying, "We aren't going to watch a movie."

The mechanical man stubbornly continued to point at the self-service ticket machine.

The phoenix-eyed man shook his head firmly. "No."

The mechanical man looked into his eyes for a long time, then his head instantly drooped, like a robot running out of power.

The people around them covered their chests, feeling that the mechanical man was rather pitiful, like a muscular doll that had been bullied.

There were other people guessing about the relationship between these two people. One honest and other witty, one big and broad and the other beautiful. It really was...

You Zhengping looked at them and frowned doubtfully. He couldn't be this unlucky, could he? He and Yu Hua had gone out on a date for once, and they had run into Destroyers again? And two of them at once?

However much he didn't want anything to go wrong with the date, You Zhengping and the other Protectors rather trusted their instincts. They couldn't relax. You Zhengping pulled a long face and stealthily turned on his phone's camera, turned off the camera sound effect, and was about to photograph the two people's faces.

"I'm sorry, we've held you up." Just as You Zhengping was about to take a picture of the two of them, the phoenix-eyed man suddenly took his hand and put a package of Extra chewing gum in it. "This is for you, to show my apology."

You Zhengping stopped taking the picture. He looked on calmly as the two of them left, then continued waiting in line to pick up tickets.

After he picked up the tickets, he looked doubtfully at the Extra gum in his hand. Frowning, he said, “When did I buy this? What the hell did I buy it for? Was I planning to make my kisses taste better?”

As he thought this, You Zhengping shook out two pieces of mint-flavored gum, tossed them into his mouth, and chewed.

He had already forgotten that he had seen two very eye-catching men.

Yu Hua looked at the movies starting at ten and saw that the remake of *Waterloo Bridge* was being screened today. He remembered looking up the plot of *Waterloo Bridge* before and smiled involuntarily. It was in fact a poignant and classic romance film, and it somewhat resembled him and Xiao You, the love of a young army officer and an impoverished beautiful dancer who were separated by bitter war...

While he was recalling the plot, You Zhengping came to the rest area chewing gum. He gave Yu Hua a cup of coke, wrapped his gum in a paper napkin, and threw it into a trash can.

Yu Hua took the tickets and saw what was written on them: 10 AM, *Gone Girl*.

Yu Hua: “...”

When You Zhengping came back from throwing away the gum, Yu Hua said, as though indifferent, “What movie are we watching today?”

“*Gone Girl*,” You Zhengping acknowledged happily. “I spent a long time choosing. This must be a poignant story of searching for your lover. It’s perfect for watching on a date!”

Yu Hua licked his dry lips. Pointing at the movie theater’s LED screen, he asked, “What about *Waterloo Bridge*?”

“That one? That must be a monster movie<sup>18</sup>,” You Zhengping said disdainfully. “Are today’s horror movies worth watching? They’re all duds with less than 30% ratings, and at the end it’s all about mental problems, treating mental illness, or something.”

Yu Hua: “...”

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<sup>18</sup> To explain this misunderstanding slightly more to You Zhengping’s credit: the Chinese translation of the title of *Waterloo Bridge* is 魂断蓝桥, which is more like “Blue Bridge of Rending Souls,” whereas *Gone Girl* is 消失的爱人, more like “Vanished Lover” (or “Vanished Wife,” if you like).

Fine, it was romantic enough just to watch a movie with Xiao You. It didn't matter what movie they watched.

The tickets were inspected at 9:50. The two of them went into the theater. The phoenix-eyed man and the mechanical man, who had left the movie theater, reappeared.

"Did you see what tickets they bought?" the phoenix-eyed man asked.

"*Gone...Girl*," the mechanical man answered. His voice was stiff.

"You need to talk more, communicate more. You can't avoid using speech to communicate just because it's troublesome." The phoenix-eyed man went up on tiptoe to pat the mechanical man's shoulder. "If you don't persevere in talking, then when your initial item upgrades again, you'll lose the ability to speak."

"Okay." The mechanical man half-crouched so the phoenix-eyed man could pat his shoulder.

"You really can't get any taller," the phoenix-eyed man said anxiously.

He took the mechanical man to a free self-service ticket machine and bought tickets to the same showing of *Gone Girl* that Yu Hua was in.

The mechanical man pointed at the self-service ticket machine and looked longingly at the phoenix-eyed man, waiting for his permission.

"No, you can't eat that. Eating it constitutes destroying public property, which is against the law. I can't pay for it, so we'd be arrested!" The phoenix-eyed man did everything he could to hold him back.

"Okay," the mechanical man agreed heavily. Somewhat unhappily, he said, "Before...you always...let me."

The phoenix-eyed man patiently said, "The world before was chaotic and disordered. We could do whatever we wanted. But the clearing mission is different. The mission target has forbidden us from breaking the law. Also, I've done some investigating, and this world may have a special organization more powerful than we are. Many levelers have died here already. The whole league saw what became of that idiot bomb freak. If we act as impudently as he did, we'll end up even worse."

The mechanical man tilted his head and nodded in a constrained way. "All right. When you... say act...I'll act."

"For now it's no use acting. We have to observe," the phoenix-eyed man said. "This Yu Hua works at the same company as Zhen Li and Yuan Luori, but he's an ordinary person. I don't believe there can be such a coincidence. Even if there really is such a coincidence, there must

be something about him that would make two levelers value him. I think that observation will definitely bear fruit.”

“I don’t...understand. Whatever...you say,” the mechanical man said, holding his head.

“You have to listen.” Sadness flashed through the phoenix-eyed man’s long, narrow eyes. “You have to understand, you can’t give up on thinking. You can’t leave everything up calculations just because thinking takes effort. I’m going to tell you everything I can think of, and you take your time understanding it.”

“But...why?” the mechanical man asked dully.

“Because you aren’t my robot, aren’t my AI. You’re my companion, who’s fought with me starting from our first world. I can’t just watch you lose your humanity.” Grimness flashed through the phoenix-eyed man’s eyes. “I know you’ve thrown away what happened on many worlds to clear your memory, but this, at least, you can’t delete.”

“I’ll...run out...of memory.” The mechanical man pointed to his head. “I have to...choose something...to give up.”

“I know. That’s why I want to clear.” The phoenix-eyed man put his arms around the mechanical man’s waist and said resolutely, “Murder and arson, forgery and fraud, everything base and shameless...anything goes. I can’t let you keep upgrading.”

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Author’s Note:

Of course Yu Hua wasn’t controlling Xiao You’s dream. The truth is like this:

Yu Hua (muttering to himself): When will Xiao You find out when will Xiao You find out when will Xiao You find out?

Brainwaves tune to the same frequency...

Xiao You: Goodness! I dreamed that the black-cloaked man and my husband are the same person!

## CHAPTER 49

Inside the movie theater, You Zhengping held the bag of popcorn with one hand and pinched his thigh with the other to avoid falling asleep because the romance film was too boring.

*Remember at all costs, wait for the romantic part, then hug Yu Hua and kiss him warmly,* You Zhengping constantly reminded himself inwardly.

Yu Hua knew the approximate plot of this movie. As he watched the movie, he observed You Zhengping’s expression, occasionally taking a couple of pieces of popcorn from the bag You Zhengping was hugging, putting the popcorn in his mouth and letting it slowly dissolve.

He didn't know what Xiao You's expression would be when he learned that this wasn't a romance film but a thriller.

Xiao You's expression would probably be more worth watching than the movie. Yu Hua frequently put his chin in his hand to watch Xiao You.

At first You Zhengping was still pinching his thigh. When he watched the wife disappear and the husband madly search for her, he nodded to himself, thinking that this time he had finally chosen a romantic movie.

But when the plot went on to the husband having extramarital affairs and all the evidence in the wife's disappearance pointing to the husband having killed her, You Zhengping released the hand pinching his thigh, sat up straight, and began earnestly guessing the plot.

By the time the plot turned once again to the wife still being alive and having done everything in order to frame her husband, You Zhengping's eyes popped out of his head.

Just then, a hand reached over and took two pieces of popcorn.

You Zhengping followed the hand, looking at the person next to him. When he saw Yu Hua, like the wife in the film, giving a falsely perfect smile, he couldn't help hiccuping. He frantically drank a mouthful of coke to keep down his hiccups, but the gas in the coke made him hiccup more violently.

"*Hic*, I didn't think, *hic*, that this movie..." In order not to bother the people around them, You Zhengping spoke and hiccuped quietly into Yu Hua's ear.

"Have some popcorn to settle your nerves." Yu Hua fed Xiao You a few pieces of popcorn. "I like this movie very much. Have you forgotten the TV dramas I've been watching lately?"

"*Hic!*" Remembering the dramas about husbands cheating and wives getting revenge or wives cheating and husbands being abused on top of seeing Yu Hua's increasingly manic smile, You Zhengping hiccuped even more violently.

Yu Hua gently patted his back, took out a bottle of water he had bought ahead of time, and gave it to him to drink so that Xiao You wouldn't choke from being too startled.

"*Hic! Hiç!*" After drinking water, You Zhengping hiccuped while he stealthily searched for reviews of *Gone Girl* on his phone. When he saw the "thriller" label on them, he nearly started to cry.

He quickly remembered *Waterloo Bridge*, the movie Yu Hua had mentioned before they had gone in to see this one, then searched for reviews of *Waterloo Bridge*. It was a poignant story of life and death and cutting lovers apart.



“Hic!” Some fucking horror film! You Zhengping really wanted to go back to yesterday and beat himself up.

Yu Hua put the paper cup of coke between them aside, took the bag of popcorn, squeezed You Zhengping’s hands. After kissing the backs of his hands, he laced their fingers together and stressed, “I really do like this movie. You chose well.”

You Zhengping’s hiccups eased considerably after having the back of his hand kissed. He saw that Yu Hua really was smiling faintly and watching the movie with keen interest. He thought, “It’s-it’s all right... At least we can hold hands.”

It was still better than him and Cen Xiao and the rest getting worked up about the plot of the movie while Yu Hua sipped lemonade on his own.

You Zhengping had bought the best seats for viewing, right in the center. Two other people, however, were sitting in a corner in the last row. They had been admitted after the theater lights had been extinguished, not attracting any notice. These two were the mechanical man and the phoenix-eyed man.

The mechanical man kept his eyes fixed on the melancholy husbands, while the phoenix-eyed man had his eyes shut tight, as though dozing.

The two of them were sharing a set of headphones, one earbud on the mechanical man and the other on the phoenix-eyed man. The two of them were sitting right under the movie theater’s security camera.

On the roof, Yu Hua had awakened 20% of his power out of fury. 15% still remained after absorbing the energy of 192’s System. This power was already rather frightening, enough for Yu Hua to discover any lines of sight observing him.

But this time, he hadn’t noticed anything.

The gaze of any person with thoughts carried ill intent, questioning, and other such notions. When that gaze fell on Yu Hua, he would notice that line of thought and catch the person watching him. But machinery didn’t have emotions, and in modern society, there were security cameras everywhere. Just in the movie theater, there was one in every corner. Yu Hua had gotten used to blocking out security cameras in public places.

But the mechanical man, the Destroyer Feng Kui, had very weak thoughts. Having gone through 199 worlds, his humans emotions were deteriorating day by day, gradually becoming the same as artificial intelligence or mechanical intelligence. His gaze was similar to that of the security cameras. Even for someone as sensitive as Yu Hua, it was still very hard to tell the difference.

Feng Kui used his eyes to collect information and transmitted it through the thought headphones, an item obtained from the System, to the phoenix-eyed man, the Destroyer Huan Zixu, so that Huan Zixu could analyze and consolidate.

Huan Zixu and Feng Kui had been teammates on their first world. They had passed 199 worlds together. The two worked seamlessly together.

Huan Zixu automatically changed the encoded information transmitted by Feng Kui into language:

*Target individual: Yu Hua*

*Current appearance: Social elite, loves his partner, considerate and gentle*

*Distribution of observation: Within one hour, 90% of his attention was concentrated on his partner You Zhengping, while 10% of his notice and his peripheral glances were given to the movie. While looking directly at the movie theater screen, his peripheral glances were concerned with You Zhengping's expression.*

*Eating preferences: Results of analysis of facial muscles and salivary secretions: while consuming popcorn and coke on his own, there were no salivary secretions. He did not appear to like the popcorn. Judging from subtle changes to the facial muscles, he only manifested clear appetite when his partner You Zhengping ate popcorn and drank water. Yu Hua prefers "You Zhengping eating popcorn" to "popcorn."*

*Body language: Manifests clear refusal to have physical contact with others. Muscular avoidance very strong. Willing to touch You Zhengping.*

*Aesthetic preferences: Viewing the actors in the movie and the others people in the theater is no different than regarding chairs and stairs. Viewing You Zhengping, manifests clear desire to possess and control.*

*Comprehensive analysis: Has antisocial tendencies. Loves You Zhengping. Weak point is You Zhengping.*

After consolidating Feng Kui's intelligence, Huan Zixu slowly opened his eyes, but he didn't look at Yu Hua. He looked directly at the big screen in front of him.

This was a habit he had formed over many years. His gaze was full of scrutiny, very easy for sensitive people to notice. It would reveal his and Feng Kui's position.

The movie ended soon. Everyone walked out of the movie making comments about it. Some said that the female protagonist was too vicious, and there were others saying that the male protagonist was also a piece of work. More people said that villains all had other villains coming for them. Though everyone's view of the movie was that it was a brilliant reversal, including You Zhengping, who had been flabbergasted midway.

You Zhengping thought that the movie was pretty good on the whole. He and Yu Hua had watched it with keen interest. It was just that the category was wrong. He had wanted to watch a sentimental romance movie...

"How about this? After we eat lunch, we can go watch Waterloo Bridge, too," suggested You Zhengping, who had been unable to attain a long French kiss in the dark movie theater.

"How about another time? Don't you have a full plan afterwards? I want to experience every item," Yu Hua said.

"...Fair, I've even made reservations," You Zhengping said. "We'll see the movie next time. Let's go eat."

The Chinese restaurant they went to for lunch was very high quality. You Zhengping had made a reservation ahead of time, and if they were an hour late, the reservation would go to someone else in line. They couldn't be late.

The two of them arrived in the reserved private room. You Zhengping ordered food and said to Yu Hua, "I'm going to go to the restroom."

Yu Hua sat in the private room alone, remembering that You Zhengping had already gone to the restroom when they had finished watching the movie. Why did he want to go now? He was looking for an excuse to hide something from him.

Yu Hua considered it, then activated his "super hearing" ability, seeking You Zhengping's whereabouts among countless noises.

"Super hearing" was an ability he had awakened at the same time as "super vision," one of the "super senses." "Super vision" increased the speed of vision so it could capture very fast movements. "Super hearing," meanwhile, increased the range of hearing and the ability to distinguish sounds. When he had activated "super hearing," Yu Hua could hear all the voices within a five kilometer range and precisely pick out which one was You Zhengping's.

This required extremely powerful screening abilities and noise capturing abilities, or else the excessive noise would disturb the mind.

Yu Hua listened to the sounds with his left ear and focused on hunting You Zhengping with his right ear. Very soon, he heard You Zhengping, a few hundred meters away, say to the owner of a small food stand, "Two youtiao jianbing, one potato turnover. Quickly."

Just then, the server in the Chinese restaurant brought over an exquisitely arranged dish. There were carrot carvings at the four corners of the plate and a cabbage heart at the center. The server poured the clear soup in a small cup over the cabbage heart. The cabbage heart unfolded like a lotus flower, more beautiful than could be imagined. This was the restaurant's famous boiled cabbage.

Yu Hua was well aware that the process to make this dish was complicated. Both the cabbage heart and the clear soup poured over it went through several steps. The single dish was extremely time-consuming. It was in fact worth its price. But for You Zhengping, no matter what process it went through, a cabbage heart was still a cabbage heart. He couldn't get full eating it.

But he knew Yu Hua liked this kind of exquisite high quality restaurant, so he was secretly eating jianbing in front of the restaurant to pad out his stomach. Then he could come back and elegantly eat high grade Chinese food with Yu Hua.

While waiting for the jianbing, You Zhengping truly couldn't resist. He called Cen Xiao. "Let me ask you, do you know what kind of movie *Waterloo Bridge* is?"

Cen Xiao said, "I played games all night last night. I only went to sleep at nine in the morning. Now...it's 11:50, I've slept less than three hours, and here you are calling and waking me up, and it's for the sake of asking this garbage? I even thought there was some new Destroyer!"

"Never mind that, what kind of movie do you think *Waterloo Bridge* is?" You Zhengping asked.

"Of course it's a horror movie, with a monster that has to do with a bridge? It is a water ghou!" Cen Xiao said vaguely, being patient. "I can't do that, I don't care about water."

"What about *Gone Girl*?" You Zhengping asked.

Cen Xiao said, "It must be a romance movie, the kind your Yu Hua likes most. If you go to a movie tonight, go to that one. I'm going to sleep. Unless the sky falls down, don't call me again, Shi Yongfu and Xiao Ruo will do!"

Cen Xiao quickly hung up the phone and went back to sleep. He had to go back to work tomorrow. He had to enjoy his last day of vacation!

"Like I said! It's these movie titles that were badly chosen. It wasn't my fault!" You Zhengping took the first jianbing and quickly started eating.

Hearing his fuming voice, Yu Hua couldn't resist laughing. He really wanted to abandon the Chinese restaurant and go eat jianbing with Xiao You. The jianbing sounded delicious.

While Yu Hua was using the sound of You Zhengping eating the jianbing to hypnotize himself into thinking the boiled cabbage was delicious, his left ear moved. He thought he had heard someone say Xiao You's name. It was in the private room next door!

Yu Hua quickly turned his attention to the next door private room and recalled all the voices he had heard within the last five minutes, precisely picking out the conversation next door.

Five minutes ago, Feng Kui and Huan Zixu had arrived at the Chinese restaurant and had wanted to reserve the private room next to Yu Hua's. When they heard there was no space, Huan Zixu said, "No problem. I can make them give it to me."

They went to the next door private room and knocked on the door. Huan Zixu took out the ticket with his number in line that he had just received and said to the guests inside the private room, "Hello, I need this room now. Could you please give it to me?"

The family in the private room took the ticket and left the room as though possessed. They went to the restaurant's waiting area to wait for their number to be called.

The wife in the family seemed to have lost her memory. She grumbled as she poked her husband, "I told you to get a place in advance, and you didn't reserve it. Look at this number. We'll be waiting for an hour."

The husband sighed and said, "It's my fault. I was too sloppy."

As if they had lost their memories, the family had given up their room.

Yu Hua, who had recalled up to this point, raised his eyebrows. "False exchange," what a special power! Weak but practical. In all the worlds he had been through, he had only seen it once or twice, because levelers who chose this ability usually didn't survive more than fifty worlds.

Because he had activated his "super hearing," Yu Hua could naturally hear the data in the signal from Feng Kui's headphones, and he could automatically convert it to speech.

After getting the private room, Feng Kui told Huan Zixu through the headphones, "You Zhengping left the private room. Yu Hua is alone, displaying a terrifying smile."

Huan Zixu said, "There's no need to be impatient for now. There are too many people in the restaurant. He had to choose a secluded place to act silently. You accessed the public surveillance images near Zhen Li's studio before. Transfer any useful information to me."

In the image, Lian Yufan, Zhen Li, and Yuan Luori were getting into the second-hand Wuling Honghuang<sup>19</sup> that Yu Hua had bought with company funds. The large words "Zhen Li Studio" were painted on the car. Lian Yufan was very against getting in the car.

"How much did this car cost?" Lian Yufan asked, his hand trembling.

"Less than twenty thousand." Zhen Li was pretty cheerful. "Yu Hua made me save the profits from the livestream. When I had finally saved up twenty thousand, he bought a vehicle for the studio. It's work car. Everyone can use it."

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<sup>19</sup> A popular car made by a Chinese automobile manufacturer. See here: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wuling\\_Hongguang](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wuling_Hongguang).

“So we have to drive this crappy car to sign the contract with the show group?” Lian Yufan was very against this car. “How far is Yu Hua going to carry his stinginess? Doesn’t he know that during an entrepreneurial period, the entrepreneur has to use a very valuable car to prove to his collaborators that he has abilities and strength? For a person in business, a rather good car isn’t an ostentation, it’s a means of showing the company’s power! I’m going to go rent a car.”

Zhen Li said, “But Yu Hua said that our studio is makeshift to begin with. Everyone in the business world knows that we’re a very unprofessional studio of internet celebrities relying on our faces for popularity. Puffing ourselves to look impressive will only make people think we’re insincere. We’ll become laughingstocks. A second-hand Wuling Honguang is a joke, but so is a car bought with a loan. It’s better to be more comfortable and economize.”

Lian Yufan’s new birthmark was going to fall off from anger. He poked Zhen Li’s head. “Have you been brainwashed by him? All you can say is ‘Yu Hua said!’ Get in!”

After resisting for a time, he still exasperatedly got in the car with Zhen Li and Yuan Luori. The two Destroyers very clearly didn’t have driver’s licenses. It had to be Lian Yufan driving the car.

When he received this image, Huan Zixu said, “However you look at it, Zhen Li and Yuan Luori are still levelers, but Yu Hua has hoodwinked them into obediently doing his work. This person isn’t simple at all.”

“Is he...the mission target?” Feng Kui said in a mechanical voice.

For Feng Kui, using the special headphones to transmit data was a fairly relaxed form of expression, but Huan Zixu insisted on making him express himself with speech, so he spoke haltingly.

“Not necessarily.” Huan Zixu shook his head. “You’ve investigated a large volume of information about him. All of his information in this world for the last ten years and more is true and actual, not falsified by the System. His behavior and bearing are natural. He doesn’t seem like he’s taken the place of a dead person. He seems to be indigenous to this world. We can only say that we can’t underestimate every ordinary person. No matter how many worlds we go through, there are always places where our skills won’t be enough.”

Feng Kui said, “Lian Yufan...”

Huan Zixu nodded. “Judging from his interactions with Zhen Li and Yuan Luori, there’s a feeling that they aren’t very familiar with him, and that he’s in a senior position to them. He obeys the traffic laws... My guess is that he’s one of this world’s super power users. There’s a strictly disciplined organization that has been secretly protecting the world from the System all along. They’re the reason that the System has never been able to open this world.

“Lian Yufan is Zhen and Yuan’s guardian or monitor... It seems that Zhen and Yuan are already under this protection organization’s control. We can’t contact them rashly, or else we’ll fall into a trap.

“I think I understand why the bomb freak fell into such a hole.”

“Zixu...you’re...right.” Feng Kui may or may not have understood; he agreed with Huan Zixu. “What...should...we do?”

Huan Zixu picked up a chopstick, dipped it in water, and wrote “kill by proxy” on the table.

He blew lightly on the water to dry it, wiped away the traces of the words, and said with a light laugh, “On the day the bomb freak died, Zhen Li was performing in the same location. This appears in the records of his studio’s bank account. From this we can conjecture that Zhen and Yuan must be in contact with the mission target.

“We know that the protection organization is very strong, and the mission target is also very strong. The protection organization protects the people of this world. Even if they’re working with the mission target, even if the mission target is one of them, a government organization still can’t completely trust a person with uncontrollable power who is also rather brutal.

“We must sow discord among them. All we have to do is push slightly. Do you know why I decided to follow Yu Hua?”

Feng Kui shook his head.

Huan Zixu said, “Yu Hua is a very special person. He seems to truly be entirely unaware, yet he inexplicably has power over Zhen and Yuan, as well as Lian Yufan. He’s a good penetration point.

“We’re going to kidnap him, attract the mission target behind Zhen and Yuan to come deal with us, wait for the mission target to arrive, kill Yu Hua, and frame the mission target. At the appointed time, the protection organization will deal with the mission target for us. We’ll only have to watch the tigers fight from the next mountain and reap the rewards of the final victory.

“My ‘false exchange’ can provide irrefutable evidence that the mission target is the killer.”

“False exchange” was Huan Zixu’s ability to use the items he gave people as a form of bribery to change their thoughts, make false events become truth in the human mind. With this ability, Huan Zixu could find countless people to provide false testimony.

In the next room, Yu Hua, with his “super hearing” activated, grinned soundlessly with laughter.

These two new levelers were saying that they...wanted to kidnap whom? Kill whom? Frame whom?

—  
Author's Note:

Yu Hua: I think this is the funniest joke I've heard in my life.

## CHAPTER 50

You Zhengping quickly finished off two jianbing and a turnover and ran back to the Chinese restaurant. The whole process took ten minutes.

When he came into the private room, he saw Yu Hua with his head turned, gazing fixedly out the window thinking about something, looking very focused.

"Wow, this boiled cabbage is really exquisite," You Zhengping praised without emotion. "The process must be very complicated. It must be delicious."

But Yu Hua turned his head, reached out a hand, and wiped the corner of You Zhengping's mouth. When he was finished wiping, there was a sesame seed on his fingertip. This had been sprinkled on the jianbing.

Smiling, Yu Hua said, "I suddenly think that jianbing is more delicious."

You Zhengping quickly got out a paper napkin and wiped his mouth, saying in a flurry, "How did you know I was eating jianbing? I chewed gum!"

"Everything you took with you when we left were things I had prepared. When did you buy the gum?" Yu Hua looked down and used his chopsticks to stir the weak leaves in his teacup.

"When did I buy it?" You Zhengping clutched his head, looking bewildered. "Weird, I don't remember. I must have bought it before the movie."

"Give me two pieces of gum, too. I'll chew them after we eat." Yu Hu opened his hand.

You Zhengping got out the whole bottle of gum and put it into Yu Hua's hand. Yu Hua massaged the plastic bottle of gum with the pads of his fingers. He said, as if indifferent, "You secretly ate ahead of time again."

You Zhengping instantly remembered how, on their day off, he hadn't gotten full eating the soup Yu Hua had made, had taken the opportunity of going out to buy something to eat barbecue bibimbap, then had been taken by Yu Hua to do back strength exercises until evening. The excessive activity had been a little too much even for a Protector like him.

"I...I wanted to eat with you," You Zhengping said falteringly. "You like the surroundings in Chinese restaurants like this."



Yu Hua had his life all taken care of. You Zhengping got his clothes when he reached for them and his food when he opened his mouth for it. Every day, there was even someone to hang his towels in a fixed spot. When it was for once time for You Zhengping to perform, he had hoped he would be able to do it as flawlessly as Yu Hua, but he had carelessly chosen the wrong movie, and he had been too busy in the morning and had forgotten to bring bread to pad out his stomach, forcing him to go buy jianbing, leaving Yu Hua alone in the private room, and even being discovered!

“Have I messed it up again?” You Zhengping said bleakly, his head drooping.

Yu Hua was sitting across from You Zhengping. The table was very large. There was a lot of distance between the two of them. The Chinese restaurant was very well decorated, with constant attention to privacy during eating and maintaining a safe distance.

But none of that suited them.

Yu Hua went around the dining table dividing them, sat by You Zhengping’s side, embraced him, and said, “There’s nothing to mess up. For me, the most important thing about a date is for two people to do things together. I don’t want you to make yourself uncomfortable to accompany me.”

“But you’re always accompanying me...” You Zhengping said unhappily.

“No,” Yu Hua said categorically. “To me, your so called mess ups and accidents are all very interesting, far better than conventional and unalterable plans.”

“But you’re a little angry...” You Zhengping said quietly.

“I’m not angry. I’m a little regretful. I want to have eaten the jianbing with you. I feel like I’ve lost an opportunity to experience the flavor of jianbing.” Yu Hua sighed faintly.

Next door, Huan Zixu, who was eavesdropping by means of Feng Kui, shuddered, took out his earbud, and rubbed his arms. “I can’t take any more. Are ordinary people in love this maudlin?”

Feng Kui looked at Huan Zixu quietly, not answering his question.

“Forget it, you don’t understand, anyway.” Huan Zixu waved a hand. “Let them eat their meal happily for now. We’ll act when Yu Hua is alone again. After all, it’s their last date.”

Feng Kui stuck out two fingers, squeezed those fingers with his other hand, and broke them off.

He didn’t bleed. It was all metal under his skin. He also seemed to feel no pain. After breaking off two fingers, a flame spurted out of the index finger of the other hand, reattaching the metal bones of the two fingers. The rest of the flesh wasn’t repaired yet; the bones stuck out.

“You’re too lazy to speak, so you’re using body language? Even though you don’t feel pain, you still have to look after your body.” Huan Zixu sighed and used his System to obtain a bottle of medicine for external injuries, then personally applied it for Feng Kui.

Apart from a human epidermis, Feng Kui’s bones, muscles, arteries, veins, nerves, energy channels...all of his organ had been changed to metal ones; only a layer of skin remained.

In fact, if it hadn’t been for Huan Zixu’s obstruction, Feng Kui would have already chosen to upgrade in the direction of mechanization. It was because he had stopped him again and again that Feng Kui could hang on to his humanity.

After their first world, the System had pointed out to them that if Feng Kui chose to become an artificial intelligence, he would actually walk a comparatively easy road. He would be able to clear more easily than an ordinary person. After going through a mechanical period during which he would have no emotions, he would develop in the direction of super intelligent calculation, gradually simulating human thought, at last surpassing humanity.

“What about emotions?” Huan Zixu had asked at the time.

The System had promised him that once the super intelligence was accomplished, Feng Kui would also simulate emotions, becoming more and more like a human.

The System had given Huan Zixu two choices. The first had been to let Feng Kui take control himself, with an evolution mode that inclined towards preserving the human brain while transforming the other parts of the body; however, once the other body parts had been changed, the brain would inevitably have to be changed as well, though at that time they could choose a brain with more advanced calculating power that resembled a human more. The second choice had been to change the brain first; because their level was so low, the only brain they could obtain was a low-level artificial intelligence model; Huan Zixu would input orders, which Feng Kui would carry out absolutely. He would be a robot who would never betray his companion.

Huan Zixu’s initial ability was very weak. He had almost no combat ability. The System gave Huan Zixu the power of choice over Feng Kui’s evolution; it also warned him that in the early period, his ability required a companion who would obey him absolutely to protect him.

The System had constantly been hinting to Huan Zixu that he should replace Feng Kui’s brain, but Huan Zixu had chosen the more difficult path.

He had preserved Feng Kui’s intelligence, but he couldn’t keep Feng Kui from being injured. Every time he was injured, he could only be healed by upgrading. To upgrade, he had to replace a body part.

When they came to the moment where they were forced to replace his heart, Feng Kui’s memory storage decreased.

It was a very strange thing. Human memory was clearly stored in the brain cortex, and the number of memories that the brain could remember was innumerable. But starting when Feng Kui replaced his heart with a mechanical one, his memory storage became insufficient. No matter how much external storage Huan Zixu found, it still wasn't enough.

The volume of information from over a hundred worlds was far too vast for them. He had no way to store so many videos, pictures, and audio recordings. Feng Kui could only rely on Huan Zixu and quietly delete a part of his memories. By the time Huan Zixu discovered that Feng Kui was losing his memories, Feng Kui had already developed a fixed habit of clearing out junk memories.

He had exerted all of his efforts, not sparing any cost for the sake of passing levels and acquiring points, just so he could improve Feng Kui's situation.

But the reality was that their level was too low. Feng Kui was becoming less and less human.

Huan Zixu didn't believe any of the System's hints. When he had received information about the clearing mission, he had at first ignored it.

He knew perfectly well that their enemy had always been the System, not the worlds they passed through. It was complete nonsense to say that they could clear if they killed some final boss. There had to be something wrong with this boss, and after killing the boss, they wouldn't necessarily be able to clear.

What Huan Zixu really wanted was to find a flaw in the System and destroy it. The appearance of the first clearer fifteen years ago reducing the System's power had let Huan Zixu see some hope. He had guessed that more and more people clearing would make the System collapse thoroughly. He incited his acquaintances to take advantage of the lower difficulty levels to pool their strength and clear. But the System had activated a second style of gameplay—levelers in the same world hunting and killing each other.

While the difficulty level had decreased, levelers who had passed a hundred levels could cross worlds to hunt and kill each other. The System would randomly fuse two to five worlds together, then tell the players that when they killed the others players, they would obtain their level count. If that player only needed one more level to clear, then if you killed him, you would also be only one level from clearing.

This mode had driven the levelers mad. The difficulty level of the worlds had decreased and the power of the bosses had weakened. With nothing else to worry about, under the stimulus of the first clearer's appearance and the hunting mode, the levelers had begun to slaughter each other.

Even if there were some sensible people who wouldn't take part in this duel, they would still become others' prey and be forced to exert themselves to resist.

The higher a leveler's grade, the more hunted he was. The players below one hundred levels, meanwhile, had it easy. They hadn't received this notice. They ignorantly and happily passed through the low difficulty worlds.

Huan Zixu and Feng Kui fled here and there. Fortunately his "false exchange" ability was already in its finished form by then. This ability's power was insufficient, but it was excellent for making a getaway. He could erase the signs of their existence and avoid pursuit.

He ran for his life while passing levels, and fifteen years later, Huan Zixu discovered a shocking fact. There were no more levelers in the System who had passed over three hundred levels.

This was totally irrational. Even though they were hunting and killing each other, some more powerful people should have remained. Even when raising venomous insects, a king of insects would emerge; how could there not be a single powerful leveler? Unless the System itself was getting rid of levelers who had hunted down too many people.

At the same time, the difficulty level of the System's worlds was slowly increasing, gradually reverting to the previous standard. Sometimes, two levelers locked in a duel would be suddenly killed by a world's monsters, which they had entirely disdained. When the world's difficulty level suddenly increased, the levelers who had gotten used to looking down on the world's natives would instantly be taken unawares. That would destroy some of the high grade levelers.

Huan Zixu had been forced to a conclusion: the System had taken heavy losses from the first clearer fifteen years ago, and to get its own back, it had provoked internal strife among the levelers, gradually restoring itself by means of absorbing the levelers' energy.

So would this so-called clearing mission be a continuation of the System's hunting mode, another means for the System to suddenly raise the difficulty and take its own back?

Huan Zixu had been unwilling to accept the mission. Then Feng Kui had told him that the System had issued him an assignment. If Feng Kui stole Huan Zixu's heart, then he would become a complete person, full of intelligence.

Feng Kui was a dim-witted person. Constant upgrades had led him to lose his capacity for thought. His first reaction had been to tell Huan Zixu about this mission. Tall Feng Kui, with expression pure and innocent, had been full of trust in Huan Zixu.

Hearing about this mission, Huan Zixu had laughed in despair. With this mission, the System wasn't forcing Feng Kui; it was forcing him.

The System was clearly telling Huan Zixu, *If you don't take the clearing mission, I have countless ways of hounding one of you to death.*

So Huan Zixu had joined the Clearing League with Feng Kui and found that the Clearing League contained only useless players, incapable of anything but protecting their own lives.

Forget about Zhen Li, who had equipped a wardrobe as his initial item and had only passed four worlds in fifteen years; his outlook was fairly positive. But Yuan Luori, who had passed thirty-seven levels, had actually thought the head of the league, who had only passed two hundred some levels, was very strong. The System really had killed off all the high level players for a mere two hundred worlds to count as strong.

The bomb freak, however, was serious about completing his missions. Fifteen years ago, he hadn't yet reach a hundred worlds. When the difficulty level had decreased, he had taken advantage of it and worked hard to pass levels for fifteen years, quickly rising to a hundred ninety-two levels. But the excessively low difficulty level worlds had left the bomb freak with no way to accurately know himself; he had thought that all worlds were trash.

Huan Zixu wanted to laugh at the Clearing League. If this rabble really could accomplish the mission...then the mission target would also have to be useless.

He hadn't stepped in, looking on from the sidelines. Before Yuan Luori had been captured, Huan Zixu had heard the mission target's voice and had suddenly had the idea of getting in contact with him. A person being hunted down by the whole System could still say that it was forbidden to harm ordinary people or violate the law; this had made Huan Zixu very curious about his ideas.

When the bomb freak had been captured, Huan Zixu, through the video, had seen the tip of the iceberg when it came to the mission target.

For many years, Huan Zixu had been looking for someone to collaborate with, someone who could get rid of the System, someone who could restore Feng Kui. The chillingly unfeeling mission target had given him hope.

So Huan Zixu had come to this world, performed an investigation, and come up with this framing scheme.

He wanted to frame the black-cloaked man, make the black-cloaked man fall out with the protection organization. He wanted to watch the battle from the shadows, observe the black-cloaked man's reaction from the sidelines. If a person could maintain his reason when he had been set up, could avoid slaughtering innocents, then Huan Zixu could rest easy and work with the black-cloaked man to destroy the System; he would be willing to entrust him with his own and Feng Kui's lives.

"Killing" Yu Hua was only an expression of Huan Zixu's. Yu Hua would "die"; then, at the appropriate time, he would "come back to life."

Enduring the sentimentality, Huan Zixu put on the earbud and listened to the husbands next door flirting. Then he heard them cancel their plans to go shopping in the afternoon and decide to go to an escape room instead.

Yu Hua said, “Since you don’t like window shopping and trying on clothes, let’s go do something you do like instead. How does an escape room sound? The two of us in frightening surroundings, locked in, looking for clues and an opportunity to escape together.”

“All right.” You Zhengping nodded repeatedly. “And I can practice my abilities to find clues and analyze. You’re not allowed to give me hints, let me protect you!”

Protect? Yu Hua froze. In his whole long life, he seemed to have heard this word very rarely.

When he had first become a leveler, Yu Hua had been a hot-blooded youth. He had been his teammates’ mainstay, taking everything on himself, carrying the responsibility of protecting everyone on his shoulders. Afterwards, many of his teammates had died, and many had changed, and Yu Hua himself had no longer been as hot-blooded as before. He had become cool and calm, protecting everyone rationally.

Later, everyone who had needed protecting had been gone, and he had gone on ahead, facing the elements alone.

While being relied on, while being betrayed, while being abandoned and abandoning others, Yu Hua had been powerful; all his companions had known that he didn’t need protecting.

*Protect... Xiao You wants to protect...me?* Yu Hua’s eyes lit up faintly, focusing on You Zhengping.

“What, what is it? Don’t you believe I can get you out of an escape room?” You Zhengping’s heart beat wildly under his almost fanatical gaze. Why was Yu Hua’s expression so...sexy?

“No.” Yu Hua shook his head. “I like you ‘protecting’ me.”

Since finding out that Xiao You was a Protector, Yu Hua had been ignoring one issue. In the eyes of an ordinary person, You Zhengping was very strong, and in the eye of the Protection Organization, he was an elite. Even facing a Destroyer, Xiao You had the ability to fight.

You Zhengping had been born to protect. Protecting the Xuyang District’s common people, he had risked everything to protect those three children on the roof. Naturally he would also include Yu Hua among those to be protected.

Yu Hua had used “time replay” on the roof to observe what violent battle Xiao You had experienced while he had been changing his clothes. At the time he had felt a trace of envy, envy for the people being protected by Xiao You. Though because he was so powerful, Yu Hua hadn’t notice this trace of longing.

He had just heard the people next door say they wanted to kidnap him, and now Xiao You wanted to “protect” him. Could this predestined?

Yu Hua had advised You Zhengping to change their afternoon plans to an escape room in order to give the two Destroyers an opportunity to kidnap him, planning to silently take care of these two Destroyers who had yet to be discovered by the Protection Organization and save trouble later.

But now...Yu Hua couldn't quite stand to go through with it.

It was an excellent opportunity to promote closeness between a couple. He could secretly raise Xiao You's power level during the battle, make Xiao You stronger and stronger, so when he met even more powerful Destroyers later on, he would be able to defeat them easily.

And he could enjoy the feeling of being protected. He had never experienced it and he rather wanted to try.

Faced with Yu Hua's expectant look, the pride of a Protector rose in You Zhengping's heart. He beat his chest and said, "That's right, when the time comes, take my hand and follow me. Leave everything to me!"

Heavens, it felt so good to be saying "leave everything to me" to Yu Hua!

You Zhengping impatiently finished off the vegetables on the plate and took Yu Hua to the escape room. He didn't notice that when they left the restaurant, Yu Hua silently tossed the gum into the trash.

When he threw away the gum, Yu Hua constantly kept watch over You Zhengping's expression. When he saw no sign that he had suddenly recovered his memory, he frowned faintly.

He had only seen the "false exchange" ability a couple of times. Normally, when the exchanged item was thrown away, the falsified "impression" would be restored to normal. Now that he had thrown away the gum, Xiao You had shown absolutely no change; did that mean that this person's false exchange ability was irreversible?

Seeing the two of them settling the bill, Huan Zixu also left with Feng Kui. Before leaving, he went into the private room before the servers could clear the table. He took the unfinished bottle of gum out of the trash.

While settling the bill, Huan Zixu put a piece of gum on the counter. The cashier, as though possessed, didn't make them pay.

Of course, the two of them hadn't ordered any food. They had been sitting idle in the private room. The "exchange" of the gum was a high meal price.

At the escape room, Huan Zixu saw the melancholy husbands cheerfully buy tickets, line up, and go in, but he wasn't in a rush to charge in. He was looking at the bottle of gum.

His “false exchange” ability had gone through many upgrades and already possessed the “unfair terms” effect—no returns, no exchanges. Even if the “exchange item” was thrown away, as long as he was unwilling to accept a return, the “exchanged” thing wouldn’t come back.

Huan Zixu in fact did not care about the gum being thrown away. What he cared about was why Yu Hua had done it.

“What do you think, is him throwing away the gum a symptom of his desire for control because he doesn’t want his husband to use something that hasn’t gone through his hands? Or has he discovered the ‘false exchange?’” Huan Zixu asked alertly.

Feng Kui pointed at the exchange room’s introductory screen and pointed to his mouth. There was a bit of machine oil at the corners of his mouth. He wanted to eat that.

“You can’t eat it!” Huan Zixu said anxiously.

—

Author’s Note:

Yu Hua: Xiao You wants to protect me! I’m suddenly turned on!

Huan Zixu: Why do I think the person I want to kidnap is kind of...psycho...

Feng Kui: Phone, want to eat it.

## CHAPTER 51

The Xuyang District’s largest escape room game was dark and strictly confidential. Only five people were allowed in at a time. Taking photographs with your phone was forbidden. Employees hid in the shadows to scare people. There were prompters before going into the escape room, forbidding people to injure the employees. Then, emphasized, it said that the employees were only there to scare you, they wouldn’t hurt you, please don’t kick or punch.

You Zhengping had said that he wanted to protect Yu Hua, so he paid more money to buy five people’s tickets when in reality only he and Yu Hua went in.

Seeing the two of them go in, Huan Zixu followed closely after with Feng Kui and said to the employee at the entrance, “We’re employees.”

As he spoke, Huan Zixu got out a piece of white paper and gave it to the employee. The employee let the two of them pass as though they were old acquaintances.

“False exchange,” by the illegal exchange of items of value (commonly called bribery), used the exchange of a certain item to change the “impression” of a certain target individual or certain interested group sharing some characteristic. “False exchange” was irreversible, no returns and no exchanges. For a single person, the exchange item was only symbolic; it could be gum,



which had a slight price, or it could be the white paper, which had an extremely low value. For a group exchange item, however, the demands for quantity were much higher.

While picking up the movie tickets, You Zhengping had suspected their identities and had been about to get Cen Xiao to report it to the organization. While Huan Zixu wasn't aware of You Zhengping's identity as a Protector, Feng Kui had looked like he wanted to eat the ticket machine at the time, and You Zhengping had been closest to them. For security, Huan Zixu had casually given him the bottle of gum, changing You Zhengping's "impression" of them into ordinary passersby, so You Zhengping had forgotten to report the event.

The "impression" wasn't limited to only themselves. In the Chinese restaurant, Huan Zixu had changed the "impressions" of the guests in the private room and the cashier; these were the reserving a private room "impression" and the having already collected payment "impression."

The "false exchange" ability didn't seem to have any power to hurt, but its genuine use was rather frightening.

For example, You Zhengping and Yu Hua were a deeply attached couple. If Huan Zixu was especially heartless and changed You Zhengping's "impression" towards Yu Hua, then it was very likely You Zhengping would forget that Yu Hua was his husband and regard him as something like a roommate or ordinary friend.

If Huan Zixu gave a certain Protector a box of small but numerous fruit candies and ordered that person to back to the Protection Organization and give each person a candy, "false exchange" would spread from that person throughout the group, and the idea Huan Zixu wanted to give the Protection Organization would be transmitted to each person's brain. Using only a cheap box of fruit candies, he could give each person who took a candy the "impression" that "the black-cloaked man is an enemy, a murderer."

Changing "enemy" to "teammate," "lover" to "foe," "nobody" to "close kin," confounding white and black, confusing true and false—that was the power of "false exchange."

There were quite a few levelers who chose the "false exchange" ability, but the majority of them died before reaching fifty levels. The reason was that this ability was too frightening. Even their teammates wouldn't dare to let such a person stay beside them, scared that they would have their thoughts changed.

Who would trust such a scheming person who could silently change their own people? Low level "false exchange" didn't have any great power. Initially it was only the ability to barter, such as exchanging a small rock for a piece of bread; people with strong enough willpower could resist the "bribe." But as the level increased, the brainwashing ability deepened, and the "false exchange" user became too powerful.

The more you understood this ability, the more you would want to kill its user. Those who killed the "false exchange" ability users were often the teammates they trusted most.

Under a hundred levels, such a powerful ability user required the attentive care of their teammates to flourish, but after a hundred levels, they were hard to rival.

No one was willing to give a “false exchange” user the chance to flourish, apart from Feng Kui.

In their first hundred levels, Huan Zixu had slowly developed under Feng Kui’s protection. In the latter ninety-one levels, Huan Zixu had used the “false exchange” ability to take Feng Kui fleeing here and there, running for their lives from high level hunters.

Huan Zixu was well aware that if Feng Kui hadn’t gradually abandoned his humanity, perhaps he also would have been unable to control his suspicions during the course of the game and would in end the have killed Huan Zixu before fifty levels. But Feng Kui had chosen the path to destroy his humanity. Feng Kui didn’t consider trust and mishaps between people. He hadn’t left himself the opportunity.

Precisely because of this, anything that Feng Kui didn’t suspect, Huan Zixu suspected; as Feng Kui gradually lost characteristics such as kindness, Huan Zixu preserved them for him; as Feng Kui gradually lost his humanity, Huan Zixu’s humanity became increasingly complex and questioning.

Suspicion, variation, prudence, extreme caution... Huan Zixu didn’t trust anyone, including the mission target being pursued by the System. He had to use every possible means to test the mission target before determining whether to work with him.

Going into the escape room through the employee corridor, Huan Zixu found two of the escape room’s employees, gave them the “impression” that they could take a break, and invited them to leave the area to rest. There were surveillance monitors in the employee corridor; they could see the melancholy husbands at the entrance, reading the introduction to the escape room.

“There’s only the four of us left. Connect to the surveillance images, change the scene,” Huan Zixu ordered.

Feng Kui’s eyeballs rotated. The fronts of his eyeballs were camouflage, like the eyes of crash test dummies. When they turned, they became two virtual screens. Innumerable data flashed over them. Feng Kui opened the surveillance system’s Cloud storage website. The Cloud storage’s address, username, and password flashed over his eyes. His System connected to the surveillance images to observe the melancholy husbands’ location.

After connecting to the surveillance system, Feng Kui went into the escape room, guarding Huan Zixu. Before the melancholy husbands went through the door, he tapped the escape room, changing the escape room’s original underground tomb into a metal space of complex mechanical structures.

Feng Kui could completely control this escape room made entirely out of alloys. The cell phone signals inside the escape room were blocked. They could move around all the rooms at will and plant countless traps inside them.

Feng Kui didn't touch the escape room's original main structure. His System storage space contained countless high tech alloys. In 199 worlds, whenever he encountered a technological world, he would store away all kinds of alloys like a hamster. All of Feng Kui's points were used up on upgrading, equipping larger System storage and saving alloys. His combat mode was singular but powerful.

This was an evolutionary model that Huan Zixu had designed for Feng Kui. Huan Zixu had believed all along that the System wouldn't give them points for nothing, and the points had to be used on a knife blade, not on equipping some convoluted items. They had to concentrate on using the points to upgrade their power and equip weapons, raise their own abilities.

Too many complicated items would vary their powers, and they would be unable to focus on improving their origin abilities. If the System took away their points one day, the only cards they would have left in their hands would be their origin power.

In fact, Huan Zixu hadn't chosen wrong. After two hundred levels, the System would close down the channel to equip items, and all their points would become waste paper. Levelers who hadn't become powerful before two hundred levels all be killed by high level players.

Covering up the grave scene in the escape room with super alloys wouldn't harm the building, but once Feng Kui had changed the structure of the escape room, once he removed the super alloys, all the construction and installations apart from the escape room's main walls would be scrapped; the decoration costs would have gone to waste.

You Zhengping finished carefully reading the escape room's introduction. The general idea was that they were a team of archeologists trapped in an ancient tomb. The ancient tomb was full of traps and monsters. They would have to go through innumerable hardships and hazards to get out alive. They walked into the main coffin chamber. The scenery in front of them was shocking. It was truly hard to imagine that the ancient people had actually had such frightening technology. They saw...

When he was finished with the introduction, You Zhengping, who hadn't done an escape room before, expectantly took Yu Hua's hand and opened the door to the main coffin chamber. The silver white metal texture of the "tomb" stupefied You Zhengping.

"Isn't it in defiance of the natural order for ancient people to have had this kind of technology? Is this an ancient tomb? Has the business misunderstood something about tombs?" You Zhengping asked in astonishment, stroking a super alloy wall.

"Have we gone into the wrong room?" You Zhengping got out his phone, wanting to search for the experiences of players who had experienced the escape room, but he found that the phone had no signal. "No way, they're blocking the signal, too. What if someone suddenly falls ill inside the escape room? You can't do that, I'm not going to take pictures and post them online."

As he spoke, You Zhengping turned his head, but he found that the entrance had disappeared, becoming one with the metal wall.

He walked forward and touched the place they where the entrance had been. He found that the door fit seamlessly with the wall. There were no gaps. He couldn't find where the door had been.

"This is... Are escape rooms so costly now?" You Zhengping said doubtfully.

Yu Hua coldly swept his gaze over the surroundings, inwardly appraising these two Destroyers' abilities and the crimes they had committed since coming to this world.

What Yu Hua knew so far was that they had swapped reservation numbers for the private room; that amounted to fraud, but they hadn't appropriated any goods, only a number. Jumping in line wasn't ethical behavior, but it wasn't against the law. They had used "false exchange" to cover up for the 100 yuan expense for the seats the two of them had used; that sum would in the end fall on the cashier at the time. This lay between fraud and stealing, but the amount of money was insufficient for a criminal penalty. It belonged in the civil sphere; they only had to compensate the individual for their loss after going through mediation.

These first two weren't serious crimes, but illegally altering a commercial area and imprisoning the auxiliary policeman You Zhengping amounted to destroying private property and assaulting a police officer. But if they were willing to help the escape room's owner renovate, the owner may even pay them for it. As for assaulting a police officer... The circumstances were light; it would be a matter of detention at most.

It seemed that the only thing they could be seriously punished for was kidnapping, Yu Hua deliberated.

Since learning of You Zhengping's identity as a Protector, Yu Hua had determined to a good wife and uphold the law, firmly support his Xiao You's work; if something didn't violate the law, he couldn't act.

For Destroyer 192's sort of crime, a hundred deaths wouldn't have been excessive. These two now hadn't caused especially large losses yet. There was no dignified reason to find fault with them.

As You Zhengping was observing the silver white alloy wall, a line of green characters appeared on the wall: *You enter the tomb and find that everything exceeds your imagination. This is no ancient tomb. Could the ancients really have have such a high tech society? Did aliens truly leave their traces on earth? You are very curious. This is a major archaeological discovery. You decide to run the risk of exploring the depths of the tomb. Just then, the wall in front of you splits open. A passage appears.*

You Zhengping: "..."

The wall really did split open, and a path that could only admit one person appeared. It felt extremely high tech. You Zhengping was a little dumbfounded. “No... Did the escape room really spend this much money?”

You Zhengping was only an idiot in love; he wasn’t really stupid. Everything he saw gave him misgivings. When he had said he wanted to look up a how-to online, he had actually wanted to secretly notify the organization, but he had found that his phone had no signal.

The organization’s signal was of the same intensity as for emergency calls with no signal. Even in an area where the signal was being blocked, it could still send out an SOS. But this escape room blocked even the emergency signal. An ordinary business’s blocker couldn’t do that.

You Zhengping seemed curious, when in reality he was already on his guard. He was keenly aware of the wisdom of being in hiding while your enemy was in the open, and he had his real face on display. If he revealed his identity but couldn’t capture the enemy, then his parents, relatives, and friends would all meet with danger.

And then there was Yu Hua, entirely unaware, following behind him. The pure Yu Hua didn’t know about the existence of Destroyers and special ability users and really took this place for an escape room. You Zhengping clenched his fist and told himself that he had to protect Yu Hua.

They were isolated and without help, and he didn’t know why the enemy would have fixed on them. Rather than deliberately exposing his identity, it was better to beat them at their own game, play dumb, and go through the room according to the enemy’s hints.

A passage that only admitted one person...

You Zhengping contemplated slightly, then simply took off his shirt, revealing the muscular flesh of his arms and his beautiful abs. He casually tore the half-sleeved shirt in half and twisted it into a sturdy and long enough rope, which he tied around his own and Yu Hua’s waists, then tied a knot specially used by Protectors that wouldn’t easily come undone.

“The business has put down so much money, they’ll definitely have thought of ways to separate us, then send employees to scare us when we’re on our own. It’s very not nice,” You Zhengping said, deliberately mischievous. “I’ve tied us together like this, and you remember to keep hold of my hand and not let the business succeed.”

“Xiao You is so clever.” Yu Hua’s gaze swept over You Zhengping’s abs. He took his husband’s hand. “I’ll rely entirely on your protection.”

Faced with the enemy, You Zhengping was always clever. Whether it was the first time, when he had no experience and had discovered Zhen Li’s identity, or at the amusement park, when he had learned the use of his third space on his own, or when he had protected four children from Destroyer 192’s meticulous plans, You Zhengping’s combat sensitivity was absolutely first rate.

It was just that he used all his silliness and ease on Yu Hua, relaxing and showing his foolish side in front of his husband. At any rate, the first time they had met, You Zhengping had lost face for the rest of his life. In front of Yu Hua, You Zhengping was willing to hand over his head and let his husband do the worrying.

Faced with battle, You Zhengping definitely wouldn't make any mistake.

Seeing Xiao You smiling brightly at him, leading him into the passage by the hand, Yu Hua's heart beat wildly.

It was his first time seeing Xiao You facing battle directly. His husband was like a cheetah; faced with the enemy, his judgement was unwavering and his power was astonishing. He was the best hunter in the wilderness.

In Yu Hua's eyes, the Protectors and the Destroyers pursuing him were all weak. Between a brown ant only the size of a grain of rice and large, flying black ant, it was still only the difference between ant and ant. In front of humans, it wasn't a very big difference.

This time, two rather large ants were trying to consume an elephant. You Zhengping had said he wanted to protect him, and Yu Hua had only taken it as a source of interest. He hadn't faced You Zhengping's powers directly.

But in this instant, seeing You Zhengping quickly entered combat mode, a small feline animal vainly using its weak arms to protect him, Yu Hua faced You Zhengping's powers directly for the first time.

Yu Hua raised his hand and held You Zhengping's weak but sturdy and muscular arm. You Zhengping turned. There was no anxiety in his face. It was his usual leisurely, joking expression. There was only a trace of battle readiness hidden in his eyes.

"Be sure to protect me well." Yu Hua lowered his head and rested it against You Zhengping's bare shoulder. "I'm leaving my safety up to you."

You Zhengping looked at Yu Hua. His husband must only have been thinking of this as game; he didn't really know how much danger they were in, right? But it didn't matter. He wouldn't even give Yu Hua a chance to sense the danger.

"Of course," You Zhengping said, smiling.

Though the passage only admitted one person, the melancholy husbands stuck so close together that there was no latitude for them to separate. Huan Zixu, keeping constant watch on the surveillance, frowned. "Why are they so clingy? Never mind tying themselves together, Yu Hua is nearly hugging You Zhengping. Release the hidden weapons, force them to separate!"

Huan Zixu only had one target in mind: Yu Hua, who had a close connection to Zhen Li's studio. He wasn't planning on touching You Zhengping.

For one thing, You Zhengping was an auxiliary policeman. While he didn't have a formal position, he was still law enforcement personnel. If he was away from his post, it would quickly be noticed by the law enforcement department. They were powerful and dynamic. Huan Zixu didn't want that. Second, he didn't want to implicate family members. Yu Hua joining Zhen Li's studio was his bad luck, and anyway he might be more or less aware of the levelers' secrets and not be an outsider at all, or necessarily innocent. But You Zhengping was totally unaware. Huan Zixu wouldn't drag him in.

You Zhengping, who was feeling the way, had his hand stuck close to the metal wall. Even if the enemy could easily control their traps, any change in the traps would create vibrations; a super alloy was still no exception. His sensory nerves were very acute. You Zhengping could sense the weakest vibrations.

Yu Hua also maintained his "super hearing" the whole time. He heard Huan Zixu saying "release the hidden weapon" and became alert. About half a second later, his "super hearing" heard the minute metallic sound of a mechanism altering. Meanwhile, You Zhengping turned to hug Yu Hua and said, "I've found that this passage isn't only big enough for one person. We're both thin. If we hug each other, we can both get through."

As he spoke, You Zhengping turned while embracing Yu Hua, turning his back to the metal wall shooting out a hidden weapon.

Yu Hua stared. You Zhengping's sense of touch had discovered the position and direction of the trap at the same time as his "super hearing." Was his Xiao You this aware?

The moment he turned, the wall behind You Zhengping opened. Because of You Zhengping's timely turn, the hidden weapon that should have attacked between the two of them, forcing them to separate, turned into an attack he bore alone. Countless tiny needles shot towards his back; looking at You Zhengping's gaze, full of self-confidence, Yu Hua in the end didn't act.

He had said he hand everything over to Xiao You, so he would trust him.

Then the thin, densely packed needles touched You Zhengping's back, they became soft, leaving only small red points on his back, not hurting him.

You Zhengping had opened a space about 1 cm thick behind himself. No matter what kind of metal hidden weapon this was, after having its power weakened to one tenth, it wouldn't do much harm to him. But when the needles touched the surface of the space, You Zhengping felt something was off. He ran the risk of quickly removing the space and scattering the needles directly on his back. The sharp metal turned into rubber when it encountered human body temperature; they were harmless. If he had actually let the needles enter his second space, that would have revealed You Zhengping's identity.

“Wow! There really is a hidden weapon! It’s pretty realistic, I was scared to death. I thought I really was going to get stuck full of holes.” You Zhengping reaching out his arm, picked up a thin needle, and pinched it. “It’s rubber.”

The enemy didn’t mean to kill them, and they weren’t going to reveal themselves! You Zhengping instantly judged the mental state of the person behind the scenes.

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Author’s Note:

Yu Hua: Xiao You is unusually sexy today.

Huan Zixu: Feng Kui, do you think You Zhengping is really that lucky, or... Don’t eat the security camera!

Feng Kui: Munch, much, just used my ability, I’m kind of hungry.

You Zhengping: Why is everyone so relaxed? Am I the only nervous one?

## CHAPTER 52

The thin needles seemed like rubber, but in reality they were a sort of memory metal he had never seen before. You Zhengping was lying through his teeth when he described them as rubber.

The two of them went through the narrow passage, each supporting the other, and entered a labyrinth. There was a line of green characters on the silver white metal of the labyrinth entrance: *You have come through the many perils of the trap-laden passage to the labyrinth. The labyrinth is the second line of defense for the occupant of the tomb. There may be unknown living beings protecting it. If you want to pass through the labyrinth, you must give up your companion. Are you ready?*

“The escape room is planned out pretty interestingly,” You Zhengping said, stroking his chin. “Unknown living beings...those must be the employees? I figure they’ll be dressed up in a very frightening way. I can’t let them scare me.”

You Zhengping said this upfront so that if some monster really did appear in the labyrinth, Yu Hua wouldn’t get suspicious.

The labyrinth was about a meter and a half wide, enough for two or three people to walk through shoulder to shoulder. This width, however, made You Zhengping more uneasy. He thought that the person behind the labyrinth was doing this to break the two of them up.

“They want to quietly separate us. It seems only one of us is the real target. Is it me, or Yu Hua?” You Zhengping said inwardly. “If it’s me, then my identity must have been exposed, but if they know that I’m a Protector, then their means of attack wouldn’t be so simple. All the traps we’ve encountered have been child’s play. It’s not very likely that I’m the target. Why would it be Yu Hua?”



You Zhengping held Yu Hua's hand, looking at this kind and gentle man who made him feel so at peace. He saw Yu Hua take off his shirt and put it on You Zhengping. Under Yu Hua's shirt, there was an undershirt!

Yu Hua said, "I felt that it was a little cold in the escape room. I'm wearing an undershirt, so I'll give you my shirt."

You Zhengping: "..."

He had no idea when Yu Hua had put on this sort of white undershirt that only middle-aged and elderly men wore. On such a hot day, wasn't he afraid of a heat rash?

All right, Yu Hua liked to take care of his health. He would always keep his back muscles warm. After all, he was a man planning on exercising his back strength until he was a hundred years old.

Yu Hua's clothes were a size larger than You Zhengping's. The shirt hung loosely on him; there was a special sort of carelessness about it.

Feeling Yu Hua's unique smell wrap around his whole body, You Zhengping felt warm inside. His emotions were unprecedentedly stable right now. He thought quickly of countermeasures and guessed why the enemy would want Yu Hua.

Since Yu Hua was an employee of Zhen Li's studio, and the studio's only ordinary person, if you wanted to get close to Zhen and Yuan, who were under the Protection Organization's protection, the best way was to quietly replace Yu Hua. Compared to Destroyer 192's fanfare, this new Destroyer's secretive operations were much scarier. If he hadn't happened to go on a date with Yu Hua today, then...

No! It was precisely because Yu Hua was a domestic person who only operated in the studio and at home each day, spending most of his time with Zhen, Yuan, and Lian, it wasn't convenient for the new Destroyer to operate. That was why they had chosen the day of the date.

Though You Zhengping's guess wasn't entirely correct, he had still roughly guessed the enemy's actions.

His thoughts were rather heavy, but he had to maintain a contented appearance on the surface, talk and laugh with Yu Hua, express admiration of the escape room's dedication.

You Zhengping said, "When we get out, I'll have to leave good reviews for this escape room on the forum. It's really unimaginable."

He knew that the Destroyer had to be using some means to monitor them and hoped to use their conversation to make the Destroyer give up the idea of taking action against Yu Hua. They

were acting in the shadows and certainly didn't want the Protectors to discover it. If You Zhengping posted a thread about it, it would be easily exposed. Hearing this conversation, the enemy would have to adopt a different policy.

You Zhengping waited patiently for a while, deliberately dawdling at the entrance of the labyrinth, but the other side took no action. Were they really not afraid of being discovered by the Protectors? Were they so sure of themselves?

The two of them, holding hands and walking shoulder to shoulder, went through the labyrinth took every right turn. They arrived back at the entrance.

"This is an interesting labyrinth. Let's take all the left turns this time," You Zhengping said.

The two of them took every left turn, and once again returned to the entrance. There was no way to get out, and they hadn't encountered the so-called monsters.

Just then, the prompt text in front of the entrance changed: *This is a labyrinth that two people can't exit together. If you want to find the way, you must abandon your companion and go on alone. There are weapons and chains next to you. The one who wins can bind his companion with the chains.*

After these words appeared, two daggers appeared at the entrance to the labyrinth, as well as iron chains that could bind a person's four limbs to the wall.

Whether it was You Zhengping or Yu Hua who went into the labyrinth, the new Destroyer would have a chance to catch Yu Hua.

You Zhengping's expressions was a little nervous. He was afraid that Yu Hua, who liked suspense dramas, would be interested in the secret room and propose chaining one of them. In Yu Hua's eyes, this was probably just an ordinary escape room, and this supposed abandoning your companion was only a means of getting out. If Yu Hua took the enemy's suggestion, how should he resist?

Unexpectedly, Yu Hua said, "Based on the the suspense novels and comics I've read, and the suspense dramas I've seen, it's asking for death to abandon your companion at a time like this. There definitely won't be a way to get out. This must be a test of our humanity. We mustn't be taken in."

Then he scratched You Zhengping's palm and said with deep feeling, "Even if the business has deliberately planned so we can only get out by separating, I'll still continue tagging along with Xiao You."

As You Zhengping relaxed, he felt some sweetness in his heart. Yu Hua was a person who couldn't even stand to abandon him while playing a game.

He still remembered when they were dating, the two of them and Cen Xiao had played Fight the Landlord. When Cen Xiao was being the landlord, Messrs. Melancholy teamed up to fighting Cen Xiao. When You Zhengping was being the landlord, Yu Hua did everything he could to trip up Cen Xiao and give cards to You Zhengping. What about You Zhengping and Cen Xiao teaming up to deal with the landlord Yu Hua? Sorry, that didn't happen. Yu Hua never fought for the landlord position. He concentrated on waiting to give up cards to Xiao You. In the end, they had played until Cen Xiao had turned on them and thrown away his cards. Since then, Cen Xiao hadn't played Fight the Landlord with the melancholy husbands again.

"Do you have a pen?" You Zhengping asked.

Yu Hua was a treasure chest. He got a pen and a tiny notebook out of the chest pocket of the shirt You Zhengping was wearing.

Based on his memory of the two attempts, You Zhengping drew out maps of the labyrinth. His spatial memory was excellent. Without error, he drew the two paths they had taken in their entirety, then combined them into one map. From the map, they could see that there was only 30% of the labyrinth's map that they hadn't walked through.

The Destroyer could change the labyrinth's paths. They wouldn't leave them a way out. But You Zhengping could force the Destroyer. Seeming careless, he looked at his watch and said, "It takes half an hour to go through this escape room, and you have to go through in groups. The next group of players can only go in when the previous one has come out. The first level alone took ten minutes. Do you think we're going too slowly? Will the players behind us protest?"

Yu Hua quickly grasped You Zhengping's meaning and cooperatively said, "They won't only protest, they'll probably also lodge customer complaints. People these days love denouncing others. Zhen Li's livestream gets reported practically every day for all kinds of bizarre reasons, and the reporters post Weibo updates and video clips, make such a fuss that everyone knows about it. As soon as it gets big, hundreds of thousands of people get drummed up to come scold us. It's impossible to change everyone's views."

Yu Hua's words had a double meaning. He was hinting to Huan Zixu, You can't play this escape room game as you like, the time limit is half an hour. If you can't catch me in half an hour, you'll have to let me go. The customers outside won't wait for you. If they complain, you won't be able to change everyone's "impressions."

Huan Zixu, watching the two of them, squeezed Feng Kui's sturdy arm. Frowning, he said, "Can you mass control this world's internet?"

Feng Kui shook his head and said, "Ordinary...hacking...yes, violating...world law...no."

"World law?" Huan Zixu said doubtfully. "I haven't heard that term in years."

World law didn't exist in worlds within the System. Only the System's law was law. Only when carrying out world opening missions would world law be mentioned. Huan Zixu had heard

survivors of unopened worlds exchanging information about it. He had learned that an unopened world had a mysterious power of law that resisted the System, and the System could only gradually control the unopened worlds by destroying the world law.

“So we can only operate within a small sphere. We can’t make excessively large changes to this world,” Huan Zixu said. “Fine, half an hour it is. We’ll bring out the big guns. Feng Kui, activate mechanical mode, go in and capture Yu Hua. After you’ve caught him, I’ll change You Zhengping’s ‘impression,’ make him think he and Yu Hua had an argument in the escape room, and Yu Hua left in a huff.”

“Copy.” Hearing Huan Zixu’s order, Feng Kui’s external skin opened, the metal bones wrapping up the skin, turning into a two centimeter thick steel skeleton.

Feng Kui controlled the escape room’s passages, going right into the labyrinth, quietly waiting for the melancholy husbands to arrive.

As he left the room, the headphones linking the two of them turned into wireless headphones, so Huan Zixu could give instructions from the other end.

Following the map You Zhengping had drawn, the melancholy husbands walked to the 30% of the area that they hadn’t gone to. They encountered a mechanical skeleton whose head nearly touched the ceiling.

Was this the Destroyer, or was it their item or ability? You Zhengping swallowed nervously. Squeezing Yu Hua’s hand, he said, “Wow! Is this an employee? How do they make that mechanical skeleton coat? It’s so realistic! Is it a real metal exterior? It must be very heavy to wear!”

Then he courageously went up to deliberately touch the mechanical skeleton’s body. Before he touched it, Feng Kui used a synthetic mechanical voice to say, “Humans, have you disturbed my slumber?”

“I do not wish to harm humans. You may leave, but I have slept too many years. You must leave one of you to keep me company, and I will let the other leave the labyrinth.”

“No!” You Zhengping’s palm was full of sweat. Instinct was telling him that he had met a powerful Destroyer. “My husband and I won’t be parted even in old age. We have to do everything together. You can’t separate us!”

As he spoke, he hugged Yu Hua like an octopus, hanging off him with both arms and legs, the muscles of his back tensed, ready to hide Yu Hua in his second space any time.

Since the Destroyer had appeared, there would have to be a fierce battle. At that point, it would be pointless to stubbornly conceal his identity. You Zhengping had already thought of how to explain things to Yu Hua after the fierce battle, and he had decided that no matter what

happened they wouldn't get divorced. Even if Yu Hua picked up his things and left, he would turn into a scoundrel and follow Yu Hua and not let go!

Naturally Yu Hua recognized the Destroyer Feng Kui. He patted You Zhengping's back comfortingly and said heavily said, "Me too, I absolutely won't let you go."

Yu Hua hoped that Xiao You would be able to unearth his identity through the clues, not that he would be forced to act under these circumstances. If he found out on his own, there would be time to reflect. Yu Hua had hidden a lot of evidence at home, and he had put some mementoes of their courtship near the evidence. If Xiao You found the evidence himself, then saw these mementoes symbolizing their love, perhaps he could think it through carefully. But if he directly revealed himself in battle, then Xiao You would definitely be angry.

And then...

Even if he had to use the black-cloaked man identity to force the Protection Organization to give him Xiao You in a marriage of alliance, they still wouldn't divorce! A trace of fierceness flashed through Yu Hua's eyes.

Seeing these two "puny" humans tightly hugging each other, the mechanical skeleton tilted its head, crouched down, and said in its mechanical voice, "You won't die. One of you will just stay with me."

"No. If we stay, we stay together, and if we leave, we leave together. Not even death will separate us!" You Zhengping said firmly.

"Ignore them." Huan Zixu had followed these two the whole way and had long ago eaten enough dog food that he wanted to throw up. "Separate them by brute force and catch Yu Hua. I'll change You Zhengping's 'impression,' you can relax and catch him!"

But Feng Kui, who had listened to Huan Zixu's instructions all along, didn't act. He raised his hands, suspended them 5 cm above the melancholy husbands' heads, and didn't continue lowering them.

You Zhengping and Yu Hua simultaneously clenched their fists. If the mechanical skeleton's hands lowered another centimeter, they would act!

"Pick up Yu Hua and run, come on!" Huan Zixu ordered.

Feng Kui tilted his mechanical head. Two red beams came from the skull's deep eye sockets, scanning the melancholy husbands up and down. Like a psychical exam, he could "see" their blood pressure, heart rates, speed of flow flow, hormonal secretions, and other indications, using them to determine whether the two of them were lying.

The hands suspended over their heads shifted. Under the melancholy husbands' somewhat dubious gazes, Feng Kui put his hands on his metal knees and sat down cross-legged. In his

own voice, he asked You Zhengping, “If...Yu Hua...was going...to die, and...you could...save him...by...changing...your bones...to metal, but then...you wouldn’t...be human, would...you...save him?”

“Yes!” You Zhengping didn’t hesitate. He answered resolutely. He looked at the metal skeleton without understanding, not knowing what the Destroyer was planning.

You Zhengping’s excellent sixth sense made him feel a taste of yearning coming from the metal skeleton.

“Feng Kui?” Huan Zixu asked over the headphones.

“Do you...want to...argue with him?” Feng Kui said, pointing at Yu Hua.

“That’s impossible.” Yu Hua smiled kindly. “How could we argue?”

When they had just gotten married, their living habits had been different, they had in fact fought, but Yu Hua was comparatively mature. He hadn’t gotten into big arguments with You Zhengping. He had only quietly lowered his head and cleaned the room.

You Zhengping, while flaring up fit overturn the heavens, had seen Yu Hua silently rinsing clothes with his hands and had felt extremely bad. He had hugged Yu Hua from behind and quietly said, “Let’s not argue, all right?”

“We weren’t arguing.” Yu Hua wiped his hands on his apron, turned, and used his cold hand to stroke You Zhengping’s forehead. “We’re only getting accustomed to each others’ lifestyles.”

Just that bit of friction had dealt You Zhengping a serious injury. Seeing Yu Hua’s back as he rinsed the clothes, he had felt sad enough to nearly cry. He couldn’t stand to have a real argument with Yu Hua.

“I’ll never argue with him.” You Zhengping leaned his head on Yu Hua’s shoulder. “If we argued, I wouldn’t forgive myself.”

Feng Kui paused as though computing. He took out the earbud, not listening to Huan Zixu. He pointed to You Zhengping with his mechanical finger, then pointed to Yu Hua, drawing a pink heart between them. The transparent pink heart burst like a special effect on a computer. The fragments turned into countless tiny pink hearts that enveloped the two people hugging each other tightly.

“You have...passed...the test, be...happy,” Feng Kui said.

He clapped heavily, and the exit to the labyrinth appeared behind him.

Feng Kui pointed to the exit. His mechanical jaws opened, and a crackling laughter came out.

“The exit?” You Zhengping was totally disbelieving. What was this? What about the fierce battle? What about the treacherous and crafty Destroyer?

“The exit.” As Feng Kui laughed, his mechanical jaw fell off. He reached out to scoop it up. His finger turned into a cross bolt screwdriver, tightening the loosened screw on the jaw.

As though dreaming, You Zhengping pushed open the labyrinth’s exit with Yu Hua. He found that he had returned to the entrance to the escape room. Here was the employee who had been here when they had gone in. She gave them a professional smile and said, “Your trip through the ancient tomb is over. Congratulations on your return to regular society.”

O-over? You Zhengping turned his head. The door to the ancient tomb was tightly shut. The thriller just now seemed to have been a dream.

Had a Destroyer wished him happiness? You Zhengping thought, uncomprehending. He jumped off of Yu Hua, and untied the rope around his waist.

What did this Destroyer want? Had it really been to test their feelings?

Huan Zixu also wanted to know what Feng Kui had been doing.

After the melancholy husbands left, Feng Kui restored the main composition of the escape room and considerably used his stored metal to reinforce its main walls so that the escape room wouldn’t collapse because of his alterations.

After taking care of everything, Feng Kui returned to Huan Zixu, changed in his human shape, and looked blankly at Huan Zixu.

Huan Zixu didn’t scold Feng Kui. He hadn’t seen Feng Kui put forth any viewpoint of his own apart from “eating” in a very long time. He asked, “Why did you let them go?”

Feng Kui looked at Huan Zixu, point to him, then pointed at himself. “We...argued...I don’t like...arguing.”

“You let them go because I said that I was going to give You Zhengping the ‘impression’ that they had argued, and you didn’t want me to do that?” Huan Zixu asked.

Feng Kui nodded. “A-Xu, we...aren’t...the System.”

“You don’t want me to abuse the abilities provided by the System. Using them for self-protection is all right, using them for harmless things is all right, but I can’t use them to give ordinary people ‘impressions’ that would do irreparable harm, is that right?” Huan Zixu asked.

“Right.” Feng Kui nodded heavily.

“Fine, we’ll find another way.” Huan Zixu took Feng Kui’s large hand. “When I kidnap Yu Hua, I’ll do my best to avoid You Zhengping, and do my best not to let the two of them be injured, all right?”

“All right.” Feng Kui gave a crackling smile.

Huan Zixu embraced Feng Kui and gently closed his eyes.

He had thought that Feng Kui had been gradually losing his humanity, but in reality, he had been deceived by power. He was the one who didn’t recognize himself. Because his internal storage was insufficient, Feng Kui had constantly deleted all kinds of memories, all for the sake of preserving his truest and purest humanity.

Conscience took up too much space. He could only keep it by forgetting some unnecessary things.

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Author’s Note:

Yu Hua (blushing): We got pink hearts on our date today. It’s kind of romantic. These two Destroyers seem all right.

You Zhengping: How should I report this to the organization? The two Destroyers like seeing love that won’t be parted even in death?

## CHAPTER 53

Since he had activated his “super hearing” in the Chinese restaurant and coincidentally heard the dialogue between the two new Destroyers, Yu Hua had known that this date would also fall through.

He hadn’t thought that there was anything unusual about it. After all, choosing a towel at two out of eight odds, You Zhengping could choose the foot towel. On his first blind date, he had met Yu Hua. He was a Protector, and his husband was the Protectors’ mortal enemy. Xiao You’s luck had always been bad. It was inevitable for a date to turn into a major battle in the end.

Yu Hua, already used to this, had looked upon the new Destroyers as though they had been condemned to death. But unexpectedly he had received the Destroyers’ blessing.

As he walked out of the escape room shoulder to shoulder with You Zhengping, wrapped in pink hearts, wearing an undershirt, his expression was vague.

No matter what the new Destroyers’ goal was, the final outcome was that they hadn’t spoiled their date. Instead, they had provided a better scene for the date.



In the escape room's rest area, Yu Hua sat in a chair, right hand slightly curled, forefinger against his chin, deep in thought.

Next to him, You Zhengping, sitting in a sprawl, also had his thoughts far away.

You Zhengping held his phone in his hand. The phone had a signal now. He could now report to the organization that he had encountered new Destroyers. That was his duty; he couldn't not report.

But...

The pink hearts released by the mechanical skeleton seemed to still be fluttering in front of his eyes. You Zhengping's brow furrowed tightly. What were Destroyers like, after all?

Since he was little, everything he had been taught said that Destroyers were bad people. They would bring incalculable damage upon society. Countless Protectors and ordinary people had died at the hands of the Destroyers.

Zhen Li was too weak. He had been captured by You Zhengping entirely without resistance. But the wounds like cigarette burns on his hand had verified the ruthlessness of the Destroyers. Yuan Luori and Destroyer 192 had used practical actions to tell You Zhengping that Destroyers were in fact bad people. They didn't care about human lives.

If not for the fact that other Destroyers would come, if not for the existence of the black-cloaked man, if not for the fact that the Protection Organization needed to use Yuan Luori, Yuan Luori would likely have been secretly executed already.

The current strange situation had only evolved in order to deal with possible future enemies.

Even though he had developed some positive feelings towards the cooperative Zhen Li and Yuan Luori, You Zhengping had still been full of enmity towards the Destroyers.

But that mechanical skeleton...

As the melancholy husbands were pondering, two people, one beautiful and one tall, walked past in front of them.

You Zhengping automatically raised his head, his gaze falling on the tall man. He thought that he didn't know this person, but he also thought that he should know him.

The phoenix-eyed man next to the tall man was playing with a couple of one yuan coins. He was constantly tossing the coins in the air and catching them in his hand when they fell.

While passing by You Zhengping and Yu Hua, the phoenix-eyed man dropped the coins. The pair of two yuan coins fell perfectly, one on You Zhengping's leg, one on Yu Hua's leg.

The moment the coin fell on his leg, You Zhengping's mind became blurred. He suddenly found that he couldn't look directly at the tall and beautiful pair. The mechanical skeleton in the labyrinth, which he was just thinking about, slowly turned into an ancient tomb and an ordinary employee.

Some things could be forgotten, but some things couldn't be.

The first time Huan Zixu had changed You Zhengping's "impression," You Zhengping had been entirely off his guard. He had casually taken the gum and been brainwashed by Huan Zixu's ability.

This time, You Zhengping had just gone through the labyrinth. He was on the alert, full of wariness towards everyone around him. Though Huan Zixu had dropped the coin on him, You Zhengping was still struggling desperately to refuse to have his "impression" changed.

Huan Zixu was very confident in his ability. It was impossible that his power couldn't change the thoughts of two "ordinary" people. After dropping the coins, he walked on straight ahead without looking back. He didn't see You Zhengping holding his forehead and struggling desperately.

The illusion of the false ancient tomb and the images of the true labyrinth flickered in his mind. You Zhengping reached out a hand towards the coin. His instincts told him there was something wrong with this coin. He had to pick up the coin and throw it...throw it...

You Zhengping's hand trembled faintly. He bit his lip. His line of sight gradually blurred. But his fingertips couldn't touch the coin. It was just a little bit more...

While You Zhengping was distracted, a hand fell on his leg and removed the coin before his "impression" could change. The pressure on You Zhengping's mind lightened abruptly. He kept both the original "impression" and the false "impression" that Huan Zixu had used the coin to "exchange," and he could clearly distinguish which was true.

"When did we get coins on our legs?" Yu Hua looked "curiously" at the two coins, then picked them up to toy with them. "Two yuan is just enough to catch a doll. Get a doll for me, Xiao You."

You Zhengping met Yu Hua's eyes and asked, "What did we do in the escape room?"

Yu Hua's fingertips hesitated as they held the coin. He avoided You Zhengping's gaze and went to the doll machine. He casually said, "The escape room...was pretty interesting."

Had it been the high-tech labyrinth or the gloomy ancient tomb? Had the employee been a mechanical skeleton or a corpse from the ancient tomb? When the words reached You Zhengping's lips, he swallowed them. He didn't ask.

It was as though something was blocking his throat. He couldn't get the questions out.

You Zhengping looked at his watch. It had taken him about a dozen seconds to use his willpower to struggle with the false impression. An ordinary person would be brainwashed instantly and quickly wake up. Yu Hua's answer would probably have been the gloomy ancient tomb and the corpse, but...why hadn't he asked?

Instinct stopped You Zhengping's throat, keeping him from talking. Instead, he followed Yu Hua to the doll machine, cast around a few times, and caught a little husky toy.

You Zhengping's doll catching level had always been high, a one-hundred percent success rate. He didn't rely on his special ability. It was pure technique.

He handed Yu Hua the little husky doll. Yu Hua looked at the husky doll's stupid face with a flicker of barely detectable detestation.

You Zhengping thought that there was something fishy here. This person's power was something like Luo Huai's, but more frightening than his. He thought he should have kept the two coins, the coins had already gone into the doll machine and couldn't be gotten back.

*He can change people's "impressions" unnoticed. Did I have my "impressions" changed before he got his eyes on me?* You Zhengping considered inwardly. He started recalling everything that had happened today since leaving the house. His memory had always been good. After going through it as carefully as though watching a movie, he found where something was wrong.

He had no impression of having bought that bottle of gum, not today, and not yesterday, either.

Also, where was the gum?

You Zhengping felt in his pockets. A bottle of gum that large had vanished. He asked Yu Hua, "Have you seen the gum I bought?"

Yu Hua's hand stopped in the middle of squeezing the husky's face. He laughed lightly towards You Zhengping. "I can't find it, either. Did we leave it at the restaurant?"

You Zhengping blinked. He put away his phone and temporarily didn't report this business to the organization. He pinched Yu Hua's undershirt and said, "There's still some time before dinner. Let's go buy some clothes. You can't go into a Western restaurant wearing an undershirt, can you?"

"All right." Detecting You Zhengping's hesitation, Yu Hua's mood was very cheerful.

He had known that the action of taking the coin would definitely attract Xiao You's suspicions, but how could he have watched You Zhengping struggling painfully because he was resisting the Destroyer's power?

Truthfully, when the coin had fallen on Yu Hua's leg, even he had had a moment of confusion, and this was a situation in which Huan Zixu had underestimated the two of them and hadn't used all of his power. This Destroyer's ability was truly very strong. Feng Kui, who had allowed his teammate to develop to this stage, was also unusually tough.

It had been a long time since Yu Hua had seen such interesting levelers. He hadn't thought that such a pure relationship could exist under the System's high pressure and incitement of disharmony.

He rather wanted to draw back, but he had to sound them out again.

You Zhengping's original plan for the afternoon had in fact been to shop for clothes. Though there had been an intervening incident and they had circled around, in the end the two of them still went shopping.

Yu Hua chose a white shirt with ink designs that gave him a refined air when he put it on. To fit the form-sitting shirt, he finally took off the elderly undershirt, changing back to an upright and dashing appearance.

You Zhengping, on the other hand, didn't buy any new clothes. He was wearing Yu Hua's original shirt. The collar was loose. This bad boy style attracted quite a few looks.

Before someone could strike up a conversation to get close to You Zhengping, Yu Hua stood in front of his husband and intimately put his arms around Xiao You's waist. The person wanting to strike up a conversation saw that he was spoken for, pursed their lips, and left.

After buying a shirt, Yu Hua put the undershirt he had changed out of and Xiao You's torn half-sleeved shirt into a bag. Dinner time came.

First, Yu Hua accompanied You Zhengping as he ate a high-energy malatang. Then You Zhengping, having eaten his fill, accompanied Yu Hua to a French restaurant to listen to the violin. This time, the preoccupied You Zhengping finally defeated the hypnosis of classical music and didn't fall asleep, spending a peaceful dinner with Yu Hua.

At 8 PM, the melancholy husbands returned home. Inside was the romantic scene that You Zhengping had had someone arrange. The two of them fell embracing on the rose petals. Before kissing, Yu Hua suddenly virtuously said, "This shirt is new, I can't let it get stained by the roses. I'm going to put it away first."

He turned on the lights and hung up the new shirt in the wardrobe. While closing the wardrobe door, the suitcase at the top of the wardrobe moved. Yu Hua quickly held up the suitcase and snuck a look at You Zhengping, a trace of unease flashing through his eyes.

You Zhengping, who usually understood his husband, swept his gaze over the suitcase without pause.

According to plan, the two of them passed a harmonious night. The roses You Zhengping had ordered were crushed. Tomorrow Yu Hua would probably have to work hard to clean the stained bedding.

At two in the morning, Yu Hua was sleeping soundly. You Zhengping quietly sat up, brushed the rose petals off of himself, and looked up at the suitcase on top of the wardrobe. He didn't attempt to open the suitcase.

He went to the bathroom to shower, washing away the crushed flower petals, then stealthily went into the second bedroom, picked out a set of clothes at random and put it on, then wrote on a piece of notepaper, "Urgent assignment, I'll send you a message when I'm coming home."

While putting the note paper on the pillow, You Zhengping looked at Yu Hua's sleeping countenance. He bent his head and kissed his face through the rose petals, then turned and left.

Not long after You Zhengping left, Yu Hua opened his eyes and looked in disappointment at the suitcase on top of the wardrobe. He recalled everything that had happened that day and sighed lengthily.

Between his assignment and staying with him on the date, Xiao You had in the end chosen Yu Hua, only returning the base to report about the new Destroyers in the middle of the night. This made Yu Hua happy but also made him feel a twinge of guilt about holding the Protectors back; he wasn't being a suitable family member for a Protector.

Then there was the suitcase. Did Xiao You suspect his identity? Why wouldn't he look in the suitcase? Yu Hua was very doubtful.

He had always planned fully, but he couldn't read You Zhengping. If it had been another person, Yu Hua would have been able to predict that You Zhengping would have become suspicious by now, but with You Zhengping, anything unexpected could happen.

"Ah..." In the long, pitch-black night, Yu Hua, alone in the empty bed, heaved a long, long sigh.

You Zhengping returned to the base that night through a secret passage. The base received the news and immediately gathered all the Protectors who were outside. Director Xiao also got up in the middle of the night and went to the base.

At four in the morning, You Zhengping reported to the organization what had happened during the day. There was no concrete evidence for the business with the gum. He had no "impression" and couldn't report it. You Zhengping only talked about what had happened in the escape room.

Lian Yufan quickly pulled up the surveillance network near the business, searching for the two people's figures. After searching, Lian Yufan said, "None of the surveillance cameras saw any people resembling the ones you described, but all of these cameras experienced some degree of disruption or blackout yesterday, then were generally restored a few minutes later."

According to the blackout times and the positions of the blacked out cameras, Lian Yufan drew on the enlarged map, quickly drawing out a route. "You're right. The locations and times of the disruption of surveillance coincide to a high degree with your route. When you were in the movie theater, the surveillance camera outside the camera theater experienced a two-minute thirty-four second blackout. When you were in the Chinese restaurant, the traffic cameras and commercial surveillance cameras along the route from the movie theater to the restaurant all became unresponsive. And the entire surveillance record of your time in the escape room has vanished."

"You didn't notice two such eye-catching people at the movie theater?" Cen Xiao asked.

"That's what frightens me." You Zhengping briefly described the business with the coins. "Up to now, I still can't be sure whether what I experienced in the escape room was the ancient tomb or the labyrinth."

"Yu Hua was in the escape room with you. Does he remember?" Lian Yufan asked.

This time, there was no suspicion in Lian Yufan's voice. After a period of working together, Lian Yufan was amply certain that Yu Hua definitely wasn't a Destroyer. The reason was very simple. In Lian Yufan's words, if Yu Hua had yet to ascend to the heavens, it was definitely because his powers were limited. He wasn't a Destroyer, and the people in the studio were already this badly off. If he had been a Destroyer, half of the Xuyang District would be slaves making money for him.

Though this wasn't at all nice, it still expressed Lian Yufan's views. His ideas had changed.

But You Zhengping, who had in the beginning had been determined to trust his husband, hesitated when faced with Lian Yufan's question. He remembered his own feeling of lightness when Yu Hua had taken the coin, remembered Yu Hua's panic when the suitcase had shaken, remembered the dream the night before that had left him dripping with sweat...

You Zhengping clenched his fist, then loosened it, as though letting go of some obsessive thought. He answered, "Yu Hua only remembers the ancient tomb and corpses version of the escape room. His memories have been tampered with."

In reality, You Zhengping hadn't forcefully questioned Yu Hua, and he hadn't gotten a precise answer, but this was what he told the Protection Organization.

You Zhengping wasn't sure why he was doing this. It was all intuition. Intuition told him that this would be for everyone's good. You Zhengping had always trusted his intuition.

"I'll take a look," Luo Huai, who had been silent all along, suddenly said. "Relax, I won't erase your memories, I'll only use my power to investigate. 'Memories' and 'impressions' belong to particular energies of the brain. The average Protector wouldn't be able to investigate this type of energy, but I can."

You Zhengping nervously licked his lips. He was worried that while investigating, Luo Huai would accidentally "see" his suspicions of Yu Hua. He was rather resistant.

Luo Huai put his hand on the center of You Zhengping's brow. He closed his eyes and sensed for a moment, then opened his eyes. His eyes were full of puzzlement. "There are in fact two types of particular energy in your brain. One changed your 'impression,' covering up the surface of your brain cortex. It won't do you any harm. It only changed your 'impression' of a certain event by means of revising electrical information. There's another energy that's isolated by a very powerful mental force. It's protecting your memories. This mental force is very powerful. I see that it will be able to drive out the second energy very soon. Soon it may even drive out the first energy."

"In other words, You Zhengping's mental force is powerful enough to resist this person's mental attack?" asked Director Xiao, who had been silent all along.

"I'm not certain." Luo Huai shook his head. "This person's energy is different from mine. I absorb memory signals from the brain by means of removing them, entirely removing a segment of signal. Of course, this process is reversible. I can preserve the memory signal in the form of an energy star and return it in the future."

"His power remains in the brain, revising the target's 'impression.' When the energy entirely fuses with the brain cortex, the false 'impression' becomes the 'truth' in the brain. What's more frightening even than 'forgetting' is when your own memories aren't true."

"In reality, if this powerful mental force in You Zhengping's brain wasn't protecting him, by the time he got to the base, that particular energy would have fused entirely with his brain cortex, and I wouldn't have been able to sense it."

...A powerful mental force protecting him? You Zhengping rubbed the center of his brow, remembering how Yu Hua had taken the coin from his knee.

"False reports will lead one astray," Director Xiao whispered. "Fortunately your mental force is powerful and your willpower is staunch, and your 'impression' wasn't changed. Otherwise, we wouldn't even know for sure whether these two existed."

After consolidating everyone's intelligence, Lian Yufan reported: "Two new Destroyers. One is 195 cm tall. Altering the structure of the escape room, causing the surveillance cameras not to work, and the more than two meter tall mechanical skeleton may be his abilities, metal or mechanical type abilities. The other is 181 cm tall. He can control people's thoughts, change their 'impressions.' His ability is very frightening. Both their abilities are very frightening."

“The strange thing is that they set up such a large battle, but in the labyrinth, they didn’t harm me or Yu Hua,” You Zhengping said. “Director, I think these two Destroyers are different from before. We can try to sit down and discuss with them.”

Faced with You Zhengping’s recommendation, Director Xiao said, “Perhaps there are some Destroyers who have goodwill towards the world. Zhen Li, for example. We do hope that not every Destroyer is as unbridled as 192. Perhaps we can sit down and discuss with these two Destroyer, but how can you be sure they aren’t being held back from making too much of a fuss because of the black-cloaked man’s warning? Perhaps they were only willing to leave you two alive because they didn’t want to attract the black-cloaked man’s extreme measures by killing people?

“There’s good and bad in everything. We’re willing to consider the good side, but if I negotiate with these two Destroyers face to face, then it must be under the condition that they have been brought under control by us, like Zhen Li and Yuan Luori!

“Above all, remember, the safety of the people, the safety of the nation, the safety of the world cannot be left up to luck!”

“Yes, sir!” all the Protectors, including You Zhengping, said in unison.

Director Xiao sighed. “According to You Zhengping’s description, their target is Yu Hua. Since Yu Hua became a member of Zhen Li’s studio, I guessed that this development would come. Sooner or later, someone would get their eyes on him.”

The reason Director Xiao hadn’t forced Yu Hua to leave the studio was that he was a Protector’s relative. If anything happened, the Protection Organization would notice it at once. If it had been someone else, the Protection Organization many not necessarily have been as highly efficient as today.

“We don’t know what the new Destroyers’ next step will be. At present, it appears that it will have to involve Yu Hua and Zhen Li’s studio.” Director Xiao ordered, “Our next operation is to protect Yu Hua. We can’t let the Destroyers take action against him again!”

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Author’s Note:

Yu Hua: I’m getting a little hard of hearing in my old age. You said you’re going to protect... whom?

## CHAPTER 54



It was night. In Yuan Luori's legal study livestream, Yuan Luori was sitting on the floor reading, from time to time stroking the head of the dog next to him. The livestream was very quiet. There was only the sound of him turning pages.

Director Ha occasionally gave an enormous yawn and licked its nose, resisting Yuan Luori's gesture of petting its head.

The body it had chosen was a dog that had died of canine parvovirus. Destroyer 192 had been willing to spend points to get medicine to heal the body of the rent boy, but it hadn't bothered to heal the body of a dog that it had only planned to temporarily use for less than an hour. It had only given the dog a little energy so it could move.

But Yu Hua had absorbed its System, and it had to stay in this body forever.

When it had first become a dog, Director Ha had wanted to die. But death wasn't so easy. Starvation, pain, bloody stools... Facing death was frequently more frightening than death itself.

Because of one instance of bloody stool caused by the parvovirus, Director Ha had been unable to stand it any longer and had used its small amount of remaining spirit energy to heal the disease. Adding in that Lian Yufan had noticed Director Ha's state of health and had taken it to get some shots, it had now basically recovered from the parvovirus.

Because of this illness, Lian Yufan had secretly cursed Yu Hua several times for being a cheapskate and buying a dog that was about to die. He would even take advantage of a dog. He wasn't human.

However unsatisfied he was with the human resources director, Lian Yufan still couldn't allow a pitiful little doggy to die like this. He had paid out of his own pocket to get the dog treatment.

When he had taken Director Ha to the vet, the little husky's blue eyes had been full of complicated emotions. If Director Lian had known that it had been the one who had broken his spine... Thinking of this, Director Ha had been unable to resist sticking its tail between its legs.

Lian Yufan had also thrown away the inferior dog food Yu Hua had bought, saying that if they wanted the dog to attract fans, its fur had to be bright. If it ate this type of dog food, its fur would fall out.

Between the shots and buying top quality dog food, nutritional paste, probiotics, and other such pet items, Lian Yufan had spent quite a lot of money.

Even so, Director Ha's health still wasn't very good. At only three months old, the dog was shedding severely. These past few days, the environmental maintenance director Yuan Luori had been brought to a state of collapse by sweeping dog hair. However he swept with a broom, he couldn't sweep it all. He had to use a mop with a sponge to wipe it bit by bit. He had to wipe several times a day.

Yuan Luori had put in a request to purchase a vacuum cleaner. He was waiting for Yu Hua to examine and approve it on Monday.

Director Ha knew that it was frail. It couldn't grow fur nearly as fast as it shed it. It didn't want to live, but diarrhea was too painful and hunger was too unpleasant. It had to get better and eat. Since it had decided to live on in spite of itself, it had to wait patiently for new levelers to arrive, long for the Clearing League's people to rescue it.

But before it was rescued, Director Ha didn't want to be a bald husky, so it resisted Yuan Luori's habit of petting it while he studied. But...

It felt so nice to be petted!

It was a dog's nature to like being stroked and having its fur combed. Although Director Ha was trapped in this body, it still couldn't control this nature.

Sometimes it shook its head to refuse Yuan Luori's petting, using a howl under fifty decibels to protest, and sometimes it involuntarily raised its front paws to pat Yuan Luori's hand as he flipped pages, making him pet it at the same time.

Yuan Luori was an expert at long distance archery. His fingers were long, slender, and powerful. He used just the right strength to pet. The canine nature couldn't resist this sort of touch. Director Ha narrowed its eyes in spite of itself, stretched out its neck, and voluntarily put its chin on Yuan Luori's thigh.

When it noticed its disgraceful behavior, it gave another miserable howl of less than fifty decibels, defiantly got away from Yuan Luori, and curled up in a corner.

The man and the dog's miraculous interactions had the livestream fans going crazy from laughter:

[Is this...a real life version of "your mouth is saying no but your body is saying yes?"]

[I really admire Yuan Luori for being able to concentrate on reading with such a little tsundere next to him.]

[What? Why are they raising the dog to be a cat?]

[Ah, graduate exams are bitter. If I can look up once in a while while studying and look at Yuan Luori-xiaogege's godly face and Director Ha's short fur, the bitterness in my heart becomes sweet.]

["Short fur" is a wonderful expression. It's very euphemistic of you not to say "balding."]

There were many people in the livestream but few comments in the barrage. The people accompanying Yuan Luori in study would only look at the video to take in the young man and the dog and post a comment for their fellow enthusiasts during their breaks.

Yuan Luori was a typical example of the thick-haired staying up late crew. He livestreamed every night starting at 11 PM and ending at 2 AM, three hours in total. Today, when he had studied until a little past one, the livestream picture suddenly shook and went off.

The fans were puzzled, but Yuan Luori had never arranged livestream times with the fans. He had always done as he liked. It was normal for him to be a little early or a little late. The fans could only lament that he had gone to bed early tonight.

When the livestream disconnected, Yuan Luori was also surprised. He picked up his phone and looked at it over and over, suspecting that he had accidentally touched some button.

“I really wouldn’t have expected you to fall to this level.” A voice appeared in the room out of nowhere. Yuan Luori followed the sound and suddenly a person who had been tied up was tossed from the direction of the voice.

This person who had been tied up once again was Zhen Li. Zhen Li bumped right into Yuan Luori, knocking off his glasses.

The person who had mocked Yuan Luori was Huan Zixu. He and Feng Kui entered directly through the wall of the studio. Like he had altered the escape room during the day, Feng Kui had covered the studio’s walls with a super alloy while Yuan Luori had been livestreaming. He had controlled the wall into opening a door, then calmly walked in with Huan Zixu.

“Who are you people?” Zhen Li asked in an aggrieved, quiet voice and rolled on the ground twice. He was only cannon fodder on the Clearing League’s outskirts. He didn’t have the seniority to see management level individuals like Feng Kui and Huan Zixu.

Everyone wanted to tie him up. Yuan Luori had come and tied him up, Director Ha had forced him to eat paper, and now these two unfamiliar levelers also wanted to tie him up! If this was what you had to put with being boss, then he didn’t want to be the boss!

“You still aren’t qualified to speak to us,” Huan Zixu said loftily. “Yuan Luori, oh, Yuan Luori, and here I thought you had potential.”

He looked down upon Yuan Luori huddled and kneeling on the floor. He couldn’t quite understand why he was maintaining this posture. Where was Yuan Luori’s vigilance?

As Huan Zixu was wondering this, he saw Yuan Luori squint and grope around wildly on the ground. He said, “Where are my glasses? My glasses?”

Having lost his glasses, Yuan Luori felt that even his hearing had stopped working. He couldn’t tell who the person speaking was.

Huan Zixu: "..."

"Over here," Zhen Li told Yuan Luori. "At your five o'clock, about three meters."

"Which direction is five o'clock?" Yuan Luori groped around like a headless fly.

Seeing Yuan Luori's sorry state, Feng Kui moved his long fingers slightly. A string of liquid metal wrapped around the glasses and formed into a mechanism around the arms of the glasses to keep them from falling off. Then he gave the glasses back to Yuan Luori.

"That can...keep them...from...falling off," Feng Kui said stiffly.

"Oh, thank you." Yuan Luori squinted and looked at the anti-slip grip. He put the glasses on and shook his head. He found that it was indeed hard for them to fall off and repeatedly said thank you.

"There's...another...little device." Feng Kui tapped the top of his outer ear.

Yuan Luori felt around on the anti-slip grip and found a tiny button. He touched it lightly, and the anti-slip grips on both ears extended, connecting at the back of his head, fixing the glasses on his head. At the same time, the anti-slip grip turned into little dragon's paw clips, firmly fixed to the arms of the glasses.

It was unclear what material the anti-slip grip at the back of the head was made of. It was evidently metal, but it was rather soft, like rubber, and didn't hurt the back of the head.

Yuan Luori touched the button again, and the anti-slip grips resumed their original forms, becoming ordinary silver-colored metal.

"That's great. Thank you so much," Yuan Luori said gratefully again.

Feng Kui let out a happy mechanical chuckle.

Huan Zixu was expressionless. The atmosphere he had created before walking through the door had vanished without a trace.

"Awoooo!" A dog's howl, under fifty decibels, came from a corner. Director Ha boldly charged up into front of Yuan Luori and barked at Huan Zixu in a voice that didn't violate the law.

"Xiao Er..." Yuan Luori was rather moved. He had heard that dogs protected people, but he hadn't expected Director Ha to charge up and protect him under these circumstances.

If anyone here had understood dog language, what they would have heard was: "Huan Zixu, help, it's me, it's me!"

Unfortunately, there was no one to understand Director Ha's inexpressible cry for help.

"This is a good dog. Too bad it's fallen among bad company." Huan Zixu's gaze coldly swept over Director Ha. Feng Kui understood. He raised his hand and dropped Director Ha into its cage, and put a metal muzzle on its mouth so it wouldn't bark loudly.

Director Ha jumped around in the cage, whimpering through its nose. But there was no one to understand its sadness, no one.

"Yuan Luori, who are they?" Zhen Li, who had been tied up into a caterpillar, wriggled slightly towards Yuan Luori.

"Two of the Clearing League's managers, Huan Zixu and Feng Kui. They're passed 199 levels. Some people said they may be more powerful than the head of the league. Especially Huan Zixu. No one knows what his ability is, but I've heard that there was a whole crowd of people who wanted to kill him, and later all those people killed each other," Yuan Luori said heavily.

His voice was calm, with a heroic tone of going to meet death. If you ignored his earlier predicament of looking for his glasses, his performance today was worthy of praise.

"Are you looking for the mission target?" Zhen Li said. "We can't contact him. We're also being forced. You can't get any information from us."

"You two are obviously bait. I had no hope of finding out the mission target's whereabouts from you." Huan Zixu looked down upon Zhen Li. "But you have at least had contact with the mission target? Just tell me something about him."

"We-we can't say," Zhen Li said, not very firmly.

"That's all right. I have ways to make you talk," Huan Zixu said.

Feng Kui cooperatively took out two metal chains studded with nails to scare Zhen and Yuan.

"I...I don't know what I can and can't say. How about you two ask. I'll say whatever I can." Zhen Li instantly gave up resisting.

Yu Hua had instructed Zhen Li that if a Destroyer had any brains, they would come to question him, and in a critical situation, apart from not giving up Yu Hua's identity, Zhen Li could say anything else. Saying it would only have the effect of creating awe, anyway.

"How could you betray the great master!" Yuan Luori angrily looked at the "traitor" Zhen Li.

"Good for you," Huan Zixu said in satisfaction. He indicated that Feng Kui should make Yuan Luori shut up.

Feng Kui tapped Yuan Luori with his finger. Yuan Luori was bound by metal fetters, unable to move. His mouth was also covered.

“Now it’s peaceful.” Huan Zixu asked Zhen Li, “What about your abilities? Even though you’ve failed at the mission and been forced to remain in this world, being controlled by the protection organization, you still couldn’t have lost your power. Is the protection organization using some means to seal your powers?”

Zhen Li obediently answered, “No, our Systems have been entirely absorbed by the mission target. Doesn’t the Clearing League know that?”

“The Clearing League has no way of communicating with this world. Apart from knowing that there is a mission target, our only information comes from the black-cloaked man’s two communications. The first time, he used Yuan Luori’s account to send a voice recording warning us not to kill innocent people. The second time, he turned on the video to torture the bomb freak. From this, we know that the mission target is the black-cloaked man, and that he can send out information regardless of the limitations of the world law.” As Huan Zixu spoke, Director Ha constantly scratched the bars of its cage.

“World law?” Zhen Li, who had been through comparatively few levels, had never heard of this concept.

“Nothing to do with you. You only need to answer questions,” Huan Zixu said coldly. “If you aren’t lying, then we levelers can’t defeat the mission target at all. Why would the System send us?”

“Huh, that’s right!” Zhen Li was thoughtful. “The great master is so awesome. The Clearing League’s head has only passed two hundred some levels, the great master passed 3,841, and he can absorb our Systems. Why would the System think a useless bunch like us could kill the great master?”

“3,841 levels?” Hearing this number, Huan Zixu’s hair stood on end, and Director Ha, who hadn’t known anything about this, also stopped scratching its cage, raising its ears and listening blankly.

“Yes.” For Zhen Li, who had only passed four levels, any number over ten was large. He was indifferent.

“Do you know what that number means?” Huan Zixu grabbed Zhen Li. “Even fifteen years ago, before the System weakened, the highest known number of levels cleared was under a thousand. How could there be someone who cleared 3,841? What kind of person is he?”

Relying on willpower to twist around the metal face mask, Yuan Luori struggled to get himself space to holler on behalf of his idol, “That’s because the great master is the only clearer! You can’t kill him!”

The clearer? Director Ha's ears quivered fiercely. Its IQ was a little higher than Yuan Luori's. It understood what it meant that the target of the System's mission was the clearer.

The target of the final mission, whom the Clearing League was going through innumerable hardships to kill, was actually the only clearer. If you would still be hunted and killed after clearing, then what was the point of them risking their lives to pass levels?

Huan Zixu, on the other hand, wasn't very astonished. He had guessed long ago that the so-called clearing mission had to be a trap. This answer resolved many of his doubts.

He didn't say so. He quietly sat cross-legged on the floor, deep in thought.

Feng Kui, hugging his knees, sat down next to Huan Zixu, looking at him in concern.

Soon, Huan Zixu issued a conclusion. "Ascending grades and passing levels through traditional means, it's absolutely impossible to clear. Our power is given to us by the System, and the System can take it away at any time. No matter how powerful, we still can't defeat the System. The clearer must have used some means to weaken the System to bring about the change fifteen years ago. After fifteen years of rehabilitation, the System issued the clearing mission, but it didn't tell us that the mission target was the only clearer..."

"The System was never counting on us to be able to kill the clearer, it was sending us on a suicide mission!"

"Is that so?" Zhen Li said blankly.

"How can you two not have come to that conclusion when you know he's the clearer?" Huan Zixu was having a hard time understanding it.

"Well..." Zhen and Yuan looked at each other helplessly.

The husky in the cage, however, jumped twice. It had just found and guessed it, but it couldn't talk!

"I'm pretty slow, but...since that's the System's plot, and we're all victims, why don't you do like we did, surrender and pay allegiance to the great master, listen to his commands?" Zhen Li advised. "The great master is a very gentle person."

Huan Zixu did in fact have plans to ally with the mission target, but he didn't want to be anyone's subordinate.

"Why would I trust the judgment of you two idiots?" Huan Zixu said coldly. "All you have to do is act according to my orders."

“I won’t obey you!” Yuan Luori said obstinately.

“Your will means nothing when faced with me.” Huan Zixu laughed lightly.

He waved his hand in the air, and four one yuan coins appeared in his palm out of nowhere.

When Huan Zixu produced the coins, Feng Kui moved. He released the restraints on Zhen and Yuan and let the four coins smoothly roll into their hands, two coins each.

One coin was to change the “impression” of Feng and Huan coming here, the other was a preparation for hunting the clearer.

After dropping the coins, Feng Kui lightly tapped on the wall, guarding Huan Zixu with one large arm. He opened a door, and the two of them left silently, leaving behind the husky that had seen everything.

Huan Zixu hadn’t paid attention to an ordinary dog that didn’t even understand human speech, and he certainly wouldn’t do anything to a “devoted protector” of a dog.

After the two of them left, Zhen Li squeezed a coin in each hand, shook his head, and said, “Weird, why was I staying at the studio tonight? Was I planning to steal one of Yuan Luori’s instant noodles while he was asleep?”

“What did you say?” Yuan Luori, who had lost his memories from just now, grabbed Zhen Li by the neck. “I thought there was a package of noodles missing. So it was you!”

The two of them grappled. The anti-slip grips on Yuan Luori’s glasses were very useful. They didn’t fall off no matter how they were hit, but he didn’t notice that there was anything the matter with the anti-slip grips.

Only the husky, which had seen through everything, banged against the cage. It was very frustrating not to be able to talk!

After their fight, Zhen Li and Yuan Luori fell asleep right on the floor of the studio. Zhen Li woke up at 7 AM and felt around in his pocket for his phone. Unexpectedly, he sent Yu Hua a message: You’re working overtime today. Go to a warehouse outside the city to pick up some clothes for me.

He also attached the address of a warehouse.

Yu Hua, who had experienced another sleepless night after Xiao You had left, read Zhen Li’s tone, which sounded like it belonged to a real boss, and raised his eyebrows. He took a screenshot of the message and posted it in the work group with the comment: *Oh?*



Yuan Luori, who had woken up at the same time, dimly posted in the group: *Oh what? The boss is telling you to go, so go!*

Yu Hua sat up among the wreckage of decaying rose petals. His face cold, he responded: *@Lian Yufan, do you perhaps have some orders, too?*

The innocent Lian Yufan, who understood everything and had been wrongly attacked, answered: ....*No.*

Lian Yufan raised the phone and said to the Protectors who had already put on their nanotech masks and fully equipped themselves, "I know where the new Destroyers are operating."

"Isn't it just Zhen Li telling his employee to work overtime? Why are you so certain?" Luo Huai said doubtfully. He didn't want to start a conversation with Lian Yufan, but this was such an obvious questionable point, and none of the others were calling it into question. It was very strange!

Lian Yufan and You Zhengping's squads, which enjoyed following the studio's livestreams, all looked woodenly at Luo Huai. Cen Xiao kindly explained, "Zhen Li and Yuan Luori dared to act like they were in charge towards Yu Hua, so they must have been brainwashed."

Luo Huai: "???"

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Author's Note:

Yu Hua: Ever since encountering Huan Zixu and Feng Kui, I seem to be having trouble with my hearing. Zhen Li, Yuan Luori, who were you two just ordering around? I didn't hear clearly.  
Zhen Li & Yuan Luori: Are we going to die when we're clear-headed again? Life is so short, boo-hoo...

## CHAPTER 55

Faced with President Zhen and Director Yuan's confusion about their positions, Yu Hua didn't lose his temper. He posted in the group chat: *I'll go pick them up. Tomorrow when we get to work, I'll hope you'll have a perfect explanation for me.*

Yuan Luori: *Leaders don't need to explain themselves when they speak.*

All the Protectors staring at the group chat: "..."

"This brainwashing ability is too scary..." third underling Xiao Ruo said, his heart fluttering with fear. "How long will Yuan Luori have to kneel tomorrow?"

Lian Yufan's expression was unhappy. "This ability is more frightening than I imagined, and hard to deal with. Zhen Li and Yuan Luori's fear of Yu Hua is deep-rooted. If they can even do this to a bone-deep impression of dominance, then won't these new Destroyers be able to do whatever they please in this world?"

Cen Xiao nodded and said, "If it had only been the metal-controlling Destroyer, we would have been able to handle it. This Destroyer who can change people's thoughts could even make us kill each other."

"Therefore, we can't send too many people on this operation," Director Xiao said heavily. "The more people there are, the more enemies we'll have."

Luo Huai volunteered himself. "Director, if a Protector is prepared, he should be able to resist for a few seconds. If I defeat and absorb the particular energy the Destroyer uses to cover the brain cortex, then I can counteract the thought changing."

Lian Yufan glanced at Luo Huai. He didn't say anything. He had never approved of the Protector Perpetuation Program, but at this moment, Lian Yufan sincerely thought in spite of himself that it was very important for the team to have a person with Luo Huai's abilities.

If the ability to remove memories had died out in Luo Huai's mother's generation and there had been no more people on earth with the same sort of ability, then faced with the new Destroyer's "thought changing," they would have had no ability to resist. He would easily have been able to infiltrate the Protection Organization, and they might even have taken the Destroyer for a friend they had grown up with since childhood.

Each person who bore a calling was undertaking a weight unimaginable to the average person.

Director Xiao said, "Your powers are unsuited to combat, and they're very precious. You would normally stay in reserve. I don't recommend that you go out to the front line."

"If I don't go, there's no way to fight this battle," Luo Huai said gravely.

You Zhengping, who had been silent since making his report, said, "Four people can go. Cen Xiao and Lian Yufan can work together to deal with the metal-controlling Destroyer, and Luo Huai and I will deal with the other one. I'll protect Luo Huai."

Director Xiao looked at You Zhengping. "These are two Destroyers who may be more powerful than 192, they'll be prepared at the warehouse, and the person they want to capture is your family member. Are you certain you can do this?"

"I am," You Zhengping said seriously.

"If you could only save Luo Huai or Yu Hua, what would you do?" Director Xiao asked. "This is a common question on reasoning tests. You always get it wrong."

While raising this question, Director Xiao looked at Lian Yufan, indicating that this Protector, who got full marks on his reasoning tests, should provide the model answer.

Lian Yufan lowered his eyelids, took a deep breath, and said, “For us Protectors, protecting ordinary people takes precedence. Reasonably speaking, if you put an ordinary person and a Protector together, the one you should save is naturally the ordinary person. But Luo Huai is different. His ability can’t be replaced. Under these circumstances, saving Luo Huai takes precedence instead. Even if the ordinary person was my own flesh and blood. Protectors must discard emotion.”

“A standard answer.” Director Xiao looked at You Zhengping. “What about you?”

You Zhengping didn’t squabble with Lian Yufan this time, or say that he was cold-blooded and unfeeling. He said firmly, “Whether it’s a test or actual combat, my answer is always the same—I want to save everyone.”

“Even if your shoulders can’t bear the weight of two people?” Director Xiao asked.

“They can!” You Zhengping said. “I have experience resisting this Destroyer’s ‘thought changing.’ My ability to resist is stronger than the others’. I’ll be able to protect Luo Huai without delay. Also, after fighting Destroyer 192 last time, my power increased. I can control the volume of my spaces, and my proficiency in long distance and control has increased by several grades. I can do it.”

As he spoke, You Zhengping pointed several meters over at the conference room’s long table. A space covered the entire ten meter long oval table. The table disappeared from the middle of the room. You Zhengping slid his palms against each other. The single space instantly split into two. The two sides moved in parallel beside each other.

After moving them, You Zhengping retracted his spaces. The originally ten meter long table had been split down the middle into two halves, and the two five meter long halves of the table had been displaced. Each showed a 50 cm cross section where it had been sliced by the space.

You Zhengping recalled his spaces, and the table lost support, sinking under the influence of gravity. Director Xiao examined the cross sections of the tables and found that the gloss on the surface was like new. The sharpest knife couldn’t have cut a wooden table so seamlessly.

After several experiences in actual combat, You Zhengping spatial ability was developing in an unpredictable direction.

When he said he could protect both people, he had absolute self-confidence.

“Fine, I’ll trust you for now. According to your plan, we’ll dispatch four people,” Director Xiao said. “But, Lian Yufan, if you encounter a situation in which it is necessary to choose, it will be up to you to remind Captain You Zhengping what choice he ought to make.”

“Yes, sir!” the four team members said in unison.

While the Protection Organization was formulating its plan, the virtuous wife Yu Hua slowly got out of bed, tossed his phone aside, and started to clean the apartment.

Roses were very romantic. He had always liked them in poems and at a distance. But it was daily necessities that supported a romantic air.

The floor was covered in crushed rose petals. They needed to be cleaned up bit by bit, and the floor, which had been stained red, had to be wiped clean bit by bit with a cloth.

The floor was easy enough to wipe, but the stained bedding wasn't so easy to take care of. Luckily, Yu Hua had known You Zhengping's plan ahead of time, so he had changed to white bedding in the morning ahead of time. Pure white bedding could be soaked in bleach to clean it. Bleach could wash off all the stains. If it had been bedding with a decorative pattern, then the original pattern would have been washed out along with the rose color.

The stained bedding had to be soaked for a while before it would be clean. After he had soaked the sheets, quilt cover, and pillowcases, Yu Hua took a shower and casually cooked himself a bowl of congee. Having gotten through breakfast, he put on rubber gloves and cleaned the bedding.

Only after cleaning the bedding, drying it, and hanging it on the clothes rack did Yu Hua at last put on his suit, pick up his briefcase, and prepare to do what President Zhen had ordered.

Xiao You hadn't driven his car when he had left last night, leaving their off-road car to Yu Hua. When Yu Hua arrived in the underground parking lot, he looked at their car. Recalling Feng Kui's abilities yesterday, he was worried that their car would be destroyed in the battle. He had bought this car less than half a year ago.

After a moment's hesitation, Yu Hua used an app to call a taxi. After getting in, he told the driver to give him a receipt. When he went to work tomorrow, he was going to print out the electronic receipt, put it on an acupuncture mat, and make Zhen Li and Yuan Luori kneel on the receipt on the acupuncture mat without being allowed to tear the receipt. He also had to apply for reimbursement.

By the time Yu Hua left after his dawdling, it was already 10 AM, and the warehouse Huan Zixu had chosen was in the suburbs. It would take an hour to drive there. At 9 AM, when Yu Hua was still washing bedding, Huan Zixu started pacing circles around the warehouse, watching every car passing by.

Also at 10 AM, You Zhengping arrived near the warehouse with the rest of the team. He used a space to screen the armored car. The four of them sat inside the car, waiting patiently.

You Zhengping opened a small hole in the space in the location of the car window. They hid behind a tree. The tree's branches blocked the location of the car window. The four of them watched the warehouse out the window with binoculars.

"The long-haired one is the Destroyer who can change people's thoughts?" Lian Yufan asked.

"It must be him," You Zhengping said. "He's the one who dropped the coin on me yesterday. He must need a medium to use his ability. We have to avoid any item he drops."

"Why isn't Yu Hua here yet? It was already pretty late when we set out," Luo Huai said, looking at his watch. "Starting out from your house, no matter how slowly he drove, he should be here by now, right?"

"Well..." You Zhengping thought of the floor covered in roses and suddenly felt a little guilty.

"I'm not certain he'll come," Lian Yufan said heavily. "The greatest likelihood is that he went to the studio to teach Yuan Luori a lesson and falsify the accounts to take away all of Zhen Li's salary, then order Zhen Li and Yuan Luori to come get the stuff."

Cen Xiao said, "...Why wouldn't he take away Yuan Luori's wages?"

Lian Yufan's tone was indignant. "Yuan Luori has never seen a hint of his wages!"

Cen Xiao hadn't thought that Yu Hua, who was extremely gentle, polite, and caring to them, would be such a frightening exploiter at work that it would strike terror into even a person like Lian Yufan. He said, "...You really do have it hard at work, but what do we do if Yu Hua doesn't come?"

"It's better if he doesn't. We'll just fight," Lian Yufan said. "Now I'm worried he's still going to come. If we get halfway through fighting and he gets here, there'll be trouble. When do you think he'll come?"

The last sentence was addressed to You Zhengping. You Zhengping didn't do housework, so he didn't know how long it would take to wash the bedding. He couldn't answer Lian Yufan's question.

Both sides could only wait patiently. Huan Zixu hesitantly said, "Why hasn't he come yet? Is he not planning on coming?"

Feng Kui had connected to the traffic surveillance cameras on the road near Yu Hua's home the night before. He hadn't seen Yu Hua's license plate number the whole time. He shook his head and said, "I haven't seen...his car."

"That's not right, I made Zhen Li order Yu Hua to leave right away at 7 AM. One way or another, he should have been here by nine. It's past ten-thirty now!" Huan Zixu said in incomprehension.

“It may be...because...of this.” Feng Kui handed Huan Zixu a phone.

The page on the phone was the Zhen Li Studio’s official account. At 10:50, Zhen Li had posted a picture, an announcement written by hand in black ink on white paper. The title “Public Announcement” had been written so it looked a lot like “Funeral Announcement<sup>20</sup>.”

*Public (Funeral) Announcement: Due to speaking rudely to Director Yu, Zhen Li and Yuan Luori must recuperate. Livestreams may cease for the next three days, or they may livestream while injured, or the people appearing in the next livestream may not be Zhen Li and Yuan Luori. Please understand.*

[I joined Yuan Luori-xiaogege’s CaoYuanLuoRi<sup>21</sup> (the name of Yuan Luori’s fans) last night because of the husky. I don’t really understand why a leader would have to stop livestreaming because of being rude to a mere director. Isn’t it normal for a leader to be harsh with his subordinates?]

[The comment upstairs is going to catch a lot of heat. You’ll go right to the top.]

[What the hell kind of name is Grasslands Sunset? How did you Yuan Luori fans think up such a fine and inharmonious name?]

[It’s normal for a leader to be harsh to his subordinates, but you have to distinguish who is the leader and who is the subordinate.]

[I’ve been gone only three days and the Zhen Li livestream world has turned into this? Do you new people not even know who the real boss is in the studio?]

[I actually think that stopping the livestream for three days is a light punishment. I would have thought it would be a month in a of livestreaming sliding knees and durian.]

[I’m Zhen Li, I’ve already bought my grave (calm face).]

[I’m Yuan Luori, I’ve already bought my grave (resigned face).]

Huan Zixu: “...”

The contents of many of the comments used jargon, but while Huan Zixu, who had a tremendously abundant stockpile of knowledge, couldn’t understand perfectly, he was still able to work out the truth about the studio from a few scattered words.

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<sup>20</sup> 公告 (public announcement) versus 讣告 (funeral announcement).

<sup>21</sup> 草原落日 - adding an extra character to Yuan Luori’s full name to get a phrase meaning something like “grasslands sunset.”

“Crap, I’ve made a big mistake!” Huan Zixu was startled.

The “impression” he had given Zhen Li and Yuan Luori was that they had to order Yu Hua to go to the warehouse to pick something up at 7 AM. That was normal. Zhen Li was the studio’s president, Yuan Luori was a director of the same rank as Yu Hua, it made sense for the two of them to give Yu Hua orders.

But this announcement had toppled Huan Zixu’s understanding. In the studio, Zhen Li and Yuan Luori depended on and were yoked by Yu Hua.

This conflicted with the “impression” he had left behind. When Zhen and Yuan realized that their behavior was inconsistent with their knowledge, then however stupid they were, they would still know something was wrong.

“If I were Zhen Li, I would definitely think of a way to contact the protection organization and the black-cloaked man.” Huan Zixu laughed bitterly. “We may have to face a concerted attack from two powerful forces. What a big mistake!”

Thinking of how the black-cloaked man could absorb the energy of their System, Huan Zixu was worried. He didn’t care about the protection organization. He had been prepared for Lian Yufan to discover that there was something unusual about his colleagues. He had deliberately lured in the protection organization’s people, planning to make Yu Hua “vanish from the mortal world” and simultaneously give the protection organization the impression that “we saw the black-cloaked man kill Yu Hua with our own eyes,” forcing the protection organization to be at odds with the black-cloaked man. Then he would stealthily investigate whether the black-cloaked man’s strength and moral conduct were worthy of trust.

If it had only been the protection organization, that would have been fine, but if the black-cloaked man also came...

Huan Zixu ground his teeth. “Let’s retreat for now.”

“We can’t...retreat.” Feng Kui took Huan Zixu’s hand. “We’re...already...at this stage.”

Huan Zixu looked into Feng Kui’s eyes, where the emotion of “fear” had already been deleted, and understood what his companion meant. Since Zhen Li and Yuan Luori had very likely already notified the mission target, then they were no longer in the shadows. The longer they dragged this out, the more likely it was that they would be discovered by the black-cloaked man.

Whereas if the protection organization and the black-cloaked man arrived at roughly the same time now, if they could lure the two sides in a battle, they might still achieve their goal.

“You’re right.” Huan Zixu gripped Feng Kui’s hand. “We only have this opportunity. It’s fight or die!”

Meanwhile, Yu Hua got out of the taxi and got a phone call from Zhen Li. Zhen Li said shakily over the phone, "Well...Director Yu, I've already posted the public announcement according to your orders. Could you forgive this unworthy one for his rudeness?"

Around 10:30 AM, Zhen Li had looked at the messages on his phone and immediately realized that something was wrong. He had quickly called Yu Hua to beg for mercy. Yu Hua's tone, however, had been very kindly. He had told Zhen Li that it would be all right if he posted a public announcement demonstrating his sincerity at 10:50.

Yu Hua's tone had given Zhen Li a sense of the end of days. He had quickly gone online to order a two person complete set of tickets for individual travel on a Maldives honeymoon. He had booked first-class plane tickets and a five-star hotel, six days round trip, and sent Yu Hua a screenshot, telling him that this was an employee benefit, and he could go with You Zhengping.

The honeymoon tickets had practically emptied out the savings Zhen Li had accumulated from his livestreams and the performance at the mall, but he thought that, for the sake of his life, it was worth it!

As expected, Yu Hua said over the phone, "Thank you very much for your care. You go ahead and livestream normally tomorrow."

He didn't mention Yuan Luori at all.

Zhen Li wiped away sweat, feeling that he had protected his life. He hung up and looked at Yuan Luori, who was still muttering, "Who cares what I said to him, I won't apologize, he can beat me to death and I still won't apologize." Zhen Li was so worried his hair was about to start falling out.

Yu Hua looked in satisfaction at the Maldives individual travel tickets and nodded. He walked over to the warehouse. When he appeared in the line of sight of the Protection Organization, the four team members became nervous.

"Move!" You Zhengping said.

He closed the small hole in the space, entirely hiding the armored car, and controlled the space to move quickly but covertly towards the warehouse.

Huan Zixu had also seen Yu Hua. He put on the alloy belt Feng Kui had prepared for him and determined that the alloy insignias at his chest, collar, knees, and other locations were all installed. This alloy didn't come from the System. Feng Kui had made them out of his own metal skeleton. Wearing the insignias and the belt amounted to Feng Kui using his body to protect Huan Zixu.



Huan Zixu put on a peaked cap. The cap also had an insignia. He walked out of the warehouse to meet Yu Hua. “Hello, I’m the manager of the warehouse. Chief Zhen called me ahead of time. Everything is inside. Please come in.”

“Chief Zhen?” Yu Hua’s tone was strange. He swept his gaze over Huan Zixu. “This is the first time I’ve heard someone call Zhen Li that.”

That was in keeping with his character as the overlord of the studio. Huan Zixu had no suspicions. He only stiffly continued his performance. “Director Yu, I’m only a worker. Everyone is a chief to me. Here is a detailed list of items. Please verify and accept it.”

As soon as Yu Hua had arrived here, he had felt a hidden spatial energy speeding towards the warehouse. The Protectors had also come. If he didn’t faint or have his impression changed under these circumstances, then he would be forced to “know” about the existence of special ability users.

That wouldn’t do. He had to be an ordinary person, had to live a peaceful life.

Before the space reached them, Yu Hua quickly snatched the list and felt the “you are going to sleep, then forget everything that happened today” information coming from it. He obediently fainted.

At the same time, the space reached the air above the warehouse. You Zhengping, wearing the handsome uncle nanotech mask, jumped out of the space as Huan Zixu was about to scoop up the unconscious Yu Hua. He delivered a heavy flying kick to Huan Zixu’s back and got ahead of him to take Yu Hua into his arms.

The battle was on the verge of breaking out.

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Author’s Note:

You Zhengping: I’m the one who gets to protect my husband!

Yu Hua: I’ve been hugged by Xiao You. A whole day’s worth of gloomy feelings have been cleared away.

## CHAPTER 56

When Yu Hua had fallen into his hands and been snatched away, naturally Huan Zixu wanted to snatch him back. Yu Hua was crucial to his plan. He had to disappear from the mortal world for a time. If the Protection Organization took him, the “impression” would be out of alignment, and all his efforts with “false exchange” would be meaningless.

Huan Zixu’s ability truly wasn’t suitable for actual combat, but his body had gone through the evolution and upgrades of over a hundred worlds. His strength, agility, and experience were all

high grade. When he was equipped with an entire lower leg bone of Feng Kui's, his combat abilities were fairly frightening.

He and Feng Kui had worked together countless times. Feng Kui would cooperate with him to control the metal according to his muscular impulses.

When the person who had jumped out of the air took Yu Hua, Huan Zixu reacted at once. He aimed at You Zhengping with one hand and curled the other hand into a fist, aiming it towards the empty space above You Zhengping's head where he had appeared from. In accordance with his movements, his alloy wrist guards turned two spring-loaded arrows, and scores of one yuan coins rapidly shot towards You Zhengping, Cen Xiao, and the others.

But there weren't ordinary coins. At this speed, the coins could pass through a human body. And the coins had been shot out by Huan Zixu, so it was very likely they had the power to change people's thoughts. Whether they received direct hits or glancing blows, they might still be brainwashed. They had to dodge.

But there were many coins, scattering and revolving as they flew like a heavenly maiden dispensing flowers. The attack range of the coins was about three meters. It was hard to dodge entirely relying on the speed of a human body. This showed that Huan Zixu's aim wasn't to harm anyone; it was to hit the Protectors with the coins!

You Zhengping was calm. He held the "unconscious" Yu Hua with one arm and lightly curled the other hand, closing the entrance to the second space, letting the coins attacking the three people in the space all hit the outside of the space, coming up empty.

As for himself, You Zhengping caught all the coins that might fall on him and Yu Hua with one hand.

Huan Zixu hadn't seen this handsome uncle's face and didn't know that the Protector in front of him was the ordinary You Zhengping he had seen yesterday. Seeing the "handsome uncle Protector" catching the coins, Huan Zixu smiled faintly.

But halfway through his smile, You Zhengping threw back the coins in his hand just as fast, aimed straight at Huan Zixu.

Huan Zixu's alloy belt became a thin but extremely sturdy shield, blocking and collecting the coins You Zhengping had thrown back.

You Zhengping snapped his fingers slightly. The space hiding his teammates opened. Cen Xiao, Lian Yufan, and Luo Huai, wearing plain masks, appeared in midair, falling beside You Zhengping.

The rumble of an armed vehicle shook the ground. An armed vehicle that was over a hundred tons of metal drove out of the warehouse. Huan Zixu leapt back and jumped onto the armed vehicle, warily watching the four Protectors.

“You already know about my ability,” Huan Zixu said confidently. “Brainwashing Zhen Li and Yuan Luori really did reveal too much information. I was careless.”

You Zhengping’s voice went through the voice changing device and became deep and resounding. “Up to now, you two haven’t done any real harm to our world. As long as you show good faith, we’re willing to work with you.”

Lian Yufan looked at You Zhengping. Director Xiao had told them to capture first and negotiate later, but You Zhengping was displaying the intent to negotiate ahead of time.

“Work together how? Show good faith how?” Huan Zixu pointed at his head. The System had placed self-destruct devices in their brains. As long as the System existed, it was impossible for them to work with the Protection Organization.

This was also why, after accepting the clearing mission, Huan Zixu couldn’t entirely trust the black-cloaked man no matter what, had to test his abilities and his intelligence before determining whether to ally with him. He couldn’t openly say to the mission target, “Let’s team up to destroy the System.” If he said these words, he would self-destruct at once.

The reason that Destroyer 192 had dared to speak to the Protection Organization openly and force out the mission target with such fanfare was that the facts about the mission and the System had already been exposed. The System must have been aware of this, so it put no more restrictions on speaking about the contents of the mission to allow the levelers to operate within the unopened world.

You Zhengping saw Huan Zixu’s movement and understood. He sighed gently.

Director Xiao had been right again. The Destroyers and the Protectors were opposed. If the black-cloaked man hadn’t absorbed Zhen Li and Yuan Luori’s Systems, the two of them would have died. Even though the new Destroyers weren’t guilty of unpardonable evil, they were controlled by the System. They couldn’t fight alongside the Protectors. If they did anything that wasn’t beneficial to the System, they would self-destruct and die.

Him thinking that they could communicate with the new Destroyers had been excessive naïveté on his part. Unless the black-cloaked man stepped in, Protectors and Destroyers couldn’t become allies. And the black-cloaked man...

You Zhengping remembered the unbelievable dream he had had the night before the date, then looked down at the “unconscious” Yu Hua.

He quickly shook his head. No, his guesses were insane, it couldn’t be.

“You have someone who can resist my ‘false exchange.’” Huan Zixu didn’t attack. He carefully considered the four faces, then raised a hand and pointed at Luo Huai. “It’s you.”

From a certain angle, the Protectors' special abilities and the powers that the levelers obtained from the System had a common source and ancestry. People with the same abilities would often have an unusual reaction. The same way that Luo Huai could check the two strains of particular energy in You Zhengping's brain, Huan Zixu could tell at a glance what was special about Luo Huai.

Seeing that Huan Zixu had identified Luo Huai, the other three protectors inadvertently stood in front of Luo Huai to protect him.

"As for you..." Huan Zixu narrowed his eyes and looked at You Zhengping. "You don't seem to have a mind control sort of ability. Either your mental force is particularly strong, equipped with a certain degree of defenses, or else...you're a spatial ability user, you covered your hand with a thin space, and my coins didn't make direct contact with your skin."

Right, it was the second one.

You Zhengping wasn't certain whether the mental force in his brain that had protected him would continue to be effective. He wasn't going to run that risk, so he had covered his hand with his shape-changing third space. Before, he had used the third space as steps. Now he was using it as gloves.

Seeing that Huan Zixu had guessed their combat methods after only one exchange, the four of them became increasingly nervous. It seemed that this would be a fierce battle.

But Huan Zixu ably said, "I don't want to harm anyone. I only want to slightly alter your abilities. Also, I need to borrow Yu Hua for a few days. I hope you can cooperate with me."

"Do you believe what you're saying?" Lian Yufan said loftily.

"If you don't believe me, we'll have to fight." Huan Zixu sighed. "So you think that because you have a mental ability user, you can do whatever you please? Mental ability users with the same attributes can still suppress each other. We'll see whose power is stronger!"

Then, without any warning, two chains drilled out of the ground, one curling towards Yu Hua, one attacking Luo Huai.

Huan Zixu had never said useless words to his enemies. If he was speaking to his opponents, it had to be to cover up Feng Kui's actions.

You Zhengping's reaction wasn't slow. He put Yu Hua into his second space, so Feng Kui couldn't capture him. He also didn't abandon Luo Huai. His other hand grabbed the chain attacking him.

But just then, the chain that had been aimed at Yu Hua suddenly turned towards Luo Huai. Luo Huai was the target of both of these chains. The attack on Yu Hua had been a feint all along.

Huan Zixu's priority wasn't Yu Hua, it was to attack Luo Huai, who could restrain his ability!

The second chain split into eight in midair, wrapping tightly around Luo Huai. But the instant the chains captured Luo Huai, Lian Yufan grabbed one of the thin chains. The chain broke at his grasp. The other seven thin chains, still binding Luo Huai, flew towards the armed vehicle.

Lian Yufan was calm. He pressed his palms together, closing the broken thin chain between them. The chains that had been speeding towards Huan Zixu were pulled back by the assembling force in Lian Yufan's hands, gathering together once more into one thick chain. Luo Huai was returned to the protective circle of his comrades in arms.

Though he disliked You Zhengping and didn't acknowledge his point of view, when You Zhengping was hard-pressed to take care of both people, Lian Yufan's first reaction was to make up for You Zhengping's shortfall, protecting Luo Huai.

"Assembly power..." Huan Zixu's easy expression became serious. "Adding in spatial power and mental power... Don't you control too much of the natural law power?"

The natural law power? This wasn't a term that the Protectors had come across before. Huan Zixu's words gave the young Protectors pause.

"When did special ability users first appear in your world?" Huan Zixu asked.

"He must want to distract us by talking again to let his companion act in secret. We can't listen to his nonsense again," Lian Yufan, the most rational, said firmly.

Lian Yufan was aware that what the Destroyer in front of him wanted to say was very important, but faced with a choice, he firmly chose to carry out the mission—drain the source of the Destroyers' power, capture the Destroyers!

Lian Yufan tightly grasped the chain he had assembled. If he had guessed right, this had come from the body of the armed vehicle Destroyer. If he only had enough power, he could drag over the main body!

Bean-sized beads of sweat rolled down Lian Yufan's forehead. Feng Kui's body trembled uncontrollably, actually moving towards Lian Yufan.

"Up!" Lian Yufan yelled. His veins were popping. The armed vehicle shaped Feng Kui rose into the air. His hundreds of tons were actually being dragged over by Lian Yufan!

The armed car turned slightly, dropping Huan Zixu so he wouldn't be taken.

"Fire!" Lian Yufan called when Feng Kui flew up.

Cen Xiao threw several petrol bombs into the air. High heat roaring flames rose up to the sky, a sea of fire encircling Feng Kui.

The strongest metal would still disappear in the face of high heat. If Cen Xiao concentrated all of his power on the temperature, he could instantly release a temperature of over ten thousand degrees. Any metal would melt under that temperature!

Just in time, Feng Kui used his points to equip a condensation spray from the System and sprayed it in all directions, counteracting the high temperature Cen Xiao had created.

He changed shape, turning into an over three meter tall mechanical skeleton. The white steam of the reaction between the high temperature and the condensation spray billowed all around. As soon as the mechanical skeleton walked out of the white steam, it was encircled by Cen Xiao and Lian Yufan.

Lian Yufan was holding his arm. The hundreds of tons of weight were too much. But it didn't matter. Last time he had broken his spine. The spine was a very important location. If it hadn't healed right, his whole body would have been paralyzed. This time he had only broken one arm. He could keep fighting.

The instant Huan Zixu dropped off of Feng Kui, before he could assist Feng Kui, he was encircled by You Zhengping and Luo Huai acting in tacit cooperation.

"I'm sorry, I need to use you. Please help me." Sadness flashed through Luo Huai's eyes. Five faint stars flew up from his arm and encircled Huan Zixu.

It wasn't that Luo Huai didn't have any combat abilities. It was that he had always been unwilling to use others' memories as a mental attack.

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Author's Note:

Sleeping Beauty Yu Hua (frantic enough to lose his hair): I'd been planning to use their battle as a diversion, change into the black cloak, and show up to clear the field, but Xiao You has stuck me into his space, and breaking out of it would hurt Xiao You. What should I do? Please assist, waiting online!

Yu Hua: Too clever for his own good.

Yu Hua: Xiao You's space is very warm and safe. Am I the first person to be in here?

Cen Xiao: ...I was the first one...

Yu Hua: You're really putting yourself out there.

## CHAPTER 57

No one knew better than Luo Huai what a frightening weapon "emotions" were. Starting from childhood, he had been engaged in the work of treating Protectors and their relatives.

If a Protector chose to marry an ordinary person, they would either conceal their identity until death or their spouse would constantly receive psychological treatment under the Protection Organization's auspices. When they were near collapse, it would be up to Luo Huai to step in to free them.

In the end, there were few family members whose willpower was as staunch as You Zhengping's father You Guodong's, who was a military man. Many more of them were only ordinary people.

Even among Protectors, when they were released from active service after being wounded, it was hard to avoid suffering from PTSD. They would be plagued by nightmares and excessive anxiety, perhaps even harming the people around them.

Decades ago, mental type Protectors only operated in secret. At the time, neither the country nor society had had a consummate system of psychological theory. They hadn't attached enough importance to the psychological states of the Protectors and their relatives. They had taken many wrong paths and brought about many tragedies.

Starting from the generation of Luo Huai's mother Luo Wenyun, the Protection Organization had begun to attach importance to the work of psychological coaching. But Luo Wenyun had touched too many negative emotions. At first she had been very happy to help her teammates and their relatives, willing to make contributions towards everyone's happiness.

But in the process of absorbing their memories, of course she would come into contact with negative emotions. Over time, this had created a great burden on her mental state. She had become dazed. Stories that didn't belong to her often appeared in her dreams. Gradually she became afraid of dreaming, not daring to go to sleep. Each night she would sit up in bed, waiting for daylight.

When daylight came, she could stay awake no longer. She would lean on her pillow, sleeping lightly for an hour or two then be startled awake by a nightmare.

Luo Wenyun's youthful appearance withered day by day. She accepted the Protector Perpetuation Program almost with pleasure. She longed for another Protector with mental powers to help her shoulder the burden.

When Luo Huai was born and displayed a special ability, Luo Wenyun was happy. But everyone had overlooked what a burden giving birth was on a woman's body and mind. In normal times, Luo Wenyun had barely been able to stand up to the negative emotions, and it was even worse in the weak period following birth.

Before her death, Luo Wenyun left behind a suicide note. She had written that there was no need to grieve for her. She was very happy to finally be able to sleep. It was so good not to have to bear others' dreams any longer. The only thing that made her sad was that she was deserting a battlefield that belonged solely to her. She could no longer offer her power to the

nation and the people. But...she was sorry. While she seemed intact on the outside, she was inwardly full of holes. She truly had no way to keep fighting.

In fact, Luo Wenyun had also developed a mental illness, but the physician could not heal herself. She could save other people's souls, but no one could save her.

Luo Huai had completely inherited his mother's special ability, and he was even more powerful than her. Luo Huai could not only absorb and preserve others' memories, he could also release these memories to influence other people.

He very rarely used this ability. Whether the emotions were good or bad, they were all someone's treasure. Luo Huai felt that he had no right to use these memories.

Only when facing an enemy would he awaken the memories of Protectors who had already passed, requesting these elders to fight with him.

The five stars surrounded Huan Zixu. As a mental ability user himself, Huan Zixu understood the nature of these stars at a glance. He attempted to dodge, but how could the body throw off the speed of thought?

The memories belonging to senior Protectors instantly wrapped around Huan Zixu. These were memories from fifty years ago and more. At that time, technology had not been developed enough, communication had not been smooth enough, the people not rich enough, and the Protectors had been facing the Destroyers while the System was at its prime.

The fragments of memory didn't show what the Destroyers' missions had been. The Protectors weren't clear on what goals the Destroyers had. They only knew that the Destroyer in front of them had created a landslide to kill a village full of people. All they felt was hatred and the certainty of victory.

Their weapons, communications, and technology were all inferior to their opponent. All the Protectors could rely on was conviction and sacrifice.

In a daze, Huan Zixu "saw" an elderly Protector leap forward to grab him while another young Protector wielded a sword of light, tearfully stabbing the elderly Protector and the Destroyer at once. Then he knelt on the ground and collapsed into sobs, desperately wiping the fresh blood off his hands.

What Luo Huai had absorbed had been the young Protector's nightmare. This was something that the young Protector had been unable to forget after retiring. During his first battle, he had killed his teacher and military instructor with his own hands. Even fifty years later, he couldn't forget those blood-stained hands. Ten years ago, when the fifteen-year-old Luo Huai had seen him, the sixty-something years old man, his legs paralyzed, had been holding a vegetable knife and scraping the skin off his palms as though removing the scales from a fish. He had already removed a layer of skin, but he seemed not to feel the pain.



A lifetime of pain couldn't be healed with even with decades of treatment.

Luo Huai undertook this work willingly. A Protector who had struggled for the sake of the world for half a lifetime, a family member who had supported a Protector heart and soul—if even these people couldn't be happy, then the world was truly too unfair. Since he was the only one who could heal these people, then he was willing, though he would also be injured because of it.

The moment that the sword of light in the memory ran through him, Huan Zixu felt a bone-piercing sadness. He couldn't even tell what was real. He only wanted to chop off those blood-stained hands. When his head had just cleared up a little, he was encircled by another star and sank into another Protector's bitter memory.

While Huan Zixu was immersed in Luo Huai's emotion attack, You Zhengping quietly opened his second space. After upgrading during the battle last time, his second space, which he used to hold people, could be separated into two. One held Yu Hua, and he used the other to seize Huan Zixu.

The door of the space opened noiselessly. As long as he could trap Huan Zixu in it, Huan Zixu's powers would be reduced to one tenth; he definitely wouldn't be able to break out of the space. Even if he wanted to use a high energy explosive ability like Destroyer 192, this sort of ability often did just as much damage to the user as the enemy. If he detonated a bomb in the narrow space, the first to die certainly wouldn't be You Zhengping.

Hunt the two Destroyers, take them to the trap prepared by the Protection Organization and throwing them in, use high tech weapons and attacks designed ahead of time by the Protectors to deplete their points, then wait for the two of them to use up all their points—that was when the Protectors would draw the net closed.

The moment You Zhengping caught Huan Zixu, half of the plan had succeeded.

Just as the space was about to seize Huan Zixu, his bracelet suddenly emitted a knife, cutting open the back of his hand. A splash of fresh blood merged with the five stars. The illusion of the memories instantly vanished, and the faint memories turned the vivid color of fresh blood.

The stars were only a manifestation of the energy of the memories. Reasonably speaking, they shouldn't have been controlled by "false exchange." But it was very clear that Huan Zixu's blood was special. With the blood as a medium, he was using his own mental power to cover up the memories, relying on pain and battle to clear his mind.

Luo Huai didn't even dare to use these memories to fight with again. Because Huan Zixu had "polluted" the five stars, if Luo Huai tried to control them, his mind might be controlled by Huan Zixu.

Meanwhile, the lower leg of the mechanical skeleton Feng Kui lit up faintly, and Huan Zixu's alloy belt lit up at the same time. His belt had been made out of Feng Kui's lower leg bone.

When Feng Kui called back his bone, the belt would carry Huan Zixu to Feng Kui's side at supersonic speed.

From the beginning, there was no way to separate the two of them. Feng Kui and Huan Zixu wouldn't be separated.

The supersonic speed let Huan Zixu escape You Zhengping's second space. He flew in front of Cen Xiao and the others and stood on the mechanical skeleton's wide shoulders. He smacked his hand. Even more blood gushed out of the wound made by the knife just now. Under the urging of Huan Zixu's power, it splashed on Cen Xiao and Lian Yufan.

The sudden change took place within 0.2 to 0.3 seconds. Even You Zhengping hadn't expected such a change. He and Luo Huai had already begun to move when Huan Zixu had cut the back of his hand, but they were half a beat too slow. They came to Cen Xiao and Lian Yufan's side half a second late.

Fortunately Cen Xiao and Lian Yufan were mentally prepared and firm in their convictions. They used their willpower to resist Huan Zixu's mental attack. Luo Huai arrived within one second, touched the two of them, and absorbed the false impression that Huan Zixu had given them.

Following this bout, the two sides stood opposed, each having gained new respect and understanding of the others' powers.

"I admire your willpower and conviction, and I fully understand your hatred for us." Huan Zixu's expression was rather sorrowful after being attacked by the Protectors' memories. "But, forgive me, there are also things that we have to do."

Lian Yufan saw that the metal on Huan Zixu's body came from Feng Kui's bones, and his eyes lit up. He stepped forward with a hand behind his back, making a few gestures that only Protectors would understand towards the people behind him.

To cover up that he had suddenly stepped forward, Lian Yufan loudly said, "Don't act like you have your own secret troubles. You're invaders. You've always devastated our world."

"Invaders don't always know that they're invaders." As if he had been impacted by the Protectors' memories, Huan Zixu said, "Perhaps the invaders take this for only a game. Do you feel compassion when using a group attack to take care of minor monsters in a game?"

Previous Destroyers had either died in battle or self-destructed after being captured. The Protectors hadn't had a chance to communicate with the Destroyers. It was Yu Hua absorbing the Destroyers' Systems' energy that had given the Protectors and Destroyers an opportunity to communicate.

The Protection Organization had only then learned that Zhen Li, who had only passed four levels, had simply taken this for an RPG. He had thought that the handsome uncle You Zhengping was an NPC who would give him clues to find the mission target. With Yuan Luori,

who had passed thirty-seven levels, it had also been “stupid native this” and “stupid NPC that.”

But they couldn't lower their guards against the Destroyers because of this. Destroyer 192, at least, had known perfectly well that this was a real world. Despite this, he had still used children as hostages and planted bombs on a large scale in public places. The two Destroyers in front of them also understood that they were flesh and blood, not game projections.

“Don't use not knowing as an excuse,” Lian Yufan said. “Aren't you perfectly well aware? Yet you still want to harm our world. From petty pilfering to murdering for money, apart from innately antisocial people, who doesn't go step by step from minor evils to major evils?”

When hatred already existed, it couldn't be forgiven with a single “we were tricked, too.”

Huan Zixu smiled mournfully. “You're right. So even if I'm not willing to become the enemy in your memories, I still have to do it. I'll say it again, give up Yu Hua, let me control you, and you may still survive.”

“Impossible,” You Zhengping said firmly. Following his words, a terrible bolt of lightning struck from above Huan Zixu and the mechanical skeleton's head.

While Lian Yufan had been speaking and attracting attention, You Zhengping had made his second space appear behind Huan Zixu to mislead him and make him defend against an attack from behind. At the same time, he had stealthily moved the first space, which could hold weapons and energy, above Huan Zixu's head. He had never used the first space in combat. This was his backup maneuver.

The first space contained powerful offensive energy from the older generation of Protectors. Tens of thousands of volts of electricity struck like lightning, directly hitting Feng and Huan.

It all happened too fast. Feng Kui only had time to extend his arms into long, narrow lightning rods, his legs becoming four metal conductors, channeling the lightning into the earth, keeping Huan Zixu, standing on his shoulder, from any harm.

Lian Yufan still held a length of chain that he had kept back during the battle. This was the weapon that Feng Kui had used to capture Luo Huai, and it was also a part of Feng Kui's body. They ought to be the same as the alloy on Huan Zixu.

Using a fragment to restore an entire item was easy, but using a fragment to attract a portion of the item required extremely strong control. Lian Yufan clenched his teeth, concentrating on attracting the alloy on Huan Zixu. He had to remove the means of physical attack from this mental ability user!

Feng Kui, who was concentrating on the lightning bolt, had no way to divide his attention to resist Lian Yufan's assembly power. He could only watch as the defensive metal on Huan Zixu all flew to Lian Yufan's hand. He let out a snarl.

Meanwhile, Lian Yufan, who had taken Huan Zixu's defensive items, also suffered a part of the lightning strike. While it was already considerably weakened, it still electrocuted him hard enough for his whole body to go numb.

Cen Xiao looked for his opportunity. The moment the defensive alloy items left Huan Zixu's body, he wildly threw petrol bombs, lighting the two people in front of him on fire.

Amid the flames, the tall mechanical skeleton with his whole covered in raging fire, didn't immediately react by getting a condensation spray. He curled up, protecting the small human on his shoulder in his arms. His back burned fiercely, metal bones melting, but in his arms, the temperature remained at thirty degrees.

Huan Zixu clenched his teeth and got a condensation spray, helping Feng Kui lower his temperature.

Thick white steam billowed up. The four Protectors, concerned that an unexpected attack would come through the white steam that was impairing their lines of sight, quickly retreated, going far from the steam.

Standing outside the white steam, which took a long time to clear, You Zhengping didn't know what attack the two people inside the steam would set off. As he was on his guard, his feelings were somewhat complicated.

In the labyrinth yesterday, the enormous mechanical skeleton had drawn countless pink hearts for him and Yu Hua. The little pink hearts had romantically encircled the couple. The mechanical skeleton hadn't attacked them then.

And now, he and his companions were using their powers without reservation, directing their strongest attacks against the two people in front of them without any leniency.

And the mechanical skeleton who had blessed them was tightly holding his companion, struggling amid the fierce flames.

The positions of the Protectors and Destroyers seemed to have instantly been inverted. They had always been cruelly injured by the Destroyers, but who was cruelly injuring the Destroyers?

The new Destroyers were much more powerful than 192, so why was this battle easier than the one on the roof? Because the new Destroyers hadn't taken hostages. The Protectors didn't need to protect anyone. They only had to concentrate entirely on battle.

The two Destroyer had given up more convenient means and accepted greater attacks.

"It would be better if I had taken a hostage or two beforehand," Huan Zixu's cold voice came from the white steam. "That way, you wouldn't have been so seriously injured."

“No good...*crk-crk*.” This was everyone’s first time hearing Feng Kui’s metallic-sounding voice. His words contained the sound of small parts moving.

“Oh, you...” Huan Zixu sighed in exasperation. “Don’t you have a little too much conscience?”

“70%...*crk-crk*.” Feng Kui was telling Huan Zixu that his humanity took up 70% of his storage.

Their entirely unreserved voices made the Protectors feel highly on their guard. It showed that Feng Kui and Huan Zixu had a backup plan. They really were very powerful!

“Me, though... Before I became a leveler, I suppose I was a ruthless salesman. To make a sale, I’d talk up countless useless healthcare products to sell to clueless retirees, make them stock up on the products, attract other people degree by degree and become my money-making props.” Huan Zixu laughed mockingly. “I’m not a good person. But since meeting you, I’ve had to act like a good person.”

Huan Zixu opened his hand. In his palm was a “Sales Champion” medal. This was his initial item.

Apart from abilities, the other powerful trump card was the initial item. Feng Kui’s initial item had integrated with his bones, but Huan Zixu’s initial item had never been used.

“There’s nothing I can’t sell, and no money (power) I can’t obtain.” Huan Zixu flung the “Sales Champion” medal.

Luo Huai was the first to feel that there was awful power hidden in that small medal. He quickly said to his companions, “Run, run as far as you can!”

If he had seen right, even if it didn’t make direct contact, this item would snatch a certain item away from a person, and its range was very wide.

In their first world, Huan Zixu’s initial item had had a range of less than 1 cm, pitifully small. After 199 worlds of upgrades, his initial item had a 100 meter radius.

Even if everyone had gotten away in a timely manner and Luo Huai’s warning had come fast enough, a hundred meters was still too long.

You Zhengping felt a fearful energy emptying out his second space. He stopped in his tracks and turned. He saw the mechanical skeleton holding Yu Hua in his hand.

He opened his hand. At some point, a one yuan coin had appeared in his palm.

Using his initial item, the Destroyer had “bought” Yu Hua with a single yuan.

—

Author's Note:

Yu Hua: Well done! I'm finally out! (Though I kind of hate to leave.)

You Zhengping: ...So the Destroyer brought out his trump card and went through countless difficulties to "rescue" his greatest enemy?

Huan Zixu: Don't ask. If you ask, you'll regret it.

## CHAPTER 58

"Yu Hua!" You Zhengping was instantly burning with anxiety.

Reasonably speaking, the most ideal choice would have been to continue retreating, because the initial item was still active in the sky. If Huan Zixu used the initial item to continue snatching the Protectors' things or abilities, or used this opportunity to brainwash them, then the loss would outweigh the gain.

If this had been a reasoning test, then the most correct answer would have been—abandon Yu Hua, guard Luo Huai, retreat strategically.

But in this moment, even the most rational Lian Yufan stopped in his tracks and turned to look at Yu Hua being wrapped in layer after layer of chains by the mechanical skeleton. He watched his face being covered bit by bit by the alloy chains until at last only the tip of his nose remained.

Time slowed. The passing of each millisecond seemed sluggish.

To Lian Yufan, Yu Hua was a detestable colleague. He was petty, bought environmentally unfriendly decorating materials, deliberately deducted employees' wages, and used loopholes in *Employment Law* to exploit workers. He was You Zhengping's husband, doomed to break up with him and leave him. He was a man obsessed with a pair of pants, an ordinary person, a perfectly ordinary person of the sort the Protectors had to protect, a member of the general public that they had learned about countless times when studying political materials, one of 1.4 billion.

"Ordinary person" = "someone to protect" >>> hateful colleague.

With his heels as a pivot, Lian Yufan turned 180 degrees, going from having his back to the Destroyers to facing them. His sprinting motion didn't change, but his direction instantly altered.

Cen Xiao and Luo Huai moved at the same time he did. In the same millisecond, the three of them turned without prior agreement, heading towards the Destroyers.

Protection was the true reasoning for the Protectors.

But even faster than the three of them was You Zhengping.

The moment he saw that Yu Hua had fallen into the mechanical skeleton's hand, You Zhengping stared at his looted second space. He noticed that only one of the two parts of the space had been snatched. The other half was still in his control.

Was there some way to get to Yu Hua at the greatest speed?

Why had the second space, which could only hold humans, split into two when it had upgraded last time? It was enough for the space's holding capacity to increase. Why did it also need to split into two? And what was the natural law power that the long-haired Destroyer had been talking about? Natural law...classical physics...quantum physics...space...

Countless concepts and pieces of information flashed through You Zhengping's mind. By some miracle, he didn't charge towards Yu Hua. Instead, he turned and walked into the half of his second space that he still controlled.

If he had guessed right, then his so-called spatial power wasn't only limited to holding things!

When Lian Yufan and the other two began to turn, You Zhengping stepped into the half of the second space. When the three of them had completed their 180 degree turns, You Zhengping, wielding a sharp ceramic knife he had taken from his own stockpile in the first space, walked out of the other half of the space that had been snatched by Huan Zixu. He held the hilt of the knife with both hands. Before the two Destroyers could react, the long knife sliced downward. The chains holding Yu Hua and the ceramic knife simultaneously fractured!

Why would the second space split in two after upgrading in power? What kind of spatial ability was a power conferred by the world law?

There was only one answer. It was a door. A door that linked and tore space.

You Zhengping had walked into the half space next to him and passed through the limits of the space. When he appeared again, it was from the space that Huan Zixu had snatched!

The two halves of his space had contorted distance, turning into a door that took no notice of distance.

When the long knife came down, time began to move once more. When the sound of metal fracturing came to the ears of the three sprinting Protectors, You Zhengping was already landing on the ground, holding Yu Hua, who was so well wrapped up in chains that only his nose showed.

Huan Zixu, who had been calm and unhurried all along, at last displayed surprise. Even Destroyers couldn't dream of equipping a "dimension door" without a high number of points, and even if they did equip it, it was a one-time use item. But the Protector in front of him could control this awful power. Though he only had a preliminary understanding of it, it was still very frightening.

“Change of target, first we need to brainwash that...spatial ability user,” Huan Zixu said seriously.

Hearing Huan Zixu’s order, Feng Kui didn’t hesitate for a moment. He grabbed You Zhengping, who was next to him. His silver-white alloy body shot out countless steel nails. He was going to nail You Zhengping to himself, even though that would cause You Zhengping serious injury!

If the spatial ability user’s blow with the knife hadn’t been for the sake of rescuing Yu Hua but had instead been an attack on Huan Zixu, in that unpredictable moment, Huan Zixu may very well have died at a single blow.

Such a frightening power...had to be subdued, by hook or by crook.

Certainly conscience took up 70% of his storage, but protecting Huan Zixu took priority!

Lian Yufan noticed Feng Kui’s intention. He wanted to step in, but it was obviously already too late.

You Zhengping, having just taught himself the “dimension door” ability, had used this completely unfamiliar power for the first time. Combined with the blow with the ceramic knife that he had put all his force into, his strength had all been used up. Right now, You Zhengping had no way to block Feng Kui’s attack.

In this desperate moment, an ice-cold hand reached out from somewhere and lightly touched Feng Kui’s shoulder.

Time and space instantly seemed to congeal. The nails withdrew back into the mechanical skeleton. Feng Kui couldn’t control his body. His combat abilities were constantly degenerating. Soon he had returned to his human form, flesh on the outside and bone on the inside.

This was an irresistible power, so strong that if you were too weak, you might not even be able to imagine how strong it was. It was just like a frog living in a well had no way to reverse the vastness of the sky. If you weren’t strong enough, then in front of this power, you wouldn’t even be in a position to feel dread.

Lian Yufan and the others stopped in their tracks. It was the black-cloaked man.

Each time they operated and faced Destroyers in battle, they would encounter the black-cloaked man at some time and place.

After the last time on the roof, the young Protectors had formed a faint notion—perhaps the black-cloaked man was on their side.



The older Protectors, who had experienced the brutal era, wouldn't have thought this. They would have thought this was a sugar-coated bullet. But the young people, especially the ones who had been rescued by the black-cloaked man, like Lian Yufan, were rather grateful and trusting towards him.

Having casually made Feng Kui return to his human form and lose his combat abilities, the black-cloaked man put an arm around You Zhengping's narrow waist. He raised his leg and, like kicking away garbage, kicked the chain-wrapped "Yu Hua" into the nearby open warehouse as if concerned that he would be in the way.

The Protectors swallowed simultaneously. The black-cloaked man's movement had looked very light, Yu Hua...probably hadn't been injured. It was for the better that he had landed in the warehouse. At least there was a structure to protect him.

The black-cloaked man had kicked You Zhengping's "spouse" away. Holding You Zhengping, he floated down from about two meters in the air. He had been flying in the air mostly because the mechanical skeleton was too tall. Without flying, it would have been hard to touch his shoulder.

You Zhengping, well-known among the Protectors for being wildly devoted to protecting his husband, didn't charge towards the warehouse after seeing his "husband" kicked aside. Instead, he stared blankly at the black-cloaked man. His gaze seemed to want to penetrate that silver mask.

When they landed on the ground, the black-cloaked man didn't let go of You Zhengping's waist. You Zhengping stared at him and whispered, "This is my third time seeing you."

The black-cloaked man was just about to speak when Huan Zixu nervously said, "You're the mission target? The only clearer?"

Cen Xiao quickly walked over and snatched the exhausted You Zhengping out of the black-cloaked man's arms.

Cen Xiao had been worried that the black-cloaked man wouldn't let go. He had used a great deal of strength. He hadn't expected that the black-cloaked man wasn't using any strength at all. His hand had only been lightly placed on You Zhengping's waist, and You Zhengping hadn't been resisting!

When You Zhengping was snatched away, the black-cloaked man looked deeply at Cen Xiao's Plain Face Number 1, as though engraving this face into his brain.

Faced with this gaze, Cen Xiao subconsciously wanted to shield his face. He felt he was being seen through.

"What did you do to him?" Huan Zixu investigated Feng Kui's body and found that Feng Kui's powers had vanished!

Huan Zixu pressed his ear to Feng Kui's chest. *Thump, thump*. He heard the sound of a strong heartbeat. This was the beat of a heart forged from flesh and blood. It couldn't be imitated with a mechanical heart.

Shaking, Huan Zixu grasped Feng Kui's hand and sliced gently, cutting open Feng Kui's skin. A few drops of bright red blood flowed out of the wound.

"He's bleeding..." Huan Zixu didn't know whether to be glad or sad. Holding Feng Kui's arm, he temporarily forgot to be wary of the black-cloaked man, forgot that he was still in a battle with the Protectors, and let out a wild laugh that was nearly a sob.

"I removed the energy of his System and returned his condition to what it was during his first world," the black-cloaked man said in his cold voice. "His initial item has merged entirely with his bones. Removing the initial item would kill him, so I've left it behind."

The initial item...

Other peoples' initial items were ones with powerful special abilities. Feng Kui's initial item was his mechanical skeleton.

In their first world, in order to save a dying Huan Zixu, Feng Kui had forced his initial item to merge with his body and raised his power; this way, he had attained a power that far exceeded newbies of the same level in his first world.

Each time Feng Kui upgraded, his item and his ability upgraded together. Since he had first chosen this path, the only end he could go towards was the artificial intelligence path. It had been irreversible.

All of Huan Zixu's dreams were about returning to that first world. If he had the chance to go back, even if it meant killing himself, he would stop Feng Kui.

The black-cloaked man reached out a hand towards Huan Zixu. Huan Zixu didn't stop him. He quietly said, "I can't defeat you, but I have a piece of intelligence to exchange for Feng Kui's life."

From just one meeting, just one action from the black-cloaked man, Huan Zixu knew that their powers meant nothing before the black-cloaked man. Faced with this sort of power, their greatest exertions would have been nothing but a mantis trying to obstruct a chariot.

"Do you have any intelligence worth listening to?" the black-cloaked man said carelessly.

"I do, I've just thought of it, but I can't say it as long as the System is present. It's very important to you," Huan Zixu said firmly.

“Then there’s no harm in listening.” The black-cloaked man reached out his hand towards Huan Zixu and waved it, removing the energy of Huan Zixu’s System. The energy turned into an energy ball the size of a basketball, which he held in his palm.

Cen Xiao, Lian Yufan, and Luo Huai looked at each other helplessly. They had barely managed a draw with the two Destroyers by risking their lives, but the black-cloaked man had defeated them in a single move. This made the Protectors begin to suspect that their fight had been meaningless.

“Save him, don’t save me.” Feng Kui raised his large arms and held Huan Zixu, looking obstinately at the black-cloaked man.

“Shut up, listen to my orders!” Huan Zixu said angrily.

“I won’t,” Feng Kui insisted.

Watching the two of them going back and forth, the black-cloaked man sighed almost inaudibly. “I never said I was going to kill you two.”

The two of them stopped their dispute and looked at the black-cloaked man in disbelief. The losers were always in the wrong. They had lost. Could they really survive?

The black-cloaked man held the energy ball in his hand. “Your lives aren’t in my hands. They’re in...”

He looked at You Zhengping.

“You want to surrender them to us?” You Zhengping pointed to himself.

The black-cloaked man nodded gently. He flicked the energy ball distastefully. A point of light the size of a pill flew out of the basketball-sized energy ball and entered Lian Yufan’s injured body. Lian Yufan’s broken arm and the scorching from being electrocuted healed.

His plain faced nanotech mask had been knocked off by the electric shock during the battle. The face with the teardrop mole was revealed.

But Lian Yufan didn’t panic. His family was long gone. He was on his own, and he was a spy in Zhen Li’s studio. He had been prepared to be revealed, and Huan Zixu had already guessed that he was a Protector.

“Thank you. This is the second time you’ve saved me.” Lian Yufan nodded to the black-cloaked man.

The black-cloaked man didn’t even glance at him. After throwing off the healing power, he said to Huan Zixu, “I know roughly what intelligence you plan to tell me. Why don’t you give it to the Protection Organization in exchange for a chance to live?”

Then the black-cloaked man looked deeply at You Zhengping and floated away.

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Author's Note:

Yu Hua: I have to hurry up and kick away that substitute body to avoid being revealed.

Yu Hua: (hugging Xiao You, unwilling to let go)

Cen Xiao rescues You Zhengping, who has been rendered unable to move by the black-cloaked man.

Yu Hua: ...Cen Xiao, you really are loyal!

## CHAPTER 59

“He left just like that?” Huan Zixu said in astonishment.

The mission target was nothing like he had imagined. He hadn't interrogated him about the Clearing League, hadn't mentioned Zhen Li and Yuan Luori, hadn't looked down haughtily upon him and Feng Kui, hadn't attempted to kill the levelers sent by the System...

The black-cloaked man had only taken the energy of their Systems, flicked his sleeves, and left.

“He's always been like this. He was like this when he dealt with Yuan Luori and Destroyer 192, too,” Lian Yufan explained placidly to Huan Zixu and Feng Kui while handcuffing them.

As they took more and more Destroyers into custody, Lian Yufan was gradually getting used to it. As long as they didn't cause large scale public damage like Destroyer 192, his attitude would be very mild.

“It shouldn't be like this.” Not for nothing was Huan Zixu a leveler with a superior IQ. Faced with such a sudden change, he could still put other things aside and concentrate on considering the black-cloaked man's situation. “I've come into contact with him twice. Once was Yuan Luori's voice recording, the other time was the video conference with the bomb freak—your Destroyer 192. I could tell he was an absolute ruler.”

The rules he had laid down when dealing with Yuan Luori and his wrath when Destroyer 192 had violated those rules all showed that the black-cloaked man was a person who wouldn't permit others to be disobedient.

“Our analysis is different from yours,” Lian Yufan said. “I believe he's a rather good-natured person who hasn't lost himself because of his power and cherishes life.”

“What kind of joke is that?” Huan Zixu took a different view from Lian Yufan. “Even though I haven't had much contact with him, I can tell that he's a tyrant with a fierce desire for control.

He won't let anything that falls outside of his expectations happen. If he didn't understand our actions and the Protection Organization's like the palm of his hand, he definitely wouldn't have left so easily!"

Hearing Huan Zixu from the sidelines, You Zhengping couldn't keep his temples from twitching.

Cen Xiao was responsible for controlling Feng Kui. Feng Kui was very well-behaved and didn't say much. While Huan Zixu was carrying on his reasonable argument with Lian Yufan, Feng Kui only quietly told Cen Xiao that he wished to be taken to the same place as Huan Zixu.

So Cen Xiao got out a pair of leg cuffs and cuffed Feng Kui's right leg and Huan Zixu's left leg together. Feng Kui looked down at their tied together legs, then gave Cen Xiao a straightforward and unrestrained smile.

A second before they were still enemies. Now, because their Systems' energy had been removed, they could interact this harmoniously. The hostile atmosphere had turned friendly.

Cen Xiao had an unprecedented moment of clarity. He saw clearly that their true enemy wasn't the Destroyers or the black-cloaked man; it was the System that had hidden behind everyone all along and existed far out of reach in the remotest place.

He sighed and looked out of the corner of his eye at You Zhengping staring blankly in the direction the black-cloaked man had disappeared. He walked over and said in a quiet, stern voice, "What's wrong with you?"

"Oh? Huh?" You Zhengping drew back his train of thought. He didn't understand what Cen Xiao meant.

Cen Xiao had grown up at the training base with You Zhengping since they had been around ten years old. He understood his comrade in arms very well. In countless battles, you could see their tacit understanding.

Precisely because he understood him, Cen Xiao was even more worried.

When he had snatched You Zhengping out of the black-cloaked man's arms, he had noticed the look in You Zhengping's eyes. Even though You Zhengping had been doing everything he could to cover it up, his gaze still uncontrollably stuck to the black-cloaked man.

"When you were injured on the roof last time, wasn't it the black-cloaked man who saved you?" Cen Xiao asked quietly.

"Yes..." You Zhengping looked warily at Cen Xiao, feeling very uneasy.

"You haven't..." Cen Xiao pulled You Zhengping towards the warehouse, avoiding Lian Yufan and the others as much as possible. "You haven't had a change of affections?"

“What?” Hearing these words, as he relaxed, You Zhengping was so startled that his eyebrows twisted like caterpillars.

He had thought that, like him, Cen Xiao had noticed something oddly familiar about the black-cloaked man. But instead Cen Xiao had come out with this soul-searching question!

“Don’t try to hide from me!” Cen Xiao said firmly. “When you fell in love with Yu Hua at first sight back then, the look in your eyes was just the same as right now!”

“Oh? Really?” You Zhengping averted his eyes, not looking at Cen Xiao.

Cen Xiao said bitterly, “Yu Hua was tied up in chains and kicked into the warehouse by the black-cloaked man, and you haven’t even glanced at him. You just kept staring at the black-cloaked man! The black-cloaked man left and we started clearing the scene, leaving the task of rescuing Yu Hua up to you, but you’ve been zoning out gazing after the black-cloaked man!”

“I...” You Zhengping couldn’t explain.

When Yu Hua had been captured by the Destroyers, his mind had gone blank. He had only had the idea that he had to rescue Yu Hua, even if it meant giving up his life. But when the black-cloaked man had appeared in front of him, he had suddenly lost any feeling towards the person wrapped up in those chains like a lump. His gaze had stuck unshakably to the black-cloaked man.

You Zhengping had all along been avoiding a certain inexpressible guess. Reason told him that this guess couldn’t possibly be true, but when had he ever gotten high grades on reasoning tests? He had always been someone who relied on instinct to act!

“I know that the black-cloaked man saved you twice, especially last time. You were injured very, very badly. I know that would cause you to feel gratitude towards the black-cloaked man. But that’s not real love, it’s the transference phenomenon in psychology, it’s a short-term false impression,” Cen Xiao said seriously. “Though Yu Hua gets a little jealous sometimes, is very weak, and can’t relate to us in terms of work, he loves you very much. His whole heart is devoted to your home. He takes care of you in every possible way, and he makes snacks for us often. He’s an exceptional spouse. You have to control yourself! The black-cloaked man’s position is unclear. He may one day be our enemy. You can’t take the wrong path, do you understand?”

“The black-cloaked man may one day be our enemy?” You Zhengping looked alarmed.

“Is that all you heard out of everything I said?” Cen Xiao slapped the back of You Zhengping’s head and pushed him into the warehouse. “Go save your husband, hurry!”

You Zhengping stumbled into the warehouse and saw the pile of chains in a corner. His heartbeat became wild again.

He had clearly felt nothing towards that pile of chains before, but now the flame of love had been rekindled.

You Zhengping didn't even dare to ask himself "why." He quickly went to Yu Hua and tore off the chains. Seeing that deeply sleeping handsome face, his feelings instantly calmed.

Yu Hua could always make him feel safe and at peace.

You Zhengping bent his head and kissed Yu Hua's face, picked him up in his arms, and went out of the warehouse.

"What did you do to him?" You Zhengping asked Huan Zixu.

Huan Zixu noticed how this handsome uncle Protector was holding Yu Hua. He forced down his suspicions and steadily answered, "I didn't hurt him. He's only going to sleep, then wake up and forget about coming to the warehouse. He'll only remember lazing around at home on a Sunday. I wasn't planning on appearing in the impressions of an ordinary person."

"It's good that he won't remember." Lian Yufan nodded. "Or else Zhen Li and Yuan Luori would be in for it."

Lian Yufan was still rather concerned about his two colleagues. "We'll bring them to the base and warn them not to reveal the business with the warehouse. Captain, remember to delete the chat log concerning the warehouse on Yu Hua's phone."

"You're a Protector and two levelers, why would you be afraid of an ordinary person?" Huan Zixu said dubiously. His flawless plan had been exposed because of Yu Hua's relationship with the studio's employees. He absolutely didn't understand it.

"We're just humoring him!" Lian Yufan said irritably. He didn't think that he was afraid of Yu Hua. He was only making necessary compromises to cover up his identity.

You Zhengping couldn't stand listening to this conversation. He said, "I'll take Yu Hua home and meet up with you guys afterwards."

That was right. He had to look after his family member first. Cen Xiao nodded inwardly, feeling that he really had outdone himself for these two people's relationship.

There were cars in You Zhengping's space. He took out two cars. One was a sedan that looked normal but in reality was unusually sturdy. The other was a police car. Cen Xiao and the others took the two Destroyers in the police car, while You Zhengping got into the sedan, carrying Yu Hua.

He took Yu Hua home, placed his sleeping husband in bed, and used his own fingerprints to unlock Yu Hua's phone.

Yu Hua never took cautionary measures against You Zhengping. He had entered You Zhengping's fingerprints in the phone's fingerprint lock, and all of his codes were You Zhengping's birthday, the day they had met, the day they were married, and so on.

When he was about to delete the chat log, You Zhengping saw the "employee benefit" Maldives luxury trip and felt moved.

Was Zhen Li...using this method to curry favor with Yu Hua? Did he know that doing this would make Yu Hua happy?

You Zhengping deleted the chat log concerning the warehouse and raised his hand to stroke Yu Hua's smooth forehead. After gazing at his husband for a moment, he got up and left the bedroom.

He saw that the suitcase, which had originally been on top of the wardrobe, was now arranged in the center of the living room as though waiting for him to open it.

You Zhengping touched the suitcase with his fingertips. He smiled gently, didn't open the suitcase, and left his home.

Half an hour after he left, Yu Hua, lying in bed, slowly opened his eyes. He went to the living room, saw the suitcase that had been of no interest to anyone, and sighed lengthily.

Today really was fraught with perils. Yu Hua absolutely hadn't expected that Xiao You's power would ascend so quickly in such a short time, enough for him to wrest him right out of the hands of the two Destroyers and hide him inside his space, making him nearly lose the opportunity to step in.

If Huan Zixu's initial item hadn't been rather powerful and snatched him out of the space, and if his face hadn't been covered in chains, he didn't know how he would have made his appearance.

Wrapped up in chains, Yu Hua had been wildly with joy. While everyone had been momentarily stunned by Xiao You's powers, he had quickly used his newly unlocked "the cicada escapes by shedding its skin" ability to throw off the binding of the chains. He had left his jacket and pants inside to play the part of his dummy. "The cicada escapes by shedding its skin" always required a "skin" to be left behind.

While "escaping his skin," Yu Hua had summoned the black cloak and the mask and floated into the air, absorbed the energy of Feng Kui's System, putting a stop to his and You Zhengping's battle.

Faced with Xiao You, he always seemed unable control his actions. He couldn't keep from hugging him, comforting him. Xiao You had experienced a fierce battle today. It must have been very difficult.



It was already very restrained of Yu Hua to only have held Xiao You's waist with one hand rather than rubbing his head and saying encouragingly, "It was really awesome how you grasped a new use of your special ability at the last second."

It was good that Cen Xiao had separated them in time, or else he really would have given himself away.

Thinking of Cen Xiao, Yu Hua felt a headache coming on.

He seemed to have left, but in reality he had returned to the chains and activated his "super hearing" to listen in on what was happening outside. Naturally he had also clearly heard Cen Xiao's words to You Zhengping.

Yu Hua's feelings were very complicated.

Did Xiao You know his identity or now? If he had already guessed that Yu Hua and the black-cloaked man were the same person, then that was to everyone's satisfaction. If he hadn't guessed and had purely been attracted by the black-cloaked man, then it proved that no matter what he looked like, Xiao You would still fall in love with him at first sight. Yu Hua also enjoyed seeing this, but...

If it was the latter, what should he do about "Yu Hua?"

After the vexed Yu Hua had been returned home, he had deliberately made the suitcase appear in the living room, blocking Xiao You's path. When Xiao You had walked through the door, the suitcase had still been lying on top of the wardrobe, but when he went out, it was in the living room. Xiao You had to notice, right? He would have to open the suitcase and see the black cloak inside?

But Xiao You still hadn't touched the suitcase. He had gone around it and left.

He really was a person who turned a blind eye to housework. He often couldn't find where he had put his clothes, and if he put his phone on the couch, he would turn around and forget where he had tossed it. So...not noticing the suitcase's original location was also normal.

As intelligent as Yu Hua was, he still couldn't guess Xiao You's thoughts.

Yu Hua found that he seemed to always have worries. As soon as he resolved one problem, a new problem would appear.

He thought of when they had gotten married and Xiao You's mother had had a heart to heart with him. She had told him, "Life is a series of daily necessities and trivial household matters. Spouses will always have little problems and little frictions between them. That's normal."

Being constantly plagued by vexations was probably what life was.

—

When You Zhengping returned to the base, Zhen Li and Yuan Luori had also been picked up. Everyone took part together in Huan Zixu and Feng Kui's interrogation.

In view of the fact that the new Destroyers hadn't done anything too bad and had had their abilities removed by the black-cloaked man, the interrogation took place in comparatively comfortable surroundings. There were no torture implements, and Zhen Li and Yuan Luori sat in chairs beside them, responsible for advising them to cooperate.

Zhen and Yuan still didn't remember the two of them coming to the studio last night. They had guessed based on their own mistaken behavior that someone must have messed with them.

"What was the information you wanted to tell the black-cloaked man?" Director Xiao had listened to Lian Yufan's report and got right down to business.

"First guarantee mine and Feng Kui's safety," Huan Zixu said. "While I can't believe in your guarantee, I still want a verbal promise."

Director Xiao said, "I won't make any empty promises. You only have to look at Zhen Li and Yuan Luori to see how you'll be treated."

Then he gave Zhen and Yuan a look, making them persuade on his behalf.

"We only have to cooperate in order to be treated leniently, and life is pretty nice. Sometimes you get kidnapped, eat something weird, dance a little, get your wages deducted from time to time. The rest is fine," Zhen Li said.

"I'm not like Zhen Li. I'm rather busy. I live in the studio, eat instant noodles, study law, take care of a dog, and in the future I'm going to take part in a talent show. Later, I hear I'll also be doing ads. I'm also planning to attend university, test into the law faculty, then take the National Judicial Exam, get a law license..." Yuan Luori stuck out his fingers to count up his abundant future plans.

Huan Zixu said, "...What power does your Protection Organization have to decrease levelers' intelligence?"

Director Xiao coughed gently. "Ahem! They were like this when they came to this world. I was also amazed. If not for Destroyer 192 appearing recently, I would have thought that the current generation of Destroyers were all of that level."

"They've all been ruined by the System." Huan Zixu looked at the two sweet idiots, involuntarily squeezed Feng Kui's hand, and calmly said, "It feels good to be able to openly say bad things about the System without worrying about self-destructing. Even though I've lost my ability, I'm still pretty happy."

Watching Huan Zixu's performance, Director Xiao glanced at the young Protectors out of the corner of his eye. He found that the young people had no ill will towards Huan Zixu and Feng Kui.

Even the most cooperative and harmless Zhen Li had at first been beaten up by You Zhengping and Lian Yufan, and Yuan Luori had been wrapped up in bandages for days. The two of them had only achieved everyone's approval that day at the mall when they had used all their strength to cooperate with the Protection Organization in protecting ordinary people.

But as for Huan Zixu and Feng Kui, the Protectors didn't have any enmity towards them from the start.

"You're very clever. You know what the best way to win our good opinion is." Director Xiao exposed Huan Zixu's goal. "First you win the Protectors' approval by displaying concern for your companion. You clearly understand what kind of enemies hot-blooded young people will appreciate. Then you display malice towards the System, subtly telling us that you were forced and had no choice. We have a common enemy. Finally, you admit that you've lost your ability and are harmless. Only a few sentences, and your status goes from being an enemy to being an informer like Zhen Li who can work with us."

Director Xiao's words put the young Protectors on their guards. Just as Director Xiao had said, Huan Zixu had been leading them by the nose.

With his plans laid bare, Huan Zixu didn't get flustered. He said easily, "The reason I can move you is that all of that is true. I used a bit of finesse, but you aren't going to say I can't protect myself, right?"

"The only means you have of protecting yourself is coming clean." Director Xiao said firmly, unmoved.

"Old fox," Huan Zixu said, shaking his head. "Your ill will towards us is very strong."

"Compared to you, it would seem that I don't count as old." Director Xiao picked up a thermos mug and drank some tea. "Zhen Li and Yuan Luori's true ages aren't very great, and mentally they're rather naïve. But you're different. You're several hundred years old at least. If a person who could originally have lived forever and had tremendous powers says that he submits and pledges allegiance, would you believe it easily?"

"You say that because you haven't lived hundreds of years." A hint of the passage of time flashed through Huan Zixu's eyes. "If I didn't have Feng Kui with me, I couldn't have held out. The human mind can only tolerate a hundred years. This tolerance is built into our genes. Past a certain threshold, the human mind will change."

He pointed to his own head. "Why did I have to use this method to test the black-cloaked man? Because you can't use conventional reasoning to conjecture about the thoughts of a person who went through 3,841 worlds on his own and has lived for thousands of years."

—

Author's Note:

Cen Xiao: My good friend seems to want to have an affair. That won't do. I have to counsel him to return to the true path.

Yu Hua: Suddenly having complicated feelings.

You Zhengping: Love comes as quickly as a tornado. There's nothing I can do.

## CHAPTER 60

Huan Zixu had a strategy in his dialogue with the Protection Organization. He and Feng Kui had lost the System's power. They were fish on the Protection Organization's chopping block, ready to be slaughtered. Feng Kui had been restored to normal and wouldn't continue upgrading in the direction of artificial intelligence. If nothing unexpected happened, this would be their last world. He had to make plans.

The last world...

Huan Zixu looked at Feng Kui, not expecting that Feng Kui would also be gazing at him with a pure smile.

Since this was their last world, then he would have to strive to obtain the Protection Organization's trust and richly live out the future decades in this world with Feng Kui. Huan Zixu made his choice.

"How will a person's mind change if he lives thousands of years?" the Protector with the handsome uncle's face who used the spatial ability suddenly asked.

Huan Zixu was surprised. Director Xiao was leading the interrogation, and the other Protectors had remained silent from beginning to end. Why would the handsome uncle Protector steps out of bounds now?

"I don't know," Huan Zixu said, shaking his head. "I only know that in my 199 worlds, I didn't only feel time. There was also the constantly increasing power, and the experience of going through different worlds. Sometimes I even got muddled, thinking that I'm not human anymore, but a god, a completely different species from humans. If a mere 199 worlds can do that, then 3,841 levels... That number is appalling. A person who has passed so many levels, I think he must have changed at the genetic level. He isn't human anymore."

"How many years have you been alive?" the handsome uncle Protector asked.

"Three hundred...four hundred...or five hundred?" Huan Zixu struggled to remember. He shook his head. "Time is a human sense of movement. One cycle of the earth's rotation is defined as a day, one cycle of the moon's orbit as one month, one cycle of the earth around the sun as

one year. With different worlds, different celestial bodies, different reckonings of time, I can't calculate it."

"Four-hundred fifty-three years, six months, and eighteen days," Feng Kui said suddenly. "I used the first world's time reckoning to keep track. This world's time reckoning is about the same."

Huan Zixu was a little surprised. Feng Kui's storage had been so small that he had constantly been deleting his memories. Why would he remember this?

"A document. It doesn't take up much memory." Feng Kui's speech didn't seem very smooth. He spoke haltingly. "I deleted—the videos and the pictures, but kept the written records. I've always—remembered."

Huan Zixu didn't want to display too much emotion in front of the Protectors, but hearing Feng Kui speak, tears came to his eyes.

Huan Zixu turned his face away and lightly wiped the corners of his eyes with his thumb, brushing away the tears. He took a deep breath and said, "Then let's say 453.5 years. Things that happened before I became a leveler feel a dozen lifetimes away. I don't remember them clearly."

Only when he spoke did he discover that his voice was hoarse.

"How does the passage of time feel? Can you tell me concretely?" The handsome uncle Protector asked another question, and the plain-faced Protector next to him yanked him, reminding him not to go outside his rank again.

Huan Zixu drank a mouthful of water to wet his throat and calm his feelings, then said, "The world is different in the eyes of different creatures. Humans experience the world through their five senses, but the colors and pixels our eyes can distinguish are limited, and the audio frequencies our ears can distinguish are also limited. I've lived four hundred years and more, but if you really asked me whether I've felt four hundred years, my answer would be that I haven't. To me, it feels like those four hundred and more years have taken tens of thousands of years to pass, but also as though they passed in an instant.

"Humans can live for several decades, so naturally they think that the lifespan of an insect that can only live for one summer is very short. But for that insect, it's a whole lifetime.

"I think that in his eyes, the only thing that can oppose him is the System. I don't know how he looks upon us levelers, and I don't know his true position, so I had to use some means that wouldn't harm me to test him out. That was my goal."

Director Xiao looked at You Zhengping, saw that his subordinate didn't intend to ask another question, then said, "It wouldn't harm you, but you wanted to drag us under."

“In the three-sided battle among the System, the world law, and the clearer, all people are only chess pieces. You exist within in the game. What do mean by ‘dragging you under?’”

“You’re good at confusing the issue.” Director Xiao was unmoved, his mind as steady as a boulder. “Go ahead and tell me about the world law. From Zhen Li, we’ve only heard about the System and the clearer who passed 3,841 levels. We still don’t have a clear notion about the world law. We need you to clear up some confusion.”

Huan Zixu said, “As far as the world law is concerned, I also only have guesses. They need to be validated. Could I borrow that eraser on the table?”

There was someone taking notes on the interrogation. The table was supplied with all the necessary paper and erasers. Director Xiao nodded faintly, and Lian Yufan picked up an eraser and passed it to Huan Zixu.

“Since you were the one who picked up the eraser, keep a portion of it. We can call that another experiment,” Huan Zixu said.

Lian Yufan cut off a corner of the eraser and tossed the larger part to Huan Zixu, not knowing what he was up to.

Huan Zixu squeezed the eraser and said towards Zhen Li, whose mind was wandering, “I heard that the black-cloaked man left you an alternate dimension stomach ability?”

“Yes, that’s right,” Zhen Li said, calling back his attention.

Huan Zixu said, “Can you only eat food items?”

“Yes.” Zhen Li was still considering abstruse questions like the passage of time and thinking about Yu Hua, who went around deducting wages and making things difficult for the studio’s personnel, who had personally rolled up his sleeves to decorate, who carried a tiny notebook to record whether the employees had made full attendance. His thoughts were rather floating.

“Open your mouth,” Huan Zixu suddenly ordered.

Zhen Li automatically opened his mouth, and Huan Zixu instantly tossed the eraser into it. Zhen Li didn’t have time to react. He swallowed the eraser.

“Water, give me water!” Zhen Li’s eyes rolled.

“Focus a little,” Huan Zixu said. “Do you really feel like you’re choking?”

Hearing him, Zhen Li dubiously rubbed his chest. “I think...I’m not choking. Did I swallow it?”

He frowned and felt around, then shook his head. “No, that’s wrong. I didn’t swallow it. Did it go into the alternate dimension stomach? But...it has to be food for the alternate dimension stomach to work. You can’t call rubber food, can you?”

“Why do you think that the alternate dimension stomach is an ability equipped from the System?” Huan Zixu asked.

“Well...when I got to this world, I used most of my points so I could equip it and eat things. Later the black-cloaked man took my System and left behind this ability and my wardrobe,” Zhen Li said.

“No.” Huan Zixu shook his head. “All the power that the System bestows can be withdrawn, except for the initial item and the origin power, because those aren’t given by the System. It’s the leveler’s power activated under the stimulus of world law. The black-cloaked man could absorb mine and Feng Kui’s systems but couldn’t entirely heal Feng Kui’s bones. That’s because the initial item can only be destroyed. It can’t be absorbed.”

Zhen Li scratched his head. “It’s what the black-cloaked man told me, and also...I didn’t have an origin ability to start with. I’m pretty useless.”

At this point, he flushed a little. Everyone was protecting the world, but he could only eat things.

“The origin ability awakens within the first ten newbie worlds. You’ve only passed four worlds. It’s possible that yours has only just awakened,” Huan Zixu explained. “The origin ability hides in the System’s market at the lowest cost in points, waiting for the leveler to equip it. A leveler who doesn’t equip his origin ability within the first ten worlds is practically offering the ability up on a platter to the System, and the System will withdraw it.”

“Really?” Zhen Li and Yuan Luori said simultaneously in astonishment. Neither of them had known this.

The Protectors: “...”

How had these two lived so long anyway? Pure luck?

“Yes.” Huan Zixu was also stunned by their stupidity. “There’s inherently no difference between the origin ability and a Protector’s special ability. There’s only one way to activate the origin ability, and that’s to be acknowledged by the world law.”

“Are you saying that our powers are all bestowed by the world law?” This information surprised even Director Xiao. He hit the table and stood up.

Huan Zixu nodded. “I don’t know if you have records, but my guess is that the first special ability user appeared in this world at the same time as the first Destroyer.”

Director Xiao, who was well acquainted with the history of the Protection Organization, said, “You’re absolutely right. The furthest we can trace back our history is over five hundred years. A Destroyer appeared in a certain town, and an officer of the time had his special ability awakened. He paid a tremendous price to kill that Destroyer. Since then, there have been special ability users in this world. We’ve never understood the reason for the appearance of the special abilities. According to you, the special abilities actually appeared because of the Destroyers?”

“Strictly speaking, the world law noticed the invasion of outsiders and awoke the origin powers within the bodies of ordinary people to do battle with the outsiders, and to protect its own law. We are those outsiders. The true goal of the assignments given to us by the System is to use those assignments to capture the power of the world law and in that way occupy the world,” Huan Zixu said. “Your world is terrifying. After all these years, the System has been unable to have its way. If it had had its way...then it probably would have chosen a few people with potential from this world and thrown them into other worlds to carry out new missions of destruction.”

Director Xiao’s right hand trembled slightly. He put his hand behind his back and said as steadily as before, “These so-called people with potential are...”

Huan Zixu’s phoenix eyes lifted. He laughed mockingly. “Why ask when you already know the answer? It’s you Protectors!”

The information Huan Zixu had provided stunned the Protection Organization. Even Director Xiao was having a hard time controlling his nerves, never mind You Zhengping and the other young men. Everyone involuntarily grabbed the people beside them, wanting to draw strength from their companions.

“All of us who you call Destroyers, if our own homelands hadn’t been destroyed, we may also have been Protectors,” Huan Zixu said with a bitter smile. “Zhen Li’s alternate dimension stomach isn’t an ability that the black-cloaked man left him. It was his own ability awakening. Since the black-cloaked man couldn’t remove it, it’s a complete power bestowed by the world law!”

“Me?” Zhen Li’s expression looked like he had won a lottery prize of five million. “Why would the world law give an outsider like me an ability?”

“The world law doesn’t have feelings. It more closely resembles a supercomputer. It wouldn’t care where you came from. It has only one criterion: whether you’re willing to protect the world. Congratulations, the world law approves of you,” Huan Zixu said.

“Me? Me!” If he hadn’t been inside the base, Zhen Li would have turned on his phone and livestreamed a celebratory dance. The dignified atmosphere around him cleared his head, and he suddenly thought of something. “But the black-cloaked man told me that this was a power he had left me. If you aren’t lying, then why would he trick me?”



“How would I know?” Huan Zixu said carelessly. “I told you, the black-cloaked man’s way of thinking can’t be judged with conventional reasoning.”

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Author’s Note:

—A little brain hole, don’t take it seriously—

The world law: I carefully selected You Zhengping from among billions as the one most suited to be the big shot’s sweetheart. After activating his power, I delivered him to the big shot to form a marriage alliance. The marriage of You Zhengping and the big shot symbolizes the alliance of the world law and the clearer against the System.

You Zhengping (tearfully): So I’m only a prop in a marriage alliance.

Yu Hua (forcefully): Don’t listen to that unfeeling supercomputer’s drivel, I was the one who made the choice.

## CHAPTER 61

Even the richly experienced Director Xiao couldn’t avoid being persuaded by Huan Zixu, never mind the young Protectors, as well as Zhen and Yuan.

The Destroyers and Protectors were actually two sides of the same coin, and whether they were good or evil wasn’t up to them to determine, but part of the battle between the System and the world law. If the world law lost and couldn’t prevent the System’s invasion, they would also become Destroyers in the future, become what they hated, go on to invade other worlds.

Hatred and antagonism against Destroyers had become nearly instinctive for the Protectors. As soon as they thought that they might become what they loathed most, the Protectors shuddered.

This shocking news made nearly made everyone accept Huan Zixu’s explanation wholesale. Huan Zixu calmly picked up a cup of water and drank of a mouthful of warm water.

He didn’t want to be like Zhen Li and Yuan Luori, who seemed to be the Protection Organization’s informers but in reality were being halfway monitored. If they lost their usefulness, whether they would be killed or let go was entirely for the Protection Organization to decide. They had no power to make their own decisions.

If he wanted to guarantee his and Feng Kui’s safety, he had to assimilate into the Protection Organization. Assimilating into a group was simple. You only had to demonstrate two things: *First, you and I are the same; second, we have a common enemy.*

Huan Zixu had fed the Protectors a delicate mix of seven parts truth to three parts falsehood, establishing the idea that the System was their common enemy. But the System was too far away. The Protectors didn’t have experience directly observing the System or bone-deep

hatred towards it. To ensure a close relationship, it was best to establish a short-term enemy, and the black-cloaked man, whose allegiances were unclear, was naturally the ideal choice.

Huan Zixu wasn't really intending on letting the Protection Organization see the black-cloaked man as an enemy. That would be asking for death. He only wanted the Protection Organization to feel a sense of danger from some other powerful source and gradually come to rely on his intelligence and analysis. This way, he could keep the initiative.

"That's wrong." While everyone was shaking and dazed, the handsome uncle Protector once again went around Director Xiao and said, "There's something you're wrong about."

Seeing this person open his mouth, Huan Zixu sat up straight and, seeming casual while in fact cautious, said, "It hardly matters whether it's wrong or right. I'm only setting out my conjectures."

"You aren't conjecturing, you're confusing the issue." The handsome uncle Protector reasoned clearly: "You just said that the System has no way to remove the initial item and the origin ability, and neither does the black-cloaked man, and the origin ability is bestowed on Destroyers by the world law. But you also said that the System puts the origin ability in its market at the lowest cost in points, and that if the Destroyer doesn't equip it within ten worlds, the System can withdraw the origin ability. That runs counter to what you said."

Huan Zixu looked quietly at the handsome uncle Protector, not speaking.

The handsome uncle Protector said, "The black-cloaked man can even absorb the System's energy, so can't we reason that he has the same ability to withdraw the origin power? Except that he didn't do that. Even if he couldn't absorb the origin ability, at least he could have destroyed that energy. But for both Yuan Luori and Zhen Li, he didn't do that.

"According to what you've said, you can use points to equip the origin ability, and points can upgrade the origin ability and the initial item. Then can't I understand that to mean that the points are the natural law power that the System has taken from worlds it has already occupied? So whether you're a Destroyer or a Protector, the origin ability is a potential you carry with you, but activating the origin power has to rely on the acknowledgment and support of world law.

"So the black-cloaked man didn't lie to Zhen Li. He did leave Zhen Li's origin ability. That he can use that ability is in fact because he has obtained the acknowledgement of the world law. But you've twisted these two ideas to give us the impression that the black-cloaked man is untrustworthy and unfathomable.

"A display worthy of a mental ability user. Even though the energy of your System has been removed, you can still change people's impressions relying only a glib tongue. That's also evidence that you still have your origin ability!"

Huan Zixu wasn't flustered despite having been seen through. He raised his hands and applauded. "Beautiful, splendid! And this is how much you trust the clearer, who has passed 3,841 worlds, who was the System's greatest butcher, who has lived thousands and maybe even tens of thousands of years!"

"He saved us, and he's been helping us protect the world. Facts trump eloquence!" The handsome uncle Protector wasn't to be outdone.

"What a joke! A clearer who can even absorb the System, a person whom the System is exerting all its forces to pursue and kill, who has been hiding in your world for over fifteen years —does he really have no goals apart from hiding from the System's pursuit? He's willing to abide by the laws, to help the Protectors. Are you telling me that isn't also trying to obtain acknowledgement from the world law?" Huan Zixu said.

The handsome uncle Protector didn't argue with Huan Zixu again. He turned to Feng Kui, who had been listening to the two of them argue all along. He asked, "What about you? 453.5 years. What do they mean to you?"

Feng Kui saw that the flames of water had spread to him. He blinked innocently and simply said, "Finishing missions with A-Xu, defeating the System, winning our freedom."

A pure and simple reason.

The handsome uncle Protector looked at Huan Zixu and said, "That's his 453.5 years, completely different from yours. Everyone has a different appreciation of time and life. How can you judge others by your own measure? You haven't personally experienced the passage of thousands of years, you aren't him, so how can you recklessly make malicious guesses about another person? What if he's only...tired? Only wants to rest?"

This Protector's question actually brought Huan Zixu to a halt. Uncomprehending, he said, "I didn't expect that you would hold such naïve ideas about a strong character who has gone to so much trouble to hide himself."

"I..."

You Zhengping wanted to say something else, but he was interrupted by Director Xiao. "Very good, thank you for your warning. My head is clear now."

Unexpectedly, Director Xiao didn't rebuke You Zhengping for his partiality towards the black-cloaked man. Instead, he stood on his side.

"What...is wrong with you?" Watching as the Protectors calmed down one after another, Huan Zixu temporarily lost his composure.

Director Xiao smiled politely. “You may not be aware of this. Fifteen years ago, when the black-cloaked man came to our world, all the Protectors in the world sensed it. He didn’t infiltrate silently. He gave us a sign, using power strong enough to destroy the world.”

The tremendous power had swept across the whole world, and then...it had turned into a weariness desiring sleep and vanished. After that, the world was at peace for fifteen years, and the Protectors had gradually begun to live peaceful and happy ordinary lives.

All the Protectors present had experienced that day. They all remembered it.

“I’ve never been able to understand what that power meant. Thank you for helping resolve my doubts today.” Director Xiao had suddenly seen the light. “Now that you mention it, we ought to thank the black-cloaked man. He’s the one who brought us fifteen years of peace. You don’t need to twist everything around for the sake of self-protection. We’ll come to our own conclusions after deliberation. I think that the black-cloaked man must already have known about the world law. You weren’t going to use that intelligence to make an exchange with him. Tell us what you’re really covering up.”

Huan Zixu was clever. Seeing Director Xiao’s attitude, he knew that anything he said next would be useless, so he frankly said, “I also guessed from the information Zhen Li provided that, with the clearer being so powerful, even if the Clearing League all faced him together, the clearer would still grind them flat and win. You may not realize that the levelers now are different from those fifteen years ago. The System has been making high grade levelers kill each other in order to restore its own power.”

“No wonder there haven’t been any proper Destroyers apart from you two,” Director Xiao said. “In that case, why would the System issue this clearing mission?”

Huan Zixu said, “There’s another thing you don’t know. The System doesn’t send people with over three hundred levels on world-opening missions, because a leveler who is too powerful will provoke resistance from the world law, and the world law will use methods that will do damage to itself to destroy the leveler. The System’s goal is to seize the power of the world law, not for both sides to fail, so it will only send low grade levelers who won’t lead the world law to use self-damaging means of resistance to the world to judge the world rules bit by bit. When many people have accomplished opening missions, the world law will be riddled with holes, and that’s when the System will come to reap the rewards.”

“A thousand league dike can be breached with ant holes,” Director Xiao said. “You suspect that the System is sending weak Destroyers to exhaust the black-cloaked man? But that’s wrong. The black-cloaked man can absorb the System’s energy. He must be becoming more powerful.”

Director Xiao recalled the recent battles. Had the black-cloaked man seemed in any way exhausted?

"No, I suspect that the System is using this 'clearing mission' to entice the levelers into coming to this world in a steady stream in order to confused the world's protective screen, so that in the future it will be able to send stronger opponents who will be able to do serious damage to the black-cloaked man," Huan Zixu said.

"But you just said that the world law can only be eroded by completing clearing missions," Director Xiao said doubtfully.

"I'm talking about confusing the protective screen," Huan Zixu said. "A threshold needs to be met for the world law to resist. Because resistance will cause it great harm, it's constantly going through calculations to assess the threshold. As more and more levelers come to this world within a short time, getting stronger and stronger without the world suffering damage, the world law's assessment of the threshold requirements will rise. The System must also be able to reckon that. When this reaches a certain critical point, someone whose strength we can't imagine will come to this world."

This information chilled everyone, and Cen Xiao said, not quite understanding, "If it knows that this person is very strong and may cause great damage to the world, and may kill countless Protectors, will the world law still let them in as long as they don't meet the threshold?"

"It will." No one understood the world law's absolutely rational calculations better than Lian Yufan. "In a battle that impacts the whole world, how could it show mercy for the sake of a few Protectors? As long as the world law judges that the Protectors will be able to defeat this person, it will let them in."

No matter how many Protectors would be sacrificed.

Director Xiao's face was grave. He said to Huan Zixu, "The two pieces of information you have provided today are critical. They are a sufficient exchange for your and Feng Kui's lives."

Huan Zixu relaxed slightly.

"But you're too clever. We can't feel easy about you." Director Xiao smiled craftily. "Fortunately, in our conversation just now, you revealed your weak point countless times. As for your punishment...Feng Kui will stay at the base, and you'll go with Lian Yufan to Zhen Li's studio and aid us in dealing with other Destroyers. Your power isn't in your ability, it's in your skill at manipulating words. I trust that with your help, we'll be able to discover the existence of Destroyers faster and nip their actions in the bud."

"What did you say?" Huan Zixu hit the table and got to his feet.

Director Xiao picked up his thermos mug again and leaned back in his chair. "Feng Kui has metal in his body. He couldn't even get through the security checkpoint going on the subway. Without the Protection Organization to shelter him, he can't go anywhere. It's better for him to stay at the base. If you display good behavior, you can see him once a week."

“You...” Huan Zixu glared fiercely at Director Xiao.

“Didn’t you say that if you attain acknowledgement from world law, you’ll possess your special ability?” Director Xiao very much resembled the club parting a couple of lovebirds. “When you have sincerely acknowledged this world and once again possess your special ability, that’s the moment we’ll release Feng Kui.”

Not letting Huan Zixu resist, Director Xiao ordered that he and Feng Kui be “escorted” out, and to separate rooms, not letting the two of them be together.

“Have people arrange classes for Feng Kui. While he’s at the base, have him train and study,” Director Xiao said. “Feng Kui is Huan Zixu’s weak point. If Feng Kui surrenders and pays allegiance sincerely, then Huan Zixu will definitely act for us with dedication.”

Yuan Luori had a sense of familiarity listening to Director Xiao’s arrangements. He poked Zhen Li. “Why did your ability awaken, but mine didn’t?”

Zhen Li shook his head in confusion. “I don’t know. What is your origin ability?”

“I... The cheapest ability in the first ten worlds... I don’t think I equipped it!” Yuan Luori’s eyes filled with alarm. “The System can’t have taken my origin ability?”

“That’s normal,” Lian Yufan said coldly. “In all probability, a person who nearly died during his nineteenth level had already lost his origin ability.”

Yuan Luori: “...”

Zhen and Yuan, whose world views had been toppled and reorganized, were taken away, and only Protectors remained in the meeting room.

“Director, what are we going to do?” You Zhengping asked worriedly.

The Zhen Li Studio was in the Xuyang District. If very strong Destroyers came to this world, their first target would be the Xuyang District.

“I’ll submit a report, unite the World Protection Organization, and request to reopen the ‘source project,’” Director Xiao said.

“But the ‘source project’ was abolished years ago, and at the time, they didn’t realize the goal of uniting the whole world. At most, the Protectors within one country put the ‘source project’ into practice, and the outcome was...no different from the world law’s self-harm, right?” said Lian Yufan, who had learned about the “source project” from their teaching materials.

“I’m only requesting it. When the Protectors have all died off, I suppose we’ll be able to use it.” Director Xiao smiled bitterly and left the conference room.

After receiving so much information, the remaining young Protectors were all somewhat dazed.

Cen Xiao remembered how You Zhengping had been defending the black-cloaked man in spite of everything earlier and became increasingly concerned. He wanted to take his friend aside for a chat, but he saw You Zhengping pull Lian Yufan into a corner and quietly say something.

“So...” You Zhengping arranged his wording. “Now that you’ve been working with Yu Hua this long, do you still suspect that he’s a Destroyer?”

Seeing You Zhengping secretively pull him aside, Lian Yufan had thought that he had wanted to start a captain-rank discussion on the basis of Huan Zixu’s information. He hadn’t expected You Zhengping’s head to still be full of his own home. He was instantly furious. “You’re a Protector. The fatal disaster may come at any time. Can’t you think about something other than romance?”

“No, I...” You Zhengping couldn’t explain.

“I don’t suspect him anymore. I’ll return those pants to you another day, and you can explain it however you want. Make him stop torturing me,” Lian Yufan said in a long-suffering way.

“You don’t suspect him anymore?” You Zhengping blinked. “When did you give up your suspicions?”

Lian Yufan rolled his eyes. “When we were doing the decorating. When you get home and have time for some pillow talk, make Yu Hua use environmentally friendly materials to redecorate the studio once we’ve made some money. I’m a special ability user, so formaldehyde won’t hurt me very much, but aren’t you afraid he’ll get cancer from breathing in so much formaldehyde every day?”

Then Lian Yufan shook off You Zhengping’s hand and left angrily.

Seeing that Lian Yufan, who had suspected Yu Hua from the beginning and had tested him in all kinds of ways, was now unshakably convinced of the fact that Yu Hua was an ordinary person, You Zhengping felt anguished.

His and Lian Yufan’s positions had been completely reversed.

Cen Xiao walked over and said, “You did a good job breaking up Huan Zixu’s arguments today, but you can’t have so many feelings about the black-cloaked man, do you understand? When I went to pick Zhen Li up from the studio, he told me that he had given Yu Hua an employee benefit, a two-person trip to the Maldives. I figure that we’ll have a few days off after this mission, so why don’t you go on a trip? Missions are important, but feelings are also important.”

After all, You Zhengping’s feelings amounted to combat ability, protecting them was also an aspect of work.

“No, I... Oh, forget it.” You Zhengping gave up on explaining, silently acknowledging what Cen Xiao was saying.

After all, from a certain point of view, Cen Xiao’s guess wasn’t wrong. He really had formed a feeling towards the black-cloaked man, but it wasn’t a feeling of psychological transference.

It was love at first sight.

—

Author’s Note:

You Zhengping: Hearing Huan Zixu smearing the black-cloaked man, I was angry! I argued on firm grounds, desperately defending him!

## CHAPTER 62

*—XX/XX/XX, I have become a married person. This is something that I never expected a year ago.*

*I’m a person who likes plans. When I was twelve years old, I planned out my whole life.*

*Go to a school that looks good to outsiders, be a student there who doesn’t stand out much. After graduation, like many university students, I would find a job through my school, starting at the lowest level. I wouldn’t need to exert myself to the utmost. I would work steadily, slowly relying on time and accumulation of experience to make it to the middle management level.*

*Before thirty, I would save enough money for a downpayment, take out a loan to buy a small apartment where I could live alone, get a car with good gas mileage under two-hundred thousand yuan, live this ordinary and languid life through to the end.*

*It was all right if I had no ambitions or couldn’t save much money. I didn’t want to work very hard. I only wanted to drink a leisurely cup of black tea in the afternoons.*

*I arranged everything, but I didn’t think of feelings and blessings. These are things outside of plans, and things that I never understood before. I had even rejected them.*

*I told Xiao You during our blind date that I wanted to find a person who longed for a comfortable life, but this was only an excuse.*

*Perhaps being alone had already become a habit. I couldn’t imagine spending my life with a complete stranger and accepting his circle of friends, being admitted into another family. Just imagining this picture made me shudder.*



*These were ideas I had before meeting Xiao You. Now, holding my marriage certificate, I'm reexamining my past ideas. I can only sigh about how changeable the world is. Plans can never keep up with change.*

*My considerations were indeed comprehensive. The only thing I didn't think of was that my plans were black and white. They didn't have the colors of life. I rejected everyone, and Xiao You crashed into my peaceful world and added color to it with his brush.*

*Thinking about it carefully, it is frightening to walk towards the grave alone. If there's someone on that road to support you and be supported, you'll have more courage.*

*From this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death do us part.*

In the base's lounge, You Zhengping turned on his personal computer and read the photographs of Yu Hua's calendar diary. After Lian Yufan's investigation, he had deleted all the electronic duplicates and sent the original to You Zhengping. Even though he had a physical copy, You Zhengping still couldn't stand to delete the electronic one and had saved it to his hard disk. The computers in the base were only connected to the internal network. The outside internet couldn't intrude. It was the safest possible computer.

He had already read the calendar diary many times. Before, he had only read sweetness in it. When he opened it again this time, he tasted bitterness.

Yu Hua's current life was completely different from the one he had planned out in that diary entry.

When You Zhengping had met Yu Hua, he had been only an assistant in the human resources department, the lowest level of employee. He had seemed to have no ambition. During the year the two of them had dated, Yu Hua's position had soared. When they had gotten married, he had been only a step from senior management.

And he hadn't bought a small one-room apartment. Before he was twenty-five, he had bought a nearly two-hundred fifty square meter apartment, because You Zhengping had many friends and relatives and needed a large apartment to entertain guests.

Buying the apartment had cleaned out Yu Hua's savings, which had come from who knew where. He had struggled for a few years before having spare money again to buy You Zhengping a car that cost over 300,000 yuan, and even then he had been a little unsatisfied; he had originally wanted to buy one for between half a million and a million.

A car for less than 200,000 hadn't been on the agenda.

Because of You Zhengping, there had been earth-shattering changes in Yu Hua's life. You Zhengping didn't know whether the changes he had brought had been good or bad.

But when he thought of Yu Hua's original plan, living alone, choosing his own grave, waiting to die a natural death and then going quietly, You Zhengping felt oppressed.

Lian Yufan had taken this diary as meaningless feelings, Cen Xiao and the others had complained about eating dog food again, and You Zhengping had at first been so delighted that his heart had filled with honey.

Until now, when You Zhengping finally understood the sort of story that lay behind this diary.

He thought of Huan Zixu's absurd conjectures about the black-cloaked man. You Zhengping had been unable to control himself. He had stood up to argue with Huan Zixu. He had wanted to tell everyone that the black-cloaked man didn't have any of those intentions. He was only tired.

He only wanted to rest, only wanted to live a peaceful life, only wanted to live peacefully to the last moment of his life. Why was that so hard?

You Zhengping rubbed his chest. It hurt. It hurt more than being blown up by Destroyer 192. It hurt so much that he was going to cry.

*Bang-bang-bang.* Someone was knocking on the door.

You Zhengping quickly turned off his computer, wiped away his tears, and opened the door to see that Cen Xiao had come with Zhen Li.

Zhen Li was a Destroyer. He didn't have the authority to move around the base on his own. He had to call on the Protectors. The Protector responsible for him was Cen Xiao. Zhen Li had requested that Cen Xiao take him to see the handsome uncle Protector.

"He said that he had something to say to you," Cen Xiao said, "and he won't let me listen. I'll withdraw."

Cen Xiao left the room. You Zhengping looked at Zhen Li uncomprehendingly, not knowing what this naïve Destroyer could have to say to him.

"I came to thank you," Zhen Li said, getting right to the point. "If you hadn't woken me up in time, I would have been tricked by Huan Zixu."

You Zhengping reverted to his official bearing and said emotionlessly, "I was only looking at the thing on its merits. That's where my duty is. There's nothing to thank me for."

Zhen Li said earnestly, "But I still have to thank you. I learned too many things today. My head was a mess. It's only just occurred to me that I'm disturbing your rest."

"You didn't disturb me," You Zhengping said simply.

"I was about to suspect that the great master clearer had hidden intentions. If you hadn't warned me, my fate would have been terrible." Zhen Li touched his face. He was afraid of being disfigured.

"Fate would have been terrible..." You Zhengping looked Zhen Li up and down and tentatively said, "You were the first Destroyer to have contact with the black-cloaked man, and much of our information about the black-cloaked man comes from you. Do you understand him well? Do you have much contact? Do you know his true identity?"

Zhen Li felt a trace of animosity from the handsome uncle Protector's three soul-searching questions. He quickly waved his hands. "I don't understand him, I don't, all I know is what he was willing to reveal. He probably wants to use me to express goodwill towards the Protection Organization. I believe that he has no ill intent and is willing to work with the organization. He just doesn't want to reveal his identity."

"Really?" You Zhengping scrutinized Zhen Li.

In fact, the reason Lian Yufan had suspected Yu Hua from the start was that Zhen Li's studio had hired him. That was what had brought about the investigation.

Now...Yu Hua was the only "ordinary person" among the studio's staff. The rest were all Destroyers or Protectors, and yet no one was suspicious. Even Lian Yufan, who had at first retained his 1% suspicion, had become firmly convinced of Yu Hua's "ordinary person" identity.

Zhen Li took Yu Hua as his guide. He gave him shares, gave him administrative powers, taught Yuan Luori the sliding kneel on the livestream. Knowing that Lian Yufan was a Protector, he still asserted himself to help Yu Hua make trouble for Lian Yufan.

The strangest thing was that the Protector squads who were following the livestreams hadn't felt any suspicion about the arrangement of authority in the studio. Luo Huai had voiced a doubt, and Lian Yufan had personally explained the unusual situation.

Even Director Xiao had privately ordered You Zhengping to pay constant attention to Yu Hua's mental state and take good care of him. If Yu Hua had been bullied at the studio, then Director Xiao would certainly have helped him find a well-paid job if he had the opportunity.

All of them had extreme faith in Yu Hua, as though they had been enchanted. "Yu Hua is an ordinary person" was a deeply-rooted idea in the Protectors' hearts.

You Zhengping was certain he didn't have any ability similar to Huan Zixu's "false exchange." He had no special ability, no brainwashing skills. This was an idea that had grown up in their minds through daily subtle influence.

Wasn't the reason that they were all so certain because there was an accomplice who seemed unable to hold his tongue, who was always saying the wrong thing, who was extremely cooperative, who was a total fool?

You Zhengping trusted his intuition absolutely. He loved Yu Hua. He had been unable to move on from the moment he had seen Yu Hua's face. He was certain that his feelings wouldn't stray. He was narrow-minded and could only love one person. If he loved someone, that person was Yu Hua!

He had no arguments, no evidence, no facts, but he was certain!

Zhen Li saw the handsome uncle Protector's expression looking more and more off. He backed up step by step, until he had retreated to the wall and nowhere else to retreat to. He was scared into trembling and crouched down, holding his head. "I really wouldn't dare to lie to you!"

You Zhengping stared at Zhen Li, feeling so sick at heart that he was in a muddle. Zhen Li was the only person who had seen the black-cloaked man's true face.

The only one!!!

With one hand, he lifted Zhen Li, who was like a scared little rabbit. He looked him up and down, left and right, and suddenly understood something Yu Hua had said—there was something attractive about Zhen Li's flat cheeks.

Zhen Li was scared nearly to death. He thought that if the handsome uncle Protector asked one more question, he wouldn't be able to keep himself from telling the truth.

But the handsome uncle Protector only pinched his chin and carefully studied his face. Sneering, he said, "You're pretty good looking. No wonder you managed to become a minor internet celebrity."

"I'm passable. If you were twenty years younger, you would definitely be better-looking than me," Zhen Li praised You Zhengping's nanotech mask.

*I don't need to be younger, I'm already more handsome than you!* You Zhengping flared up inside, but he didn't say it out loud. He let go of Zhen Li and waved his hand. "All right, you've thanked me, go on."

"Oh, thank you." Zhen Li felt that he had escaped a calamity and dejectedly left the room. When he walked out the door, he let out a long breath.

Cen Xiao, waiting outside the door, saw that Zhen Li's expression was unhappy and asked, "Why are you looking so bad?"

"It's nothing. Your captain just told me I was handsome," Zhen Li said, holding his chest, still scared after the fact.

"What? He said you were handsome?" Cen Xiao's voice nearly broke.

What was wrong with You Zhengping? Not only was he defending the black-cloaked man in every way he could, he was also flirting with Zhen Li. What was going on? The seven year itch? He had been married too long and wanted stimulation?

Cen Xiao wanted to go have a heart-to-heart with You Zhengping, but first, he still had to take Zhen Li back, and second, he had already warned You Zhengping twice today.

“Aren’t I handsome?” Zhen Li looked at Cen Xiao in some disappointment. Where good looks were concerned, he had to stand up for himself when he could.

“That’s not it, I didn’t mean that you aren’t good-looking, I was just saying, he shouldn’t be... I don’t want him to... Forget it, don’t mention it, don’t take any notice, you’re the most handsome. Go get some rest, I’ll take you guys home tomorrow,” Cen Xiao said vaguely in the end.

Inside the lounge, after seeing Zhen Li off, You Zhengping leaned feebly against the door and slid down. He sat down on the cold floor.

If he had only asked one more question, Zhen Li wouldn’t have been able to withstand the pressure. He would have told the truth. But then what?

Yu Hua’s husband You Zhengping wanted to clear up his stew of messy feelings, but the Protector You Zhengping couldn’t know the black-cloaked man’s identity.

A Protector had a duty. If he acquired definite evidence, he would have to report it to the organization. He couldn’t do anything that wouldn’t be in the organization’s interests. He couldn’t hide any information concerning Destroyers.

He had been born into a military family and grown up in the Protectors’ training base. The teachings of generations of his ancestors and the education he had received growing up were all telling him that he had to be prepared at any moment to offer up everyone for his country and the people, to fulfill his duty. He couldn’t betray that.

So...what should he do?

He remembered that dream, the dream about the black-cloaked man kissing him. It hadn’t been a delusion, and it hadn’t been a disturbance to his thought field. It had been his intuition and his heart telling him the truth.

At the same time, intuition had told You Zhengping to ignore that dream.

You Zhengping painfully closed his eyes, every word Yu Hua had written in the calendar diary flashing through his mind.

Yu Hua wanted to live a peaceful life, and You Zhengping, who had married him, wanted to protect that dream.

You Zhengping opened his eyes. With no evidence, relying solely on his personal intuition, nothing was clear. Lian Yufan had been very suspicious of Yu Hua, but faced with the outcome of the investigation he had had to acknowledge it. Unless there came a day when the black-cloaked man took off his mask in front of everyone, all his guesses, intuitions, and feelings were of no avail.

The Protector You Zhengping didn't know anything.

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Author's Note:

Xiao You: I can only love one person. No matter what he becomes, I'll still love him.

## CHAPTER 63

On Monday morning, Yu Hua came to work looking gloomy.

He had passed a rather chaotic weekend.

First he had happily passed a romantic Saturday with his husband, which his husband had considerately prepared in accordance with his interests. Though the choice of movie had been kind of funny, that wasn't a big problem. That day should have been very happy!

But two Destroyers had suddenly appeared. Yu Hua had been ready to forgive them onto account of them sensibly giving him and You Zhengping pink hearts.

But Xiao You had urgently gone out "on assignment" on Saturday night because of those two Destroyers, leaving him lying alone among decomposing rose petals. He had gotten up in the morning and still had to work to scrub the bedding. And the new Destroyers had brainwashed his subordinates. First thing on a Sunday morning, he had been faced with his ignorant subordinates' disobedience.

Yu Hua had even printed out the receipt from the app-based taxi, but Huan Zixu had "changed" his impression, making him think that he had stayed home all day sleeping and that the business with the warehouse hadn't happened.

So what about his plan to make his subordinates kneel on the receipt on the acupressure mat? Yu Hua was annoyed.

The absolute most angering thing was that these two seemed to know quite a lot, Xiao You had gone to the base and hadn't come back, and Yu Hua had slept alone for another night.

They had just gone on a sweet date, and it had been closely followed by two nights of solitude in a row. Was this how a normal couple was supposed to live?

According to precedent, every time they caught a Destroyer, the next morning, Xiao You would come home early. Yu Hua had gotten up first thing and baked many cute cakes and made egg yolk pastries, cream puffs, and other such afternoon tea foods. He had put them in a lunchbox and carefully made an ice bag, so that when Xiao You came home and finished eating breakfast, he could take them to work and share them with Cen Xiao and the rest of his friends. This way, Cen Xiao would praise him for his virtuousness and continued advising Xiao You to treat him well.

Yes, while he had always been unhappy about Cen Xiao so clearly coming between them, this time Yu Hua was inwardly in approval of Cen Xiao.

He knew to advise Xiao You to return to his home. He was a good brother.

Even though the person Xiao You liked this time was also Yu Hua himself...

Thinking of this, Yu Hua felt happy and pleased, and the little pastries he made were especially delicious.

But Xiao You didn't come home in the morning.

At 8:30 AM, Yu Hua had stared at the table covered in pastries, his mood going from clear skies to a thunderstorm. He couldn't resist calling Xiao You.

Xiao You did pick up. He said he was working back-to-back shifts. After finishing his assignment, he had gone straight to work. He would only be back in the evening.

If he could take the call, it showed that he had left the base and returned to the police team. Why could he return to the police team but not come before that to see him? They could have eaten breakfast together! If he didn't have time to eat breakfast, he still could have come back to have a look at him, kiss him, take the sweets and go!

Yu Hua raised his hand and brought his palm down towards the sweets he had worked hard to make. The air pressure around him dropped. If that palm fell, then the whole Xuyang District might be done for.

When the calm was only a millimeter away from the sweets, the message notification belonging to You Zhengping rang. Yu Hua glanced out of the corner of his eye and saw a pop-up window on his phone: *I'm sorry for being so busy right now. In a few days, I'll ask for a vacation and go on a trip with you, okay? Love you (finger heart).*

The power to topple mountain and overturn seas vanished in an instant. The direction of Yu Hua's palm changed. He carefully packed up the mango layer cake and strawberry cake on the

table into cake boxes and put them into another lunchbox. He also wrote out a label that said “exclusively for You Zhengping” and stuck it onto the lunchbox.

He called an errand runner and sent him to bring the two lunchboxes to the Xuyang District’s first police station. One box was especially for You Zhengping, the other box was from him as a common person to the hardworking people’s police.

When he was finished doing this, his thunderstorm having changed to an overcast sky, he arrived at work.

When he walked in, he saw Zhen Li kneeling on the ground, practicing tightening his abdominal muscles and doing a yoga cat pose to warm up. He remembered the employee benefit, and his expression improved slightly. He nodded and said, “Go ahead and warm up, but don’t hurt your knees.”

Hearing him, Zhen Li’s eyes brimmed with tears. The first class seats and five-star hotel hadn’t been bought for nothing!

“Where are the janitor and the stupid dog?” Yu Hua said darkly, sitting in his chair, casually putting his feet on the desk.

He wasn’t even calling them Director Yuan and Director Ha? It seemed that the great master was very angry. Zhen Li swallowed carefully and explained on Yuan Luori’s behalf, “Director Ha is still little, only three and a half months old. It can’t use a human toilet, so Yuan Luori went to an estate nearby to walk it. That estate has an area specially set aside for walking dogs, and Yuan Luori brought a poop scooper. He won’t harm the estate’s environment.”

“Fine.” Yu Hua wiped the desktop. There was no dust. Yuan Luori had in fact done a good job cleaning.

While there were only the two of them in the office, Zhen Li put in a good word for Yuan Luori. “Great master, Yuan Luori didn’t know what he was doing. He’s innocent. We got caught last night because we’re useless, but Yuan Luori really...wasn’t deliberately disrespectful towards you. He really, really respects you. You’re his belief system.”

“Yes.” Yu Hua half lowered his eyelids, accepting Zhen Li’s explanation.

But inwardly, his anger hadn’t dissipated. He needed to find someone to vent it on.

Zhen Li said, “Great master, I have important information, can you screen off the surroundings? In case the walls have ears.”

Yu Hua reached out a finger and touched the top of the desk. An invisible ripple radiated outwards from Yu Hua. “Go ahead.”



Zhen Li clearly felt that power. He thought faintly that the great master was even stronger than he had been at the interview at the very beginning. Many times stronger.

Qualified two-faced spy Zhen Li briefly explained the two points that Huan Zixu had brought up the day before, concerning the System's future scheme and the natural law power. When he was finished, he stared anxiously at Yu Hua, looking forward to having his misgivings dispelled.

"Huan Zixu is a genius." Yu Hua nodded faintly. "Only 199 levels, and he's more or less guessed the outlines of the truth."

"So...it's true about the world law? The reason that I can use the alternate dimension stomach is that the world law acknowledged me?" Zhen Li said in astonishment. "This power...wasn't it set aside for me by you?"

Even though the handsome uncle Protector had punctured Huan Zixu's plans for instigation yesterday, Zhen Li was still hoping to get an answer from Yu Hua.

"I did leave it for you. The System can't directly remove a leveler's initial item and origin ability, but I can," Yu Hua said patiently. "But later, when you ate the rope Yuan Luori used to bind you, and when you ate the poison bubbles at the amusement park, and the paper slips and cardboard box, that was actually your own skill. An alternate dimension stomach can in fact eat those things, but have you considered whether an ordinary person's esophagus could endure those items?"

"I was choking!" Zhen Li said, wide-eyed.

"The poison bubbles could even be absorbed into the body through the skin. You ate the poison bubbles. They touched your whole oral cavity and esophagus. Why weren't you poisoned?" Yu Hua asked.

Zhen Li said, "...That's right, I actually never thought of that!"

"When you felt that it was difficult to swallow, that was because your ability is too weak. It hasn't upgrade yet, but it's already visible in its rudimentary form." Yu Hua smiled faintly. "When Yuan Luori tied you up on the toilet, why do you think I hinted to you to eat the rope?"

"!!!" Zhen Li was shaken. "Did you think then that my power came from the world law?"

Yu Hua glanced at him with an "isn't that obvious?" expression.

Zhen Li covered his heart. He thought that he was the person in the studio who somewhat understood the great master. He hadn't thought that there would be many secrets he wasn't aware of. The great master's thoughts were too deep. It was impossible to see the bottom.

"Why-why didn't you tell me? I would have worked hard upgrade and help everyone..." Zhen Li said, aggrieved.

Yu Hua turned his chair. Looking out the window, he said, “Do you think that the Protectors and the Destroyers can shake hands and make peace?”

“That...would be hard to force them into,” Zhen Li said after thinking about it.

“I know that.” Yu Hua gazed at the far-off insubstantial clouds. “One person’s power can’t change hundreds of years of hatred, and it’s not something I can impose. I’ll only follow along as this develops, quietly waiting for the day their ideas change.”

“You-you hope that the Protectors and Destroyers will work together?” Zhen Li said. “And that’s why you set down the rules that no one could harm people or violate the law, and why you haven’t shown yourself, letting the Protectors come into contact with different Destroyers. The two sides exchange ideas in battle, understand each other. You only appear when the battle is white-hot and the two sides are about to bring about irreversible losses to save a desperate situation, and use an even stronger enemy as an excuse to force the Protectors to leave behind the Destroyers, who have information, and then gradually acknowledge...”

“No!” Yu Hua interrupted Zhen Li’s guesses and said firmly, “I hope that day never comes.”

But the great master’s actions were clearly facilitating such a day... Why? Zhen Li stared at Yu Hua, faintly feeling that there was a trace of sorrow hidden in his eyes.

Was the great master still concealing something that they didn’t know? A means to truly protect this world, but a means that would make the great master forever...

Zhen Li didn’t dare to think about it any further. He faintly thought that he had felt the edges of the truth, something that Yu Hua didn’t want anyone to know about but was still slowly bringing about.

Zhen Li shook his head, shaking out his train of thought. He changed the subject. “Great master, about the System confusing the world law and maybe sending more powerful people, is that true?”

“It’s half right,” Yu Hua said dully. “It’s true that more powerful people will come, but you and the other levelers haven’t only been used to confuse the world law. It’s also to...”

Strengthen the System’s power.

Yu Hua’s seal had been created by absorbing more than half of the System’s energy. Each time a part of it was unsealed, a bit of energy that had originally belonged to the System would drain away. The more his power awakened, the stronger the System would be.

On the day 100% of his power awakened, the System would be restored to the power it had had in its prime.

And on that day, it seemed that he could have no choice but to...

Yu Hua sighed. He only wanted one quiet lifetime. Why was it so hard?

“So when the time comes, how strong will the people who come be?” Zhen Li said in fright. “How much damage will they cause? Will the Xuyang District still exist? How many losses will there be among the Protectors?”

“You sound more and more like a Protector,” Yu Hua said.

“I...” Zhen Li was also a little taken aback.

“Think up a reason to pass this on to the Protection Organization. The powerful people who will come in the future will definitely be ones who hold a portion of natural law power. If the Protection Organization has some trump card that they haven’t used yet, then that will be the time to get it out,” Yu Hua said. “It won’t be long now, a year...half a year...and then they’ll be here.”

“A portion of natural law power?” Hearing this expression, Zhen Li was frightened.

“Right, the ability to distort certain natural laws,” Yu Hua said. “It’s a threshold that levelers pass at five hundred worlds, and it’s a level that the System wants levelers to survive. After five hundred levels, the levelers’ points disappear, and the System’s market disappears, because they have absorbed fragments of the natural law power that they’ve destroyed. They can warp a certain space, create their own little world and lay down new laws in it. Five hundred levels is the boundary line between humans and gods.”

This fell into the category of things Zhen Li couldn’t understand. He shook his head and said, “Why does the System want to destroy so many worlds, create so many levelers, and then in the end kill them? What is its goal? Doesn’t it take human life and death into account?”

Yu Hua laughed mockingly. “Does the earth’s rotation need a goal? Does the sun attracting all the bodies in the solar system to orbit around it need a goal? Does a black hole constantly sucking in and consuming everything around it need a goal? When the universe explodes and is reborn, will it take into account the life and death of the insignificant beings on all the celestial bodies?

“The System absorbing parallel worlds is instinct, it’s a rule, it’s an inevitability of the world’s development, it’s the destruction that must come after too much prosperity. There is no reason. There is only inevitability.”

“Then is there any meaning in our opposition and efforts?” Zhen Li said blankly when he heard Yu Hua.

If everything was inevitable, then why did they have to struggle? Why not enjoy life while they could?

“Do humans stop scientific development in its tracks because they are certain to die in the future? Will they cease to yearn for the sky because gravity exists? Will the Protectors give up on protecting ordinary people because something has been fate?” Yu Hua said firmly, “Humans are creatures who go forward in defiance of natural order. Every day we exist, we oppose heaven and earth. We will not stop until we are destroyed.”

“And that’s why I want to be human. I won’t be a god,” Yu Hua said.

Zhen Li crouched silently on the floor, curling into a ball, considering what Yu Hua had said.

When Lian Yufan arrived at the studio with their new colleague, this was the scene he saw. Yu Hua had his legs propped up on his desk, while Zhen Li was crouching in a corner drawing circles in the air, looking as though he had been bullied.

Witnessing this scene of the employee bullying the boss, Lian Yufan felt displeased. He angrily said, “Yu Hua, you’re oppressing us again!”

“No, no, no, I wanted to crouch.” Zhen Li quickly crowded the other two into the bathroom and locked the door behind them.

Huan Zixu, who had just arrived at the office, was stunned. In spite of himself, he asked, “Does your company always welcome its new employees in the bathroom?”

“I think we do...” Zhen Li said thoughtfully.

When Yuan Luori had come, he had tied Zhen Li up in the bathroom, and later Yuan Luori himself had gone to clean the bathroom. And Lian Yufan had been forced into the bathroom by the formaldehyde smell. It seemed to be the fixed pattern.

But that wasn’t important. Zhen Li held Lian Yufan in place and said, “I just had a feeling.”

“What feeling?” Lian Yufan asked.

Zhen Li stretched out his finger and drew a circle in the air with only a five centimeter radius.

This tiny circle was connected to an alternate dimension space. Lian Yufan tossed a piece of soap into it, and the soap vanished without a trace. Zhen Li himself didn’t know where that piece of soap had gone.

“This...” Lian Yufan looked at Huan Zixu. “You were right. Zhen Li is a Protector.”

Zhen Li “grabbed” the circle and tossed it towards his abdomen. He nodded in satisfaction. “It can still serve as an alternate dimension stomach. I’ll be able to promote food on the livestreams.”

Lian Yufan for once gave Zhen Li a friendly smile. "I'll try applying to the organization to see whether they'll agree to let you become a true Protector."

"Thank you so much," Zhen Li said happily.

He had suddenly understood the true use of the alternate dimension stomach because of Yu Hua's words. If a battle was destined, then Zhen Li hoped to become a power.

Even if it was only a tiny spark, it could still light up the path at his feet.

—

Yu Hua: I want to be human.

Lian Yufan: Act like a human being!

## CHAPTER 64

"Ah..." Yuan Luori sat on a bench in the estate, holding a leash, looking worried.

Yuan Luori had a stubborn character. No matter how much bitterness he was holding in, he wouldn't perform for others. For example, Zhen Li, who had offended Yu Hua just like he had, could immediately fall into a sliding kneel and apologize, but Yuan Luori wouldn't apologize even if Yu Hua held his head down and made him kneel.

Yuan Luori had taken a pretty big hit from the meeting at the Protectors' base last night. He had always thought that the reason Zhen Li had been able to keep his special ability was that he had behaved well and not offended the great master clearer, while he had committed a crime and been punished by having his eyesight damaged and losing all of his power.

When they had returned to the studio this morning, Zhen Li had quietly told him that the great master clearer in fact hadn't destroyed his initial item and origin ability. Before, when he had been at the base and had suddenly lost his eyesight for a whole night, that had been the great master reactivating his initial item.

So his uselessness and inability to help hadn't been the great master's punishment. It had been because he hadn't obtained recognition from the world law.

Yuan Luori was unwilling to show weakness in front of others (especially Zhen Li). He could only take advantage of his time walking the dog to say some of what was in his heart to Director Ha, who was in this with him and was also studying law.

"Tell me, why do I need to get recognition from some stupid world law?" Yuan Luori was rather defiant. "Do I need to please someone else in order to get the power? Pooh! As if!"

He heavily stroked the husky's head and tore out some fur. The little husky resisted.

“But if I had my ability, I could help the great master destroy the new levelers!” Yuan Luori’s eyes lit up. “The System wants to use the levelers to hurt that great master. I wish I could help.”

The husky shook its head desperately, trying to dodge Yuan Luori’s torment.

Yuan Luori was too rough. His head stroking gesture wasn’t pleasant at all. It felt bad!

“Since this is the case, for the sake of my savior, my idol, then I can accept bowing my head before the world law.” Yuan Luori finally found himself a reason to submit and felt much better. While there was no one around, he said to the sky, “Hey, I’ve decided to join the Protectors, please activate my ability.”

The little husky: “...”

It had been wrong. It had only thought that Yuan Luori was stupid. It hadn’t thought that he was *this* stupid!

“It hasn’t been awakened yet?” Yuan Luori said doubtfully after waiting for a while. “What *is* my origin ability anyway? Hm?”

The next second, Yuan Luori grabbed his own hair with both hands and said in panic, “Xiao Ha, do you think that I didn’t equip my origin ability in the first ten levels, so the System’s market took it back?”

The little husky: “...”

It saw its leash fall from Yuan Luori’s hands. Yuan Luori, who only had attention to spare for his ravings, didn’t notice the dog’s leash slackening.

The little husky quietly lowered its head and took hold of the other end of the leash with its teeth so Yuan Luori couldn’t take it.

While this idiot was talking to himself, it was going to quietly run off and escape Yu Hua’s torture. It would hide out near the studio and wait for new companions from the Clearing League to arrive, then ask them help using the information it had learned from Yuan Luori, make them use their items to help it change to a better body!

Yuan Luori didn’t notice the husky’s movements at all. He took off his glasses and whispered, “My initial item was the vision link. Would my origin ability also manifest in my eyes? Or... maybe my nearsightedness isn’t nearsightedness, it’s an eye technique? What if what awakens is a Byakugan or Sharingan like in the anime?”

He stared at the tree next to him, his eyes open very wide, waiting expectantly for a special ability to appear.

He had a high level of near-sightedness and astigmatism. When he took off his glasses, he was half blind, to the point that he couldn't tell humans and dogs apart at a slight distance. Director Ha naturally understood the condition of Yuan Luori's eyes. It quietly used its paws to knock Yuan Luori's glasses off the bench, quietly jumped off the bench itself, then scurried away.

Seeing that Yuan Luori hadn't noticed at all, Director Ha was extremely pleased. It was free!

It strode on its four legs, quickly sprinting around the estate, and ran into a group of elementary school students playing with scooters.

"A dog! A little husky!" A tall, skinny boy saw Director Ha and charged over on his scooter, blocking Director Ha's way.

Stupid native whelp. Director Ha haughtily swept its gaze over the boy and howled up to the sky to express its disdain.

This seemed ferocious, but in reality its voice was young and tender. After all, it was only three and a half months old. It wasn't very large. There wasn't anything imposing to speak of about it.

"It has a leash. Whose dog is this? How could they lose the dog?" The tall, skinny boy tried to catch Director Ha.

Director Ha quickly fled. The tall, skinny boy was a little bratty. Seeing that Director Ha was going to get away, he quickly called, "Stop it, don't let that dog run around!"

The group of children on their scooters intercepted and encircled it, surrounding Director Ha completely. The tall, skinny boy ran up and grabbed Director Ha's tail. Roughly holding on to it, he said, "I got it, hahaha!"

His movements weren't gentle at all. The tug hurt Director Ha. It began to howl and turned its head to bite the tall, skinny boy.

When its teeth were just about to touch the child's hand, its body instinctively relaxed. This was Lian Yufan's training. It was a conditioned reflex. It couldn't bite.

Director Ha hadn't bitten the boy, but it had still scared him.

"The dog bites! Bad dog! We have to teach it a lesson!" The bratty child gave Director Ha's tail another fierce tug. The crowd of children threw aside their scooters and surrounded Director Ha, pinching and hitting.

Director Ha couldn't escape. It was in pain. It could only curl up, wailing pitifully in the circle of bratty children, just as though it was crying.

“What are you doing?” said a childish voice that was rather full of righteousness. Everyone stopped. There was a boy standing on a scooter, looking righteously at the crowd.

“Liu Junjun.” Seeing him, the bratty children backed away one after another. Someone quietly said, “His dad is a criminal police captain. He arrests bad children. My mom told me so.”

The tall, skinny boy quickly said, “The dog bit me first.”

“I saw you yanking its tail. Of course that hurts. Let me see your hand. If it really bit you, you have to go get a rabies shot.” Junjun pulled over the tall, skinny boy’s hand.

Hearing about the shot, the tall, skinny boy quickly said, “No, no, no, it just scared me, it didn’t really bite me, its teeth didn’t even touch me.”

Junjun carefully examined the tall, skinny boy’s hand and didn’t find any broken skin or red marks. Then he relaxed and said, “Then why were you hitting the dog? You shouldn’t have been pulling its tail in the first place. If you pull like that, even a dog that doesn’t bite people would be forced into biting.”

“Right, right.” The tall, skinny boy dejectedly ran off with the other children.

Junjun looked at the little husky curled up and shaking on the ground. He crouched down and didn’t touch it. He tentatively asked, “Whose dog are you? Where’s your owner?”

Director Ha saw the little boy that it had used as a hostage in the park and thought to itself that enemies truly were destined to meet. It was a goner.

The first time it had seen Junjun, Director Ha had still been human. He had given Junjun a glass bottle, patted the boy’s cap, told him that this was a bomb and he had to hold on tightly, or else it would explode if he dropped it.

Then he had picked Junjun up, dropped him into one of the park’s little boats, and blown up the water, sending Junjun out into the middle of the lake.

Then he had blown up several places in the park and injured a number of people, attracting the notice of the Protection Organization.

The little boy Liu Junjun was the beginning of Destroyer 192’s series of cases.

Seeing that the little husky didn’t move, Junjun worked up his courage and reached out to gently stroke the husky’s head.

His hand was different from Yuan Luori’s. The child’s hand was tender and soft. It seemed that Junjun had a dog at home. He knew how to pet a dog’s head so that it felt good.



“Awoo,” Director Ha called happily. Promptly noticing its own embarrassing behavior, it quickly shook its head to throw off Junjun’s hand.

Junjun was scared of being bitten by the dog. He drew back his hand, observed for a while, saw that Director Ha wasn’t going to attack, then went up again to pet the dog’s head and scratch its back.

Director Ha was inwardly resistant, but its body’s instincts were very honest. It liked having Junjun stroke its head.

It was truly humiliating to be so weak in front of an enemy. Director Ha was inwardly disdainful towards itself, but its body rolled over, revealing its white belly for Junjun to pet.

“All right, all right.” Junjun pet the dog’s belly, picked up the leash, and called out, “Who lost a dog? A husky, three or four months old.”

Yuan Luori, who was looking for his glasses, heard this and quickly called, “It’s mine, it’s mine, wait for me! Where are my glasses?”

He had searched the bench for ages without seeing where his glasses were. Luckily, Junjun heard his voice and followed it, leading the dog. He helped Yuan Luori pick his glasses up off the ground. “You dropped them over here, dagege.”

Yuan Luori put on his glasses. Hearing the address “dagege,” he was beside himself with happiness and said in praise, “You have excellent judgment.”

While he’d been walking the dog in the park these past few days, there had been brats calling him “uncle.” *Uncle my ass!* Physically, he was only nineteen.

Junjun smiled politely. “Dagege, do you often walk this dog here?”

“I pretty much walk it once every morning and evening,” Yuan Luori said.

He blinked at Junjun, then took off his glasses and stared at Junjun some more. Was it because he was near-sighted? Why was it that when he took his glasses off, it looked like there was something missing on the boy’s head, but when he put his glasses on, nothing was missing?

“So when you come to walk your dog, can I pet it?” Junjun said. “I used to have a dog at home, but later my grandmother got sick and moved in with us. Her health is bad, she’s allergic to dogs, so we gave the dog away...”

As he spoke, Junjun’s eyes moistened slightly.

“I’m going to go on a talent show in a few days, so someone else will be walking it. When that happens, I’ll tell that person, and you’ll still be able to pet the dog,” Yuan Luori promised.

After the grownup and the child said goodbye to each other, Yuan Luori took Director Ha back to the studio. Seeing Director Ha looking listless, he said, "Why are you drooping? Didn't you have fun running around just now?"

Director Ha rolled its eyes at Yuan Luori, thinking, *How could a waste of space like you understand the suffering of being rescued by your nemesis, then showing your belly in front of that nemesis?*

Instinct truly was frightening. Thinking that it still had to suffer this way for ten years, Director Ha thought that Yu Hua really was a brutal person.

Yuan Luori returned to the studio leading the dog. As soon as he walked in the door, he heard Yu Hua's terrifying voice: "Once again you've gone around me, the human resources director, to hire someone new? Lian Yufan, oh, Lian Yufan, you don't manage public relations like you're supposed to, but you're so attentive to everything that isn't your responsibility."

As soon as he heard this, Yuan Luori knew that Yu Hua was in a very bad mood. This was normal. Director Yu was never in a good mood.

He bent down, drew back his neck, and picked up Director Ha. The man and the dog didn't even dare to breathe loudly, quietly walking towards a corner.

"Stop," said Yu Hua. "Put down the dog."

Yuan Luori sucked in a breath. He stiffly turned to face Yu Hua. His knees were starting to go soft.

He wasn't sure himself why he was so scared of an ordinary person like Yu Hua. Perhaps there were some people who naturally possessed leadership ability.

Yu Hua fixed his eyes on Yuan Luori. He thought about how he wasn't supposed to remember about the warehouse and had no reason to get mad. He had been planning to find an unswept place to use as a reason to make Yuan Luori kneel on the acupressure mat today, but the studio was so clean that he couldn't even find a single dog hair. He had to bear it. "The show group is coming today to film a video of your daily life. It has to be with the dog. Make yourself and the dog look nice. Have Zhen Li help you with your makeup and picking out clothes."

Hearing that this was about the show group, Yuan Luori relaxed slightly. He straightened his back and was planning on giving Director Ha a bath, so the show group would see a husky with a fluffy and smooth coat.

Of course, the important thing wasn't the filming. The main point was that the bathroom had a door. He would be relatively safe hiding inside.

Seeing the janitor and the dog hiding in the bathroom, Yu Hua's gaze fell on Huan Zixu. His eyes were full of dissatisfaction.

He did indeed want to recruit a subordinate, but the one he wanted was Feng Kui. Huan Zixu only came along as a two-for-one deal.

Thinking that this person was the chief culprit behind the last few days, Yu Hua smiled faintly. He'd finally found someone to vent his anger on.

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Author's Note:

Yu Hua: There's a whole row of tight shoes<sup>22</sup> at the studio's door. No need to fight over them. Just walk in and they're right there, right there!

Zhen Li: I have small feet. These shoes are okay.

Yuan Luori: Where are my glasses? If I don't have my glasses, I can't see where the shoes are.

Lian Yufan: Am I seeing wrong? Yu Hua, did you put Director Ha's shoes on my shoe rack?

Huan Zixu: Isn't there something wrong with our studio?

Everyone: Get used to it.

## CHAPTER 65

Huan Zixu was very curious about Yu Hua. When you came right down to it, his stratagem to sow discord between the Protection Organization and the black-cloaked man had run afoul because of Yu Hua.

He had thought that in a studio full of Protectors and Destroyers, Yu Hua's position would be the lowest, and that President Zhen Li and Director Yuan Luori would be ganging up to order him around every day. Therefore, he had controlled the two of them to make them send that sort of message to Yu Hua.

This originated from a leveler's habit of looking down on the ordinary people in their levels. Even someone as astute and circumspect as Huan Zixu couldn't avoid falling into this common trap. While following Yu Hua and his husband, he had discovered that Yu Hua was a person with a strong desire for control and a high IQ. He was even a little sinister. His desire for control over his husband reached terrifying levels.

But Huan Zixu had thought at the time that a desire for control in familial relationships was precisely a sign of foiled ambitions at work, making up for a lack of satisfaction in community relationships with another type of relationship. That was common.

As it turned out, underestimating Yu Hua had been the reason this operation had failed.

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<sup>22</sup> "Giving someone tight shoes to wear" is a common expression for making an employee's life difficult in little ways."

Yu Hua not only oppressed the two levelers, even Lian Yufan, who was a Protector, had instructed Huan Zixu on the way: “We’ve settled behind closed doors than you’re going to be the studio’s marketing director, but we still have to respect appearances. Yu Hua is the human resources director. The employment contracts and the official seal are in his hands. He may want to interview you again when we get to the studio. He’s a little... Well, you’ll know when we get there. Above all, remember one thing, though we handle secret work, we still need to have a comfortable working environment. If you want to do your work without trouble, it’s best to get on Yu Hua’s good side.”

These words had surprised Huan Zixu. He had thought that the reason Yu Hua could oppress Zhen and Yuan was that the two of them were Destroyers who had committed crimes. Lian Yufan oversaw the studio, and Lian Yufan would no doubt take good care of an ordinary person like Yu Hua. That was why Zhen and Yuan were polite to Yu Hua.

But hearing Lian Yufan talk about it... Did that mean even a Protector was oppressed by Yu Hua? What was his actual position in the studio?

Holding these doubts, Huan Zixu arrived at the studio and met with Yu Hua’s attitude during work.

He held a pen and sat in the office’s best president’s chair, interrogating Lian Yufan about why he had exceeded his place and meddled in Yu Hua’s affairs, going around the human resources director to hire an employee.

Lian Yufan said, “Huan Zixu’s working abilities are excellent. He’s a former champion salesman, and a talent personally located by President Zhen.”

Hearing Lian Yufan mention him, Zhen Li inadvertently drew in his neck. Being a boss like him really meant he might depart this life at any moment.

“Let me see his resume,” Yu Hua said. “Zhen Li is in fact the boss. He suspended his university education to start a business. His courage is commendable. But he admits himself that his social experience is insufficient. To prevent himself from being duped by people with sinister intentions, he was willing to let me oversee things. This is written in my contract in black and white.”

“Yes, yes! It’s written, I’ll listen to you,” Zhen Li said fawningly at once.

Lian Yufan quickly offered the resume that the Protection Organization had worked through the night to falsify for Huan Zixu. The System had thrown together an identity for Huan Zixu of a middle school graduate who had gone out to work, alone in the world with no one but a cousin (Feng Kui) to support him. They couldn’t use that resume.

Yu Hua took the resume and flipped through it. Seeing the university, he laughed and tossed the resume on the table. “Not even a Project 985 or 211 university? Just this?”

“For a new graduate, you do have to consider the school they graduated from, but for a person with work experience, their track record is of top priority,” Lian Yufan said.

Yu Hua glanced at him, turned on his work computer, searched online, opened a video, and turned the computer towards Lian Yufan.

The video was a recording of the time when Zhen Li had hired Yu Hua. Zhen Li was as proud as a peacock, wearing a white scholarly gown and waving a fan. He was saying haughtily towards the camera, “Our position here requires that you be a graduate of a top three university or better.”

It was accompanied by a comment on the barrage: [Right, right, our studio’s requirements are high. We have no time for an average person.]

Lian Yufan turned his head and glared at Zhen Li.

Zhen Li lowered his head even further. He thought that the elegant, beautiful, and haughty self in the video...was a thing of the past.

“You also have to be proficient in five or more foreign languages.”

“Also, three years or more experience in senior management at one of the country’s top one-hundred enterprises.”

“What I need is someone who can collaborate and struggle with me in the long-term.”

The more the white-clothed, ancient-styled, long-haired, floating and elegant Zhen Li in the video said, the more sweat broke out on the real Zhen Li’s forehead. He went from lowering his head to bending his waist to going down on his knees, only a centimeter away from kneeling. The reason he didn’t really kneel was that the acupuncture mat wasn’t in position.

“I thought that these were our company’s employment requirements,” Yu Hua said, smiling faintly at Zhen Li. “Yuan Luori’s education record is inadequate, but we all know that his true position isn’t director. He’s the janitor, and he takes care of the dog. ‘Environmental maintenance director’ is a pleasant-sounding polite fiction, just because there are few people in the company. And as for his contract, Director Lian knows all about that, right?”

Seeing Zhen Li in the video going on about “needs a good education record,” “needs to be able to operate transnationally,” “needs to have work experience,” “work experience can’t be too good”; he wished he could throttle the quail next to him.

“What was going through your head when you were first setting up the studio?” Lian Yufan nearly roared at Zhen Li.

"I was just thinking beautiful thoughts about showing off my wardrobe and my face in front of the livestream camera. Yu Hua said he could make it so more people saw me, so I hired him," Zhen Li said quietly.

"While Director Lian is an employee that President Zhen went around me to drop on me out of nowhere, his education is adequate, and he can in fact speak five foreign languages," Yu Hua said.

Lian Yufan was one of the Protection Organization's carefully trained elite, first every year in the nationwide contest. His top school graduate student experience was the result of sitting the examinations himself, and the United Nations' commonly used languages were necessary study materials. His record was flawless, even better than Yu Hua's own, and he was single. He completely fit Zhen Li's initial requirements. This was the reason that Yu Hua hadn't made trouble about Lian Yufan being employed.

But Huan Zixu was different.

Yu Hua casually asked a few questions in foreign languages. He knew well that when a leveler came to a new world, the System would load them with the language of the country their body was in, but if there were other languages, it was necessary to use points to equip translation devices or knowledge of the language. How many languages could Huan Zixu, who had lost the power of the System, understand?

Huan Zixu couldn't answer. Parallel worlds did in fact have comparable languages; other worlds had languages similar to English and Chinese, but they had gone through on those other worlds. The differences in grammar and pronunciation were very great. He had come to this world less than five days ago. Where would he have learned five languages?

"Oh, a marketing direction who only knows one language. If you encounter a foreign businessman, how will you communicate?" Yu Hua said.

"He's very young. He can learn!" Lian Yufan said on Huan Zixu's behalf.

"We're a company, not a school. If you want to learn, please go back to school," the human resources director said.

Lian Yufan wanted to say something else. Huan Zixu held down his shoulder and politely said, "Director Lian, thank you for your approval, but, after all, I'm the one being interviewed, and it's my professional ability being interrogated. Let me explain myself to Director Yu."

In a single confrontation, Huan Zixu had seen that Yu Hua had been leading these people by the nose from the start. They were acting within the limitations of the rules he had set out and couldn't conceive of the notion of rebelling.

According to common reasoning, never mind Zhen Li and Yuan Luori's powers, even Lian Yufan's social background alone should have been enough to keep Yu Hua down. It was very

simple. All that was necessary was to reveal the public relations director's connections. Resources, policies, influence would have come crashing down, and Yu Hua would have been hard pressed not to compromise.

But instead they were using business reasoning to resolve the problem. If you threw out their resources outside of the studio and only discussed based on the conditions of the contracts and topics that had been previously discussed, then who could outdo Yu Hua, who had drawn up the company's rules?

This was a thought trap.

This was Huan Zixu's first time seeing an ordinary person use nothing but thought limitations to trap three special ability users in his game, leaving them unable to escape and look at events. This ability to subtly influence thought limitations was actually something like the ability to alter natural laws within a space. This was an ability that only experts who had passed over five hundred worlds could use. Huan Zixu had only encountered this sort of power when he had watched from a distance as two experts hunted and killed each other.

As a mental ability type user, Huan Zixu naturally understood how frightening the power of thought was. If a human bound a young elephant to tree stump, the young elephant would have no way to escape before it grew up. When it grew up, it could easily escape, but because of the habit of thought from its childhood, it would think that there was no way to resist. It would have lost the ability to escape.

It was this ability to subtly influence that Yu Hua was using. Letting Lian Yufan keep discussing his treatment would only make things worse. Huan Zixu decided to come to his own rescue.

"If you're going to be interviewed, then please sit down across from me." Yu Hua gestured at Huan Zixu. "President Zhen and Director Lian belong to the company's executive level. Naturally you're also examiners. Pull up a couple of chairs and sit next to me."

Zhen Li did indeed bring over two ten-yuan-a-piece plastic chairs. Naturally these had been bought by Yu Hua. Lian Yufan and Zhen Li obediently sat on either side of Yu Hua. The three people's positions were evident at a glance.

Huan Zixu: "..."

He had just seized the initiative, keeping Lian Yufan from being led by the nose by Yu Hua again. Yu Hua had spoken and turned the mode of thinking back to the business interview mode once again, and cleverly established himself as the head examiner, while the others could only put forward views, not make decisions.

This ordinary person...was very hard to deal with.

Huan Zixu had originally thought that Yu Hua's control towards his husband You Zhengping was frightening. Now that he had observed his conduct in the studio, he thought that Yu Hua

did his best to restrain himself in front of You Zhengping, hiding his talons and teeth, desperately holding down his desire for control, displaying his best aspect in front of You Zhengping.

“I’m very sorry. In the interview just now, I let my feelings gets involved. It was unprofessional behavior,” Yu Hua said gently. “I keep thinking that when I was hired, I was faced with criticisms from all sides, but others are hired so easily. It makes me feel society is a little unfair. But in reality, as our company shifts direction, a suitable change in our hiring requirements is a positive phenomenon. I hope that the company will be able to hire more talent and produce more value.”

Lian Yufan nodded inwardly and met Zhen Li’s eyes. It seemed that Yu Hua would agree to allow Huan Zixu to be hired. After all, Huan Zixu’s ability was in fact up to the test.

But Huan Zixu wasn’t optimistic. Yu Hua was a typical case of alternating the carrot and the stick. First he had entirely refused, mentioning the harshest requirements. He had touched off antipathy, then displayed weakness. Then he would mention comparatively relaxed yet still harsh requirements. At this point, the other party would agree. This was a commonly used move, but it was well-tried and very effective.

“I’ve taken a serious look at your resume, Mr. Huan Zixu. You truly are outstanding. This report of your marketing achievements is astonishing. You actually managed to prevent your previous employer from going into bankruptcy entirely through your own efforts. One does not ask for a hero’s origins. While your educational record isn’t good, your work record is sufficient to make one overlook that and relax requirements for you. Naturally I’ll give the green light. I also understand Director Lian’s frame of mind in hiring you,” Yu Hua said.

Lian Yufan nodded repeatedly, thinking that Yu Hua had behaved decently for once.

Huan Zixu’s expression, however, was getting colder and colder. He would have preferred that Yu Hua berate him as entirely devoid of merit. That would have made it more convenient for him to rebound after hitting bottom.

“But...marketing director? What marketing work does this company have?” Yu Hua said. “Your position doesn’t seem to accord with this company’s position. We may not be able to provide you with a platform to develop your ability...”

“What about promoting products on the livestreams?” Lian Yufan said quickly. “Haven’t you already consulted with several clothing and makeup advertisers? Leave that to him, he’ll definitely be equal to it.”

“So will Huan Zixu be working behind the scenes on the livestreams, or will he appear on camera?” Yu Hua asked.

“Of course he’ll appear on camera. His eloquence and looks would be wasted in the background,” Lian Yufan said.



Yu Hua smiled almost imperceptibly.

Huan Zixu saw that things were going badly. “No, I want to work behind...”

Before he could say “the scenes,” Yu Hua interrupted him. “If he’s going to appear on camera, then he won’t be a marketing director. He’ll be an internet celebrity and promoter. That coincides with our ideas. You’ll be a commodity yourself. We will supply you with a persona, a plot, and lines, use this company’s resources to make you popular. You’ll be only a ‘product’ turned out by this company. All the value you earn will have everyone’s exertions behind it. We’ll let you take a commission.”

As he spoke, Yu Hua pulled over his computer and typed a contract no better than Yuan Luori’s. A contract with a base salary of 1,500 plus commission, food included (instant noodles), lodging included (the studio), practically no personal freedom. Within the five year term of the contract, it was impossible to resist. A contract in which even his face didn’t belong to him, because Huan Zixu’s face was also a commodity turned out by the company.

Huan Zixu silently read this contract, in which even portraiture rights didn’t belong to him. It read as an employment contract, but it had been written as an indenture.

“This contract...” Lian Yufan thought it was rather harsh.

Yu Hua said, “When we use our resources to cultivate an internet celebrity with a large number of fans, shouldn’t we guarantee our own interests? A presupposition of Huan Zixu’s future popularity is that, in the early period, he’ll draw fans away from Zhen Li and Yuan Luori. Aren’t we worthy of taking this much of a cut? What will we do if he runs off after getting big? I don’t want to be betrayed.”

The word “betrayed” jabbed into Lian Yufan’s heart. He remembered Huan Zixu’s performance at the base, when he had attempted to brainwash the Protectors, as well as Director Xiao’s precaution against him. He suddenly thought that Yu Hua was right. They had to attack the problem for both angles to confine Huan Zixu.

Huan Zixu was a sharp knife. A good knife requires good sheath to keep it from killing its owner.

So Lian Yufan passed the contract to Huan Zixu and said approvingly, “Sign it.”

Huan Zixu: “...”

Look at Lian Yufan. Before walking through the door he had been protecting him, indicating that he was willing to help him resist Yu Hua. Now he had turned around and was ganging up with Yu Hua against him!

Feng Kui was in the Protectors' hands. Lian Yufan was the one who could really pressure him. But this contract had been drawn up by Yu Hua. When he signed it, he would be inside the rules Yu Hua had laid down, controlled on all sides.

While Huan Zixu signed his name with a trembling hand, Yuan Luori walked out, carrying the freshly washed husky.

Yuan Luori said, "Director Ha can really make trouble. It splashed my glasses. They're covered in water."

Yuan Luori took off his glasses, intending to wipe the water off with his clothes. Suddenly, everything went dark. He couldn't see anything.

"Did the sky go dark, or did I go blind?" Yuan Luori said, a little panicked.

In his panic, he put on his glasses, which calmed him down. The sky lit up again.

"Huh? Why could I see again once I put my glasses on?" Yuan Luori clutched his head. "Lian Yufan, is there something wrong with my eyes? Take me to get another detailed exam later."

When Lian Yufan heard him mention his eyes, his head turned. A perfectly good assassin type Destroyer had been beaten until he was half blind by the black-cloaked man, and when he took off his glasses, he was also half deaf. He spent all day looking for his glasses. It would have been better if he had truly gone blind. At least then his hearing would have become more acute.

Yuan Luori hadn't done anything very bad, and he had ended up like this. He wondered how badly Destroyer 192, who had attempted to blow up the park and the mall, had turned out.

As Lian Yufan sighed, he went around Director Ha, whose fur hadn't dried yet, and went up to Yuan Luori carrying the contract. Pointing to the largest characters on it, he asked, "With your glasses on, can you see what's written here?"

"Employment contract. I can see it perfectly," Yuan Luori said. "So did the sky really go dark just now?"

"You were crouching too long while you gave the dog a bath. When you got up too fast, your vision went dark," Lian Yufan deduced according to common sense.

"That makes sense." Yuan Luori nodded.

Only Yu Hua raised his eyebrows.

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Author's Note:

Huan Zixu: Lian Yufan, you're a pig of teammate!

Yu Hua: I can sell this one, right? A five-year contract will fetch a good price. I can launder a hundred million.

## CHAPTER 66

Huan Zixu noticed Yu Hua's expression and was faintly curious. He felt like there was some profound meaning in it.

Yu Hua collected the signed-in-triplicate "indenture" and instructed Zhen Li and Lian Yufan: "I'm to go put this on record at the Bureau of Personnel. In a while the show group will come and have you filmed according to my script. Lian Yufan is responsible for receiving them. After all, you are the public relations director. If you aren't up to it, then let Director Ha take your place."

He walked to the door and saw out of the corner of his eye that Yuan Luori was about to take his glasses off again. He had been scared by his vision going black before and hadn't wiped his glasses. Now he thought that his eyes were fine, so he wanted to try wiping them again.

Yu Hua was in the studio, and so was Lian Yufan. Yuan Luori couldn't be allowed to take his glasses off right now. So Yu Hua stopped in his tracks as and said, feigning carelessness, "Oh, right, you post a funeral announcement on the official account yesterday, then deleted it. I just saw someone's screenshot and thought it was very strange. How did you speak rudely to me? What merits stopping the livestreams for three days? I didn't have any contact with you two yesterday."

Yuan Luori stopped in the process of taking off his glasses. Lian Yufan, who was going to help him out with optometry, didn't move a muscle. Zhen Li's face went rigid; he didn't even dare to move his eyeballs.

If Huan Zixu hadn't been able to see the seconds changing on the electric clock on the wall, he practically would have thought that time had stopped!

Right, Yu Hua wouldn't remember that. Huan Zixu had changed his "impression," the handsome uncle Protector had taken him home and deleted the messages on his phone, and Zhen Li had complied with the order to delete the studio's public announcement.

But netizens took screenshots.

Yu Hua had a public account. Some well-meaning netizens had messaged him in private or sent an @, telling him that Zhen Li and Yuan Luori had posted a status and then quickly deleted it.

It was normal for Yu Hua to ask about this, but the atmosphere of the airflow in the studio stopping was entirely abnormal!

Couldn't Zhen Li think up a joking excuse to brush it off? Four or five ways to respond instantly flashed through Huan Zixu's mind, but he had just come to the studio and shouldn't know about this. He couldn't put in a word.

"The public announcement... Shouldn't that be Director Lian's responsibility? Apart from the livestreams, all the work updates and public statements to do with the studio are your area." Yu Hua looked coolly at Lian Yufan. "Even if you didn't know about it at the time, you still should have asked after the fact. Don't fob me off with 'I didn't,' 'it wasn't me,' 'I didn't know.' The fans have come all the way to asking me. How are you planning to explain this?"

The three of them didn't speak. Even Director Ha stopped shaking off water and stood unmoving at Yuan Luori's feet, pretending to be a toy dog.

"Who wrote out 'public announcement' to make it look like 'funeral announcement?'" Yu Hua asked in a level voice.

"Me," Yuan Luori said, raising his hand. "My eyesight is bad, and my academic background isn't good. I wrote the wrong thing. And it was Zhen Li who made me write it. He's the boss. I do whatever he says!"

Yuan Luori kicked the ball to Zhen Li, and Zhen Li sucked in a breath. His emotions were so roused that he nearly hyperventilated himself into a faint. He pointed to Lian Yufan and said, "I was going to leave it. It was Director Lian who made me delete it!"

The ball was kicked once again to the director of public relations. Lian Yufan was not to be outdone. He said at once, "I only took care of the public relations issue in a timely manner when I discovered this. The two of them messed up in the first place! I was still thinking of a plan for how to explain it."

"Ordinarily, you're supposed to explain at the same time as you delete. It's been nearly twenty four hours and you still haven't given an explanation. What a speedy reaction," Yu Hua said. "Think of a reason ASAP, or else I'll fire you and make a cute video of Director Ha to act as an apology!"

When Lian Yufan had done nothing wrong, Yu Hua had still been able to pile a heap of wrong on top of him. Now that something had actually happened, he suspected that Yu Hua was going to peel off a layer of his skin.

"Then there's you." Yu Hua pointed to Yuan Luori. "You managed to write 'public announcement' to look like 'funeral announcement.' If your vision is so bad, please protect your glasses. Is it so hard to weld the legs of your glasses to your ears?"

"No, no." Yuan Luori shook his head and covered his ears, afraid of shaking off his glasses.

“So why *did* you post the public announcement?” Yu Hua looked at Zhen Li and faintly, very faintly, sent him a meaningful glance.

“Well...” Zhen Li grasped Yu Hua’s meaning and pointed to Huan Zixu. “It was him! I-I-I interviewed him yesterday, and he said he had a brand new marketing technique that was sure to raise the studio’s popularity. He didn’t tell me why, just made a deliberate mystery of it and had me post the announcement.”

“Oh, that’s right!” Yuan Luori also saw the light. This had all been caused by Huan Zixu using “false exchange” in the first place. If he wasn’t going to take the blame for it, then who was? “I was there, too. He was the one who made us do it.”

Lian Yufan also looked at Huan Zixu and nodded. “Yes, Director Huan, why don’t you explain?”

Lian Yufan’s expression said, “At any rate, you’re a first rate liar, you must be able to think of something.”

The three of them had offered up Huan Zixu as the chief culprit. Yu Hua looked at Huan Zixu in satisfaction. “Director Huan truly is young and promising. I’ve been working for many years, and your line of thought is different from mine. Why did you do this?”

Huan Zixu hadn’t expected that while he was watching a fire from the other side of the river, the flames would in the end find their way to him. His brain moved quickly, and he reacted almost at once. “Personas. It’s to establish your personas.”

This was a term he had just picked up from the contract.

“What personas? Hm?” Yu Hua asked.

Huan Zixu licked his dry lips and recalled his marketing skills from when he had been an ordinary person hundreds of years ago, as well as what he had understood of this world since arriving in it. A plan rapidly formed in his brain. He arranged his wording and said, “I observed the company’s situation and discovered that our fans seem to enjoy watching the president and the directors being in difficult predicaments.”

This was something Huan Zixu had noticed this morning before coming to the studio, when he had been searching for popular videos online in order to understand Zhen Li and the others’ popularity. He had seen some humorous videos of internet celebrities. The celebrities being in dire straits in itself attracted quite a lot of commentary and attention.

Huan Zixu thought, *It’s unfeeling of you all to leave the explaining to me when I don’t understand the situation, so don’t blame me for being immoral.* He said, “The fans especially like watching stories where you play the tyrant and oppress the president and the other directors, Director Yu. That public announcement was very well received. Everyone was very enthusiastic. So I thought that we would establish your persona as a despotic ruler and Zhen Li as the stupid and beautiful boss who’s easily tricked and made a figurehead of by Director Yu.

Yuan Luori's persona is...a forthright, proud, stubborn person with a poor education who is nonetheless energetically striving to study, dreaming of studying the law and testing into university so he can use the law as a weapon to protect himself from having his freedom and rights snatched away by Director Yu. Then there's the public relations director, the only person in the studio who dares to take a stand against the vicious power, but only suffers greater oppression because of it, full of inexpressible bitterness.

"I believe that internet celebrities require humble tactics. They can't be lofty and superior. It's best for them to give the fans a feeling that they're modest and unassuming and also suffer oppression, so that the fans can feel a closer relationship. We want people to like us, so we have to be rooted in the masses, arise from the masses, speak to the masses. Only if we understand what they like can we more effectively promote products.

"For example, yesterday we posted a public announcement. So the next day, we post a video of President Zhen and Director Yuan being oppressed by Director Yu, and suddenly he gets out a thirst-quenching beverage and has President Zhen personally unscrew the lid and present it to him. Director Yu drinks it, and his mood instantly improves. He pats President Zhen's head and lets him go. Won't that lead to a good result in promoting the beverage?"

"Not bad." Yu Hua nodded. "So what about your persona? Have you thought about it?"

"I..." Huan Zixu had been hoist by his own petard. Under the circumstances, no matter what persona he described, he would be dropping a rock on his own foot.

"You used to be a marketing champion... How about this? When you were down and out in your early years, I helped you get your first purchase order and let you reach the peak of life. You heard that I had resigned my position in order to start a business. In order to repay me, you voluntarily came to my company and from now on will follow me blindly, doing anything I say. If I make you work twenty four hours a day without rest to make money, you won't have any complaints, even feel that working for me is a kind of joy. How does that sound?" Yu Hua said.

"This...bootlicking persona won't attract fans," Huan Zixu resisted.

"That's true. After all, I'm a married man. Having a bootlicker around is no good, and I don't want my husband to misunderstand." Yu Hua's smile instantly turned cold. "Let's change the object of your loyalty, say...Director Lian. Change the person you owe a debt of gratitude to from me to Director Lian. Because of your gratitude to Director Lian, you're willing to suffer my oppression. Every time I bully Director Lian, you bravely step forward on his behalf. At any rate, a ship can also attract fans. There are quite a lot of fans who ship Yuan Luori and Zhen Li."

Huan Zixu felt bitter. "That's also not very..."

"You've already refused me once," Yu Hua said. "Is my request very difficult? You've read for yourself what the contract says. You'll do whatever I tell you to do!"

Then, wrapped up in cold, he left the studio, leaving four people and one dog staring at each other, not daring to breathe too loudly.

After a very long time, Zhen Li said, “Let’s do what he says. It’s already very indulgent of him not to make us kneel during the livestream like we said in the public announcement.”

Of course Lian Yufan was in agreement now that there was someone to shoulder the blame for him. He nodded. “It will also benefit the studio’s development and lure in more Destroyers. It works.”

Yuan Luori thought about it. “My persona is pretty good. Maybe I really will be able to test into university. I agree.”

Huan Zixu: “...”

What about him? Was he supposed to be shipped with someone else just like that? It wasn’t enough that they were keeping Feng Kui at the base as a hostage, they also had to force him into a ship with Lian Yufan?

Before he had left the base, Feng Kui had said goodbye to him, smiling foolishly, and said that in a few days the base would take him to a place where he could access the internet. Then he would be able to see Huan Zixu on the livestream. Was he supposed to let Feng Kui see this?

Since entering the studio, Huan Zixu had been led around by Yu Hua. Whenever he had wanted to speak, Yu Hua prevented him from speaking by interrupting him or questioning the others, and he had cleverly used the public announcement to make the other three push everything onto him. While there was some coincidence in this, Yu Hua’s methods were in fact savage and powerful.

He finally understood what means Yu Hua had used to seize power. Huan Zixu laughed bitterly and said, “The market is a like a battlefield. In every circle, the weak are prey to the strong. I underestimated Yu Hua.”

“At any rate, you’ve managed to join the company smoothly. The show group will come to do the filming soon. Zhen Li, hurry up and help Yuan Luori with his makeup,” Lian Yufan said, clapping his hands.

In fact, Lian Yufan had his own selfish motives. Huan Zixu was an unfathomable person. He had been worried that Huan Zixu would beguile Yu Hua and trip him up at the studio. With Yu Hua asserting his power, the work of keeping Huan Zixu under control would be comparatively easy in the future.

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Author’s Note:

Yu Hua: You may not have realized it, but I did all that just to keep Yuan Luori from taking his glasses off in front of Lian Yufan. That kid's ability is a little frightening. I have to think of how to deal with it.

## CHAPTER 67

You Zhengping had just guessed Yu Hua's true identity. He didn't quite dare to go home.

It wasn't that he didn't want to see Yu Hua. He just didn't know what kind of expression to use to face his husband. He knew he ought to act like he always had, but he was worried that he couldn't act as naturally as he had in the past.

So when he left the base in the morning, he went right to work with his team, changed into his uniform, sat in his chair, and zoned out.

Cen Xiao reached out a hand and waved it in front of his eyes. "What are you thinking about? We're going on patrol at ten, get motivated."

"Okay." You Zhengping drank a mouthful of water. He wasn't especially motivated.

He hadn't gone home in the morning, so he was missing breakfast personally made by Yu Hua. You Zhengping felt that his energy was lacking.

In fact, it was because of Yu Hua that he could formally participate in battle.

Yu Hua seemed to only be doing normal housework, but he was You Zhengping's safe haven. No matter how tired he was, how hard he had worked, when he came home and saw Yu Hua, hugged him, ate a mouthful of familiar home cooking, he would be full of energy.

Seeing You Zhengping looking listless and sick, Cen Xiao said in concern, "Are you not feeling well? Did you pull a muscle playing basketball yesterday?"

"Playing basketball" was a term they used to cover up their operations. This was their job; there were many ordinary people here, and the walls had ears. Cen Xiao couldn't speak as freely as he did at the base.

Cen Xiao was asking You Zhengping whether he had been injured during yesterday's operation in some way that hadn't been noticed. The fight yesterday had been fierce, and You Zhengping had developed a new use for his spatial ability at a critical moment. He may have received a hidden injury.

"I'm fine, just a little disinterested." You Zhengping shook his head.

He had been somewhat worn out by yesterday's breakthrough, but when the black-cloaked man had held his waist, You Zhengping had felt his body fill with energy. It had definitely been the black-cloaked man restoring his energy for him.



No matter the circumstances, Yu Hua was always his mainstay.

There was still some time before they went on patrol. You Zhengping lay unmoving on his desk, his eyes fixed on the screen of his phone. The screen displayed his and Yu Hua's chat log.

Yu Hua must have been disappointed when he didn't come home in the morning. *I should have gone home to see him*, You Zhengping was thinking unhappily.

Cen Xiao shook his head. To protect his friend, Cen Xiao hadn't reported You Zhengping's ambiguous relationship with the black-cloaked man. He believed that as an outstanding Protector, You Zhengping had enough conviction to resist this sort of emotional danger. Cen Xiao was willing to give You Zhengping time to recover.

At a time like this, he couldn't struggle on his own. Yu Hua also had to act.

Cen Xiao picked up his phone, wondering whether to warn Yu Hua not to always be busy at work and to pay some more attention to You Zhengping.

While he was considering it, the door guard came over carrying two lunchboxes and said, "A runner just delivered these. They're for You Zhengping."

You Zhengping slowly got up. He walked over and saw the familiar handwriting on the lunchboxes and instantly felt warm.

He opened the lunchbox with his name stuck onto it. The smell of sweets instantly filled the whole room. Cen Xiao and the others swallowed involuntarily. Yu Hua had made delicious food again.

Before, Cen Xiao would have wanted to snatch some. But You Zhengping's emotions were going through a dangerous period. He couldn't destroy this sweetness; he could only endure starvation and hold back his teammates.

Fortunately, You Zhengping pushed the other big box in front of them just then. "Yu Hua says this is for all of you. He says everyone has been working hard to protect the people, he can't do anything to help, and giving presents is against regulations. He can only send some food to display the gratitude of a common person."

Yu Hua knew just what to say. Cen Xiao and the others charged over, happily picked up the sweets, and started to eat.

The Protectors' energy consumption was large. They had strong cravings for sweets. Among the ordinary policemen, there were those who didn't like sweets, so Yu Hua had considerably made some savory cakes. Everyone was pleased.

You Zhengping in particular had been grinning from ear to ear since he had seen the lunchboxes. He picked up an egg yolk pastry and began to eat blissfully.

He had eaten breakfast at the police station's dining hall. He had gotten full, but he hadn't felt satisfied. But after eating only a mouthful of egg yolk pastry hand made by Yu Hua, his motivation soared.

The sweet but not cloying taste spread through his mouth. As he tasted the familiar flavor, You Zhengping envisioned the black-cloaked man. He saw the black-cloaked man in front of him, taking off his mask and black cloak, holding a cup of hot black tea, and putting it in front of him.

You Zhengping shook his head, recalled his thoughts, and thought that he could face Yu Hua again.

Those years of small, steady efforts hadn't been pretend, and his feelings for and reliance on Yu Hua were heartfelt. There was no need to think about acting. As long as he knew that he was facing Yu Hua, that was enough.

You Zhengping, smiling, ate all of the cakes, adjusted his police badge, and went to line up at the door full of vigor, ready to start his patrolling assignment.

Seeing him hold up his head and puff out his chest, Cen Xiao relaxed considerably.

Today they would be patrolling in some heavily populated areas in the Xuyang District. They would use motor scooters for transportation; this was quick and convenient.

When they arrived at the job center, You Zhengping saw Yu Hua at the door holding a briefcase and knew that he was making a filing because of Huan Zixu. He didn't know how Yu Hua had gotten Huan Zixu to knuckle under.

When Yu Hua walked out of the job center, he acutely sensed someone's gaze on him. He turned his head to look and saw You Zhengping wearing his uniform, his back straight, riding a police issue motor scooter, stopped by the side of the road and looking at him.

This was his first time seeing Xiao You at work. Yu Hua was pleasantly surprised. He waved to You Zhengping across the street. You Zhengping couldn't come over while he was on assignment. He tipped his cap and nodded in acknowledgement.

Yu Hua's mood instantly improved. He watched Xiao You leave with his team, the corners of his mouth turning up uncontrollably.

He had been planning to go to his psychologist after putting the contract on record, indicate that his husband was too busy, the two of them were apart very often, and he was troubled and losing faith in his married life. His psychologist had been sent by the organization. If he

heard this, he would definitely report it to the organization, and then maybe Xiao You would hear about his feelings and come to cheer him up.

But now...never mind, he should support his husband's work, be a good family member. Yu Hua's feelings calmed considerably. The anger he had been holding in all morning vanished.

Meanwhile, in the studio, Huan Zixu was demonstrating to Yuan Luori how to use the arms of his glasses. That night, Feng Kui had altered Yuan Luori's glasses for him, but Huan Zixu had changed the segment of memory, so Yuan Luori didn't know about the mechanisms contained in his glasses.

After fixing his glasses in place, Yuan Luori moved his neck in satisfaction. "Now they may as well be welded to my ears."

"But you can't wear your glasses while I'm doing your makeup!" Zhen Li said in desperation. The show group would be there in two hours, and Yu Hua had ordered him to do Yuan Luori's makeup. He had changed his clothes now, but the makeup hadn't been done. What was he supposed to do if Yuan Luori didn't take his glasses off?!

"You should get used to contact lenses," Lian Yufan said. "If you get involved in battle one day, contact lenses will be more convenient."

"The great master promised to heal my eyes in the future," Yuan Luori said stubbornly. "I can't get used to those things. They're very uncomfortable to wear."

"Then how are you going to film the show?" Zhen Li said helplessly. "Have you ever seen a talent show where the contestants wear glasses while they dance?"

While Zhen Li and Lian Yufan persisted in trying to get Yuan Luori's glasses off, Huan Zixu sat in a corner hugging his knees and protesting. "I'm not going to do the ship, I absolutely won't!"

Lian Yufan said, "Are you going to listen to Yu Hua? At the beginning, he tried to get me into a triangle with Zhen Li and Yuan Lori, but I didn't cooperate, so eventually it came to nothing. You're so clever, you're sure to think of something."

More than he hated the idea of the ship, Huan Zixu was having a hard time dealing with losing in the exchange with Yu Hua.

In this chaos, Zhen Li finally plucked off Yuan Luori's glasses. Yuan Luori blinked and said quietly towards the sky, "Why is it so gloomy outside?"

Lian Yufan didn't notice this, but Zhen Li felt that something was wrong. He looked at the bright and clear sky outside and waved his hand around in front of Yuan Luori's face and saw that Yuan Luori's eyes followed his movement. So there was probably nothing very wrong with his eyes.

“What are...” Yuan Luori lowered his head and saw a hole where Zhen Li’s stomach was. There was a black whirlpool in the hole, as though it wanted to suck in everything around it.

Zhen Li saw Yuan Luori staring at his stomach and instantly gestured for him to be quiet. He typed on his phone: Your special ability may have awakened. Don’t say it out loud.

Yuan Luori didn’t understand why he couldn’t say it out loud. This was a good thing. Of course he had to let everyone know that he had an ability, especially Huan Zixu. He wanted to establish his position in front of the new guy.

Seeing that Yuan Luori didn’t understand, Zhen Li pointed to Director Ha. Yuan Luori looked that way and saw that the little husky had a pair of human eyes, and there was a bomb inside it.

“!!!” Yuan Luori was startled and was about to cry out. Zhen Li covered his mouth.

Zhen Li quietly told him, “It’s a bright sunny day. It’s not gloomy.”

But...in Yuan Luori’s eyes, black clouds covered the sky outside the window. The sky above the whole Xuyang District was shadowed, and the direction that the job center lay in was entirely shrouded in black. There wasn’t a shred of light to be seen.

Yuan Luori’s fingers tapped wildly on the phone, writing down everything he was seeing for Zhen Li to read.

Zhen Li read it and understood why Yu Hua had told Yuan Luori to weld his glasses on before leaving. When Yuan Luori had taken his glasses off before and the sky had gone dark, the problem hadn’t been with his eyes. It was that he could see special ability users’ powers. Yu Hua had been in the studio then, and the whole room had been shrouded by his energy field. It wasn’t that Yuan Luori’s vision had gone black, it was that he had seen Yu Hua’s power!

Yu Hua didn’t want more people to know his identity and had hidden it from Yuan Luori. He had been worried that Yuan Luori would say something right in front of Lian Yufan and reveal his identity. That was why he had left the studio.

Yuan Luori blinked hard. He said soundlessly to Zhen Li, *Whose power is this strong? Is this the great master? Is he at the job center now?*

Zhen Li worked out what he was saying through sheer guesswork, turned his eyes away in pain, and nodded slowly.

Yuan Luori walked up to the window and looked at the sky full of black clouds in astonishment. It covered the whole Xuyang District...no, the dark clouds covered the whole city as far as the eye could see, focusing on the blacked out job center. He sighed inwardly. How powerful was the great master clearer? This was on a different scale from their little dribs and drabs.

Suddenly, he remembered that when he had taken his glasses off before, he hadn't been able to see. Yu Hua had been in the studio then, and now Yu Hua had gone to...the job center?

Yuan Luori looked at Zhen Li. He pointed in the direction of the job center and silently pronounced a name: *Yu Hua*?

Zhen Li nodded heavily. He put his index finger to his lips to signal for Yuan Luori to keep silent.

Yuan Luori froze and went dumb as a wooden chicken. After a long while, leaning on the wall, he crawled over to the acupressure mat and very properly knelt down.

"What are you doing?" Lian Yufan asked. He had just gotten through settling Huan Zixu, and now Yuan Luori was starting to act up.

Yuan Luori looked up at Lian Yufan. He saw Lian Yufan's face fall apart, then completely piece itself back together, symbolizing his repair special ability.

"Just...exercising my knees," Yuan Luori said sadly.

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Author's Note:

Yuan Luori: I'll never see the sun again.

## CHAPTER 68

When he got out the acupressure mat, many images flashed through Yuan Luori's mind.

This must be what it was like when your life flashed in front of your eyes before you died, like a movie recalling your bleak and oblivious life, ending with a sigh and regrets about your past deeds.

What had he done in his whole brief and stupid life? When he had first come to the studio, he had held a dagger to Yu Hua's neck and threatened him to walk out and not look back.

Thinking back on it, if Yu Hua hadn't wanted to cover up his identity as the clearer, then wouldn't Yuan Luori have been dead a hundred times over then?

Oh, no, there was no need to die a hundred times over. Yuan Luori's gaze fell on Director Ha. Seeing the faint bomb in Director Ha's body, he had guessed who Director Ha had been originally.

He and the black-cloaked man had plotted against Destroyer 192 and had stood with the Protector on the roof, facing 192.

Destroyer 192 hadn't even spared a single glance for him then, but now the husky let him brush its fur, take it for walks, pick up its poop, and give it baths. The world was changeable; life was truly full of ups and downs.

In Yuan Luori's eyes, Director Ha's bomb was a little black ball with a fuse on it. The spark of the fuse was extinguished, and the bomb was gradually becoming transparent. It was nearly invisible. But it seemed that at Director Ha's tail, there were two long threads stretching away. Yuan Luori couldn't clearly see what was at the ends of those threads.

What did this mean? The extinguished bomb becoming transparent symbolized that Director Ha's past ability had vanished, but why would there be two threads?

Yuan Luori couldn't understand it.

He looked at Huan Zixu and saw a blue particular energy hidden in his brain and a lotus flower growing on his tongue. The blue energy was like Director Ha's bomb, nearly invisible; it was inactive. The tongue...this must have been his inherent skill. Recalling Huan Zixu's eloquence at the base, he thought that he really was as glib as though he had a lotus flower growing on his tongue.

But what did it matter what ability he had? Wasn't he ignorantly trapped in the studio all the same, still naïvely believing that he could resist Yu Hua?

As his thoughts floated back to Yu Hua, Yuan Luori in spite of himself remembered the very beginning, when he hadn't lost his ability yet and had carelessly signed the employment contract. He had sat at the studio's only desk, bossing Yu Hua around, all "stupid native this," "ignorant human that," "waste of space with no combat ability..."

In the studio, right in front of Yu Hua's face, he had spoken fervently to Zhen Li, telling him that the great master clearer was his savior, his idol. While he had been talking, he had even made Yu Hua pour him a cup of water!

No wonder Zhen Li had looked like he was keeping himself from saying something then. No wonder Zhen Li's contract was the best in the whole studio. No wonder Yuan Luori had yet to see a hint of his salary and had been eating expired instant noodles all along. He...had only himself to blame!

He had also wanted to kill Yu Hua at the amusement park, make the Protection Organization believe that Yu Hua was a Destroyer, and free himself of suspicion!

He had also ruined Yu Hua's date with his husband and shot Yu Hua with an arrow through the chest. Then all of his powers had been removed and his eyes had been damaged. He had suffered many broken bones and spent days recovering at the Protection Organization's base.

The more Yuan Luori remembered, the more he thought that him still being alive was pure philanthropy on Yu Hua's part.

He knelt heavily on the acupuncture mat, lowering half of his body onto it and burying his face against the mat's little nubs. He was too humiliated to face anyone.

"Yuan Luori, Yuan Luori!" Seeing him looking half dead, Lian Yufan went to pull Yuan Luori up. "What's going on with you, get up!"

"I'm not getting up," Yuan Luori said dully. "I'm too humiliated to live. Just let me rot in peace."

"Get up!" Lian Yufan couldn't budge him. He stealthily kicked his shin. "The show group is here, the camera is rolling."

"What!" Yuan Luori lifted his head at once. His face was covered in indentations from the acupuncture mat. He saw a blur of color in front of him and could faintly distinguish that there were five people there. They had some black pieces of equipment on their shoulders. He couldn't tell what their features looked like. He couldn't even tell whether they were men or women.

Though he had obtained the acknowledgement of the world law and had his special ability awakened, he was still near-sighted. When he looked at special ability users and those with the potential for special abilities, he could see them clearly, but for ordinary objects, he was still practically blind.

Thinking about it carefully, he had had eyes but been unable to see; the great master had truly accorded him the most appropriate punishment. What use were his eyes? He ought to donate them to someone who needed them!

Yuan Luori squinted and strove to distinguish the appearances of the show group's members. The person responsible for filming him was a young woman. "Sorry, we came a little earlier than we arranged. My surname is Fu, you can all call me Xiao Fu. I'm going to shadow Yuan Luori for a day and night to make source material for the future show."

"Oh...sorry." As the studio's president in name, Zhen Li went up to block Yuan Luori and communicate with the show group. "Our Xiao Yuan hasn't had time to do his makeup yet."

"Oh, that's all right, Yuan Luori looks good without makeup, too..." Xiao Fu stared blankly at Yuan Luori and Zhen Li's faces.

If there was no filter, people in reality looked better than people on camera. People in reality were three-dimensional and dynamic, but the camera would flatten them out, stretch them vertically and horizontally, and make them lose their dynamism. However good the equipment, actors on camera would still look fatter than they did in real life, so all actors were desperate to keep their weight down, keep their figures very skinny; that way they would look good on camera.

Yuan Luori had been an assassin. His figure was like a black cat's, slender and supple. His muscles were well-proportioned and firm, giving him the sort of physique that looked thin when he was wearing clothing and muscular when he took it off. He also had a coldly arrogant face. Seeing his face in real life was a frightening assault on a person's vision.

Though right now he was a little ridiculous, kneeling on the acupressure mat with uneven imprints on his face. His indifferent and wandering gaze added to his movements made him seem somewhat cute in a stupid way, entirely different from his previous livestreams.

"You're also very handsome, President Zhen..." Since walking into the studio, Xiao Fu hadn't known where to put her eyes. "Director Lian, your bearing is very forceful when you move. You have a military sort of elegance. We haven't seen that side of you in the livestreams before. And then there's..."

"Hello, Miss Fu, my name is Huan Zixu. I'm the new marketing director." Huan Zixu drew back his previous lost expression, tidied his clothes, and shook hands with Xiao Fu.

Zhen Li turned on the livestreaming equipment in the corner in a timely manner. They had to livestream every morning anyway, so Yu Hua had ordered Zhen Li to livestream while the filming was going on so the show group wouldn't try any malicious editing.

Zhen Li briefly explained the contents of today's livestream, and soon countless fans surged up. Many of them called out on the barrage [We're watching the crappy little studio all grown up and taking on business!]. The fans got excited. There was something of the happiness of "my child is a success."

Yu Hua was a person who spent money on the edge of a knife. He had chosen decoration materials that were cheap but looked good. On the surface, his work was always satisfactory. But as for the livestream equipment, he had scooped the bottom out of the studio's funds to buy good equipment. The angle of the lens was wide. It wasn't an ordinary internet celebrity's phone screen. It was a camera lens that could see in all directions around the whole studio.

As soon as the livestream began, what met the eye was Zhen Li's lovely face, which had many times been in danger of being disfigured. When Zhen Li moved away, the three other attractive men were already arranged in working poses to welcome the show group.

Lian Yufan was specially trained. His posture was upright. He stood properly and sat properly and made no excess movements. His whole bearing was a comfort to the obsessive-compulsive. He had originally been excessively stiff, but the plastic surgeon had added a teardrop mole to the corner his eye; the mole added a bit of softness to his face, diluting his imposing military manner and making him look more simple and unassuming.

Yuan Luori had just stood up from the acupressure mat. He stretched his arms, displaying his slender, supple body. He was wearing all form-fitting black clothes. Standing next to the upright Lian Yufan, one stiff and one soft, they made a perfect contrast.



Zhen Li set up the livestream equipment and went over to the others. To welcome the show group, he had changed into a pure white suit, which suited his overly pretty but harmless face. He fit in perfectly among Lian Yufan and Yuan Luori.

The three of them were as beautiful as a picture, but the fans were already familiar with them. The barrage comments on the screen were thick, all asking about another person—Huan Zixu.

[Long hair, phoenix eyes, thin lips... In my view, this is a beautiful male character from ancient times appearing in front of me like this. May I ask who he is?]

[Why isn't he wearing ancient dress? Where are President Zhen's ancient robes? Get them out and give them to the new director to wear!]

[They're introducing themselves, the new director is named Huan Zixu, even his name sounds like an ancient figure<sup>23</sup>. I'm clutching my chest. He should be a beauty in red or purple. It's best if he follows the demonic path, both good and evil.]

[He despises everyone on earth, but in his heart there is only one "him." For that "him," Huan Zixu would kill everyone under the sun, and he would also put down his butcher's knife and become a Buddha on the spot. Ah! I've already written a million character novel in my head.]

[Sister, if you can talk, then keep talking! Write it down for us! Hurry up!]

[Is there anyone else like me who has the impulse to tear that teardrop mole off of Director Lian's face and stick it onto Director Huan?]

[Me too, I've always thought a thin-lipped, long-haired beauty is most suited to a teardrop mole, as though he's shedding a single tear as he goes from demon to human for that one good and pure "him."]

[So who is that "him?" Currently I don't think there's anyone suitable. President Zhen is only beautiful, Director Yuan is only proud, Director Lian is only ruthless—their auras don't match with Director Huan's!]

[Wait, when they were introducing themselves just now, what did Director Huan say he was the director of? Marketing director? What is your studio going to market, beauty? If it is beauty, then I'll give up a family fortune...]

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<sup>23</sup> His given name (子虚) looks like a courtesy name with the 子(zi) character, though actually it's a word meaning "fictitious." For that matter, his surname (桓) sounds similar to the word for barter (换).

[The Zhen Li Studio really is unique. They've collected all kinds of beautiful men who would be big hits in the entertainment world, and they've made them go direct public relations, marketing, cleaning... Your company's human resources director is a rare genius.]

[And who was the Zhen Li Studio's human resources director again?]

[Yu Hua.]

As soon as the characters "Yu Hua" appeared, the barrage instantly emptied out, as though all protests, doubts, and criticisms became powerless before this name.

A few minutes later, someone tentatively posted a [Let's talk about the talent show] comment, and the barrage slowly became active again. From then on, no one touched the subject of the allocation of responsibilities.

From then on, in the Zhen Li Studio livestream, whenever there was any trouble, argument, malice, or name-calling on the barrage, if anyone so much as posted the characters "Yu Hua," the barrage would instantly call a truce and turn to harmony. "Yu Hua" became the barrage's protective talisman, clearing away all the forces of evil.

Of course, that was later.

With four handsome men all in different style standing in front of her, Xiao Fu was ready to faint. She covered her nose, turned her face away, and said, "Let's start filming. Not need to be nervous, we'll just film your lives and your interactions with Director Ha. You can answer a couple of questions from time to time. Yuan Luori-xiaogege, you also don't need to worry, you look very good on camera!"

"All right," Yuan Luori said, squinting.

"But don't squint..." Xiao Fu said as soon as she saw his expression. "Glasses, contacts, either is good, just don't squint."

"Put on your contacts. I still need to do his makeup, wearing glasses is unsuitable," Zhen Li said.

He took out contact lenses from a cabinet. These had been bought by the Protection Organization. They were of excellent quality, much better than contacts bought on the market in drug stores or makeup stores.

Yuan Luori still hadn't come around from learning Yu Hua's true identity. He seemed rather obedient, entirely different from his usual "you're all stupid humans" manner on the livestreams. He also didn't have the cold legal feeling of his midnight study livestreams. He seemed more like a proud black cat coming over once in a while to rub up against you. It softened the heart.

He opened his eyes wide and looked towards Zhen Li's face, longing for Zhen Li to help him put in the contacts. He had had enough of this sunless sky.

Glasses seemed to be able to seal his special ability. When he put them on, the world became bright again, and Yuan Luori had the feeling of escaping from Yu Hua's energy field. His body warmed up.

The way he had just earnestly and obediently let Zhen Li adorn him just now made the livestream fill up wildly with "LimingLuori." Of course, there were also a few "CaoYuanLuoriLiming<sup>24</sup>" comments sandwiched among them from ill-intentioned believers, vainly attempting to carry their point.

The script in Xiao Fu's hands was full of questions for Yuan Luori. She asked, "Why do you want to participate in the show 'Idol's Light?'"

Ordinarily, a person would give a conventional answer like "It's my dream" or "To have a platform." But Yuan Luori said, "In order to realized Yu Hua's dream."

"Yu Hua...is the human resources director we've been negotiating with but haven't seen in person?" Xiao Fu asked. "What dream does he have?"

Yuan Luori was going to recite his answer from the script, but he suddenly remembered that Yu Hua was the great master clearer and instantly choked.

The great master clearer had subjugated countless world, acquired terrifying power, raised carnage in the System's countless parallel worlds, and changed the structure of the System itself. You could say that Yu Hua could do anything he wanted. So in coming to this world and hiding among countless ordinary people, what did he want to do?

Yuan Luori remembered the world law that Huan Zixu had mentioned yesterday and suddenly had a bold idea. Did the great master clearer perhaps want to seize this unopened world's natural law power and use it to defeat the System?

Somehow, what Yuan Luori said was, "It must be to conquer the world."

"I had no idea myself that I had such a grand dream," a voice said from the door.

Yu Hua walked into the studio, carrying his briefcase. He swept his gaze over Yuan Luori and said, "I belong to the salaried class, working diligently, desperately making money to pay back my mortgage and support my family. If I have to say that I have a dream, then it's to work less and spend more time at home."

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<sup>24</sup> From earlier, the name of Yuan Luori's fanbase thrown in with the ship name. Put together, it's "grasslands sunset and sunrise."

Author's Note:

Yu Hua: You may not believe it when I say this, but everything I'm doing is to find a job with little overtime and relatively flexible hours.

## CHAPTER 69

Just from the “conquer the world” he had heard before coming through the door, Yu Hua determined that Yuan Luori knew his true identity.

He stepped calmly through the door and refuted these words with the language of a common social animal, at the same time giving Zhen Li an apparently careless glance.

Zhen Li hunched his shoulders. He shook his head slightly towards Yu Hua. Yu Hua understood that Zhen Li had acted in time to prevent Yuan Luori from spilling the beans in front of Huan Zixu and Lian Yufan. He was satisfied.

Zhen Li was cowardly and soft, but he won through by being harmless. He had no aggression and no bad intentions. He also had his petty tricks and means of self-protection. If this sort of person wanted to conceal something or trick others, it would be hard to discover it.

Yu Hua understood this reasoning. That was why he had been interested in Zhen Li in the first place and had chosen him to establish this studio, and told him his identity.

There were some secrets it was hard to cover up without an accomplice. In the studio, he was like a fish put back into the water. All the Protectors were firmly convince concerning his identity; Zhen Li's contribution could not go unnoticed.

“Have they already started recording?” Yu Hua's gaze swept over Zhen Li, and he nodded slightly. “Well done.”

Zhen Li understood the double meaning in these words and was instantly inspired. The small makeup brush in his hand fluttered cleverly over Yuan Luori's face. The movements of his fingers were direct and efficient. When he was moving quickly, if there was a faint lag in the livestream, his movements would leave behind a trail on the screen, like a special effect.

[Is he doing makeup or performing a hand seal? I keep feeling he's about to break out some ninjutsu.]

[Watching the makeup livestream feels like watching special effects.]

[There are people who seem to be soft and cute presidents on the surface, but whose true identity is martial arts master. Look at my Buddha Palm Technique!]

[What Buddha Palm Technique? It's clearly a ninjutsu hand seal!]

[It's obviously a Sunflower Acupressure move!]

The barrage began to argue about the name of Zhen Li's technique. Yu Hua, meanwhile, after making small talk with the show group, went over to Yuan Luori and watched Zhen Li do Yuan Luori's makeup.

Zhen Li was nimble. In a moment, the makeup was done. He had deepened the outlines of Yuan Luori's features, making them look sharper and clearer, so icily arrogant that it was threatening.

Yu Hua raised his hand and brought it down on Yuan Luori's head. In a normal voice, he said, "You seem nervous. That's unavoidable when it's your first time on camera. Don't worry, calm yourself, just behave as usual. Director Lian and our new Director Huan are both watching. You're a veteran employee. Don't embarrass yourself."

Yuan Luori felt cold seeping into the top of his head from Yu Hua's hand. He was instantly frozen from his head down to the soles of his feet. The originally simple thoughts in his brain instantly achieved enlightenment. He understood what Yu Hua meant.

"Behave as usual," "Director Lian and Director Huan are watching," "don't embarrass yourself"... Yu Hua was telling him to maintain his usual attitude so the other two wouldn't see through him.

And-and was he also supposed to behave as impertinently towards the great master as before?

Yuan Luori felt tremendously stressed. His fingers began to shake. Zhen Li saw that things weren't going well and quickly grabbed Yuan Luori's hands, looking considerate. Smiling, he came to the rescue. "Xiao Yuan hasn't seen many people. When there are a lot of people around, he gets nervous, and he even has a hard time talking. Director Yu, don't you still have some work to do? I remember you don't like appearing on camera."

"Right!" Yuan Luori felt warmth coming from Zhen Li's hands. Some sensation returned to his body. He straightened his neck and said staunchly to Yu Hua, "I don't need you to encourage me. Mind your own business and get to work!"

He had always been the person in the studio who most "looked down" on Yu Hua. His attitude towards Yu Hua had always been one of protesting with his words but obeying with his body. He was a typical case of stubborn even in defeat. It was normal for him to say this sort of thing.

Yu Hua's eyes curved in satisfaction. He removed his hand from Yuan Luori's head. Holding his briefcase, he said to the show group's workers, "You carry on. I have some things to take care of, so I'll go inside to work. Director Huan, Director Lian, shouldn't you two also return to your work stations?"

Lian Yufan and Huan Zixu froze. What work did they have?

Lian Yufan thought, *Since coming to this studio, what work have I done apart from decorating and dancing?*

While Huan Zixu also didn't know what work needed to be done, he still sensibly picked a cubicle at random and walked in, avoiding the livestream camera.

As soon as Yu Hua left, the barrage instantly became lively.

[I was so scared. When Yu Hua put his hand on Yuan Luori's head just now, I had the feeling he was going to crush it.]

[Me too. It's strange, Yu Hua was just doing normal work, giving normal instructions to an employee, and even comforting Yuan Luori in a gentle voice, so why did I get a feeling of danger like the god of death had arrived even through the screen?]

[You're not wrong. It looked like the show group's Xiao Fu also didn't dare to breathe just now.]

[Ah! I feel like I've been watching a horror movie! This feeling of my adrenal glands going into overdrive is great!]

[Yuan Luori really is a man of iron. In front of Yu Hua's despotic rule, he still retaliates dauntlessly. How cool!]

[It's not that Yuan Luori is dauntless, it's that Zhen Li held his hands and gave him the strength to resist the vicious power. LiMingLuoRi is real. This CaoYuanLuoRiLiMing girl is moved to tears.]

[I was wrong, I always thought that the name LiMingLuoRi was no different from saying ZhenYuan, but adding the "cao" character...it's so vivid! An inspired name!<sup>25</sup>]

The show group had originally meant to use Zhen Li to promote Yuan Luori's popularity, use post-production editing to make Zhen Li appear on the show as a contestant's friend. The rest of them were no good; if they wanted to appear in post-production, they would have to pay.

Xiao Fu watched as the images of the four handsome men were filmed, as well as the strange image of Yu Hua pressing on Yuan Luori's head; she sighed inwardly. These were such good images, but they couldn't use them. They would definitely have been enough to set off countless conversation topics. Currently the Zhen Li Studio didn't allow its livestreams to be recorded. They didn't follow up on previous videos, but in the future, only the studio would be

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<sup>25</sup> From the top: 黎明落日 (li ming luo ri) and 真圆 (zhen yuan) are ship names, one using their given names to put together the expression "sunrise and sunset," the other based on homophones of their surnames. is the 草原落日黎明 (cao yuan luo ri li ming) adds the character 草 (grass) to Yuan Luori's full name to get "grasslands sunset." It is all rather poetic.

able to post videos concerning itself. The copyright belonged to the studio. Reposts were forbidden.

Huan Zixu was an expert observer. He felt that Yuan Luori hadn't been as fearless just now as he had made it sound. He seemed to be afraid of Yu Hua. So Huan Zixu went to Lian Yufan's cubicle, borrowed a pen, and wrote: *Won't there be trouble if Yuan Luori goes to film this show? There won't be problems if he trains with the other contestants?*

Huan Zixu thought along the lines of a leveler. If a new leveler came and simultaneously saw, on the one hand, Zhen Li, Huan Zixu, and the others all together on the livestream, and, on the other hand, Yuan Luori all on his own, they would definitely choose to go find Yuan Luori. After all, there were few people in the Clearing League who would dare to provoke Huan Zixu, but Yuan Luori was only cannon fodder in the eyes of the ten managers.

Lian Yufan also wrote on the paper: *The show is a taped broadcast. After Yuan Luori has gone to practice with them for a couple of months, they'll cut the footage and broadcast the first episode. By the time they play the first episode, he'll already have been kicked off and come back. Furthermore, apart from public performances, the locations of the show group's training are confidential. If the Destroyer goes around asking about the training location, their wording will sound different from a fan's, and they'll be exposed. We'll instantly be able to catch them. This will make it easier to locate Destroyers.*

It was for this reason that Lian Yufan hadn't protested against Yu Hua's policy decision too much. Otherwise, he definitely would have thought of a way to prevent this collaboration from coming into effect.

*So it's like that...* Huan Zixu frowned and looked towards Yu Hua's cubicle. He kept thinking that there were too many coincidences around Yu Hua.

He had coincidentally been employed by Zhen Li's studio, coincidentally acquired the approval of the Protection Organization, coincidentally chosen this path for Yuan Luori that would make it easier to located Destroyers but was also comparatively safe... This many coincidences gathered around a single person weren't coincidences anymore.

Putting all the coincidences together, there seemed to be only one answer...

Huan Zixu had a paranoid nature. He fixed his eyes on Lian Yufan and wrote his guess on the paper: *Is Yu Hua a Protector? On the leadership level, like Director Xiao?*

Lian Yufan: "...!"

He sucked in a breath, nearly stifling to death on it.

Huan Zixu didn't think there were any flaws in his reasoning. If Yu Hua wasn't someone who knew the Protectors inside and out, if Yu Hua didn't have Protectors near him to guard him at all times, how could the Protection Organization allow an ordinary person to stay at the studio?

And Lian Yufan's attitude towards Yu Hua was very unusual. Sometimes it seemed like he was avoiding some subject. There had to be some private connection between them!

Huan Zixu wrote: *Being candid with you about my guesses demonstrates my sincerity. Feng Kui is in your hands, I'm willing to cooperate with the Protection Organization's work. Please don't exclude me.*

The more clever and paranoid a person was, the less of a sense of security they could have. Without a definite answer, they would always go around suspecting everything. Huan Zixu wasn't as satisfied with his lot as Zhen Li and Yuan Luori. Though he had lost his power and had been forced to part from Feng Kui, he still had to grasp the initiative, find a role to play within the Protection Organization.

Lian Yufan silently read Huan Zixu's reasoning and thought that the majority of it was right.

The reason the Protection Organization trusted Yu Hua was that they had already investigated him. The reason they had let him stay at the studio was You Zhengping. You Zhengping was responsible for the Xuyang District, one of the Protection Organization's best. During each battle, he revealed astonishing talent. Hidden in the shadows, he had enough strength to protect Yu Hua. He was still growing up, not mature enough yet. The Protection Organization didn't want to throttle his potential for growing up.

Therefore, You Zhengping's identity was top secret. He had to remain in the shadows.

Lian Yufan put their dialogue into the shredder, shook his head, and told Huan Zixu, "Be content with your work. Don't make wild guesses."

The more he acted like this, the more likely Huan Zixu thought it was that his guesses were true.

During their confrontation, Yu Hu said, "Come over here, you two."

The two of them went to Yu Hua's cubicle. Yu Hua instructed: "Lately there have been quite a few advertising companies coming to ask us to promote their products. I've selected carefully among them and chosen three brands. One is clothing, one is snacks, and one is facial cleanser. I've seen their ads. Their quality is good, and so is public opinion about them. They have their eyes on Zhen Li's popularity. It's our first collaboration of this type. We need to perform well."

There was nothing but Destroyers on Lian Yufan's mind. He was in no mood to care about the studio's business. He agreed carelessly. But Huan Zixu was different. He knew he would most likely have to live in this world. While he was dealing with the Protection Organization, it was best if he made some money to support himself, at least enough to rent an apartment so he would be able to bring Feng Kui to live there later. He couldn't stay at the studio and sleep on a folding bed like Yuan Luori.



“Let me see the price,” Huan Zixu said.

Yu Hua had intended to test Huan Zixu’s abilities. He gave him the price lists and commission tables. Huan Zixu quickly entered working mode. He looked up these companies and the prices of their products online. After some calculating, he gave an informed opinion: “There’s latitude to drive the price of the products down.”

Yu Hua raised his eyebrows and waited for Huan Zixu to continue.

“No matter what the promotion format, for livestreaming and online shopping, what attracts the most traffic is to be the lowest. At base it’s a price war,” Huan Zixu said. “I’ve researched the effectiveness of these companies’ events and the stock of their second hand goods. I think there’s still room to drive down the price. I can negotiate the price with a bet-on agreement. The studio can take 20% more of the revenue than the estimate. The ordinary income will be treated according to our contracts, and of the excess 20%, I want half, or else I won’t negotiate and no one will get that money.”

Director Ha had come over and looked at Huan Zixu in shock. He truly was a warrior. He could haggle with Yu Hua, and he had precisely seized on Yu Hua’s weak point!

Huan Zixu didn’t wait for Yu Hua to agree. He added, “Of course, if there are problems with the quality after sale, that will be for Director Lian to take care of. I trust that with Director Lian’s supervision, there will be no problems. If there are problems, then Director Lian can pay for the losses out of his own pocket.”

He smiled at Lian Yufan, who had been planning to stay out of it.

Lian Yufan: “...”

Look at Huan Zixu, threatening him with compensating out of his own pocket if the quality was no good. This amounted to forcing him to use the Protection Organization’s power to supervise the advertisers to avoid them perpetuating a fraud and impacting the studio’s public image.

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Author’s Note:

Huan Zixu: Incessant life, incessant scheming.

Yu Hua: Very good, he can make money, he’s a genius, I’m not letting him go.

Huan Zixu’s entire deduction process is correct, but he reached a totally wrong answer.

## CHAPTER 70

Hearing Huan Zixu’s quote, Yu Hua began to seriously consider this marketing director. He knew of Huan Zixu’s excellence in mental abilities, and he was aware that Director Huan was a

person who could easily assimilate into the real world. But he hadn't expected that Huan Zixu's marketing talents would be far higher than he had imagined.

This was a talent worth keeping. Though his price had to be cut down.

"You don't think that commission is too high, Director Huan?" Yu Hua said. "If you sign a bet-on agreement with the advertising company and your bet fails, we'll have to bear the loss."

"With me here, we won't fail," Huan Zixu said proudly.

"And Director Lian will have to bear responsibility for the quality of the products after sale. We can't let him do that work for nothing," Yu Hua said, smiling faintly. "My proposal is for the company to take seven parts of the excess 20%. Of the remaining three parts, Director Lian will take one, and you'll take two."

Huan Zixu laughed coldly. "That's daring of you to say. Do you believe that I'll keep you from getting any bit of that money, do an under the table deal and stuff it all in my own pockets?"

"Either you take two parts or no one gets any of this money," Yu Hu said carelessly. "Even if you don't negotiate, if the company does enough marketing, we can still make quite a bit of money. But you won't have anything to do with that money. You'll continue to receive your 1,500 yuan base salary."

If Huan Zixu could earn this money, then he temporarily wouldn't need to use this opportunity to launder money, because they would have earned enough. If Huan Zixu didn't step in, Yu Hua would personally fix up the accounts and make a few changes, transferring a million of the hundred million from the hundred million secret account into his own account. He would have the money to pay back his mortgage.

No matter what, Yu Hua couldn't lose, while Huan Zixu was out of luck. He had to take either the 1,500 or the two parts. There was no room for discussion.

When two forces confront each other, momentum is the most important thing. Huan Zixu had lost from the very beginning.

He met Yu Hua's eyes for a moment. He firmly believed that this person would rather do as much damage to himself as to his enemy than let himself be taken advantage of.

Huan Zixu thought of Feng Kui still waiting for him at the Protectors' base and took a deep breath, forcing himself to calm down. He needed a suitable place to take Feng Kui after earning the Protection Organization's trust. He compromised: "That's doable, but first you have to rent a two bedroom, one living room apartment for me. I won't stay in the studio."

"I'll take the advance rent out of your commission. If you can't sell what you promised, you'll work me for free for half a year to repay it." As he spoke, Yu Hua's fingers flew over the

computer. In less than five minutes, he had typed up a contract between the company and Huan Zixu.

“Fine, I’ll let you off easy this time.” Huan Zixu carefully read the contract then fiercely signed his name.

Lian Yufan, looking on: “...”

Lian Yufan was rational, a brilliant student, and he had taken part in quite a bit of combat during his trial period. But he had never seen the mutual deception of society. He was a little dumbfounded. He felt that during the dialogue just now, there had been the light of flashing blades. Yu Hua and Huan Zixu had seemed to be smiling, but in reality, blood had been drawn —Huan Zixu’s blood.

Seeing Huan Zixu looking glum, Lian Yufan said in spite of himself, “I’m not short on money. You can have my one part.”

Huan Zixu took Lian Yufan to another cubicle, avoiding Yu Hua. Quietly, he said, “I know you aren’t short on money. You may not have any opportunity to spend money in your whole life, but the money isn’t only for you. When you hire people for quality testing and outside legal assistance, are you planning to make them work for free? I know you’re capable of making them work for you for free, but while you can do it once or twice, you’ll still have to collaborate with them afterwards. Who’s going to work overtime for nothing? Money owed has to be paid. Yu Hua is the one who ought to be paying this money, though I can see he isn’t planning on it.”

Having said this, Huan Zixu covered his heart, looking as though he had received an internal injury.

Lian Yufan nodded and decided to take the money. He wasn’t planning to keep it. He would divide it all up among the workers responsible for managing the follow-up.

This gave Lian Yufan a new perspective on Huan Zixu. He said, “You can still make such considerations for me. You have your good points.”

Huan Zixu rolled his eyes and said disdainfully, “You think I want to give them money? It’s because they’ll work better if they’re paid. There a few devoted and unselfish beings like you people, but the majority of people are selfish and self-interested. If you want the horse to run, you have to feed it grass. I primarily want to make money for myself. No matter where I am, I first have to accumulate something that can be exchanged for value. This is an unchanging principle of existence.”

Huan Zixu wasn’t strong. At least, he hadn’t been strong at all during his first hundred worlds. He was different from levelers like Yuan Luori and the bomb freak, whose powers lay in physical strength and combat ability. When these levelers arrived in a new world, what they thought of was always becoming stronger, finding their mission target’s weakness, beating

them, defeating them. But every time Huan Zixu had come to a new world, what he had thought of was survival.

He had managed to become stronger, but after only a few worlds, the System had begun its hunting mode, and he and Feng Kui had been plunged into a nightmare of running for their lives.

Surviving in the crevices was Huan Zixu's normal condition.

If Yu Hua was a leader among the Protectors, that was all right; everything was only a performance. But if Yu Hua really was an ordinary person who spent his days thinking about how to make money and exploit his employees, then if Huan Zixu wanted to improve his life at the studio, the only way was to make money.

Yu Hua handed over the advertising company's contact information to Huan Zixu and told him and Lian Yufan to go negotiate those lists.

Lian Yufan's initial understanding of the studio had been dancing every day, attracting traffic, drawing the notice of Destroyers, turning the Xuyang District into a Destroyer absorption point, aiding the Protection Organization in immediately discovering Destroyers and minimizing the harm they did to the world. During this process, if he could trace the black-cloaked man's identity, that would be for the best.

When he had accepted this assignment, Lian Yufan hadn't considered his own life and death in exposing himself in front of Destroyers. Naturally he also hadn't thought of what Zhen Li and Yuan Luori, who had lost their powers and had to survive in this world, could do.

Lian Yufan didn't lack for money. His father had been a Protector. The state was responsible for their family's expenses, including his mother's high medical costs. He hadn't needed to spend money to go to school. Even when he flew, it was on special planes provided by the organization. There were people to take care of his clothing, food, housing, and transport, and every month a considerable subsidy was deposited into his account.

This rationality and detachment from the material world were built on a foundation of having people to take care of all trifling matters for him so the Protector Lian Yufan could focus wholeheartedly on his work.

But the Lian Yufan in Zhen Li's studio had to knuckle down and decorate along with Yu Hua. Seeing Zhen Li still living in his dark basement and Yuan Luori with only a folding bed to sleep on, eating primarily instant noodles every day, he had gradually taken on a tint of materiality.

Lian Yufan was still most concerned about the Destroyers, but Zhen Li and Yuan Luori, who had aided the organization many times in protecting ordinary citizens during this assignment, had to live, had to have better lives.

At least they had to make enough money to move the studio to a new location. Their studio consisted of five grown men. They couldn't cram themselves into this crappy little studio full of formaldehyde and dance every day. Though he was a special ability user and his power could automatically remove harmful substances from his body, keeping him from being impacted, smelling it still made his head hurt.

The members of the show group who had come to do the recording were looking at them with pitying glances. Xiao Fu even especially went downstairs to buy a bag of face masks to give her workers to wear.

Gradually, from only wanting to force all Destroyers into the open, Lian Yufan had gone to being willing to consider their future livelihoods.

He would find some acquaintances and hire them to help him complete the follow-up work for this order.

Lian Yufan and Huan Zixu went out together to run errands. This caused Zhen Li some anxiety.

This morning, Yu Hua had told him about the natural law spaces. Zhen Li wanted to convey this information to the Protection Organization as soon as possible. But today, first there had been a new employee hired, then there had been the show group's filming. He hadn't been able to find an opportunity.

And now Lian Yufan had gone out into the field and would supposedly be out negotiating business for the next few days. He wouldn't be coming to the studio for the time being. Then who should he go to to talk about these things?

Yu Hua finished with the purchase order, contacted a broker, and had them find an apartment that fit Huan Zixu's requirements. The broker sent photographs and asked whether Yu Hua wanted to come see for himself. Yu Hua wasn't in the mood. It was Huan Zixu who would be living there anyway, and it was his money being deducted to pay for it. He randomly chose a place that was close to the studio and convenient for the Protection Organization to monitor. He misappropriated the deposit that the show group had given Yuan Luori to pay the broker.

Having finished the trivial work, Yu Hua looked at the time. There were only three hours left until it was time to get off work. He had to pack up his things and get ready to go home.

Xiao You hadn't been home for two days. Today he would definitely come home and eat. He had to go to the produce market nearby ahead of time and buy some fresh ingredients to make a sumptuous feast in the evening.

So he said to Zhen Li, "I'm going out. You stay with the show group to do the filming. Keep an eye on Director Yuan and Director Ha, understand?"

"I-I understand." Zhen Li swallowed. It seemed that he had to suppress the fact that Yuan Luori's special ability had awakened. For now, he couldn't tell the Protection Organization.

After Yu Hua left, there were many things Zhen Li had to take responsibility for. There was nothing he could do. He had to turn off the livestream and find an opportunity to spare some time to send a message to the Plain Face Number 1 Protector, use coded language to arrange to see him tonight. He had important information to tell him.

This was the emergency contact method that Cen Xiao had given Zhen Li when he had been at the base. It was a personal action on Cen Xiao's part. He had been worried about Zhen Li running into an emergency. If Lian Yufan wasn't around, Zhen Li would have no way to protect himself.

Huan Zixu's actions towards Zhen and Yuan had been merciful. He had only wiped their memories without harming them. If they met a Destroyer more brutal than 192, then Zhen Li wouldn't be so lucky.

Zhen Li sent the message. He waited for a while and didn't see the Plain Face Number 1 Protector respond. The time had come to walk Director Ha. He had to follow the show group as they watched Yuan Luori walk the dog.

They all went to the estate. Yuan Luori walked Director Ha at a leisurely pace. The cameraman documented it. It was a sweet image.

In reality, Director Ha was unwilling to resolve its physiological requirements in front of a camera even if it died of it. It refused to go to the bathroom no matter what. And, while Yuan Luori was sitting on the bench, it hit Yuan Luori's eye with its paw, knocking out his contact lens.

When Yuan Luori's contact fell out, with one eye he could see real objects, and with the other eye he could see power.

He saw Director Ha taking advantage of his flurry to throw off its leash and run off. The bomb inside its body was getting fainter and fainter, while something seemed to have appeared at the ends of those two threads, as though it was dragging something. Though they were also very faint. It was an inactive state.

The image of the husky hitting its owner in the face and running off was also pretty cute. Zhen Li stayed behind to help Yuan Luori change his contact, while the show group chased the husky.

The dog knew how to hide. It went around the estate twice and vanished without a trace. The show group chased it for ages and found that the dog was nowhere to be seen. They quickly contacted Zhen Li so he could find the dog.

While everyone was panicking, Director Ha quickly ran to the place in the estate set aside for dog walking to resolve its physiological demands. There was satisfaction written all over its fluffy face.

When it was finished, Director Ha walked happily out of the bushes. As soon as it turned, it saw a large-scale Alaskan Malamute staring at it.

Director Ha: "..."

The Malamute pounced and held Director Ha down. The big dog's owner was a young woman who didn't seem very strong. However she pulled, she couldn't pull the dog off.

Director Ha wailed mournfully as the Malamute enthusiastically licked and bit it. By the time its owner had pulled the dog away, Director Ha was on its last gasp, more dead than alive.

This was intolerable. It would be better if the dog bit it through the throat and it dropped dead, Director Ha thought forlornly.

Just then, there came a childish voice: "Xiao Ha, there you are! I just saw Yuan Luori-gege looking for you."

The little boy Junjun reached out his arms and picked up the little husky. He found that the little dog was trembling all over from being bitten by the big dog. He quickly stroked the husky's head and back reassuringly it and quietly said to console it, "Don't be scared, it was just too excited. It only wanted to play with you. I'll take you to your owner."

Junjun accepted the Malamute owner's apology in Director Ha's place, pressed the little husky's head against his neck, and, with some difficulty, went to find Yuan Luori, carrying the dog.

While he was a boy, he was only eight years old, and a husky over three months old already weighed six or seven kilograms. It was strenuous work for a child only eight years old to pick up that much weight.

Junjun wanted to put Xiao Ha down so it could walk on its own, but the dog was shaking so much that there was nothing Junjun could do. He grit his teeth and kept holding it.

Director Ha buried its face against Junjun's neck, feeling the warmth of the little boy's body and inwardly despising itself. Once again it had been saved by its foe.

It wanted to struggle, jump out of Junjun's arms and walk on its own, refuse its foe's present. But its body was really too weak. It was already an accomplishment that it hadn't been driven to lose control of its bowels by being bitten. Now its four legs were all weak. It would be hard to run around. It could only let the little boy hold it.

The soft little hand was stroking its back reassuringly. Instinctively, Director Ha's body couldn't bear to give up this solicitude.

How shameful. Director Ha covered its face with its paws and surrendered to its fate, letting Junjun return it to Yuan Luori.

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Author's Note:

Huan Zixu: No matter what, I need to get a place to live and think of a way to get Feng Kui there.

Yu Hua: I'm satisfied. The studio is gradually getting onto the right path.

## CHAPTER 71

While Yu Hua was haggling with Huan Zixu at the office, You Zhengping had finished patrolling and was discussing dinner plans with Cen Xiao.

"There's no need..." You Zhengping said to Cen Xiao, looking uncomfortable. "Yu Hua and I don't need to be so formal, I can just drop a word."

Cen Xiao was anxious to see an improvement. "What's lacking between lovers is exactly that bit of deliberate formality. Yu Hua likes romance. If you do this, he'll definitely be happy. Since changing jobs, you've often gone out on assignment. You and Yu Hua have been apart too much. You finally got out on a date last Saturday, then you went out on assignment again at night, and you still haven't seen Yu Hua since. If things go on like this, what will happen to your marriage?!"

*Actually, we haven't been apart that much. We've seen each other during missions,* You Zhengping thought inwardly.

"In married life, it's important to create some nice little surprises from time to time. That's how you make feelings last," advised Cen Xiao, who had never been in a romantic relationship. "We have a break after our midday patrol today. Take advantage of the afternoon! I'll help you!"

Cen Xiao hauled You Zhengping to the produce market and bought a big pile of random ingredients. Carrying the produce, the two of them arrived at the Messrs. Melancholy's home.

That's right, Cen Xiao's supposed nice little surprise for promoting feelings was making You Zhengping come home early and personally cook for Yu Hua.

You Zhengping thought of his own cooking skills and thought that this wouldn't be a nice surprise. It would be a shock.

"I'll help you!" Cen Xiao said, pounding his chest. "While my skills aren't up to Yu Hua's, I'm better than you, at least. Anyway, even if we can't make good food, our knife work is still first rate."



In this way, Cen Xiao arrived at You Zhengping's home, brimming with self-confidence.

You Zhengping opened the door first. As soon as he came in, he saw that suitcase arranged in the most obvious place in the living room. The suitcase also hadn't been closed fully. A corner of black clothing was hanging out of it.

You Zhengping: "!!!"

His heart stopped for half a beat. He blocked Cen Xiao behind him, not letting his friend walk through the door. "W-w-wait a bit, I'll find you guest slippers, you can't wear your outside shoes indoors. Yu Hua hates dirt, he'll be mad if he sees footprints."

Cen Xiao held two bags of ingredients. A live crayfish had crawled up the plastic bag to his hand and was just pinching him with its pincers. Head dripping with sweat, he said, "No need, I'll just leave my shoes outside and go in wearing socks. Haven't I seen how clean your floor is? Not a speck of dust on it. It won't get my socks dirty. Hurry up, let me come in and put the food down, I can't control this crayfish. It hurts."

He didn't wait for You Zhengping to get slippers. He tossed his shoes outside the door and squeezed into the apartment, going directly to the kitchen.

You Zhengping hurriedly walked two steps, walking at Cen Xiao's right, blocking his line of sight so Cen Xiao wouldn't see the suitcase next to them.

Cen Xiao didn't notice anything about the suitcase. He was thinking, You Zhengping's house is a safe place, and we're two Protectors with no one else here. It's just a suitcase in the living room, what is there to worry about?

You Zhengping escorted Cen Xiao all the way to the kitchen, saw him bend down and drop the food, then quietly shifted to the living room. He wanted to put away the extremely obvious suitcase. Their apartment was on an open plan. From the living room to the dining room to the kitchen, it was all open. There were no obstructions. You could see all the way to the living room balcony from the kitchen.

But Cen Xiao, rolling up his sleeves, said, "Find me a bowl, I'm going to clean the crayfish and teach you how to make hot and spicy crayfish. I'll do the teaching, and you can do the cooking."

"Where...where are the bowls?" You Zhengping didn't know where to look. He kept one eye on Cen Xiao to keep him from looking towards the living room and one eye on the suitcase, considering how to put it away without raising any suspicions. His eyes were wandering as though he had lazy eye.

"You don't even know where the bowls are?" Cen Xiao didn't know whether to be envious or concerned. "You've really been so spoiled that you can't provide for yourself. You can't be away from Yu Hua. Get serious and have a nice life."

To Cen Xiao, You Zhengping and Yu Hua absolutely couldn't break up. If they divorced, what would happen to his wallet?

"Maybe they're on the north balcony," You Zhengping said, pointing to the opposite side of the living room. "Why don't you go look around there?"

Cen Xiao cluelessly turned to the balcony to look. You Zhengping swiftly went into the living room and picked up the suitcase, wanting to hide it in some not so obvious place.

Who would have expected that Yu Hua's hints to You Zhengping would have reached this manic stage? He hadn't locked the suitcase. The mask and black cloak inside it came tumbling out.

"!!!" You Zhengping's eyes popped out of his head.

"What was that sound?" Cen Xiao asked from the balcony, head down as he looked for a bowl to wash food in.

"Nothing, I'm looking for slippers for you." You Zhengping bent down in a flurry to pick up the cloak and the mask.

Then he heard the sound of Cen Xiao's footsteps coming in from the balcony. "Everything in your house is really laid out perfectly. I found two different bowls. Which is for washing vegetables, and which is for washing meat?"

Hearing the sound of Cen Xiao gradually getting closer, You Zhengping had no time to think carefully. He quickly opened his first space, which hid weapons and natural energy, and hid the black cloak and the mask inside it, only leaving behind the empty suitcase.

Cen Xiao walked into the living room, carrying the two bowls. He saw You Zhengping sitting on the ground with an empty suitcase open next to him. He looked very woebegone. Cen Xiao couldn't help laughing. "What are you doing? Are you going through the suitcase for guest slippers?"

"I-I thought Yu Hua had brought back a pair of hotel slippers in his suitcase," You Zhengping excused himself at random.

"Pfft! Your Yu Hua really knows how to live. No wonder Lian Yufan is always complaining that he's stingy and saying he's a modern day Grandet<sup>26</sup>." Cen Xiao thought he could understand Lian Yufan's suffering.

"Haha, I also don't know which bowl is for what, though it's all right, just go ahead and use one, at worst we'll wash it afterwards," You Zhengping said, laughing dryly.

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<sup>26</sup> Notably miserly character in Honoré de Balzac's *Eugénie Grandet*.

“Well, I don’t know if Yu Hua will be mad if I get it wrong. I’ll try to tell them apart.” Cen Xiao saw that You Zhengping couldn’t be depended on. Exasperated, he could only rely on himself.

Seeing Cen Xiao return to the kitchen, You Zhengping wiped the sweat from his forehead, picked the empty suitcase up off the ground, and only then belatedly realized what he had done.

Crap, he had stuffed the black-cloaked man’s cloak and mask into his first space. There was air in the second space; he normally used it to hold people. The first space was an entirely airless environment, and it was divided into two parts. One part was used to store objects, specifically heat weapons. The other part only contained energy. The vacuum let the different energies coexist peacefully.

And he seemed to have just put the black cloak and the mask into the space with the energies...

You Zhengping quietly split off a bit of awareness to investigate the first space and saw that, like a drop of water in a pot of oil, the black cloak and the mask had made the peaceable energies explode here and there like a pot being boiled. They only calmed down once more when the black cloak and the mask had been completely destroyed.

You Zhengping: “...”

What had he done...? You Zhengping covered his face.

“I’ve washed the crayfish, can you find me an apron? Why are you still sitting on the floor?” Cen Xiao asked strangely when he walked over again and saw You Zhengping collapsed like a wad of mud next to the suitcase.

“I-I’m feeling self-reproachful,” You Zhengping said sorrowfully.

“Oh, you’ve thought of how good Yu Hua is?” Cen Xiao crouched down and patted his friend’s shoulder. “Look how well he takes care of you. He even scrimps and saves when it comes to his own slippers, but he’ll dig into his savings to buy you a car, buy you clothes, buy you tasty food. He’s even so generous to us as your friends. You have to treasure a person like that!”

“Yes, I have to treasure him.” You Zhengping sucked in a breath through his nose. He had always treasured Yu Hua. But right now, he was too ashamed to face the organization or Cen Xiao.

You Zhengping didn’t dare to look at Cen Xiao. He staunchly climbed to his feet, carried the suitcase to the bedroom and put it back on top of the wardrobe, then got a pair of guest slippers for Cen Xiao out of the shoe rack. He went to the kitchen to study cooking with Cen Xiao.

“Today we’re making a seafood feast. It’s fairly easy to cook. Most of it can just be steamed in clear broth. You can eat the authentic taste of crab.” Cen Xiao’s so-called cooking ability was the ability to steam things. “Crayfish are a little troublesome. Let me look up how to make hot and spicy crayfish. You clean them, remove the heads, devein them, then use seasonings. Where are the seasonings?”

The kitchen was off limits to You Zhengping. Of course he didn’t know. Cen Xiao had to go look for himself. Fortunately, Yu Hua arranged things very regularly. Cen Xiao quickly found the seasoning box. When he opened it, he saw Sichuan peppers and star anise, everything neat and tidy, arranged from big to small inside the box, so orderly that it was alarming.

He opened the fridge to look for green onions, ginger, and garlic. As soon as he opened the door, he was startled by the arrangement of ingredients.

Cen Xiao had been to You Zhengping’s house many times, but Yu Hua had been here every time. There had been no need for him to cook. Cen Xiao had never seen the items in Yu Hua’s kitchen on display.

All the vegetables were placed in freshness preserving boxes or wrapped in freshness preserving film, arranged according to size like soldiers arrayed for battle. All the green onions were peeled and cut to the same length, lying neatly in their box, so orderly that Cen Xiao didn’t dare to take any, afraid of ruining the vegetable ranks. The heads of garlic looked like they had been painstakingly chosen by Yu Hua; they were all about the same size, lying in the freshness preserving box in the most aesthetically pleasing order. Yu Hua had sliced all the corners and protrusions off the irregularly sized lengths of ginger and sealed the cut places with freshness preserving film; they were also neatly arranged in a freshness preserving box. The three boxes of green onion, ginger, and garlic were lined up according to size.

“This...” Looking at the fridge laid out more neatly than a supermarket display, Cen Xiao involuntarily backed up two steps. “Is your Yu Hua’s obsessive-compulsive disorder this serious?”

“What’s wrong, weren’t you looking for aromatics?” You Zhengping, who had been removing the crayfish heads, walked over and saw Cen Xiao staring blankly at the fridge. Paying no attention to how neat the fridge was, he casually grabbed a few green onions. Cen Xiao looked on as the green onion ranks were destroyed by You Zhengping.

You Zhengping also took a head of garlic. He didn’t take one from the edge of the great garlic array. He picked one at random from the middle and also bumped the garlic around it.

The fresh ginger also suffered violence at his treacherous hand, and he knocked some of the vegetables next to it into disarray.

The scalp-numbingly tidy fridge had been messed up by You Zhengping and took on a lively air. It wasn’t so frightening anymore.

Cen Xiao closed the fridge and looked around.

When he had just walked into the kitchen, he had thought that Yu Hua was truly good at housework. It was rare to see such a clean kitchen. Now that he looked at it again, the spotless kitchen range, the orderly cupboards, the regularly arranged knives, and even the perfectly laid out chopsticks in the chopstick basket, all took on a shocking appearance.

Could a person really endure this kind of life?

While Cen Xiao thought this, You Zhengping shook his hands, splashing countless water droplets onto the kitchen range, instantly waking Cen Xiao from his nightmare of order. The terrifying feeling vanished.

“The head is off, and I’ve taken care of the veins. What do I do next?” You Zhengping was holding a knife. Somehow he had managed to knock a chip off of it while removing the heads and veins of the crayfish. There was a gap in the knife blade. And if Cen Xiao wasn’t mistaken, that was a vegetable chopping knife. It shouldn’t have been used to cut meat and seafood.

“Chop up the aromatics and bring the pot to a boil...” Cen Xiao instructed.

He suddenly thought that to be able to ignore all this order and live naturally with Yu Hua, from a certain point of view, You Zhengping was a ruthless person, too.

They were a perfect match.

The two of them flailed around making chaos in the kitchen and at last produced a passable seafood feast. After all the dishes had been arranged on the table, Cen Xiao looked at his Protector phone and saw Zhen Li’s message.

Ordinarily, Cen Xiao wouldn’t have missed a message on the Protector phone. Even when he was fast asleep, if his phone made a faint sound, he would immediately wake up.

But just now, when he had been awed by the fridge, he actually hadn’t heard the phone’s message notification.

“Is there important news?” You Zhengping looked at his own Protector phone. There were no messages.

“Zhen Li says he has important information to report.” Cen Xiao looked at You Zhengping apologetically. “You may have to work overtime again tonight.”

“What? Overtime?” Thinking of the destroyed black cloak, You Zhengping felt that overtime was a good thing. There was a trace of happy surprise in his voice.

You Zhengping really didn’t know what expression he was supposed to put on if he was present when Yu Hua discovered that the suitcase was empty.

“Ah, I was planning to let you and Yu Hua spend a nice evening together.” Cen Xiao looked dejectedly at the table covered in food.

“I’ll leave a note.” You Zhengping scribbled a note and stuck it onto the table. “I’ll do my best to come back tomorrow morning.”

There was no other way. Cen Xiao and You Zhengping left the apartment.

Not ten minutes after they had left, Yu Hua came to the door carrying groceries. He was about to use his fingerprints to open the door when he noticed that the position of the door handle was three millimeters off from what it had been in the morning.

Had someone been here? Had Xiao You come back, or had the property management agent come to the door? Yu Hua looked down at the marks on the doormat. From the marks on the mat, he guessed that there had been two people. They seemed to have gone in. One of the shoe sizes matched Xiao You’s, while the other tracks looked like Cen Xiao’s. When Cen Xiao walked, he would put a little more pressure on his right foot than his left.

It seemed that Xiao You had brought Cen Xiao home, and then they had left.

Yu Hua wasn’t in a rush to get inside. He crouched down and picked up a crayfish whisker.

The two of them had also bought crayfish. From the color, they had been live ones. Had they come home to cook crayfish and drink? Yu Hua frowned faintly.

He opened the apartment door and went in. While changing his shoes, he investigated the shoe cupboard. The positions of Xiao You’s slippers and a pair of guest slippers had changed considerably.

Wearing his own slippers, Yu Hua saw at a glance that the suitcase in the living room was gone.

His forehead furrowed tightly. The suitcase and the black cloak had been left for Xiao You to see. He hadn’t thought that Xiao You would bring Cen Xiao home. Had Cen Xiao also seen?

He wanted Xiao You to know his identity, but as for Cen Xiao and the Protection Organization...

A sliver of fierceness flashed through Yu Hua’s eyes. He tapped the wall with his finger, wanting to use “time replay” to see what had happened when he hadn’t been home. If Cen Xiao really had seen—it had been less than ten minutes since the two of them had left, since they couldn’t report this sort of thing over the phone and there hadn’t been enough time for them to have arrived at their base. Yu Hua still had time.

Yu Hua controlled his power, speeding “time replay” up to its fastest, but nothing appeared in front of him. His ability had failed.

What was going on? Yu Hua's finger also tapped the couch and also came up empty. He couldn't obtain a "time replay" of the room.

There was only one reason for this to happen—someone had used time or space natural law power, bringing this area under their own law. Unless Yu Hua destroyed the other party's law, he couldn't use his ability within this space.

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Author's Note:

After discovering You Zhengping's identity, Yu Hua tore up the label and receipt from the pants and flushed them down the toilet, and burned the pants.

After discovering Yu Hua's identity, You Zhengping stuck the black cloak and man into his space and completely destroyed them with a storm of power.

Messrs. Melancholy: It's getting cold. Time to put on our armor.

## CHAPTER 72

"Time replay" had been blocked by the natural law power. Yu Hua didn't rush to chase after Cen Xiao and You Zhengping. Instead, he strolled to the dining table and lifted of the lid off the pot of crayfish. A strong smell of crayfish hit him in the face.

Before coming through the door, Yu Hua had smelled hot and spicy crayfish, but he had thought that it was floating from upstairs or downstairs through a range hood. He hadn't expected it to be coming from his own home.

There was a note stuck next to the pot, written in You Zhengping's handwriting: *After my patrol ended, I came back early to make you dinner. Cen Xiao taught me how (I'd have blown up the kitchen on my own). I was planning on giving you a pleasant surprise, but unfortunately I got another last minute assignment, so I'll probably only be able to come home tomorrow. Sigh.*

There was a little sighing person draw at the end, adorably ugly.

Yu Hua lifted the other lids. There were hot fried clams, crabs in clear soup, fresh oysters in minced garlic...

Everything You Zhengping liked to eat.

They had left less than ten minutes after making everything. The food was still steaming hot. Yu Hua took off his jacket, tied on his little bear apron, slowly put on a pair of single use gloves, peeled the crayfish and ate them.

"Tastes all right." Yu Hua smiled faintly.

When he ate out or ate his own cooking, Yu Hua couldn't taste any flavor. He could only judge from You Zhengping's enjoyment level whether food was all right, good, or very good. Today, he unexpectedly tasted flavors.

Heat, spice, sweetness, and the particular flavor of crayfish exploded in his mouth. It was so good he couldn't stop eating.

So this was how the crayfish Xiao You liked tasted. It really was good.

Yu Hua, who never had much appetite, thought of You Zhengping busily cooking while slowly and elegantly eating up the whole pot of crayfish.

While he was still wearing the gloves, Yu Hua also ate all the crab. Then he threw away the single use gloves, cleaned up the kitchen waste on the table, used dishwashing liquid to wipe away the grease stains on the tabletop, then at last served himself a bowl of white rice and ate the hot fried clams and fresh oysters in minced garlic with it.

You Zhengping had made a lot of rice. He hadn't measured out the water well, so the rice was only partially cooked. But there was just the right trace of sweetness when Yu Hua chewed it.

Saliva in the oral cavity breaks starch down into maltose. Maltose is faintly sweet. Chewing rice or flour for a while lets you taste a faint sweetness. But Yu Hua couldn't taste anything even when eating man-made fruit drops. Today, he could suddenly sense this bit of sweetness.

With the bitterness of the chili peppers, the sweet pungency of the onions, the flavor of the garlic, accompanied by the sweetness of the maltose in the rice, Yu Hua ate all the dishes on the table without noticing.

There was still quite a bit of rice left. You Zhengping hadn't known how much to make and produced an entire big pot of half-cooked rice. Yu Hua covered the leftover rice with freshness preserving wrap, planning to make congee out of it in the morning. It would be a pity to throw out such good half-cooked rice.

He took out another pair of single use gloves and cleaned up the leftover clam and oyster shells. He carefully wiped the table and the kitchen range three times, until they were bright and clean as new, without a trace of grease.

He scrubbed the dishes and the pots, washed the cleaning rag, and rearranged the messy cupboards. When he had pretty much cleaned everything up, Yu Hua opened the fridge, saw the vegetables that You Zhengping had messed up, laughed lightly and closed the refrigerator door, letting the vegetables remain disorderly.

He cleaned the floor rather cheerfully and arranged You Zhengping's slippers by the door, so Xiao You would be able to change his shoes as soon as he came home.



After finishing the housework, Yu Hua took off his apron and went into the bedroom. He looked up and saw the suitcase on top of the wardrobe.

He raised his hand and pointed. The suitcase floated down. It was completely empty. His black cloak and mask had vanished without a trace.

Yu Hua sat on the bed, closed his eyes, reviewed everything in the apartment, and attempted to piece together what had happened.

He could work out the general outlines: Xiao You had received his lovingly made cakes and had brushed past him on patrol without saying anything. He had wanted to do something for him and had finally decided to cook a meal for him. With Xiao You's cooking skills, he knew he wouldn't be able to make anything relying solely on himself, so he had arranged it with Cen Xiao, who had decent cooking skills and was willing to make his friend look better. The two of them had bought groceries and come home to cook.

After making the food, they had suddenly learned of something urgent, so You Zhengping had written the note and left.

Finally, there was the missing black cloak in the suitcase, and "time replay" being sealed.

Yu Hua's finger fell on the suitcase. He tapped with his fingertip.

After "time replay" had failed, he hadn't rushed to chase the two of them, but had instead enjoyed the dinner Xiao You had personally prepared. This was because he didn't want to behave too impulsively.

Even if his identity really was revealed, that was all right. If the Protection Organization was willing to trust him, they would give him You Zhengping as a hostage to form an alliance. If they weren't willing to trust him, then...

Yu Hua pressed his long, slender fingers against his forehead. If they didn't trust him, that was easier. There were many ways to control an organization.

While Yu Hua was considering how to negotiate with the Protection Organization, if Yuan Luori had by coincidence taken off his glasses, he would have seen that the whole Xuyang District was enshrouded in black, without a sliver of light leaking out.

No, no, no, he hadn't come to the point of thinking about his final step. There were still some questions he hadn't resolved. Yu Hua told himself to calm down, keep recalling and analyzing.

There were two questionable points here. One was who had used the natural law power, and the other was where the black cloak and mask that symbolized his identity had gone.

Based on Yu Hua's understanding of natural law power, the power in his home wasn't intended to harm anyone. It hadn't been deliberately left here. It had manifested unconsciously. The

natural law power was confused and disorderly, without clearly formulated rules. It lacked the power to restrain. The method was crude, as if it had been done by someone who had just grasped natural law power.

Even among levelers, there were very few people who had grasped natural law power. Most of them had obtained their little world at the five hundredth level and used it to pass. Otherwise, the difficulty of levels over five hundred would be too much for ordinary levelers to pass. Either they would set foot on the path to godhood, or else this would be the end of the line for them. There was no third road.

Up to the present, Yu Hua hadn't found anyone among the Protection Organization who could grasp natural law power, because in a situation where the world law was entirely intact, people living within the rules couldn't attain natural law power.

In a complete world, no one could possess natural law power. This could only be someone the System had sent, or something that had awakened with the tacit approval of the world law.

Yu Hua said heavily towards the air, "Tell me your rules."

The wild flow of power in the room gradually became regular. Yu Hua seemed to hear a flustered voice say into his ear, "No, it can't be discovered... It can't be seen!"

The voice was familiar, and moreover, the natural law power clung affectionately to Yu Hua.

What couldn't be discovered? What couldn't be seen? Yu Hua's gaze fell on the suitcase, and he understood.

The first question had been resolved, and the solution to the second question also seemed easy to reach.

Yu Hua had left his imprint on the black cloak and mask. No matter where they went, he could summon them. Before, Yu Hua hadn't known what he had run into, so he hadn't hastily summoned those things. Now he could.

He snapped his fingers lightly. Nothing happened.

No, something had appeared, though it had been disintegrated to atoms. The naked eye couldn't see it.

At this point, even without using "time replay," Yu Hua could guess what had happened in the apartment. Xiao You had destroyed the things in the suitcase before Cen Xiao could see them, and he had inadvertently left behind his just awakened natural law power.

His natural law power had awakened at a time like this. What was the world law thinking?

Yu Hua asked, "Are you trying to display your good faith?"

No one answered him. The world law didn't possess the ability to think. It only ceaselessly calculated according to certain patterns. Its goal was to keep calculating forever. When it encountered a power that could make it stop calculating, the law would go into action.

It would select loyal, staunch protectors willing to sacrifice themselves according to its measured reasoning. It would awaken their special abilities and have them disregard everything to fight the external force of the levelers. It had tolerated the arrival of Yu Hua with his sealed powers, and at this stage of events, it had chosen You Zhengping, giving Xiao You a sliver of natural law power.

All of the world law's activities showed that the time for Yu Hua to make a choice was coming closer and closer.

Yu Hua closed his eyes. He seemed to hear the hands of a clock ticking, minutes and seconds pressing forward step by step.

He simply lay down on the bed, hugged You Zhengping's pajamas folded neatly by the pillow, and quietly said, "Xiao You..."

Xiao You had chosen to trust him.

—

At the Protectors' base, everyone was listening to Zhen Li convey the black-cloaked man's words. You Zhengping suddenly felt as though something had left his first space without his control. He let his thoughts drift slightly.

Just then, Director Xiao suspiciously said to Zhen Li, "Within half a year, the System will send fighters who possess natural law power and can open their own little spaces to make us use our trump card... When did the black-cloaked man contact you?"

Zhen Li calmly said, "I'm not certain. A piece of paper suddenly appeared in the office with the information I just told you printed on it. I brought it."

Zhen Li got a wrinkled piece of paper out of his pocket and put it in front of Director Xiao. He had used the office printer to print this without connecting to the internet. It hadn't left any traces.

Director Xiao seriously read the contents of the paper. "All the information we currently have about the black-cloaked man has come from you. It's all your doing. We can't completely believe it. We need to take some precautions. Please excuse us."

Director Xiao nodded to Luo Huai. Luo Huai went up in front of Zhen Li. "I'm sorry, I need your memories. When I've reported to my superiors, I'll request to return them to you."

Zhen Li was flustered. He was worried that Luo Huai would see the great master's true identity.

You Zhengping was just as flustered. He wanted to prevent Luo Huai from taking Zhen Li's memories, but he wasn't in a position to do that.

Instead, Lian Yufan, who had been urgently called back in the middle of negotiating business, said, "Is it absolutely necessary to use these means? Zhen Li has obtained approval from the world law, and he's helped us deal with Destroyers many times. Is there any need to treat our companion like this?"

"Director Lian..." Zhen Li looked gratefully at Lian Yufan. He hadn't thought that this man, who had been the most rational and unfeeling at first, would be able to speak for him.

"Don't thank me too much. I just hate the conduct of casually touching others' memories." Lian Yufan looked coldly at Luo Huai.

Luo Huai gave Lian Yufan a hollow look. "I have my duty. Please understand."

He put his hand on Zhen Li's forehead and attempted to absorb Zhen Li's memories of the black-cloaked man. Seeing his movements, You Zhengping licked his lips nervously.

Luo Huai tried a few times to take the memories, but he couldn't touch them. He drew back his hand and wiped sweat from his forehead. He shook his head. "His memories are protected by a tremendous mental energy. I can't take them."

It must have been the great master clearer. Zhen Li relaxed.

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Author's Note:

Yu Hua: Another attempt to open the dark little room block failed.

You Zhengping: Another blocked path leading to a bad ending.

## CHAPTER 73

"The power in Zhen Li's brain is the same as the power that protected his 'impressions' from being written over by Huan Zixu." Luo Huai looked at You Zhengping. "Only the power protecting the captain was stronger."

With Zhen Li there, Luo Huai couldn't say You Zhengping's real name. After all, Captain You's husband was still working at Zhen Li's studio.

Everyone looked at You Zhengping. Cen Xiao said, "That day on the roof, the black-cloaked man personally healed the captain when he was injured."

Before the black-cloaked man had appeared on the roof of the mall, everyone had been able to follow the battle through the security cameras. They knew how seriously You Zhengping had been injured. Nearly all of his internal organs has been blasted to pieces by Destroyer 192. His right arm had been broken in more than one place. These were wounds that ordinary treatment measures couldn't heal.

Apart from Yuan Luori, no one knew how the black-cloaked man healed. Everyone had only seen the outcome of the healing in You Zhengping.

"It's possible that he left behind the mental energy that protected the captain then," Luo Huai said, nodding.

"It seems that the black-cloaked man is preventing us from learning his identity," Director Xiao said. "When someone so powerful is hiding in the shadows, it's hard to let down our guards..."

Lian Yufan thought about it and said, "Director, I've analyzed the data about the black-cloaked man."

Seeing Director Xiao nod faintly, Lian Yufan gave his results. "The first time the black-cloaked man appeared was to deal with Yuan Luori. When he appeared then, he chastised Yuan Luori and used his power to frighten the Clearing League. He also healed the seriously injured Yu Hua.

"The second time, he appeared on the roof. He killed Destroyer 192, who hadn't listened to his warning, and destroyed 192's neckbands. According to our research, Destroyer 192 could change bodies by relying on those neckbands. The black-cloaked man destroying the neckbands prevented 192 from escaping and rescued countless lives that may have been lost because of 192. And during that battle, he also saved me and the captain.

"The third time, with Feng Kui and Huan Zixu, to tell the truth, if he hadn't come, then of the four of us taking part in the operation, at least half would have died, and Feng Kui and Huan Zixu are also unlikely to have survived. He prevented a loss for both sides from occurring.

"There have also been three times that he didn't appear but rendered aid. The first time was when he took the power of Zhen Li's System and ordered Zhen Li to establish the studio, attracting the attention of all the Destroyers, according with our views. The second time was when he made Yuan Luori lure Destroyer 192 to Xincheng Mall. Once again his plans were the identical to ours. Now there's this time. He's told us in advance of our possible future enemies.

"Other incomplete statistics show that since the Zhen Li Studio was established, our colleagues in Protection Organizations in other areas have been able to located seventeen Destroyers solely relying on monitoring inquiries about the Zhen Li Studio. Only those Destroyers weren't as fortunate as the ones in the Xuyang District. They were controlled by the System and either died in battle or self-destructed after being caught. The Protectors of other areas have also suffered twenty-six deaths and thirty-five injuries. Among the injured, twelve

will be unable to fight again. There were also dozens of casualties among ordinary people caught in the fray.

“The Xuyang District is at the heart of the battle, but up to now we haven’t had any losses. The black-cloaked man’s contributions in this cannot go unnoticed.”

You Zhengping looked at Lian Yufan. All the data presented by this Protector he didn’t get along with was actually in favor of the black-cloaked man.

After reporting the data, Lian Yufan gave his conclusion. “Based on the present circumstances, I personally believe that the black-cloaked man can be trusted. He is not only opposed to the System, he is also willing to extend a helping hand to the Protection Organization and ordinary people. I haven’t reached this conclusion in gratitude because the black-cloaked man rescued me twice. I’ve made it on the basis of analyzing his behavior on its own merits. I incline towards preserving a non-aggressive manner in working with the black-cloaked man.”

“Preserving it in what sense?” Director Xiao asked.

Lian Yufan said, “Not delve into his identity, not disturb his actions, and demonstrate our good faith.”

Director Xiao looked at Lian Yufan’s young face and shook his head. “Looking from the point of view of a Protector, that’s impossible. Not delving, not disturbing, indicates that we’re handing over the initiative to him, leaving him in the shadows and ourselves in the open. He’s currently willing to consider the safety of ordinary people. If there comes a day when he changes, what should we do?

“And according to Huan Zixu’s information, the System’s goal is to absorb the natural law power of different parallel worlds. The black-cloaked man shares this ability.

“The situation now stands at a triangular balance of power. If we and the black-cloaked man deal with the System, it’s two comparatively weak parties being forced join hands with some strong opponent. If one day the System disappears, we can’t know whether the Protection Organization will conduct a war against the black-cloaked man.

“Of course we don’t hope for that day to arrive, but we must plan for the worst in everything. Learning the black-cloaked man’s identity beforehand will increase our ability to avoid risk.”

Director Xiao’s speech rendered everyone silent. But You Zhengping raised his hand.

If even Lian Yufan could speak in favor of the black-cloaked man, then he shouldn’t remain silent.

Having received a sign from Director Xiao, You Zhengping said, “Captain Lian has used data to speak from the rational point of view, so I’ll discuss instinct. Huan Zixu mentioned before that if too strong a power came to our world, the world law would even engage in a life and death

struggle to prevent them from invading. The black-cloaked man arrived fifteen years ago, and the world law didn't prevent him."

You Zhengping brought up a previously unthought of point of view. This point of view surprised everyone.

Lian Yufan was taken aback by You Zhengping upholding his point of view. This was the first time the two of them had reached a consensus.

"True, your view makes sense." Director Xiao, who had been unconvinced by rational data, was moved by You Zhengping's words.

"Also, he has always protected us," You Zhengping said. "It's been fifteen years. If it wasn't that he couldn't protect us any longer, that he had come to the end of his strength, he wouldn't have let Destroyers come to this world. It's our good fortune to have encountered him."

Director Xiao couldn't avoid being visibly moved. He remembered the battles of the first half of his life and the peace of the second half. It had been the black-cloaked man's existence that had bought this world fifteen years of breathing room.

"I'll try to convince my superiors," Director Xiao at last relented. "In fact, the leadership level is also divided between two view points. We were missing compelling evidence. You've provided me with a good line of thought."

You Zhengping and Lian Yufan looked at each other and smiled. Since training, they had competed against each other in open strife and veiled conflict. Neither had been able to change the other's views.

But in reality, sometimes you didn't need to change each other for your views to be the same.

Because their goals were identical.

"Also, I propose permitting Zhen Li to join the Protection Organization," Lian Yufan said. "He's never hurt anyone, and he's always helped us. The world law has also acknowledged his contribution."

Director Xiao recited the Protection Organization's regulations. "For a special ability user from civilian life to enter the Protection Organization, the recommendation of three or more Protectors is required, and one of the recommenders must be of captain rank. They must then undergo a three month observation. Special ability users with faulty histories also have to render meritorious service."

"I recommend Zhen Li," Cen Xiao said, raising his hand.

“Me, too,” You Zhengping said. He had always been somewhat jealous of Zhen Li because of his face and his little secrets with the black-cloaked man, but when it came to recommending him, You Zhengping wasn’t about to call Zhen Li’s contributions into question.

“Adding in that I made the proposal, that makes three,” Lian Yufan said. “Zhen Li’s performance at the Xincheng Mall attracted countless observers. He also ate the bomb Destroyer 192 placed in the lottery box, saving hundreds of customers at the mall that day. That counts as a meritorious service, doesn’t it?”

“It does,” Director Xiao said. “Is Comrade Zhen Li willing to join the Protection Organization?”

“Can I?” Hearing that the two captains and Plain Face Number 1 were speaking in his favor, Zhen Li was so happy that tears came to his eyes. He said excitedly, “I’m willing! I’m part of this world, too. I want to calmly live my future life here. I’m willing to contribute my strength!”

“After the meeting, fill out a form. If there are no unfavorable signs during the three month observation period, you can become a Protector and enjoy all the remuneration given to Protectors by the state,” Director Xiao said. “Are you still living in a basement? I can request a temporary apartment near the studio for your ahead of time. An ordinary Protector has the right to an 80 square meter apartment in any region. When you’ve been working for ten years, all the rights in the apartment will belong to you.”

“An 80 square meter apartment in the Xuyang District?” Zhen Li recalled the housing prices in the Xuyang District and was happy enough to faint.

He really was a lucky person. Ever since coming to this world, his luck had been great!

Director Xiao saw Zhen Li’s happy look and couldn’t help smiling, too.

In his era, how could such a thing as a Destroyer becoming a Protector have happened? There had been no communication between the two sides. When the Protectors discovered a Destroyer, they would do everything they could to eliminate them. And the Destroyers only wanted to complete their missions. They believed themselves a cut above others. They had no empathy for ordinary people.

Today’s situation had come about because the black-cloaked man had given the new generation of Protectors fifteen years, let them grow up healthy and without hatred. He had also removed Zhen Li and the others’ Systems, allowing some of the Destroyers to experience the commonplace.

That there were a few Destroyers who could become Protectors showed that the age truly had changed. Director Xiao was slightly emotional.

After a period of happiness, Zhen Li anxiously said, “Director Xiao, if the natural law ability user that the great master talked about really does come, what should we do?”



“Your line of thought has changed pretty rapidly. So soon, and you’ve started thinking from the point of view of a Protector,” Director Xiao said. “Don’t worry, the Protection Organization has persisted for so many years. We still have some cards in our hand.”

“But that all comes at the cost of Protectors’ lives!” Zhen Li thought of what he had heard from Yuan Luori about how the handsome uncle Protector had been injured, and he felt afraid. “How many people will be sacrificed if such a powerful person comes?”

“If they really are strong to a certain degree, not too many people will die,” Director Xiao said. “It’s all right to tell you about this. Captain Lian, you explain.”

Having received permission, Lian Yufan explained the World Protection Organization’s ‘source project’ to Zhen Li. Around fifty years earlier, a very strong Destroyer for the time appeared. A number of Protectors who thought they were certain to die had a sudden thought just before death. They merged all their powers together, releasing a power far exceeding what they had imagined, defeating the Destroyer. Apart from being exhausted, the Protectors had been intact.

This had attracted serious notice from the Protection Organization. After several studies, the organization made a stunning discovery. When Protectors’ powers were combined, one and one made far greater than two, especially when powers with the same property were combined; the force was unimaginable. A Protector skilled in calculation had believed that if the power of all the Protectors in the world was gathered in one person, that person would have been able to destroy the world in one blow.

The Protection Organization experimented constantly. They started by combining the same properties, then added similar properties, then followed with different properties. Everyone found that as long as they followed some mysterious order, even abilities with totally opposed properties could be perfectly combined.

For example, if you combined a fire type power with a fire type power, then added the similar wind, having the wind attribute, you could go on to add wood, earth, metal. In the end, even water types could be combined with a fire property power.

Then an elderly Protector who was also a physicist and philosopher had come up with an idea—the source project.

He had thought that the origin of all the Protectors’ power was identical. Perhaps everyone’s powers began at some identical mysterious source and would only gradually separate into different properties in each person’s body. So when all the world’s Protectors were put together through some medium, in the end, all the power would concentrate in a single person’s body, and that person could defeat all the Destroyers.

According to this belief, every country had begun to research methods for combining power. Countries with advanced technology had developed fusing weapons, while the countries with long histories had researched energy fields.

The repulsion field was a by-product of this project.

“That’s amazing!” Zhen Li said excitedly when he had heard. “Then we don’t need to worry at all! But then why...didn’t you use the source plan when dealing with a Destroyer like 192 and used the repulsion field instead?”

Lian Yufan said gravely, “Two reasons brought this project to a halt. First, who would be that person? Who could grasp all that power, far exceed humanity, and then be willing to be an ordinary rank and file Protector? I don’t think I’m that enlightened, and I wouldn’t request it of other people. Even if someone could do it, what country and what organization would allow such a powerful person to appear?

“Second, the source project has a boundary point. Forty years ago, there was a country that managed at last to combine all its power into the strongest Protector. But when the power reached a certain threshold, this Protector’s power went out of control. He was unable to control his rapidly increasing power or his mind. In the end, his power was exhausted, and he died at the bottom of the sea. He even caused a small-scale tsunami.

“This made everyone realize that humans have a limit. Humans aren’t gods. Each country’s Protection Organization wondered, where was that boundary? Then the black-cloaked man’s words made us realize that it was natural law power. Without grasping natural law power, even if you combined that much power in a single person’s body, he still wouldn’t be a suitable receptacle to contain it.”

“After that Protector lost control and died, the World Protection Organization stopped the source project,” Director Xiao said. “Several countries’ leaders signed an agreement saying that if they encountered a Destroyer with extremely powerful destructive force, they would choose one Protector with the greatest potential and provisionally use the source project once. Up to now, the source project has been activated three times. Each time, when it was over, the Protector who assumed the power would either die or be unable to keep fighting. A human can’t assume the power of a god.”

“So that means that if a super strong Destroyer does come, our choice would be...” Zhen Li had already guessed the outcome.

Lian Yufan expressionlessly said, “Essentially it would be a story of sacrificing one person to protect everyone.”

“But we restricted the power to what was within the scope of that person’s endurance, then no one would be sacrificed,” You Zhengping contradicted him.

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Author’s Note:

Lian Yufan: Yu Hua is an asshole. I’m ashamed that we’re both human!

Lian Yufan: The black-cloaked man has helped us time and time again. I'm willing to trust him and establish an equal cooperative relationship with him. I would vouch for him with my life.

Yu Hua: Oh, humans.

## CHAPTER 74

Lian Yufan, who regarded himself as having matured considerably, didn't argue with You Zhengping. He only calmly said, "Of course I hope that no one will be sacrificed, but that's the probability. At present, 100% of those who assumed the source project's power have died."

Hearing the outcome of the source project, Zhen Li quietly said, "Then-then it would be better to ask the black-cloaked man to step in."

Lian Yufan shook his head. "We won't do that. Collaboration is built on a foundation of equality between two sides, not one side absolutely having the upper hand. That's support, not collaboration. We can't appeal to the black-cloaked man for everything."

You Zhengping added, "If the black-cloaked man could truly eliminate the system, I think he would have done it long ago. He must have had his reasons for staying in this world and handing so many things over to us. Maybe he needs our help, too. We must get stronger. We can't rely on a single person."

"Oh," Zhen Li said dejectedly.

"Currently we can only raise our vigilance. I'll go report this to my superiors and do my best to facilitate the activation of the source project. I'll also submit a request on Zhen Li's behalf. Captain Lian, take Zhen Li to fill out a form, then take him to rest," Director Xiao said.

Everyone dispersed. Lian Yufan helped Zhen Li fill out a request, then took him to a lounge.

When Zhen Li walked in, he found that this was where Feng Kui was staying.

The Protection Organization must have had its reasons for arranging things like this. They probably hoped that he would tell Feng Kui about what had recently been discovered, and that he would pass along Feng Kui's current situation to Huan Zixu.

Perhaps mixed in with that was wanting to use Zhen Li to influence Feng Kui's thoughts, and in turn use Feng Kui to influence Huan Zixu and thoroughly subdue the two of them. Though the indications hadn't been very clear, so it was up to Zhen Li himself to choose what to do.

Zhen Li walked through the door and saw that Feng Kui was drawing something on a piece of paper.

Zhen Li spoke in a friendly manner: "Hello, I'm Zhen Li, I think we've met three times."

One time was among the Clearing League, when Zhen Li had glimpsed Feng Kui from afar. One time was at the studio, though that memory had been overwritten, and Zhen Li only knew that such a thing had taken place without remembering it. The last time was after the two of them had been successfully arrested, and Zhen Li had joined in the interrogation.

Feng Kui didn't answer. He was always quiet. The majority of the time, he let Huan Zixu speak for him, only occasionally expressing his own point of view.

Zhen Li didn't feel awkward at not getting an answer. He sat down across from Feng Kui and saw that this lummoX was holding a pencil and seriously drawing someone. Zhen Li looked closely; of course it was Huan Zixu.

Zhen Li didn't bother Feng Kui again. He quietly watched him draw. Feng Kui's sturdy fingers wielded the pencil, stroke by stroke carefully portraying Huan Zixu's eyes. When he was finished drawing, he considered, and added a teardrop birthmark at the corner of Huan Zixu's eye.

Because of the addition of this teardrop birthmark, the crafty and beautiful man in the drawing took on a grief-laden appearance. Feng Kui shook his head and quickly used an eraser to get rid of the teardrop birthmark. He fixed a part of the drawing that he had accidentally erased, then nodded at the drawing in satisfaction.

"Did you see today's livestream?" Seeing that teardrop birthmark, Zhen Li had suddenly remembered that there had been a barrage comment during the livestream saying that Lian Yufan's teardrop birthmark would suit Huan Zixu better.

Feng Kui nodded and simply said, "I know—he's very good."

After Yu Hua had removed the energy of his System, Feng Kui's body had completely reverted to its condition during his first world. But at that time, he had already been transformed. His voice was still the metallic mechanical voice, though now it was considerably smoother.

"I also noticed that comment. I thought that netizen was right at the time, but when I saw your drawing, I discovered that it would be inappropriate." Zhen Li recalled how Huan Zixu had attempted several times to resist Yu Hua at the studio and couldn't help smiling. "He's a person who doesn't admit defeat. Tears don't suit him."

Hearing Zhen Li praising Huan Zixu, Feng Kui finally looked up at him and gave him a straightforward smile. "Right."

"I'll tell you what happened during his first day at the studio," Zhen Li said. "Huan Zixu is really awesome. He's gotten accustomed to this world with hardly any transition period."

"Tell me." Feng Kui seemed very interested. He put down his pencil and earnestly listened to Zhen Li speak.

Zhen Li recalled everything that had happened that day. He did his best to make Yu Hua sound good, his description turning Yu Hua into a shareholder who exerted himself for the sake of the studio's development. He emphasized how Huan Zixu had haggled with Yu Hua, and how he had decided to rent a two bedroom one living room apartment near the studio.

"Lian Yufan went with him to negotiate the contract. Just now while I was filling out my form, Captain Lian was saying that the advertising company's faces all turned green from Huan Zixu's bargaining today, but he used profit figures, future popularity, brand establishment, and tactics for standing out among competing brands to make them smile again. They even wanted to headhunt Huan Zixu to come manage their marketing department." As he spoke, Zhen Li became happy. "When I heard Captain Lian mention the sum of money in the contract, I was stunned. Huan Zixu is amazing at making money!"

Feng Kui listened quietly with a faint smile on his face. When Zhen Li was finished, he proudly said, "A-Xu has always—been very clever."

Looking at him, Zhen Li suddenly sensed profound loneliness from Feng Kui. It wasn't from a single day's separation, it was the accumulation of years and years.

"I didn't think that you would know how to draw. And you draw so well." Zhen Li was afraid of being infected by Feng Kui's loneliness and didn't dare to mention Huan Zixu again, so he changed the subject to praising Feng Kui's drawing.

But instead, that made Feng Kui bring up Huan Zixu. "A-Xu said, we're very weak, so in each world, it's good to learn something new. It might save our lives."

As he spoke, the loneliness became even deeper. Zhen Li said, "That's right, you two have passed many worlds together over so many years. In all those years, you must have learned many skills."

"It wasn't so many years. Many worlds—I don't remember them." Feng Kui's fingers brushed Huan Zixu's eyes in the drawing. "Written records don't feel real. If I draw him, I can remember."

Feng Kui spoke briefly, but Zhen Li understood what he meant all at once.

Feng Kui hadn't only learned to draw in order to possess another skill. More than that, he wanted to remember Huan Zixu. Memories disappearing was a very frightening thing. Feng Kui had deleted the feeling of "fear," but that didn't mean that he couldn't be afraid. He just didn't know that that feeling was called "fear."

Whenever Huan Zixu said anything, he could only keep up a conversation by searching through his written records. There were no images in his internal storage. He didn't remember what he had experienced or felt. Would a day come when he woke up and couldn't even remember who the long-haired companion by his side was?

In Feng Kui's fear, he had backed up his written records again and again, but even so, he couldn't feel at ease. Everything else could be forgotten. The only thing he couldn't forget was that Huan Zixu had been his companion for many years.

So he had learned to draw, and the first person he had wanted to draw was Huan Zixu. He drew him many, many times and had stored the drawings in his hoard and in corners of various worlds. Even if he forgot Huan Zixu's appearance one day, he could still recognize him from the drawings—yes, it was this person.

Zhen Li understood where that bone-chilling loneliness came from. It was hundreds of years of Feng Kui's loneliness, an unknowing loneliness, as though he had been left behind for hundreds of thousands of years.

Zhen Li couldn't hold back his years. He took out a tissue to wipe his face. He cried very fiercely, as though Feng Kui had been bullying him.

"It-it'll be all right, at least this world, you'll remember everything," Zhen Li said as he cried.

Huan Zixu had said that everlasting life was only the unending passage of time. True time spent living was only some decades. Zhen Li, who lived each day fully, hadn't understood Huan Zixu's definition at the time, but now he could understand it.

For Feng Kui and Huan Zixu, the previous hundreds of years were worthless. A single day of such a bitter life was too much.

"Yes, I'll remember." Two faint dimples appeared on Feng Kui's simple and honest face. "I'll remember each day."

"Can you draw another one to give me? Draw yourself," Zhen Li said. "I'll take it back to give it to Huan Zixu, and I'll have Huan Zixu write something for you, then I'll have a chance to give it to you next time I'm at the base. Oh, no, you can see each other once a week, I would be doing something superfluous."

"I'll draw. You can take it back. Thank you," Feng Kui said.

Then he took out another sheet of paper and slowly drew two people.

One was the tall and broad Feng Kui, the other was the long-haired Huan Zixu. They were looking at each and smiling.

Zhen Li carefully put away the drawing and solemnly cupped his fist. "I pledge to deliver it."

Feng Kui also cupped his fist and gently knocked it against Zhen Li's.

The next morning, Zhen Li, who had become a reserve Protector, returned to the studio. By this time, Yuan Luori had already left with the show group. Lian Yufan had said that he had already

notified his colleagues at the filming location, and they would keep a close eye on the show group.

Today, the person walking Director Ha was Huan Zixu. It took time to rent an apartment, so last night he had slept on the folding bed in the studio. The penniless Huan Zixu had refused to eat expired instant noodles and had been so hungry in the morning that his blood sugar had been a little low. When he had fed Director Ha dog food and caught the scent of the food, he had actually started salivating with hunger, scaring Director Ha, who had always been resistant to the dog food, into eating it up at an unprecedented speed.

Huan Zixu stared at Director Ha's bag of dog food, then looked at the box of instant noodles that would be expired in another week. He clenched his teeth. "Forget it, it's not like I haven't been hungry before. I can take this bit of hardship."

According to Yuan Luori's instructions, he took Director Ha to the nearby estate for a walk. Chilly-faced, he left Director Ha in the bushes. He very much didn't want to pick up this thing's poop.

Director Ha also didn't want to be around Huan Zixu. Yuan Luori sometimes pet its head roughly, but most of the time he was very gentle, especially when he pet it before bed. It was extremely comforting for a not yet fully grown dog.

But Yuan Luori had gone with the group, and Huan Zixu felt it was beneath his dignity to pet a dog. Director Ha had wanted to ask for his help, but Huan Zixu had coldly shut it into its cage. Seeing Huan Zixu's expression, Director Ha had given up on asking him.

"Hurry up, don't make me wait too long." Huan Zixu crossed his arms, waiting for Director Ha to finish.

Just then, there came a childish voice: "Is that Luori-gege and Xiao Ha? Oh, it's not Luori-gege today."

Huan Zixu turned his head and saw little boy he had never met coming towards him on a scooter. He politely said, "Hello, my name is Liu Junjun, I often take Xiao Ha around with Yuan Luori-gege."

"Oh? You've walked this dog?" Huan Zixu asked.

"Yes, Yuan Luori-gege promised that I could play with Xiao Ha every day." Junjun was looking at Huan Zixu expectantly. "Can I?"

"Here." Huan Zixu passed the poop scooper to Junjun. "If you can help, thank heaven and earth. My name is Huan Zixu."

“Thank you, Zixu-gege. I’ll take care of Xiao Ha.” Junjun happily gave him a pioneer salute. Though he quickly noticed the breakfast food that he had just bought still in his hand and looked awkward. “Gege, could you hold my breakfast for me?”

“Go ahead.” Huan Zixu took the breakfast. Smelling the soup dumplings, he felt even dizzier. His stomach was full of air.

Not far away, Junjun and Director Ha frisked and gamboled. Huan Zixu hatched a plan. “Child, how about you walk the dog for the next few days? You can take it punctually, then bring it back.”

“All right!” said Junjun, who liked the dog very much. “I’m on summer vacation now, and dad makes me go out to exercise in the morning and evening. It’ll be great to have Xiao Ha with me!”

Director Ha was also pleased, waving its tail in spite of itself. After waving it twice, it stopped. Pooh, what was there to be happy about! He was falling into his foe’s hands!

Huan Zixu was delighted to have resolved the poop scooping problem. At the same time, he was once again salivating over the breakfast Junjun had bought.

It wasn’t that he hadn’t starved before. At his worst, he had gone four or five days only drinking water, eating nothing. But on those arduous worlds, food was a scarce resource. No one could get enough to eat, and you didn’t feel especially pitiful when you were hungry. But this world was calm and peaceful. People in the estate went out to buy breakfast or ordered take-out. In under ten minutes of dog walking Huan Zixu had seen five people coming to their doors carrying breakfast. Others’ happiness made his hunger increase unbearably.

No, that wouldn’t do, he couldn’t eat the child’s breakfast. Huan Zixu shook his head.

Just then Zhen Li returned to the studio and didn’t see Xiao Ha or Huan Zixu. He knew that they had gone to the nearby estate and quickly went out to find Huan Zixu. He wanted to give him Feng Kui’s drawing right away.

From far away, he saw Huan Zixu, dressed in casual clothes, long hair blown gently by the breeze, his head slightly lowered to look at the bag he was holding, his long, long lashes making him look as beautiful as a painting.

Zhen Li came puffing up to Huan Zixu and patted him on the back. He had run so hard he couldn’t speak.

“You’re here?” Huan Zixu spoke, spoiling the picture. “You have money, right? Go buy me some breakfast. The soup dumplings across the street smell good.”



“Sure, I’ll go buy some.” Zhen Li obediently ran a couple steps. Then he remembered the drawing he still had and quickly went back to give it to Huan Zixu. “Feng Kui gave me this for you.”

Huan Zixu casually gave Junjun’s breakfast to Zhen Li. He unfolded the neatly folded paper, saw the drawing on it, and smiled in understanding.

“It’s very well drawn.” Huan Zixu carefully folded the paper and put it away in his pocket.

Zhen Li quietly told him what had happened yesterday. He also told him about joining the Protection Organization, and that he would soon have an 80 square meter apartment.

Zhen Li also hadn’t eaten breakfast. He got hungry after saying a couple of sentences. As he spoke, he opened the bag of breakfast in his hand and started to eat. He also gave Huan Zixu a cup of soy milk.

Huan Zixu drank soy milk and ate soup dumplings. When he heard Zhen Li mention the apartment, he couldn’t avoid being moved. He whispered, “So two people would have 160 square meters, two people could...”

“Hehe, you’d have to be someone who hadn’t done any harm to society and had aided the organization in protecting residents.” Seeing that as powerful a lever as Huan Zixu was envious of him, Zhen Li couldn’t help being proud. He happily ate a mouthful of pickled vegetables.

Junjun, who was bringing Director Ha back: “...”

All the breakfast he had bought for Dad, Mom, and himself was gone! Waaah!

The two all-powerful Destroyers rushed to console the child. While they were making reparations for his lost breakfast, an exhausted You Zhengping was returning home.

Actually, he still didn’t know how to face Yu Hua, especially after he had destroyed the black cloak yesterday. You Zhengping was even more troubled.

But he hadn’t been home for three whole nights. Never mind Yu Hua being unsatisfied, You Zhengping himself couldn’t stand the pain of missing him.

He stood at the door for a while and smacked his chest to encourage himself. Then he worked up his courage and opened the apartment door with his fingerprints. He quietly went inside.

Yu Hua should be making breakfast now? In order to have breakfast at home, You Zhengping had taken Zhen Li, who had been in a rush to see Huan Zixu, away from the base early. Neither of them had eaten breakfast.

When he walked through the door, he saw that it was pitch black inside. All the light-screening curtains were tightly drawn. At 6 AM on a summer morning, the sun was already shining

brightly, but their home was shut up so that it was as lightless as the dead of night. The air-conditioning was turned up very high. It was as cold as an ice house inside.

He was about to turn on the entrance hall light by the door when he was hugged from behind. Two strong arms held him firmly. A deep voice said into his ear, "You're back at last."

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Author's Note:

Yu Hua: I'm a wife who's been left alone for three nights. Today I'm having my little dark room, and no one is going to stop me!

You Zhengping: A man-made little dark room with the curtains drawn.

## CHAPTER 75

You Zhengping gripped one of the arms and felt that the skin was ice cold, like a corpse with no body heat.

How long had the air-conditioning been on?

You Zhengping had just come in from outside. His body temperature was high, and he had always been of an ardent disposition, the sort that could give off heat at any time.

He gripped Yu Hua's right and left arms with both hands, transmitting warmth. At the same time, he asked, "Aren't you cold? What temperature is the air-conditioning on?"

"Sixteen degrees," Yu Hua answered. "It's all right. I'm not very cold."

So he was a little cold. You Zhengping grasped Yu Hua's hands and brought them together. He slipped out of Yu Hua's embrace, turned, and held Yu Hua's icy cold hands in his, gently blowing warm air on them and rubbing them with his palms.

"Even the average person wouldn't necessarily get cold at this temperature, never mind me," Yu Hua said tentatively.

You Zhengping's movements stopped. He couldn't see Yu Hua's expression in the dark. He could only hear the sound of his even breathing.

He was a Protector. If he had wanted to see, he could have released a part of his power externally and used the perceptivity of his power to substitute for sight. He could have clearly "seen" Yu Hua's expression. But You Zhengping didn't do that.

You Zhengping remembered Yu Hua's diary. On the surface, his husband was a calm person who seemed not to mind anything, gentle and generous, extremely tolerant. But the Yu Hua in

the diary was extremely subtle, excessively deliberative, susceptible to jealousy and anger, a person with a powerful desire for control.

When they had just gotten married, You Zhengping had liked to stay up late. There had been dark circles around his eyes every day from playing games. In the morning, his pillow would be covered with dropped hair. This had seriously impacted Yu Hua's sleep.

Yu Hua had tried to persuade You Zhengping from the standpoint of staying up late being bad for your health and expressed a wish that You Zhengping would go to bed a little earlier. You Zhengping, meanwhile, had thought that he was troubling Yu Hua's sleep, so he had chosen to go to the guest room to keep staying up late playing games.

You Zhengping's idea had been very simple. His thoughts hadn't changed from dating to marriage yet. He had thought that since playing games would disturb his husband's sleep, he would play in a different room, and that way Yu Hua could sleep well.

What You Zhengping hadn't known at the time was that in a different bed from himself, Yu Hua still couldn't sleep. Every day, Yu Hua had only been able to truly go to sleep when You Zhengping had returned to the master bedroom and gotten ready to sleep.

Ordinary newly married couples might have had a big argument over schedule problems until one side compromised with the other.

But Yu Hua was different. He quietly stayed awake for a few nights, each day going to sleep around three or four in the morning and getting up at 5:59 to cook.

At the very beginning, the breakfasts Yu Hua made weren't very tasty. But after getting married, his cooking skills improved dramatically. After less than a month, it had reached the point of being so delicious it would make you bite your tongue, perfectly tailored to You Zhengping's tastes.

Every day, Yu Hua put breakfast on the table and went to work. By the time You Zhengping got up to eat, it would already be cold. Yu Hua would eat this cold and no longer tasty food for lunch, and if he didn't finish it, he would eat it for dinner. If he still didn't finish it at dinner, he would take it to work the next day. But what he made for You Zhengping was always fresh out of the pot.

After a few days, Yu Hua had quietly let You Zhengping notice that he was eating leftover cold food, staying up, only sleeping a few hours a night. He started taking stomach medicine and flashed it around obviously in front of You Zhengping, walking around in front of You Zhengping holding his stomach.

You Zhengping quickly discovered what Yu Hua was doing. He was concerned about Yu Hua, but there were many things he didn't notice. You Zhengping had taken Yu Hua to the hospital to get put on an IV. In front of the doctor, Yu Hua had explained the reason for his stomach problems. When Yu Hua was better, the guilty You Zhengping had struggled to get up early in

the morning to eat breakfast. After getting up early for a few days in a row, he naturally started getting sleepy earlier at night. Added to the fact that Yu Hua had increased the intensity of their exercise, You Zhengping started going to sleep earlier and earlier.

Then Yu Hua had instilled in him the idea of going to bed early and getting up early. He had also pointed out the lost hair. His tone had contained the implication that “if you don’t sleep, I’ll also lose sleep.” You Zhengping hadn’t resisted his daily routine anymore. He had gradually developed a healthy biological clock.

Yu Hua wouldn’t argue with him and certainly wouldn’t force him to do anything. When Yu Hua had any request, he would torment himself, then make it clear in front of You Zhengping, quietly waiting for You Zhengping to take notice.

If You Zhengping had been careless or hadn’t paid enough attention to Yu Hua, then he would never have found out about Yu Hua’s requests.

Then by now...they may already have been divorced, You Zhengping thought inwardly.

Lian Yufan said that Yu Hua was a control freak, a despot, not allowing others to be disobedient towards him. He had even wondered how You Zhengping could bear it. But You Zhengping thought that wasn’t right.

Yu Hua was only too powerful, so powerful he didn’t even realize himself that he needed someone to look after him. Yu Hua used many scheming methods to accomplish his own goals, but he would never openly say to You Zhengping, “Don’t do this, do that.” He always waited quietly for the careless You Zhengping to notice for himself.

This time was the same. How long had that black cloak been in the suitcase? Yu Hua had hinted to him many times that he should look in the suitcase, but You Zhengping had taken little notice of it.

He hoped that his husband would pay attention to him, longed for his husband to make changes for him but even more that he would understand everything about him. But he wouldn’t express it. Secretly holding onto his little plots, he would go around the issue, doing some things to attract notice.

“What a difficult person...” You Zhengping sighed lengthily.

“Are you talking about me?” There was a thread of danger in Yu Hua’s voice. “Hm?”

But You Zhengping wasn’t afraid of him in the slightest. He said firmly, “Yes, I’m talking about you. You’re so difficult.”

Yu Hua pulled his hands out from between You Zhengping’s palms. He put his hands, which still hadn’t warmed up after all that rubbing, on the back of You Zhengping’s neck. Holding that slender and easily broken neck, he quietly said, “Do you want to say that again?”

You Zhengping leaned back, pressing his neck more firmly to Yu Hua's hands. "Though it's lucky that you have such a difficult nature. I'm glad for it."

Yu Hua didn't respond. His fingertips pressed against You Zhengping's carotid arteries.

"I'm your partner. We promised that we wouldn't part until death. No matter the difficulties, I'm always willing to face them with you," You Zhengping said. "But at the same time, my background is military, and my profession is...the work of national defense. I have duties and obligations that I must fulfill. I won't give up any of that. I know that in worldly affairs it's hard to have everything, so instinct has made me ignore you again and again, but there would always have to be a time when I would have to face you. Are you...going to force me to choose?"

You Zhengping's voice shook as he asked this question. He wasn't only asking whether Yu Hua would come clean about his identity. More than that, he was inquiring about Yu Hua's position.

"We've never been at odds," Yu Hua said earnestly. "We're partners. But you and your people may not trust in that."

"I trust you," You Zhengping said firmly. "Do you want us to know about you?"

The cold around Yu Hua gradually dispersed. He rubbed You Zhengping's neck up and down and sighed quietly. "I only care about your opinions, your safety. I only want to live a peaceful life with you."

He didn't want what had happened on the roof of the Xincheng Mall to happen again. He didn't want to let his husband be seriously injured because he was hiding himself. He didn't want his husband to lose his life in some place that he couldn't see. For this, Yu Hua was only too glad to tell You Zhengping everything, but he also didn't want to be controlled by the Protection Organization.

"I understand." You Zhengping put his arms around Yu Hua's waist. "Don't tell me anything more. If there's something you think I need to know, you can tell me next time we meet."

Tell him next time the Protector captain met the black-cloaked man.

Yu Hua slowly let go of You Zhengping's neck and pulled him into his arms. His lips gently touched the artery in You Zhengping's neck, where his pulse beat. He quietly said, "All right, next time. For now we'll live in peace."

Only for now? You Zhengping leaned his head against Yu Hua's shoulder, wishing that time could stop.

He said gloomily, "I came back without eating this morning. I want to eat your breakfast."

"Okay, I'll go make some," Yu Hua said quickly.

You Zhengping said, “And turn off the air-conditioning. It’s cold.”

Yu Hua agreed. “Fine, I’ll turn it off.”

You Zhengping said, “Then there’s the curtains. It’s too dark in here. I can’t even see your face.”

Yu Hua said, “I’ll open them right now.”

The curtains were opened, the air-conditioning was turned off, and the warm sunlight bathed the two of them. It truly was a sweet and peaceful morning.

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Author’s Note:

You Zhengping: Yu Hua isn’t a control freak, he’s only a poor baby who needs love!

Yu Hua: The half-cooked rice Xiao You made is delicious, I nearly ate the whole pot!

Lian Yufan: Your eyesight put together isn’t as good as Yuan Luori’s!

## CHAPTER 76

There is research that shows that the most suitable temperature range for humans to sleep in is sixteen to twenty degrees. Slightly cold interior surroundings accompanied by a comfortable and warm quilt will result in high quality sleep.

You Zhengping didn’t know how accurate this was. He only thought that it was quite pleasant to sleep in a room with the air-conditioning at sixteen degrees.

He had been troubled for days by certain things. He had been having trouble sleeping. Today he had finally gotten an explanation. While there was still a long distance to go until he had a full answer, it was already enough.

He only needed to know whether the black-cloaked man would harm the Protection Organization. All he needed was a negative answer.

As for the rest, when the black-cloaked man was willing to tell the Protection Organization, then they would discuss it.

You Zhengping looked at the time. It was already 2 PM. After eating breakfast made by Yu Hua at seven, he had been pushed into the bedroom to experience the feeling of a lightless world.

Pulling the curtains shut to block out the hateful sun when in a bad mood, pulling the curtains shut to welcome in the joyful darkness when in a good mood—fine, that was very Yu Hua. You Zhengping felt that he understood Yu Hua better and better.

He got up, holding his waist, recalling how many years it had been since he had felt weakness there.

When he had been training before he was fully grown, he would always get exhausted from inadequate power. Since his space had developed to the point that it could hold an adult, he hadn't had a sore waist.

It seemed that Yu Hua had actually been restraining himself before, You Zhengping thought inwardly.

He felt hungry and went to the table. He saw that Yu Hua had put the food into a heat-preserving box and stuck a note on top of the box: I've gone to work, this is lunch. I hope you can eat it before three.

Three? He was an hour ahead of Yu Hua's estimate. Did that mean that he was stronger than Yu Hua guessed? You Zhengping was pleased. He opened the box and smelled the aroma of meat.

Cola chicken, handmade meatballs, Kung Pao chicken, and sweet and sour pineapple pork. Yu Hua really understood him. He knew he liked to eat meat.

The food was still warm. You Zhengping served himself a bowl of perfectly cooked white rice. Top quality rice combined with a suitable amount of water and cooked for the right time, the rice neither soft nor hard, sweet to the taste—You Zhengping could have eaten a whole pot in one sitting.

This was rice. He had made some kind of crap yesterday.

While he ate the tasty rice, You Zhengping couldn't help remembering the ham and eggs fried rice that Yu Hua had treated like a treasure at breakfast.

In the morning, when Yu Hua heard that You Zhengping was hungry, he had gone to make pancakes at once. What he gave You Zhengping to eat were beef pancakes with crisp outsides fresh from the pan, while he himself took out yesterday's half-cooked rice and made fried rice with it.

You Zhengping had smelled ham and had felt that someone else's meal might be tastier than his own. He had asked Yu Hua for a taste of the fried rice. He hadn't expected Yu Hua to refuse.

This was the first time Yu Hua had refused him on the subject of food. Naturally You Zhengping was unwilling. He seduced Yu Hua into letting him snatch a mouthful of the fried rice. The instant he put it in his mouth, he nearly spat it out.

What kind of rice was this? It was hard. And raw, almost impossible to chew, almost indigestible. It was a total waste of ham sausage and eggs personally cooked by Yu Hua. It was a waste of the bounty of nature.

You Zhengping only then belatedly realized that this was probably the rice he had made yesterday. Last night, Cen Xiao had been in charge of the seafood feast. Cen Xiao had helped him keep an eye on cooking times and watched every step of the process, so nothing major had gone wrong. But cooking rice was too simple. It was the only food item that Cen Xiao hadn't overseen. And that was where something had gone wrong.

You Zhengping forced himself to swallow the fried rice and saw that Yu Hua looked unhappy, actually angry that he had snatched a mouthful of rice.

There was absolutely nothing fake about Yu Hua's expression. He really thought that the fried rice taste good. You Zhengping stared blankly for a few seconds, then asked, "Do you...have no sense of taste?"

"It's not that I don't have a sense of taste. I can distinguish taste, or else I wouldn't be able to cook." Yu Hua put down his chopsticks and pointed to his head. "This is where the problem is."

You Zhengping didn't understand what he meant. How could he think the fried rice tasted good if he had a sense of taste? That wasn't how loving everything connected to a person worked.

Yu Hua explained, "I often wonder whether the human body and mind actually have the same interests. Much of the time, the body and brain work together in harmony, but in an emergency situation, the brain and body will have completely different reactions.

"For example, when pain reaches a certain threshold, a person won't feel it anymore. It's not that it stops hurting, it's that the brain chooses to protect itself and gives up on bodily sensations. When it doesn't have enough energy, the brain will often abandon all the organs, including the heart, setting its own existence above them. At the same time, the movements of the limbs aren't directly controlled by the brain, but by the central nervous system. So it may happen that the brain dies, but the body is still alive, because the central nervous system is still functioning.

"When an ordinary person eats, taste is transmitted to the brain by nerves, and the brain distinguishes the taste and produces a happy or disgusted sensation. That passage is broken for me.

"Look at the pancake I cooked. I can taste the flavor of the meat. I can tell that this is a nourishing, good-tasting thing. I also know there's no problem with my own cooking. It isn't burned or undercooked. But if I chew a food like this, my brain won't produce the sensations of happiness or satisfaction."



Only the fried rice with the idea attached to it that “You Zhengping personally made this” would make his brain produce the sensation of happiness in advance, voluntarily linking with the sense of taste, letting him taste the sweetness.

“You...don’t even trust the sensations of your own body?” From among all that discourse, You Zhengping grasped the point that Yu Hua was trying to convey.

Yu Hua hadn’t expected You Zhengping to unerringly guess the truth. He paused, then nodded. “I don’t dare to.”

What tasted like crisp and tender food might in fact be a fatal parasite. If he gave himself up to appetite, he would swallow such bugs and turn into a monster. If he wanted to survive, he had to maintain absolute reason, force down his appetite. He couldn’t trust what his eyes saw, couldn’t trust what his ears heard, couldn’t trust what his tongue tasted, couldn’t trust what his fingers touched... All he could trust were deductions made after painstaking investigation.

“I thought before that since I couldn’t taste the food, I should at least eat in graceful surroundings. While I didn’t feel that they were very refined, at least they were clean,” Yu Hua said with a light laugh. “Now it’s different. When I see you happy with your food, I feel that it’s very tasty.”

He liked personally making food for You Zhengping to eat. When he saw his husband enjoying it, his brain would produce the sensation of happiness. It would tell his sense of taste that the food that You Zhengping liked was an exquisite delicacy.

You Zhengping bent his head and stuffed a whole pancake into his mouth and chewed desperately, covering up the heartache on his face with his ravenous eating.

Huan Zixu’s words echoed in his ears once more: “A person who has passed 3,841 worlds—do you think he’s an ordinary person? Can he understand an ordinary person’s life?”

He really couldn’t live the life of an ordinary person, but it was very different from what Huan Zixu imagined.

“Why are you in such a rush to eat?” Yu Hua passed him a bowl of egg drop soup, keeping You Zhengping from choking.

The egg drop soup Yu Hua made was thickened with starch. The threads were delicate, smooth to eat. You Zhengping gulped it down in one go and finally swallowed the food stuck in his throat.

Though he had swallowed it, the feeling of having a fishbone caught in his throat was still pressing on You Zhengping’s heart.

“What is there to be sad about?” Yu Hua didn’t say anything else. He only gently patted You Zhengping’s head.

He quietly got up and cleaned the kitchen. When it was clean, he carried You Zhengping, who had just finished brushing his teeth, into the master bedroom.

You Zhengping had sensed that Yu Hua was delighted, delighted that You Zhengping would feel sorry on his account.

You Zhengping bit into a piece of pineapple pork and quietly said, "It's delicious."

How could Yu Hua stand to leave behind such good food and go to work? It would have been better if he had stayed to eat lunch with him, You Zhengping thought, feeling lonely.

Yu Hua also didn't want to go to work, but he didn't want to see You Zhengping looking sad again.

The past was past. He had started again this world and wanted to forget the past, live here in peace. Xiao You felt for him, and that made him happy, but that was enough. There was no need to talk about things from the past to make Xiao You feel bad.

So while You Zhengping had been asleep, Yu Hua had quietly made lunch and gone to work. He was going to oppress the studio's employees to vent his feelings.

Everything was happy today. He didn't need to vent. Right... Yu Hua considered it. He thought that because Xiao You was sad, he was sad, too, so he had started wanting to go to the studio to vent.

When he came in the door, he saw Zhen Li practicing a split. Everyone else wasn't there. Yu Hua asked, "Where are the others?"

"Yuan Luori went with the group after filming the daily life video." Zhen Li quickly stood up and explained. "Lian Yufan went with Huan Zixu to look at the new apartment, and Director Ha is with Junjun."

"Junjun?" Yu Hua asked, frowning.

Only You Zhengping, Cen Xiao, and Luo Huai had seen Junjun during the business at the park. Among the others, even Lian Yufan hadn't seen him. The studio people's only impression of Liu Junjun was of a little boy from the nearby estate who liked dogs.

"Can that dog play with ordinary people?" Yu Hua asked doubtfully.

Zhen Li scratched his head. He knew Director Ha's identity and at first hadn't agreed to let an ordinary child take care of Director Ha for them. He had been worried that Junjun would get hurt. But this morning's events had perplexed him.

In the morning, he had unknowingly eaten all of the breakfast Junjun had bought. Due to some unknown goal, Huan Zixu hadn't warned him, and had even divided up the soup dumplings with him.

When Junjun had been standing next to them silently shedding tears, Zhen Li hadn't realized why the child would be crying, until Director Ha had charged over and wildly torn at the empty bag the breakfast had been in. It had also let out a growl like a wolf's towards Zhen and Huan. That was when Zhen Li had belatedly discovered that the breakfast had been someone else's. He had quickly gone out of the estate to a breakfast restaurant to buy exactly the same thing. Then he had apologized to Junjun.

The whole time, Director Ha had been biting Zhen Li's pant leg and had only stopped when Junjun wasn't crying anymore.

Huan Zixu had stood aside as though this had nothing to do with him, hands in his pockets. "Whose dog is this, anyway? It doesn't protect its owner at all."

Looking at his unconcerned appearance, it was just as though he hadn't shared the breakfast.

Zhen Li had also been pretty curious about Director Ha sticking up for Junjun. He didn't understand why a Destroyer would care so much about Junjun.

When Lian Yufan had found out, he had also been frustrated. He had been the one to pay out of his own pocket to buy high quality dog food and get treatment for Director Ha's parvovirus, and he had been responsible for training Director Ha. Why did this dog's loyalties lie elsewhere?

Though in the end, Director Ha was only a dog. It couldn't cause any harm. Zhen Li had let it go. Junjun liked dogs, and they didn't have the patience for walking a dog. The estate was close to the studio. It was pretty good to have someone responsible for taking care of Director Ha, who was getting more and more energetic by the day and starting to wreck furniture.

Zhen Li also told Yu Hua that he had become a Protector and that in a few days his apartment would be ready.

Zhen Li quietly told him about the source project. Yu Hua had expected this. His expression didn't show a sliver of surprise.

"Will this project harm you or the System?" Zhen Li asked in concern.

Yu Hua laughed coldly and said, "Only the power of a single world. It's far from sufficient."

Zhen Li stared dumbly. When he had heard of the source project, he had been worried but expectant. The worry was that the Protection Organization would use the source project to hurt Yu Hua, and the expectation had been that the source project could destroy the System.

"I thought it could help a bit," Zhen Li said falteringly.

"It will, a bit," Yu Hua said. "Often what decides the outcome of a war is one last straw. But..."

He didn't continue. He seemed not to want to explain anything to Zhen Li. Instead, he said, "So Director Ha has been ingratiating itself with someone else. A real traitor. I'll go bring it back."

Yu Hua still needed someone to vent his feelings on. Zhen Li had just become a Protector. There really was no reason to get mad at him over something so good. So he would go find the dog.

Yu Hua walked to the estate like the wind and saw far off a little boy playing a sled pulling game with Director Ha. The child was big-hearted. He had tied the dog's leash to his scooter. He was sitting on the scooter and letting the dog run along dragging it, not afraid of any accident.

Huskies were sled dogs. Their energy was very vigorous. If a husky didn't get ten kilometers of walking daily, it would attack household objects and or even people. Before, Director Ha had contracted parvovirus. It had been all drooping. It hadn't seemed lively at all. When it had healed completely under Director Lian's meticulous treatment, its instinct to destroy things had started to increase daily. But the studio contained a demon like Yu Hua, and at night while Yuan Luori memorized law, Director Ha didn't dare to make a sound louder than fifty decibels. Its energy had been severely repressed. Today, Junjun had for once taken it out to play, so Director Ha had finally been able to let it out.

The cars and people were separate in Junjun's estate, there were few pedestrians in the estate on a summer afternoon, and the speed of Junjun's scooter matched the husky's. Director Ha sprinted happily. Running wildly now, it felt happier than it had when it had been a leveler detonating bombs.

This was a husky's nature. When Director Ha felt mournful, it still couldn't resist this happiness originating in instinct.

In the midst of his pain and happiness, Director Ha's fear of Yu Hua was currently even deeper. No wonder this mission target was a thorn in the System's eye. Not only strong, he was also vicious. He was using this method to torment it, making it struggle between the awareness of its soul and the instincts of its body. It was malicious.

As it thought this, the great demon king appeared in front of it in person. Director Ha braked instantly and bumped into Yu Hua's leg. Its braking was too abrupt. Junjun's scooter didn't stop; it kept going forward from inertia, only stopping when Yu Hua blocked it.

"Thank you, uncle," Junjun said politely, not blaming Yu Hua for suddenly appearing and blocking his way.

Yu Hua stared at Junjun's head. He hadn't awakened his "truth seeing eyes" yet and couldn't tell what was going on with Junjun. But an uneven distribution of mental energy told Yu Hua that Junjun had lost a portion of his memory.

Yu Hua remembered that among the four Protectors who had arrested Feng Kui and Huan Zixu, there had been one who could remove memories. His name was Luo Huai.

What had made it necessary for Luo Huai to step in and take the child's memory? Yu Hua glanced at Director Ha out of the corner of his eye and saw the dog crowding between himself and Junjun, its tail between its legs, looking like it was protecting Junjun.

Zhen Li had also said that Director Ha was unusually protective of Junjun.

"I'm Yu Hua, Yuan Luori's supervisor," Yu Hua said coldly. "I'll take this dog."

"Oh, so you're Xiao Ha's real owner," Junjun said quickly. "Sorry, I shouldn't take Xiao Ha to run around like this, it's dangerous. I was wrong. But can I play with Xiao Ha again another time?"

The boy's limpid eyes were watching Yu Hua, but Yu Hua asked unfeelingly, "On the day before Xuyang District Central Park's renovations started, did you go to the park?"

"Huh? I don't remember," Junjun said.

But Yu Hua hadn't really been asking Junjun. He looked down at Director Ha and indeed saw the dog's head hanging down. It didn't dare to look at Junjun.

"I understand. If the dog will play with you, then I don't object," Yu Hua said.

Then he led Director Ha away from the estate. On the way, Yu Hu asked, "You used Junjun as a hostage before, right? You like taking children as hostages that much?"

"Awoo..." Director Ha called quietly.

Yu Hua stopped and looked down at Director Ha. "Do you know the relationship between the initial item and the origin ability?"

When Yu Hua said this, it was as if the air around them had thickened. Time came to a standstill. Even the leaves gently blowing in the wind behind them stopped fluttering.

"Awoo?" Director Ha didn't understand why Yu Hua would suddenly say this.

Yu Hua said, "Have you noticed that the reason Protectors don't have initial items is that the origin ability is a power inherent in the body, while the initial item is a manifestation of the soul? They ought to be one and the same. But the System tears levelers' origin abilities apart, letting it control and collect them. The Protectors, meanwhile, don't have that difficulty. Their abilities are a combination of their initial item and origin ability, purer than the levelers', and more

stable. Only a leveler who grasps both kinds of power at the same time has a chance to ascend to the highest grade, like Feng Kui's mechanical skeleton and metal ability, Huan Zixu's 'Sales Champion' and mental type 'false exchange,' Yuan Luori's 'vision link' cage and 'truth seeing eyes,' Zhen Li's world-crossing carry on wardrobe and alternate dimension stomach—they're all abilities of the same type. What about you?"

Director Ha was struck dumb. Its neckbands could move souls, but its origin ability was the "bomb game." These two didn't have anything to do with each other.

"Apart from you, for the other four levelers who came here, the System randomly fabricated an identity no one would know. The Protection Organization has investigated it. Zhen Li's university records, apartment rental records, and even his landlady's faint impressions of him are false. Yuan Luori was a vagabond in the park, with no background at all. Only you took over the body of someone who was already dead." Unfeelingly, Yu Hua said, "The answer is that they chose the correct origin abilities, equipping the power belonging to them within the first ten worlds, while you lost your body and your origin ability long ago. You were truly fortunate to encounter the System while it was weak, or else the System would have absorbed your soul for power before your one-hundred fiftieth level."

Director Ha was thunderstruck. It wouldn't accept these facts. It had always looked down on Yuan Luori and Zhen Li, but they had more potential than it did? It was the truly useless one?

"A soul without a vessel will be worn down and invaded sooner or later. If your treatment of Junjun the result of a guilty conscience, or the instinct of a dog? My guess is that it's both." Yu Hua bent down and put his hand on the dog's head. With a bit of force, he could have crushed the delicate skull. "I won't oppose you coming in contact with Junjun. If you like him, then you can play with him. But... Never mind, do as you like. After all, the soul can't resist the instincts of the body, right?"

He let go, releasing Director Ha.

"Bark?" Director Ha was all at sea. A husky's mental capacity wasn't enough to allow it to analyze Yu Hua's speech, and anyway there was no connection between the first part and the second. There was no explanation.

But there was one thing it had understood. Yu Hua had agreed to let it play with Junjun.

When it thought of this, Director Ha wagged its tail in spite of itself.

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Author's Note:

Yu Hua: I want Xiao You to feel bad for me, but I don't want to make him said. What a problem. Sigh.

Yu Hua: Xiao You is unhappy, so I'll go take it out on the dog.

Director Ha: Bark?

## CHAPTER 77

Because it would make You Zhengping sad, Yu Hua didn't mention anything concerning the past again.

You Zhengping also refused to talk about it as much as possible. The more he knew, the guiltier he would feel towards the Protection Organization. It was better not to ask.

He had left the decision of when to reveal his identity up to Yu Hua. When Yu Hua thought it was necessary, he would tell the Protection Organization his identity. Before that, You Zhengping would remain silent.

Of course, if the black-cloaked man did something to harm the world or the Protection Organization, You Zhengping would go to the end with him, dying for love and dying for a cause.

These were the only satisfactory outcomes You Zhengping could think of.

When the two of them had just started dating, Yu Hua had already spent eleven years living as an ordinary person. Of course he had already lost his powers, and there had been nothing to hide. The days had passed smoothly and peacefully. And when then they had met, You Zhengping hadn't experienced actual combat. He didn't have much awareness of his identity as a Protector. The new generation of Protectors had even thought that there would be no more Destroyers, and they were only a group of somewhat stronger than usual young people.

In four years of dating and marriage, they hadn't lied to each other. They had always considered each other, been in tacit understanding on all points. Their feelings were naturally warm.

Yu Hua's seal weakening and his power suddenly increasing had been the fuse that set everything off. Not long after his strength had grown and he had started breaking household objects, Zhen Li had appeared, and You Zhengping had encountered a Destroyer for the first time and clearly understood his mission.

From then on, the melancholy husbands had been running counter to each other, each with his own designs, mutually concealing their identities, with no way to have the same silent understanding they had had before.

Until now. While everything unspoken, the two of them could face each other, and the atmosphere returned to what it had been at the beginning.

Yu Hua understood You Zhengping's caution, and he understood his husband's position. He kept the tickets for the two-person Maldives luxury trip, not choosing a date to set out,

because he knew that Captain You Zhengping of the Xuyang District Protectors couldn't leave this place. There was no one to stand in for Captain You.

He hoped that there would come a day when they would be able to use those tickets. Otherwise, the cost of returning the tickets would be too expensive. It would be a waste.

After all, Yu Hua knew how to get by. He didn't want to spare the money.

The scorching summer passed amid their silent understanding.

And during this month and more, the Xuyang District was unexpectedly peaceful.

More Destroyers were discovered in other regions and countries. Because of the lure of the Zhen Li Studio, the motley forces rushed desperately towards the Xuyang District. These people were either untethered and alone in the world, or else they had substituted a dead person and showed a significant change in personality. Adding in that they were trying to get information about the Zhen Li studio in roundabout ways, it couldn't have been simpler to catch them.

The Clearing League's people were often noticed by the Protection Organization while they were still lying low and investigating. They would fall into traps and be captured. They didn't even cause major harm to society.

But unlike Zhen Li and the others, these Destroyers weren't lucky enough. As soon as they were captured by the Protectors, they would immediately self-destruct. Yu Hua didn't even have a chance to absorb the energy of their Systems. These levelers, like headless houseflies, would die without accomplishing anything.

When Zhen Li, who had become a reserve Protector, received this news, he stealthily questioning Yu Hua about why such a change would take place.

Yu Hua's answer was simple: "Because you've become a Protector."

"It has to do with me?" Zhen Li said in astonishment.

With a cold look, Yu Hua said, "At first, the System threw levelers into the Xuyang District because it wanted to use you to expose my identity and fool the Protection Organization into going after me. But not only did things not proceed according to its plans, you, a Destroyer, shook hands and made peace with the Protector and became one of them. The System is sending the Clearing League's people in order to exhaust me, not to make more trouble for itself. Naturally it doesn't want such a thing to happen again."

Zhen Li said sadly, "Yuan Luori has also been acknowledged by the world law and had his ability awaken, and Director Ha, Huan Zixu, and Feng Kui have integrated into this world's customs. If levelers continue to become Protectors, it'll get harder and harder for newly arriving levelers to get close to you. So the System has been controlling the self-destruct devices in



their brains, not giving the levelers a chance to repent. As soon as they're captured, they immediately die?"

Yu Hua nodded. "Not only that. It has also sent the levelers to places comparatively far away from me, so that I won't discover them and remove the power of their Systems."

"How could that be?" Zhen Li's face was despairing. "What does the System take us levelers for?"

"When you're playing Go, do you regret giving up pieces?" Yu Hua said expressionlessly. "You'll only regret losing territory. As long as you still have your territory, you can spend as many pieces as it takes."

"But the levelers have no way to get close to you! Doing this is just sending them to die for nothing!" Zhen Li said angrily.

Zhen Li had always been a good-tempered person. Lian Yufan had beaten him up once, and he could still get along with him harmoniously. He rarely got angry, but today he had truly been provoked.

"I also think it's strange. The System wouldn't do anything without a purpose. Sending so much cannon fodder has already raised the world law's threshold. So what is it trying to do now?" Yu Hua lowered his head in thought.

Yu Hua and the System were old opponents, after all. After a bit of thought, he understood the System's intention. He frowned. "Pass on to the Protection Organization that they should impose martial law within the Xuyang District. There may be a great battle coming soon."

"What does a great battle mean?" Zhen Li said in fear. "The holder of natural law power you mentioned before?"

"Not only that," Yu Hu said. "The System is putting pressure on the Clearing League."

Zhen Li had seen the head of the Clearing League. He carefully considered everything that had happened since he had come to this world and in a flash of realization said, "The System wants the Clearing League to send several high grade levelers to this world at once, making it impossible for you to take care of all of them at once. They'll eliminate the Xuyang District's Protection Organization and cut off your fallback!"

The reason that Yu Hua could focus on dealing with Destroyers was because the Protection Organization fought to protect ordinary people and uphold the stability of the Xuyang District. If the Protection Organization suffered serious injury, the System would be able to use ordinary people's lives as a shield, stopping Yu Hua in his tracks. If Yu Hua were unable to stay his hand and killed a large number of ordinary people, then the alliance between the Protection Organization and the black-cloaked man would no longer exist.

Then Yu Hua would be under attack from both sides, and he would be unable to act against the Protection Organization. This would be the ideal opportunity for the System to eliminate Yu Hua.

There wasn't much skill involved in this trap. It was even an open plot. But it was savage.

The System was using the hundreds of thousands of lives of levelers, Protectors, and ordinary people to pile up a road that would lead it to Yu Hua. Stepping on these bodies, the System would approach Yu Hua to deliver the fatal attack.

This was a cruel and unfeeling method, but for the System, which had already consumed and destroyed countless worlds, what value did the lives of nonentities have?

After getting information from Yu Hua, Zhen Li quickly printed it out, pretending according to custom that this information had suddenly appeared in the studio. He knew that if he used this method too much, the Protection Organization would suspect him. It might impact his ability to become a full member. Maybe they would take back the 81.26 square meter residence he had been living in for a month. But these external matters were meaningless in the face of countless lives.

Zhen Li no longer needed to go through Lian Yufan of Plain Face Number 1 Cen Xiao to contact the Protection Organization. He had Director Xiao's emergency contact information. He only needed to send a message, and soon an armored car would come to take him to the base.

The information was too important. No modern electronic means of communication were secure. Zhen Li had to give Director Xiao this intelligence face to face and let Director Xiao tell the other Protectors at an emergency meeting.

At the same time, Director Xiao also had to report to his superiors and request that elite Protectors from other regions be transferred to the Xuyang District. This wouldn't be easy, because Destroyers were appearing everywhere in the world and the Protectors were seriously short on manpower. Every area where Destroyers had appeared had been reinforced. Many reserve Protectors who were sixteen and over but not yet adults had been put out on the battlefield under the name of actual combat training.

It was already good that the Xuyang District, where no Destroyer had appeared in over a month, had not had to send people to support other areas, never mind asking the head office for reinforcements.

Luo Huai had spent this month running around all over the place, covering up for other regions. He had lost weight and looked like a paper person who could fall over if the wind blew. His mental condition was also rather bad. He had become a lot gloomier. No matter what the psychologists did, he couldn't become more cheerful.

Zhen Li thought of how scattered the Xuyang District's forces had been lately and felt scared. What if the requested support hadn't come before they encountered the sudden attack...

He sped up as he ran towards the people picking him up. Outside, a drizzling rain began, the first rain of early autumn carrying a sliver of chill.

Yu Hua sat by the window, watching Zhen Li sprinting through the rain downstairs. He was silently computing the time.

The base wasn't close. For Zhen Li to reach the base and find Director Xiao, give him the urgent information, convince Director Xiao to strengthen their forces, Director Xiao to first report to headquarters and convene the Protectors...

It seemed that there should still be enough time for Xiao You to come home and eat dinner before receiving the emergency notification to gather.

Yu Hua looked at his watch. It was still two hours before work ended. He should go home and make dinner.

He went to get one of the studio's reserve umbrellas. This was a freebie from an advertising agency they had promoted products for. The studio had about a dozen. Anyone could take it if they needed it.

When he got to the storage room, he saw the already five month old Director Ha tearing up an umbrella. Only the umbrella skeleton remained, but Director Ha was still unwilling to give up. It would only be happy if it snapped each strut.

A husky in its growth period developed very quickly. From the pitiful little animal it had been when it had first arrived at the studio, Director Ha had changed into an 18.5 kilogram, 52 centimeter long, 46 centimeter tall, over a meter tall standing up half-grown dog. In a month it could eat up forty pounds of dog food. It tore up objects all over the place. It had scratched a hole in the wall of the storage room. Even a piece of the cement had been knocked off. Yu Hua had paid the landlord quite a bit of money to compensate for it.

Zhen Li had thought that Yu Hua would be mad enough to simply stew Director Ha, but Yu Hua had only laughed mockingly and looked pityingly at Director Ha, saying, "You've grown up. We should get you sterilized."

Lian Yufan had also come over and said, "It should be sterilized. The other day in the morning, I saw it hugging Junjun. I was scared into running over and pulling the dog off. It's strange, though. It only sticks to Junjun and doesn't pay attention to any of us here at the studio. When Yuan Luori comes back, I figure it won't recognize him anymore."

Lian Yufan was the one paying for the dog food, and Director Ha was a big eater. It had eaten up the greater part of Lian Yufan's wages. Since it had taken most of Director Lian's wages, it amounted to truly becoming the public relations director.

As though it could understand human speech, Director Ha had heard the word “sterilize” and tucked its tail between its legs, attempting to shove its large body into the little hole it had dug in the wall, not minding whether the hole was big enough to hold it.

“More and more like a dog.” Yu Hua smiled maliciously. “What you still struggling for?”

Director Ha had used its remaining intellect to understand what Yu Hua had meant. It had lost the protection of its body and its origin ability and used its initial item to change its body. Its soul would be constantly eroded by the instincts of its body, until the properties of its soul had been worn away and it would become an entirely different person.

How many times had it changed bodies before its one hundred ninety-second level? Was it still the same self it had been at the beginning? Director Ha could no longer consider these things. The other levelers at the studio all remembered their original names, but what about it? What had its name been? Director Ha didn’t remember. It only knew that when Junjun called “Xiao Ha,” it quickly came running.

Yu Hua stared at the umbrella that had been ripped into garbage and picked up one that was still relatively whole. He patted the dog’s head. “I got a phone call. Yuan Luori’s second performance ended last night, and the live audience voted him out. He’ll be coming back tonight.”

Director Ha had no reaction to the name “Yuan Luori.” Yuan Luori had been with the group for over forty days. Director Ha didn’t have enough intellect to remember him.

“It was Yuan Luori’s trap that got you turned into a dog. You’re so strong now. Do you want to get revenge?” Yu Hua asked.

“Bark?” The husky opened its blue eyes wide and tilted its head, looking like a stupid dog. Then it shook its head, seeming to struggle between its human and animal natures.

Yu Hua didn’t say anything else. Carrying the umbrella, he walked out of the studio, leaving work early.

Today was the one day a week that Huan Zixu and Feng Kui could see each other. In order to monitor Huan Zixu, Lian Yufan had gone with him to see Feng Kui. Both of them had had their perfect attendance record taken away by Yu Hua. Of course, neither of them had ever seen a full attendance bonus.

Huan Zixu was a very good at making money. With him at the studio, the sales volume from only three livestreams had been astonishing, and the return rate had been low. In only three promotional streams, he had made quite a bit of money.

Since this was a rental apartment, every time Feng Kui came to see Huan Zixu, the landlord would always be nearby holding a phone ready to call the police, and he would occasionally

hint to Huan Zixu that he shouldn't make friends who looked like they belonged to the criminal underworld. Huan Zixu couldn't take the landlord's discrimination against Feng Kui and was considering purchasing an apartment in the complex under construction next door. The price was a little high, but he had already gotten to know the money-making patterns in this world. As long as he could convince Yu Hua not to take too high of a commission, the problem of a down payment wasn't very big.

Yu Hua locked the studio door, leaving Director Ha alone to look after it. He got into his car and drove home. The armored car taking Zhen Li to the base at full speed was penetrated by a high pressure water cannon and turned over on the highway, hitting three ordinary sedans.

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Author's Note:

Yu Hua: This last month, I've really wanted to see the Protector Captain You using the black-cloaked man identity, but there hasn't been an opportunity!

## CHAPTER 78

"First put down an advance of a hundred thousand yuan, then the down payment within seven days, and prepare the loan materials." Lian Yufan read the list Huan Zixu had given him. "Can you put down the full down payment on this price within seven days? The rental apartment is all right, the landlord is just a little jumpy. Can't you just explain things to them?"

During the rare times Huan Zixu got to see Feng Kui, he would take him along no matter where he went. Today he had gone to see a 150 square meter residence in the new complex he had taken a liking to. While buying the apartment, he also took Feng Kui along, and Lian Yufan, who was monitoring the two of them, was forced to also come see the apartment.

"With Yu Hua's miserliness, do you think I have enough money?" Huan Zixu said. "I put twenty thousand of those hundred thousand on my credit card."

"You have a credit card? You can have a credit card?" Lian Yufan said in surprise.

"The materials your logistics department provided for me are very complete. There's even a credit history," Huan Zixu said, holding a printed "Personal Credit History." "To suit the materials of a sales champion, I also have a complete bank record and spending record. The credit card center reviewed it and issued me a card with a pretty high limit. Fifty thousand."

"You've earned eighty thousand in one month of livestreaming. The ability to dig out that much money from between Yu Hua's teeth is truly astonishing, but it'll be hard to pay the full down payment," Lian Yufan said.

"In three days, the advertising company from the last promotional livestream will settle up. I've calculated. The total will be enough for the down payment and my credit card payment," Huan Zixu said carelessly.

"You dare to use the studio's public money?" Lian Yufan thought that Huan Zixu had simply lost his mind over this apartment. "Instead of provoking Yu Hua, why don't you think of a way to get the acknowledgement of the world law and become a Protector. Then you can have an apartment!"

"I asked Zhen Li how to go about getting the world law's approval, and he hemmed and hawed and didn't say anything to the point. And I looked at his apartment. It'll only belong to him after he's been a Protector for ten years, and it's in a commercial apartment block where 40% of the space is shared. Even if you gave me an apartment like that, I wouldn't want it," Huan Zixu said disparagingly. "The property management fees in commercial apartment blocks are high, you can't set up a home, you don't belong to a quota to attend school, and there's no room for the property value to increase. They have no value aside from being rented out."

Lian Yufan stuck up for the Protection Organization. "We gave him a choice between a residential building and a commercial apartment block. Zhen Li was the one who thought that a loft was more attractive, and the natural lighting was more attractive, and the high quality decoration was more attractive. He insisted on the loft."

Huan Zixu was speechless. "...Zhen Li doesn't value anything but attractiveness, does he!"

"He also said it was good that there would be no need to decorate. He really doesn't want to decorate. He must have been scarred from Yu Hua's torture." Mentioning decoration, Lian Yufan clenched his teeth involuntarily. "Anyway, the organization undertakes the property management fees. You don't need to worry about those problems."

"But the residences you provide are mostly in old buildings, twenty years old or more. The prices are high, but you can't sell them on. I incline towards buying a new one," Huan Zixu said. "First I'll make the down payment, and then I'll deal with Yu Hua. At worst he'll add a few years to my indenture."

Feng Kui, who had been silently listening to the two of them argue, suddenly reached out a hand to shield Huan Zixu's head. "It's raining."

Lian Yufan saw that it had indeed started to rain and hurriedly pulled his shirt over his head. He said, "Let's run back to the studio. There are umbrellas there."

"We're 3.2 kilometers away from the office. How long would that take? We'd be better off going back to the complex's sales area to ask for an umbrella," Huan Zixu said.

"Ask for an umbrella?" Lian Yufan couldn't understand Huan Zixu's reasoning at all.

Huan Zixu said, in a righteous tone, “I just bought such an expensive apartment, can’t they give me some umbrellas? If they won’t give them to me, then Feng Kui and I will sit at their door until the rain stops.”

Lian Yufan looked at Feng Kui’s height. With a lummoX like this sitting at their door, the sales area would probably be forced to use the umbrellas to get rid of them.

“You’re pretty vicious.” Lian Yufan gave Huan Zixu a thumbs up. Huan Zixu really was a landslide in the marketing world.

“Don’t get in my way,” Huan Zixu warned Lian Yufan.

Feng Kui, who was keeping the rain off of Huan Zixu’s head, made a throat-slitting gesture towards Lian Yufan. The two of them were annoying him to death. Who was watching whom?

“Forget it. You’ve bought something so expensive, they really ought to give you something. I’ll come with you to get the umbrellas.” The rain was getting stronger, and Lian Yufan compromised.

The three of them quickly ran to the complex’s sales area, Huan Zixu protecting the folder containing the receipt for the hundred thousand yuan, Feng Kui protecting Huan Zixu, and Lian Yufan all on his own, shielding himself from the rain with his clothes.

When the three of them reached the sales area’s sign, they heard a rumble from not far away. Huan Zixu looked in the direction of the sound, and his eyes instantly turned red. “My new apartment!”

The rumble originated from the new complex’s construction site. Building 11, where Huan Zixu had just bought an apartment, had exploded. Countless pieces of reinforced concrete fell, smashing heavily into the ground.

“How could a new building blow up for no reason?! I’m going to take a look!” As Lian Yufan ran, he called the Protection Organization’s emergency number. Instinct told him that something was very wrong.

Huan Zixu followed closely after him. This was his new apartment! The whole building was gone!

Feng Kui naturally ran after Huan Zixu towards the complex. The three of them were startlingly strong. Lian Yufan took the lead in leaping over the galvanized iron wall surrounding the construction site. He found that the construction site’s workers were all running away. Luckily, because it had just started raining, the workers had been dispersing. They had already been far from Building 11. No one had died in the building’s collapse, though many people had been hit by falling pieces of cement and had been seriously injured.

“I’ll call an ambulance, you hurry up and organize the employees to leave!” Lian Yufan said to someone who looked like the head contractor.

Though he didn’t know who Lian Yufan was, the head contractor could see that the young man in front of him had an austere air. Evidently he wasn’t a layabout. The head contractor agreed decisively and organized the workers to leave the construction site, carrying away the wounded.

Building 11 was the main building in the complex, placed at the center. When Huan Zixu had been buying an apartment, he had chosen the best and most expensive. Now the whole building had collapsed, and he still owed twenty thousand yuan on his card. He went up to the ruins. Suddenly, the folder with the receipt for the advance flew out of his hand into the air. There was a person standing in midair. He opened the folder, looked at the “Commercial Purchase Agreement” inside it and laughed mockingly. “Huan Zixu, so you really are planning to live in this world?”

This person was over 185 cm tall. His hair was an unusual sky blue and his eyes fiery red. He held a constantly twinkling crystal sphere in his hand. There wasn’t a single raindrop within a meter of him.

Lian Yufan, who had given the head contractor simple instructions on how to evacuate the employees in an orderly manner, had just run over when he heard these words. He looked at Huan Zixu. “It’s a Destroyer. Do you know him?”

Huan Zixu’s long hair was wet from the rain, making him look rather put upon. He looked up and said, “One of the Clearing League’s ten managers. He’s passed 217 levels. His ability is...”

Before Huan Zixu finished speaking, Destroyer 217 raised his hand, and an invisible wind pressure came from his palm and passed through the rain, rushing towards Huan Zixu’s face.

Huan Zixu had no time to dodge. He only had time to turn slightly to avoid the wind pressure harming his head or chest or other vital areas.

But Feng Kui was even faster than the wind pressure. He had charged towards Huan Zixu the moment he had seen Destroyer 217. Before the wind pressure hit Huan Zixu, Feng Kui threw himself forward in time, blocking the attack with his broad arms and shoulders.

When the wind pressure dispersed, Huan Zixu was entirely unharmed, while all the flesh of Feng Kui’s arm was gone, leaving only a mechanical arm. Sweat brought out by the fierce pain mixed with rain and fell drop by drop.

Rain, blood, and sweat mixed together, soaking into the cement ground.

“Huh?” Destroyer 217 said in surprise. “The System told us that it had removed the abilities of levelers who had pledged their allegiance to the mission target. Why does Feng Kui still have his mechanical skeleton?”



Huan Zixu looked at Feng Kui's arm and began to tremble uncontrollably. Clenching his teeth, he said, "You're dead!"

"Me?" Destroyer 217 laughed. "Even if the two of you hadn't lost your powers, you still aren't a match for me. What qualifications do you have to say something like that to me? I only came to find you to find out one thing. Where is the mission target? You two must know, right?"

Lian Yufan, who hadn't been noticed by Destroyer 217, crouched down and picked up a broken segment of reinforcing steel bar. He squeezed it in his hand and said, "Could you tell me whether I have the qualifications?"

"What the hell are you? Some low grade leveler or one of this world's special ability users?" Destroyer 217 said disdainfully.

"Oh?" Lian Yufan shifted his steps, lining himself up with the collapsed building and Destroyer 217. Destroyer 217 was standing in the middle.

"Join!" Lian Yufan said quietly when his position was correct, holding the steel bar with both hands.

The reinforced concrete behind Destroyer 217 that had originally belonged to Building 11 was attracted by the assembly power. Countless scraps of building material crashed into Destroyer 217 like a mountain falling!

Destroyer 217 hadn't expected Lian Yufan's attack method to be this unique. He had only been paying attention to the enemies in front of him and had ignored the ruined building behind him. He quickly opened an air shield to protect himself.

Before the building materials could collect around the metal bar in his hands, Lian Yufan threw the bar towards Destroyer 217 so he wouldn't face the weight of the building himself and be crushed under it.

Building 11 rebuilt itself over Destroyer 217 under the influence of the assembly power, but there wasn't enough of a foundation to support it. It quickly fell again. Countless heavy pieces of concrete bombarded Destroyer 217.

"Director, a Destroyer has appeared in the Xuyang District's — — new complex, 217 levels, requesting support!" In an emergency, Lian Yufan was forced to use voice communication to request support.

Pulling Huan Zixu and Feng Kui, Lian Yufan said, "You two have lost your powers, and I definitely can't defeat him on my own. I can only stall for time. We can't let him go to a populous place and cause destruction, harm ordinary people. The best thing to do is to keep him in this already evacuated construction sight and wait for support to arrive."

You Zhengping's squad and Lian Yufan's squad made thirteen people in all. They patrolled the Xuyang District all day. Support should come soon.

But Huan Zixu, who was holding up Feng Kui, said, "There won't be support."

"No way," Lian Yufan said optimistically. "There are many Protectors in the Xuyang District. Support will be here within five minutes."

"Did you see the crystal sphere in his hand just now?" Huan Zixu pointed towards the place where the building without foundations to support it was constantly collapsing. "It's a power probe. It can detect people with special abilities within a certain area. During a mission, you can use it to discover danger and other levelers ahead of time. It's always been an expensive good for high level masters and needed the highest number of points to equip. Very few people could afford to buy that thing."

"That only means he came for us," Lian Yufan said.

Huan Zixu shook his head. "No, I saw numbers on the energy probe, '5-2.' That means that five energy probes were equipped in this batch, and he only has the second one."

"You're saying...that there may be four other equally strong Destroyers in the Xuyang District?" When he heard this information, Lian Yufan felt all the blood in his body flow backwards. Were these Destroyers going to destroy the Xuyang District? The Xuyang District had a permanent population of over three million!

Just then, Director Xiao's voice came from Lian Yufan's communications device: "All parts of the Xuyang District have encountered sudden attacks from Destroyers. Support sent from the nearest region will still take over an hour to arrive. I'm with Zhen Li. Captain Lian, you absolutely can't allow the Destroyer in front of you to harm the Xuyang District's citizens. That is your mission."

Director Xiao finished speaking and cut off the communication. Lian Yufan looked dazedly at the fully collapsed building.

No support. He was on his own, and he had the wounded Feng Kui and Huan Zixu with him. Both of them had lost their abilities. And he was supposed to deal with a Destroyer who had passed 217 levels and whose strength perhaps surpassed even Director Xiao's?

A terrifying stream of air exploded from the inside of the building. Destroyer 217 had used his frightening air pressure to flick away the hundreds of tons of reinforced concrete. And he had only had one lower leg pierced by a steel bar when his air pressure shield hadn't entirely opened. Otherwise, he was completely uninjured.

"You're one of the special ability users who protects this world?" Enduring the fierce pain, Destroyer 217 pulled the steel bar out of his leg and equipped medicine to heal himself.

He definitely couldn't win against him. Lian Yufan decisively called to Destroyer 217, "The mission target you want to kill is the clearer. Even if you kill him, the System still won't let you clear. It's lying to you!"

Lian Yufan believed that this news would shake Destroyer 217's determination and give him an opportunity to attack. But Destroyer 217, entirely unsurprised, said, "The System told us this before we came here."

We... There really were more than one of them!

"But so what?" Destroyer 217 raised his hands. "The System also said that if we don't kill the clearer, it'll detonate the bombs in our brains at once. Die at once, or living for a few more worlds? Forgive me, but I don't want to die at once."

Several wind blades powerful enough to destroy a skyscraper were released from Destroyer 217's hands, attacking the three of them.

## CHAPTER 79

"It's going to rain," Cen Xiao said, staring at the still fairly clear sky and looking unwell. "I really hate rain."

He was a fire type special ability user. Encountering rain or snow made him feel unwell. After becoming a Protector, he had voluntarily requested an area in the north, going as far as possible from the rainy southern areas.

Precisely because of this characteristic, he was unusually sensitive towards the climate. He could predict rain and snow more accurately than the weather forecast. He could feel half an hour to an hour ahead of time when there would be a rainstorm. Everyone jokingly called Cen Xiao "Little Rain Radar."

"There are still two streets we haven't patrolled. Put your backs into it, everyone, let's hurry up and get off work. Ow, I can feel my bones itching." Cen Xiao uncomfortably kneaded his shoulders.

Seeing that his friend was really uncomfortable, You Zhengping urged his teammates to hurry. The whole force quickly passed by the sales area of the Xuyang District's newly constructed complex on their police issue electric scooters. Around thirty minutes after they had left, Huan Zixu, having just walked out of the sales area after having paid a hundred thousand yuan advance, had been conducting an intense discussion about misappropriating public money with Lian Yufan.

Meanwhile, the squad that had sped up had already reached a place ten kilometers from the new complex. This was a familiar location—Xuyang District Central Park.

The central park had been blown to bits by Destroyer 192 two months earlier. Even hundreds of years old trees had fallen. The losses had been great.

Fortunately, Yu Hua had restored the life force of the old trees, and Lian Yufan had repaired some historically significant buildings, reducing the losses to a minimum. The park had taken advantage of the opportunity to renovate. After two months of construction on overdrive, the central park had taken on a whole new look.

You Zhengping arrived at the park's gates and scanned an announcement posted in front of them. Surprised, he said, "Renovations have been completed, the park is opening tomorrow?"

"Really?" Hearing that the park renovations had been completed, the ill-feeling Cen Xiao came over. This was a place where they had struggled. It was a good thing that the park could be opened.

From outside, the major changes to the central park's appearance were visible. The old-fashioned gates had been renovated and become a great deal more lavish. The manmade lake where they had rescued Junjun had been widened, and many amusement activities had been added on the water.

Cen Xiao bumped You Zhengping with his shoulder and, with an evil smile, said, "We're off tomorrow. Why not come with the first wave to play in the park? Bring Yu Hua. You can go together to look at the tree where you pledged your love. Maybe he even has those thousands of characters of self-criticism memorized. Oh, and remember to return my money."

You Zhengping imagined the black-cloaked man coming in the night to restore the old tree to life and felt both sweetness and awkwardness. He rolled his eyes at Cen Xiao. "You can still joke? Looks like you aren't feeling that bad, huh?"

"Ow, ow! It's getting bad again!" Cen Xiao exaggeratedly rubbed his shoulders. "It's like my bones have been frozen. Is it raining or sleeting!"

"Stop pretending, the hottest days of the year have just passed, and it's thirty-two degrees today. It'll drop to twenty-eight at most if it rains. What sleet are you talking about?" You Zhengping gave Cen Xiao a kick.

"No... Captain You, Captain Cen!" underling Shi Yongfu said, staring at the sky. "It's not a joke, it's really sleeting!"

The seven members of You Zhengping's squad raised their heads and saw countless ice crystals coming down over the park's thousands of square meters.

"How can it be snowing?" One of the squad members jokingly caught an ice crystal with his hand. "It's August. Does the snow have a grievance?"

The moment the ice crystal touched the squad member's hand, a horrifying feeling came from his heart. You Zhengping cried out, "Drop the scooters and hide, take shelter at once, don't touch the ice crystals!"

As he cried out, he kicked away his motor scooter. After a single moment's hesitation, You Zhengping had found that his hand was frozen to the scooter by the ice crystals. He didn't try to touch the ice crystals. Instead, he kicked the scooter without hesitation. The part stuck to his hand tore off a piece of flesh.

Meanwhile, the squad member who had touched the ice crystal had half his arm frozen, and his legs were frozen to the motor scooter. He could no longer drop the scooter and escape.

You Zhengping wanted to go to his rescue, but when he had only gone one step, he found that the ground had frozen, and the soles of his shoes were frozen to it. He couldn't walk.

"Fire!" You Zhengping immediately called to Cen Xiao.

Cen Xiao, as a fire ability user, had suffered the least damage. He hadn't frozen to his scooter, and the ground beneath his feet was normal.

He was like a heat source. The area a meter around him was untouched by the ice crystals. The others, meanwhile, were being frozen in more and more places.

Cen Xiao quickly raised his flames, wanting to thaw out his teammates. Just then, an ice coffin fell out of the sky and trapped Cen Xiao inside it.

A person dressed in white clothes floated down from the sky and stood on top of the ice coffin. Their hair was white, their eyebrows were white, their skin was white, and so were their lips. They seemed to be made entirely out of snow. Only their ice blue eyes still had a trace of living energy.<sup>27</sup>

In the ice coffin, Cen Xiao tried countless times to ignite his flames, but the temperature was too low. It was 150 degrees below zero in the ice coffin. Even flames froze in an instant. Anyone else would have been frozen solid inside the ice coffin by now. Only Cen Xiao could still show signs of life.

Seeing different degrees of frostbite appearing on his other squad members, You Zhengping unhesitatingly opened his second space and hid them inside it, preventing them from getting any more frostbite.

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<sup>27</sup> For the sake of clarity: the pronoun used for the head of the league in the original text is 他, which can be male, but can also be gender neutral. Because of the terms the character is described in, I've opted to go with gender neutral pronouns in translation.

“Hm?” The person who looked like an ice sculpture spoke in a voice whose gender couldn’t be distinguished. They looked at You Zhengping. “You’re a spatial ability user. That’s a rare power.”

“You’re a Destroyer,” You Zhengping said decisively.

“So you call us Destroyers,” the snow person said calmly. “And what do you call yourselves?”

“Protectors.” You Zhengping felt colder and colder. His life signs were falling. Even movement was becoming difficult.

The park next to them had turned into a world of white. The old trees were covered in icicles, their leaves sealed inside.

The snow person took out a crystal sphere. The numbers 5-1 were carved on the bottom of the crystal. They looked at the twinkling power points in the crystal, doubt flashing through their ice blue eyes. “Strange. You’re the strongest person in this area. Your power is as different as night and day from the others. How can you only be a Protector, not the mission target? I came right for you because I thought I could win the prize right away. Too bad, I guessed wrong.”

This Destroyer looked able and practiced, entirely different from the ones You Zhengping had seen before. There were no surplus items on them, only a full outfit of white clothes and pure ice powers. Their attack method seemed to be singular, but it was extremely terrible.

The surroundings cleared. There were no more sounds of birds or beasts. Between heaven and earth, everything was white. The air was full of cold. And this low temperature passed through You Zhengping’s space, transferring to his squad members, who were gradually recovering inside.

“Who are you? A holder of natural law power?” You Zhengping felt a chill at heart. If that were the case, then he wouldn’t be able to go home and eat Yu Hua’s dinner.

“I’m the head of the Clearing League, an idiot who has passed 273 levels.” The snow person laughed in self-mockery, an expression appearing on their ice-sculpture-like face for the first time.

So this was the head of the league, the one who had organized the Clearing League to deal with Yu Hua, who had forced Zhen Li and Yuan Luori to come test the waters, who had made the league’s Destroyers deliver themselves one after another, and... You Zhengping shook his half-frozen head and found that the head of the league hadn’t done anything apart from that. They were only an organizer. Even without them, the Destroyers would still have come to their world in waves, lured by the bait of clearing.

And they called themselves an idiot. Was that because they knew something about the System? It was too cold. You Zhengping’s train of thought was gradually freezing.

"I'm not the most powerful person in this operation, but I do in fact hold a bit of natural law power. Only a tiny bit, not enough to establish a natural law space, but I can control some of the rules within a certain area." The head of the league came up to You Zhengping and smiled bitterly. "I'm going to die for that bit of power."

"The most powerful person in this operation... There are more of you?" You Zhengping was feeling waves of sleepiness.

"That's right," said the head of the league. "This is the last time. After this, no one else from the Clearing League will come to trouble you."

*Why... What are they saying? I can't quite hear...* You Zhengping's sight was blurring. He thought that the head of the league's figure was increasingly illusory.

The head of the league saw that You Zhengping would soon be asleep and quietly said, "The System forced me to consume the shards of a world's natural law power. With my current power level, I can't contain that power. Soon, because my body can't endure the sudden rise in power, I'll explode and die. I'll probably become a piece of ice that will never melt, probably about the size of this park. The temperature of the area will drop to minus twenty degrees. For hundreds of years, this area won't have summer."

No... If that happened, the Xuyang District's people would die out, over three million permanent residents. He couldn't sleep, he absolutely couldn't sleep... You Zhengping forced his eyelids open and looked at the ice coffin trapping Cen Xiao. Inside the ice coffin, a tiny flame was just going out.

"I'll tell you a secret. Everyone in the Clearing League is scared to die. If they weren't scared to die, they wouldn't have desperately passed so many levels." The head of the league approached You Zhengping and raised an ice cold arm, putting it around You Zhengping's waist. The moment they touched him, You Zhengping turned into an ice sculpture.

After You Zhengping was sealed in ice, a space of about 64 cubic meters appeared because it had been frozen. The head of the league raised their hand towards the space and gripped it. The space broke into pieces of ice. Countless weapons fell out of the space onto the frozen ground and were frozen as well.

The essence of energy is the kinetic power of the vibration of micro-particles. Even the power of the space was a special barrier formed of special particles. But when the temperature reached absolute zero, even the motion of the particles froze. No power could transmit in absolute zero. But it was impossible to reach absolute zero. You could only limitlessly approach it. This was a natural law of this world.

But when the head of the league held a portion of natural law power, they could change the rules within a certain area, increase the threshold of absolute zero to  $-200^{\circ}\text{C}$ . There was no need to reach true absolute zero temperature ( $-273.15^{\circ}\text{C}$ ); energy would freeze at  $-200^{\circ}\text{C}$ , making an always moving world that had never been stationary come to a halt.

This was natural law power. Slightly changing one rule gave you the power to destroy the world.

But how could a human body contain natural law power? Frozen cracks appeared on the head of the league's cheeks. They were going to die.

The System had promised that it would preserve their soul after death and prepare another body for them. That was the only way they could survive.

Of course, they knew that the System might be lying to them. But so what? They had no other choice.

The head of the league put a hand on You Zhengping's ice sculpture shoulder. A bit of pressure, and this young man would turn to ice crystals.

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While Cen Xiao was complaining about feeling unwell because it was about to rain, Yuan Luori was yawning in a taxi. The exhausting talent show had finally ended. After the second performance, he had been voted out by a narrow margin, according to the arrangements, leaving behind a friend who had been shipped with Yuan Luori to carry his dream going forward.

After over forty days of closed off filming, today he had finally returned to the Xuyang District. There was no one to pick him up from the airport. There was no crowd of fans. Yuan Luori sat in the taxi all alone, worrying whether his job would compensate him for the taxi fare.

When he thought that when he returned he would see his idol the great master clearer, and that he would have to maintain his dismissive attitude towards Yu Hua, Yuan Luori felt that he was under great stress. He wasn't sure that he would be able to survive three days.

As he was dizzily considering whether he should kneel on durian fruit or on the acupuncture mat, the taxi driver braked suddenly. Yuan Luori, sitting in the backseat, was thrown forward by inertia. His glasses fell off.

Fortunately, Yuan Luori had gotten clever over the last month. He had a cord tied to both arms of his glasses and hung around his neck. This way, even if they fell off, they would still be tied to him, and he wouldn't have to search for his glasses everywhere.

When the taxi had come to a steady stop, Yuan Luori heard the taxi driver say, "Sorry, a parrot flew in front of us. Strange, why would there be a parrot here?"

Yuan Luori looked up. Through the car window, he saw the blurred scenery outside, and his expression changed instantly. Without taking his luggage from the trunk, he opened the car door and charged out.



He looked in the direction of the Xuyang District, thought that he wasn't high enough, and leapt up to the roof of the taxi, standing there to survey the scene from an elevated position.

"Hey, young man, what do you think you're doing?!" the taxi driver said despairingly. "Get down from there!"

Yuan Luori ignored him. He saw that there was a tall tree by the road and nimbly leapt three meters onto the tree and climbed to the top of it. Standing on a narrow tree branch, he swayed but didn't fall, like a graceful cat.

The taxi driver was astonished by his actions and didn't care about the car anymore. He decisively picked up his phone to film Yuan Luori climbing, sighing about his movements, which were as natural as moving clouds and flowing water.

"You've had some training, young fellow!" The driver gave him a thumbs up.

Rain drops fell out of the sky, dripping onto Yuan Luori's head. He looked incredulously towards the Xuyang District and said in shock, "What is this!"

The whole Xuyang District was densely covered in dark clouds. To the north, in the direction of the base, two surging rivers were colliding. To the east, a row of tall buildings was engulfed in a windstorm. The central park was a pure white field of ice and snow. And not far from Yuan Luori, a mountain range was protruding out of the ground.

By coincidence, the place near Yuan Luori where the mountains stood was the amusement where Yu Hua had become the black-cloaked man and beaten him up.

After the battle at the amusement park, the government had paid to have it sealed off. It was currently being renovated. Now it had been destroyed again.

But even more frightening than those four places was an area near their studio, at the estate where Yuan Luori normally walked Director Ha.

A whirlpool that could bend time and space shrouded the whole estate. Yuan Luori seemed to dimly see an incomparably huge clock. The hour hand and minute hand were stopped.

Yuan Luori only hesitated for a second. He jumped out of the tree and got into the taxi's driver's seat. He called to the driver, "Lend me the car, you'll be compensated!"

*If I haven't died, I'll personally compensate you in apology.* Yuan Luori swallowed these words and slammed the gas pedal, heading towards the amusement park.

This was the closest battlefield to him, and it was also the place where his identity as a Destroyer had ended.

## CHAPTER 80

After Yu Hua locked the studio door, Director Ha was left alone in the dance room. It hopped in place a few times, bit a plastic bench to pieces, scattered the pieces of the bench all over the floor of the dance room, then lay down amid the pieces, blinked its big eyes, and slowly closed them.

At some point, it had begun to fear loneliness.

Had it happened when Yuan Luori had gone to join the show group and there had been no one to keep it company? Or had it been when Huan Zixu had rented an apartment and the studio had become empty at night? Or was it that he couldn't go out to play with Junjun at night, so it had no way to let off the vigorous energy inside itself?

Director Ha didn't know the reason. It only knew that when the studio was empty, it would mess up the clean floor of the dance room so it wouldn't be so empty. It curled up by the door, quietly waiting for someone to come to the studio the next day.

If Yu Hua was the first to come in, when he saw the disorder on the floor, he would shut it into its cage. There was a delicious dog treat hanging in the cage that it could see but not eat. It would feel awful all day.

If Zhen Li came first, he would stroke its head and quickly clean the room so Yu Hua wouldn't punish it.

If Lian Yufan came first, he would grumble about whether someone had forgotten to walk the dog yesterday, not giving it a chance to let off all its energy and leading it to destroy things in the studio.

If Huan Zixu came first, he would tap Director Ha's forehead and say to himself, "This husky is purebred. When it grows up, we can sell it out for breeding and maybe make up our losses."

When someone came in and saw the mess Director Ha had caused, Director Ha would tuck its tail between its legs and hide in a corner, guiltily accepting chastisement, then next time it would do it again.

It didn't want to do it. It didn't really have that much energy to let off. Junjun was still on summer vacation and spent a long time playing with it every day.

It was just...lonely. It wanted to use these things to demonstrate its existence, make them come to pet its head, even if they slapped it.

Zhen Li often livestreamed with Director Ha, and he would show the fans the objects Director Ha had destroyed. After several livestreams, Director Ha had quite a lot of fans. People often sent it dog food, nutritional paste, chew toys, rabbit's ears, beef jerky...and many other fun and tasty things.

At first Director Ha had resisted them, but now it had given up resisting. It was getting more and more like a dog.

Sometimes Director Ha even forgot that it had once been the bomb freak leveler. It only wanted to run around cheerfully.

“Awooooo,” Director Ha called in a low, mournful howl. Yu Hua hadn’t walked it before leaving. How was it going to see Junjun?

During its unhappiness, a building blew up outside.

Director Ha leapt to the window and stood up. It saw that about three kilometers away, a building under construction had collapsed. It had vaguely heard Huan Zixu mention that building yesterday. Huan Zixu had been standing by the window. He had narrowed his eyes, looked at the building, and nodded to show satisfaction.

The building had exploded. Outside, thunder rumbled and lightning flashed. Director Ha was terrified of rain and thunder. It still remembered the night it had become a dog. There had been a downpour, the boom of thunder and the flash of lightning. Yu Hua, soaked by the rain, had carried it through the rain for a long time. Then he had dropped it in a corner of the studio. It had been cold, dark, and scary.

When it heard thunder, Director Ha lay down and covered its ears with its paws, trembling.

Suddenly, a very subtle feeling arose in its heart. It felt awful, painful, frightening, as though it was about to lose some important person.

Perhaps it was the sixth sense of a leveler, or perhaps it was the animal instinct of a dog; the image of Junjun appeared in Director Ha’s brain.

Yes, it was nearly time for it to play with Junjun. Even when it was raining, as long as it wasn’t too heavy, Junjun would still play with it, carrying an umbrella or wearing a raincoat and rain boots.

Would Junjun be waiting for it in the rain? Director Ha turned circles urgently around the studio. The fretful feeling made it unable to calm down.

It went to the door and took the door handle between its teeth. It pulled downwards, and the door opened. The door hadn’t been locked from the inside!

Director Ha quickly ran downstairs. The studio was on the twenty-first floor, but that was all right. It was strong and could run that distance.

The husky hurtled down to the first floor. Ignoring the building’s security guard blocking its way, it charged out of the office building, flailing its four legs towards the estate.

Its heart beat wildly. The rain fell on Director Ha's body, *drip, drip, drip*.

It ran into the estate and saw Junjun. Junjun was standing on a scooter with an umbrella in his hand, looking all around as he waited for it.

He was waiting for it! Director Ha charged towards Junjun. It ran and ran. It seemed to run for a whole century, but it still didn't reach Junjun. The rain around it became slower and slower. It had been a downpour before. Now it was several seconds between one drop of rain and the next.

Why would this happen? Director Ha didn't know, but it wanted to run to Junjun, play sled dog pulling the scooter for Junjun. It wanted to run over there.

A man dressed in black clothes stood at the estate's gate, quietly watching the dog running towards the little boy.

*You won't get there, the man in black thought quietly. Time has been slowed down many times. This distance of a single second will take you a whole year to run.*

As the rain around him slowed to falling at a millimeter per hour, the man in black moved. He walked towards Director Ha. The whole world was still. Only he was moving.

Director Ha was frantic. It wanted to tell Junjun to hurry home... No, he couldn't go home, home wasn't safe, either. It had to find Yu Hua! It had to take Junjun to find Yu Hua!

But it couldn't run. Every step it ran was so hard. Why was it so slow? Why couldn't it reach Junjun?

"Awoooo!" Under the weight of the time power, Director Ha suddenly let out a husky's howl. Its speed instantly increased countless times. In the endlessly slow world, it arrived at Junjun's feet.

Liu Junjun, meanwhile, still wore his expression of happy surprise from having seen Director Ha. Not even his eyelashes moved.

Time was still at a standstill. Only Director Ha was moving in this endlessly slow world.

"Hm?" The man in black raised his eyebrows, gaze falling on Director Ha, which was the only thing moving. He strolled over to the husky and said uncertainly, "Inside my field, everyone's time has been slowed down thousands of times. Why can you move?"

"Woo!!" Director Ha guarded Junjun, the hair on its back standing up, four paws planted on the ground, baring its teeth, looking warily at the man in black.

The man in black seemed very young, but the passage of ages seemed to be written in his eyes. He laughed lightly. “I only came over here for a look because I caught a whiff of my old friend nearby, I didn’t think there would be someone...no, some dog that would be able to move inside my time field. Who is your owner? Is it ‘the Tyrant?’”

“Awoooo!!” Seeing the man in black approaching, the husky called loudly.

But sounds also needed time to spread. The world had slowed down so much that not even sound could travel.

Only the man in black’s voice could spread normally. He considered and said, “You didn’t have any reaction to hearing ‘the Tyrant,’ so that means you don’t know that title. How could that be? Has his nature changed these last few years? If you don’t know his title, then...let me think, what was his name, now?”

Director Ha couldn’t understand what the man in black was saying. It only knew that if Junjun stayed inside the time field, he would die!

Time had been slowed down, which meant that the speed of people’s heart rates and blood circulation had also become extremely slow. But Director Ha could see the building far away collapsing at a normal speed. That showed that time hadn’t been slowed down everywhere. It had only been slowed down in this field they were in.

Outside, time was passing. If Junjun’s life signs slowed to a certain degree, his breathing wouldn’t be able to keep up, his blood circulation wouldn’t be able to keep up, his heart rate and energy transfer wouldn’t be able to keep up. In less than a minute, Junjun would die.

The man in black didn’t mean to kill anyone. His expression was indifferent. He viewed humans the same way he viewed ants. He wouldn’t deliberately step on an ant like Junjun, but he also wouldn’t get rid of the time field because Junjun was going to die soon.

“I’ve remembered. I haven’t called him by that name in so long that I nearly thought ‘the Tyrant’ was his name,” the man in black said. “In all the previous worlds, he was called Yu Hua. Do you know where he is?”

Yu Hua! Hearing this name, all the blood in Director Ha’s body congealed. This was an old friend of Yu Hua’s, someone as powerful as him, someone who held natural law power!

Run! It couldn’t do anything but run!

Like before, Director Ha tied its leash to Junjun’s scooter and began to sprint, pulling the scooter. But it couldn’t move. Time was still passing just as slowly for it. It had only sped up the instant it had been running towards Junjun. Why?

Director Ha slowly raised its head and saw a flash of lightning drawn across the sky. The lightning was like a silver snake scurrying through the black clouds, spreading at a speed the naked eye couldn't hope to follow.

Soon after it, there was the thunder.

Light was faster than sound. First came the lightning, then you heard the thunder.

Just then, Director Ha heard the cry it had used to menace the man in black. It had taken this long for the sound to reach its ears.

It was speed. This area's flow of time had been slowed, but it had only been slowed down to the greatest degree, not entirely stopped. That was why sound would only carry after a very long time, and so it had been able to move just now.

It had used a speed that surpassed time to come to Junjun. In that instant, why had it been so fast? Director Ha didn't understand.

It only needed to think clearly, and then it would be able to escape from the area with Junjun and find Yu Hua.

Think, think fast. Its dog's brain moved quickly. Director Ha was frantic enough to go mad.

"From the reactions of your vital signs, it seems you know where Yu Hua is. Take me to him." The man in black reached out a hand towards Director Ha.

Because it was raining, Yu Hua didn't buy groceries. He was going to go home and take his estate's elevator to the supermarket in the basement to buy ingredients. It was a little more expensive than the produce market there, but he wouldn't have to go out in the rain. He could go straight from the underground garage.

It was nearly time for elementary school to start. Added to the fact that because it was raining, more people had chosen to drive. There was traffic on the road. The flow of cars crawled forward bit by bit. At each intersection, it would take three or four green lights to be able to slowly climb through. After ages, Yu Hua hadn't gone a hundred meters. He was still near the studio.

Suddenly, a building not far away collapsed. The drivers sitting in traffic heard the noise and stuck their heads out one after another, looking in the direction of the building. There were even some who got out their phones to film it. There was also someone who thought it was an earthquake and quickly jumped out of their car to hide somewhere spacious.

Screams rose instantly. Yu Hua sat in his car, watching the constantly moving windshield wipers. He released his energy.

In only 0.0000001 seconds, an energy probe faster than the speed of light scanned the whole Xuyang District. From just that moment, Yu Hua had a grasp on the current situation and a stratagem.

He had told Zhen Li that the Xuyang District might soon encounter a large scale attack from Destroyer, but he hadn't expected that it would come so soon. And there was also a remote and familiar energy mixed in.

Yu Hua closed his eyes. Combat images he had gathered with the energy probe floated through his mind.

Yuan Luori had driven to the amusement park that had been turned into a small mountain range. He had seen Luo Huai leading the six members of Lian Yufan's squad, doing battle with a Destroyer who could control gravity and earth. Luo Huai was assisting with his mental attack. While the Destroyer was immersed in the memories Luo Huai had released, the other six members would attack and then run off. They weren't being over-zealous. They had pledged to exhaust this Destroyer. Yuan Luori, meanwhile, quietly climbed on the toppled over drop tower, staring fixedly in the direction of the Destroyer.

At the newly built complex, Lian Yufan was protecting Huan Zixu and Feng Kui, struggling desperately with the wind attribute Destroyer. If he could hide, he hid. The new complex had been utterly destroyed. All the buildings had fallen. But the more destroyed the surroundings became, the more suitable it was for Lian Yufan's attacks.

On the outskirts, Director Xiao was battling fiercely with a water type Destroyer. The whole highway had broken. Zhen Li had pulled the wounded into a bunker, trying to minimize losses.

In the central park, You Zhengping had become an ice sculpture. His first space with its weapons had been shattered. But his second space, which could contain energy, had quietly appeared next to the ice coffin trapping Cen Xiao.

Also, in the estate next to him...he couldn't see! The law of time held that area. Yu Hua couldn't observe what was happening inside that field.

"Nicely done," Yu Hua said quietly.

At present, he had only released 15% of his power. He couldn't save so many people at once. The System was using the lives of all the citizens in the Xuyang District to force him to undo his seal. Even if he hadn't cared about the lives of strangers, the System had sent his old friend to force him to undo the seal whether he wanted to or not.

Yu Hua sat in the car, not getting out. He put his hand on his chest and squeezed as though he wanted to crush it.

A majestic energy was set free from Yu Hua's body. It flew into the air and was absorbed by some mysterious power. The System had recovered the power that belonged to it, and Yu Hua had released 50% of his power.

"50% is enough to deal with you." Yu Hua looked towards the nearby estate.

With half of his power released, the natural law power Yu Hua had been suppressing awoke now. He spread his hand, and a writing brush appeared in it.

Yu Hua cut open his palm, dipped the brush in the fresh blood, and wrote in the air—

*Rule 1, All "common people" involved in this campaign who bear no ill will towards the "Tyrant" will not be damaged.*

*Rule 2, All "soldiers" loyal to the "Tyrant" will come under the sovereign's control and take up their weapons.*

*Rule 3, The Tyrant's majesty must not be beheld. All "common people" will lower their heads the moment they see the "Tyrant"; they will be unable to see the sovereign's true face.*

The man in black quietly said, "He's a friend who went through hundreds of levels with me. His origin ability is 'Tyrant,' and his initial item is 'the rule writer.' Before him, all natural law power must bend its head. All people must act according to his rules. He is 'the ultimate controller.' He bestows 'life force' upon all who obey him, and delivers 'death' to those who are disobedient.

"He's an out-and-out lunatic who can do whatever he pleases."

## CHAPTER 81

Yu Hua opened the car window. The three rules written in fresh blood floated out with the wind, blending into the rainy sky.

As fast as the speed of thought—that was how fast the power of the rules spread.

Everyone in the whole Xuyang District almost instantly felt a force they couldn't describe pressing down on their chests.

Residents near the central park, who were frozen to the point of fainting, felt their bodies gradually warm. The plummeting temperature had no impact on them. When their body temperature recovered, they couldn't resist going out to have a look at the snow floating through the summer day.

Next to the new complex, the workers quickly seeking refuge stopped in their tracks. Workers who had been injured by falling cement leapt up from stretchers or from their coworkers' backs



and hopped in place. They looked at their limbs, which had just been dripping with blood. They wiped away the congealing blood on their skin and found that the wounds had disappeared.

On the highway in the outskirts, the passersby who had been injured by car crashes and the clash of two powerful water special ability users were not only healed, they also remained intact even when hit with water under high pressure. Some young people let their safety go to their heads. They raised their phones in the face of the water columns and filmed them. The instant they were hit by the high pressure water column, they were all right, but their phones and clothes were ruined. This startled them into quickly covering up their important bits and retreating into their cars.

Different people had different reactions when faced with this marvel, but one thing was for certain. Everyone felt protected.

Why did they dare to go out to look at the snow? Why did they dare to stop amid the collapse of the buildings? Why did they dare to chase the high pressure water columns that were like rocket guns? Because everyone knew—a silent rule had told them all that they would be safe.

Yuan Luori was not included among these people.

When Yu Hua unsealed his powers, everything went pitch black in front of Yuan Luori's eyes. Before it had only been dim, different types of power flying through the sky over the Xuyang District with blackness around the block where Yu Hua's off-road car was. Now, for Yuan Luori, the Xuyang District was so dark he couldn't see his hand in front of his face.

He had wanted to creep stealthily to the Protector squad and borrow a sniper rifle. While Yuan Luori's vision was poor, he could see the location of the Destroyer's energy. That was more accurate than ordinary vision.

Now he couldn't see. Yuan Luori sighed.

Just then, the parrot that had forced the taxi driver to brake suddenly by landing on the taxi and knocked off Yuan Luori's glasses silently landed on his shoulder.

"Weapon! Weapon! Weapon! Take up your weapon!" the parrot said loudly, flapping its wings.

"Are you that parrot I stole in the park?" Yuan Luori said in disbelief.

This parrot was something of a legend among avian kind. It had originally been an ordinary old man's parrot. When the old man died, there had been no one to look after it. It was already ten years old, very intelligent. It had used its beak to open its cage and fly to the park and had been caught by Yuan Luori, who had just arrived in this world and had needed a living creature that could fly and give him a wide range of vision. He had put the parrot into his birdcage and activated the vision link.

Yuan Luori had been thinking of catching a sparrow, but people kept parrots as pets; no one kept sparrows as pets. He had met this parrot that had a personality at just the right time, and the man and parrot had become a partnership from then on. While Yuan Luori had pretended to be an elderly man in the park while in fact being a vagabond, he and the parrot had depended on each other for survival, sneaking food all over the place. The parrot had become quite a bit cleverer from Yuan Luori's training.

Later, then Yu Hua had gotten rid of the power of Yuan Luori's System and broken his vision link, turning him half blind, the parrot had been taken away by the Protection Organization. After they had kept it for a while, they had discovered that it was only an ordinary bird that Yuan Luori had happened to choose. Then the parrot had been taken to a zoo.

But the parrot that had had its vision linked to Yuan Luori's was a great deal more intelligent than other birds. While in the zoo, it had always wanted to break out. It had pretended to be content with its lot, a caged bird that wouldn't even fly out of the cage when it was open. When the zookeepers had let down their guard around it, this parrot, which had nearly achieved enlightenment, had run away.

It had wanted to find Yuan Luori. It wasn't that it was so fond of this man who could only steal bird feed for it. What it liked was the feeling of the vision link. Everything left its mark. During the course of the vision link, Yuan Luori's power had unavoidably poured into the parrot's body. Now that it was a super powered parrot, how could it stand to give up that feeling?

While Yuan Luori had been with the show group, it hadn't been able to find him. It had only dithered around the highway leading to the airport, enduring hunger, searching for him all over.

Today, when Yuan Luori had returned to the Xuyang District, the parrot had chased impatiently, following Yuan Luori to the amusement park where they had first been parted.

Everything returned to its origin.

"Weapon!" the parrot said loudly and anxiously, flapping its wings against Yuan Luori's face. "Weapon!"

*All "soldiers" loyal to "the Tyrant" will come under the sovereign's control and take up their weapons.* It said "soldiers," not "humans." The parrot had come into contact with Yu Hua at the studio. It was also an asset of the studio along with its owner, Yuan Luori. In the battle at the amusement park, the parrot had been very respectful towards the powerful black-cloaked man.

Now, this parrot was also a "soldier."

"Weapon? What does that mean? I can't see anything right now!" Yuan Luori put his hand on the parrot. Power came from within the parrot and linked with Yuan Luori's vision.

The so-called initial item was in fact the power of a leveler's soul, cast into an object by the System to make it easier for the System to plunder. The true power of the soul wouldn't disappear. Even if there was no item, it could still awaken.

When "the Tyrant" placed the "weapon" in his hand, the power that belonged to him was naturally restored.

Yuan Luori opened his eyes wide. With one eye, he could see the form of all the power. With the other eye, from the parrot's point of view, he could clearly see the Protectors doing battle.

Through the destruction of the earth power battle, the amusement park had turned into a puzzle ring of caves. Everyone ran around as though playing hide-and-seek. The Protectors had been separated.

The parrot spread its wings and flew up into the sky. Its wide field of vision let Yuan Luori clearly see all of the rugged terrain. The colors of the powers let him quickly locate the first Protector—Luo Huai.

Luo Huai was in a sorry state. He had just returned to the Xuyang District. He had recently absorbed too much negative energy. The organization had seen that he was truly unwell and ordered him to go recover. Luo Huai had chosen the Xuyang District, where Destroyers hadn't appeared lately.

Lian Yufan's squad had received orders to bring Luo Huai back there. They had cheerfully gone all the way to the area near the amusement park. They had seen the site of the first battle in the Xuyang District. The amusement park where the fight with a Destroyer had taken place had already been rebuilt. After a safety inspection, it could open.

The squad's members had been somewhat nostalgic, and they had thought that Luo Huai's condition was truly poor. They had decided to take him out for some fun. The energy reaction of too many Protectors gathered together was very strong. A Destroyer who had passed 183 levels had come after them.

This Destroyer knew very well that in this operation, his 183 levels gave him the weakest power. He didn't dare to directly attack powerful people. He had simply changed the topography and was playing hide-and-seek with the Protectors.

He didn't want to get into a life and death struggle. He only wanted to drag this rather troublesome Protector with mental powers into the amusement park. That would count as rendering meritorious service. After he completed the mission, the System would let him live for a time.

When the amusement park became a mountain range, the inspectors had been injured. The Protectors had organized an evacuation of the ordinary people, and Luo Huai had led the squad in guerrilla warfare against the Destroyer.

Though Luo Huai's goal was to catch this person. When Luo Huai had requested support, Director Xiao had ordered him to lead the team in taking this Destroyer alive so they could learn the reason for the System's large scale attack this time. Of all the battlefields, Luo Huai's had the most people and the fewest residents in the area. It would be easiest for him to catch his opponent.

But as though he had vision that could see through walls, no matter how the Protectors hid, no matter what traps they laid, the Destroyer could easily escape them. It was the Protectors who had been scattered by pursuit, unable to find their teammates.

When he saw Yuan Luori, Luo Huai briefly explained the situation.

"My parrot saw that he had an energy probe. He can see your positions. And he can control this mountain range and change its shape as he likes, so he can separate you easily." It seemed as though Yuan Luori's eyes were looking at Luo Huai, but his vision was unfocused. He was looking into the distance.

Luo Huai said, "I have the feeling that he's been dealing very cautiously with us. When he realizes that we can't handle him, his attack methods will gradually become fiercer and swifter, more fatal. He'll start dealing death blows."

Yuan Luori, who was very familiar with levelers' methods, nodded. "That's right. When we first arrive in a world, because we don't know others' strength, we'll first lay low for a time, then become more arrogant."

This earth power leveler was an old hand.

Yuan Luori's self-knowledge was too candid. It made Luo Huai a little speechless. Most of the people he treated had deep thoughts and were unwilling to talk about what was on their mind. They hid all of their negative emotions in their hearts and wouldn't release them. Over time, they became ill. People like Yuan Luori, ridiculously arrogant and candidly cowardly, were very rare.

"Since you can see him, point out his position for me. I'll use a mental attack." Luo Huai accepted Yuan Luori's appraisal and concentrated on the battlefield. "A mental attack has to be done at extremely close range, but it isn't obstructed by stone walls. As long as I can get close, I can inflict heavy injuries on his mental state."

"Did you use this method to attack him before?" Yuan Luori asked.

Luo Huai said, "I managed it once. He quickly used his item to clear his head and escape."

"It won't work, then. He must be keeping an eye on you and staying as far from you as possible. It won't work a second time. But we can use that," Yuan Luori said. "You lead away, I attack. Do you have a sniper rifle?"

“Yes!” Luo Huai instantly understood what Yuan Luori wanted to do. He took a gun from his back and gave all the bullets to Yuan Luori. “Will his energy probe notice you?”

“No.” Yuan Luori stood firmly against a wall and hid his presence. It was as though he had disappeared. Luo Huai, who had had his eyes on him the whole time, nearly suspected that he had been looking at a holographic projection.

Hiding his presence was an assassin’s instinct. For Yuan Luori, who had recovered his powers, these maze-like surroundings were simply the ideal battlefield.

“I’ll lend you my parrot. It’ll help you find your companions, and point out where you’ve gone, so I can hit the enemy better,” Yuan Luori said.

Combat veterans didn’t need too much negotiation to cooperate in battle. Their combat instincts told them how to cooperate with each other.

Taking the parrot, which had landed on his shoulder, Luo Huai parted with Yuan Luori. The parrot seemed to have reached enlightenment. It knew that its voice was too loud and that it would be heard by the Destroyer if it spoke among the caves, so it used its wings to lead Luo Huai.

Luo Huai stroked the parrot’s feathers gratefully, quickly traveling through the caves. When the parrot’s toes squeezed his shoulder, Luo Huai would stop.

Meanwhile, Yuan Luori, hidden in the shadows, could “see” the power of the earth type Destroyer. He was within his firing range, and there were no obstructions in front of him!

*Bang!* Yuan Luori pulled the trigger. The impact from the sniper rifle passed directly through the Destroyer’s abdomen!

After a single shot, Yuan Luori quickly changed his position. His movements were silent, without flaw. By the time Destroyer 183 had equipped medicine and healed his wound, Yuan Luori was already elsewhere.

Luo Huai was the bait, and Yuan Luori attacked by stealth.

*Bang! Bang! Bang!*

An assassin rarely acted. When he acted, he wouldn’t miss. Each shot indicated a serious injury.

Luo Huai, meanwhile, lured on the Destroyer and found his lost teammates with the parrot’s help. Everyone had been somewhat wounded, but the strong constitutions of Protectors could withstand the pain.

After they had gathered, Luo Huai continued to act as bait as he told his teammates Yuan Luori's plan.

When everyone was assembled, it was time to put the second stage of the plan into action!

Destroyer 183 wasn't stupid. All the energy points had assembled in the energy probe, and there was still someone attacking him by stealth. Naturally he had guessed that there was an attacker who could hide his presence. Maintaining the cave maze now would definitely be a bad idea. He had to change his means of attack.

At a time like this, the ideal method would be to carry out a cave-in against the assembled Protectors. He could take them all at once.

But he failed, because seven Protectors were enough to establish an energy field and withstand his attack.

The energy field, which originated in the Source Project, involved the Protectors adjusting their powers to the same frequency or to mutually repellant frequencies to disturb their opponent's attack. Mutually repellant frequencies required the Protectors to stand in different places and release their powers simultaneously. It had to be discussed in advance, and the precise spots had to be located before it could be put into action. A slight deviation, and the effect would be enormous.

But an energy field of the same frequency was different. As long as everyone was gathered together and adjusted their amplitude to the same frequency, the power created by wave after wave multiplied together could far exceed the power of seven people.

While an army was walking across a bridge, if they marched quickly, the bridge might very well collapse from the resonance. So in the past, armies had had a rule of stepping lightly when crossing bridges.

The same frequency energy field worked on this principle.

The power of the seven Protectors expanded, repelling the enormous stones falling from the firmament. Meanwhile, the flustered Destroyer 183 didn't notice that the killer in the dark had already quietly come up behind him.

Energy... The System's items, tricks, and points were all energy. Yuan Luori's pupils were vertical slits like a cat's. With his slit pupils, he "saw" the source of the Destroyer's energy.

No wonder the black-cloaked man could take their power. The System's power was linked by countless while threads to the leveler's origin ability. You only needed to snap those threads to escape the System's control.

But energy could only be broken with energy. The gun in his hands wouldn't do.

Just then, the parrot standing on Luo Huai's shoulder raised its wings and roared in a certain direction. The parrot said quietly, "Here, concentrated attack!"

Luo Huai understood what the parrot meant. He gave his comrades in arms a look. He could control an energy field made of only seven people's power.

A small-scale assembly of power controlled by one person was a variant of the source project. The power wasn't as fearsome as in the origin project and wouldn't cause so much harm to a Protector.

Luo Huai's teammates put their hands on his back, and the energy field gathered in him. Controlling this boundless power required extremely powerful mental energy.

Luo Huai's brow furrowed. The power was hard for him manipulate, and the parrot was once again hopping urgently on his shoulder, urging him to act as soon as possible. Yuan Luori's eyes couldn't hold out for so long.

Sweat dripped a drop at a time from Luo Huai's forehead and fell on the stars on his arms. Stars belonging to countless already dead Protectors lit up. Luo Huai suddenly felt his mind lighten. He could control the power.

The condensed power of seven Protectors, along with the support of the mental energy of countless elder comrades in arms who were still protecting the world though they had passed on, with Luo Huai as guide, became an energy blade that could cut through the caves, ignoring the obstruction of rock. A flash of white light that seemed as though it was about to rend heaven and earth split open the mountain created by the Destroyer.

Yuan Luori leapt and skipped, dodging the falling rock and stood firmly on the surface. Destroyer 183, who had had the energy source of the System cut off, fell at Yuan Luori's feet.

Luo Huai and the others were entirely exhausted. When they arrived on the surface, holding each other up, they saw Yuan Luori stepping on Destroyer 183, puffing himself up and saying, "You dare to destroy the amusement park? Do you know how much damage you've caused to public property? Let me tell you, this carries a ten year sentence at minimum!"

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Author's Note:

Yuan Luori: I'm imitating my idol. Don't I have the same graceful demeanor now as my idol did when he beat me up?

Luo Huai: ...

## CHAPTER 82

High and mighty, Yuan Luori stepped on the Destroyer for a while, then demanded, “How many levels have you passed?”

Destroyer 183, who had had the power of his System cut off, was bruised and battered. “183 levels, don’t hit me anymore, don’t hit me.”

“183? I easily defeated a master player who passed 183 levels? Hahaha!” Yuan Luori laughed wildly. He had indeed chosen the right person to follow. Look at the outcome of following the System; over many years, he had only passed 37 levels. But firmly following in the great master clearer’s footsteps, after only a few months, he could take care of a master with 183 levels!

“Who said you defeated him on your own?” The members of Lian Yufan’s squad were defiant. Supporting each other, they all came up to Yuan Luori. “It was collective power. It was our energy field that broke off the source of his power in the end!”

But Luo Huai, being fair, said, “Without Yuan Luori, we would only have died at the Destroyer’s hands. He gathered us together when we had been scattered, and he was the one who saw our opponent’s weak point. His contributions to this victory can’t go unmentioned. There’s also this parrot. It was thanks to your hints that I was able to lure the Destroyer into the trap without being injured.”

Hearing Luo Huai praise him, Yuan Luori tapped lightly with his feet, using Destroyer 183 as a jumping off point. He jumped lithely in front of Luo Huai. Imitating Yu Hua, he gave a restrained smile. “So you have good judgement.”

The parrot flew from Luo Huai’s shoulder to Yuan Luori’s. It stuck up its tail feathers and raised its head. Its proud look was identical to Yuan Luori’s.

Luo Huai sighed slightly. “It would be a good thing if you could maintain the same chill you have when you’re sniping.”

The change in his manner was rather great. Luo Huai, who wasn’t well acquainted with Yuan Luori, couldn’t adjust to it at first.

On the other hand, the members of Lian Yufan’s squad, who regularly watched the livestreams, understood Yuan Luori’s peculiarities. One of them said, “You should get used to it, Captain Luo. The Destroyers at Zhen Li’s studio are all like this. You haven’t seen him on the livestreams, looking all cold and haughty, and then kneeling whenever he’s told. It’s hilarious, hahaha!”

“Don’t think I can’t hit you just because you’re wounded.” Yuan Luori clenched his fist and shook it in front of the face of the squad member who was mocking him.

Luo Huai’s nature was rather steady. He said without emotion, “Check whether there are any highly dangerous objects on Destroyer 183, remove his equipment, restrain him, and take him to the base to wait for Director Xiao’s questioning. Also, those who are lightly injured, clean up



the battlefield and call the police to seal off the scene. Request the base's internal construction team to come put up some high walls. Otherwise, there'll be no way to explain the mountain. And have a look around for passersby and nearby cars that have been affected."

When Luo Huai mentioned the cars, Yuan Luori instantly screamed. Guided by the parrot's vision, he groped his way to the taxi stopped outside the amusement park. As expected, the car had been crushed flat by a falling rock during the battle.

Remembering his promise to the taxi driver when he had snatched the car, Yuan Luori turned and went back to the Protectors. He punched Destroyer 183 and miserably said, "It's all your fault! All your fault! I can't afford that car!"

Of the money he had gotten from the talent show, Yu Hua had said he could take 10%. Just as Yuan Luori was getting to celebrate that he wouldn't need to eat instant noodles anymore and could switch to ordering takeout, he had wrecked a taxi and owed a huge sum of money. After punching 183, he lay down spreadeagled on the ground, looking like he didn't want to live anymore.

The parrot didn't understand Yuan Luori's pain. Clever as it was, it was still only a bird. It didn't understand the fascination of money. But it dimly sensed that Yuan Luori's suffering originated with Yu Hua. Remembering Yu Hua, it also suffered. So the parrot went belly up, spread its wings, and lay on the ground in the same half-dead posture as Yuan Luori.

Luo Huai was extremely sensitive to emotion. He had never seen a person who was so demonstrative about his aggression, caution, happiness, arrogance, and sadness. As his emotions changed, it seemed that he was several people, all conflicting but perfectly combined within a single person's body.

He crouched down and poked Yuan Luori's belly with a finger. Trying not to laugh, he said, "Don't lose heart, the organization allows Protectors to apply for reimbursement for missions. It's not like they can make soldiers who have fought a life and death battle pay out of their own pockets."

"I'm not a Protector." Yuan Luori turned his face away, not looking at Luo Huai.

The parrot turned its face away at the same time he did. After all, if the parrot could see, then Yuan Luori would be able to see even with his eyes closed.

"Isn't there Zhen Li as an example? He was acknowledged by world law, his special ability awakened, and he had the recommendations of three Protectors, including one of captain rank. I'm a Protector of captain rank, and the six comrades in arms who just fought with us can also recommend you," Luo Huai said, smiling.

"Really?!" Yuan Luori and the parrot sat up in happy surprise, looking expectantly at Luo Huai.

"Yes. And there's also the Protector's subsidy," Luo Huai said gently.

“Wow, you’re a pretty good Protector, you’ll do.” Having recovered his vitality, Yuan Luori became proud once again. The parrot flew to Luo Huai and patted his shoulder with its wing.

Luo Huai lightly stroke the parrot’s feathers. The parrot cried out happily.

Near Yuan Luori wasn’t the only place where there were car crashes. Zhen Li was where the real pile-up collision was.

He had been heading towards the base at full speed in the armored car. The armored car, which could have withstood a hit from an artillery shell, had been cut apart by a high pressure water column, causing a chain reaction accident on the highway, one car hitting three cars.

Fortunately, the car contained only two accompanying soldiers and a driver. While they weren’t special ability users, they were still special figures who were veterans of many battles. The instant the accident occurred, they quickly jumped away from the car. One of the soldiers also protected Zhen Li, who was sitting next to him.

Yuan Luori was an assassin. However you looked at it, he had at least passed 37 levels. He was well acquainted with battle. But Zhen Li had been determined to be idle, passing levels without lifting a finger. Apart from being able to dance and having good flexibility, he had practically no combat value. If the soldier hadn’t protected him, Zhen Li would have been seriously injured when the car overturned.

Zhen Li was intact, but the soldier who had protected him had fallen onto a passing vehicle. When he fell to the ground, he was unconscious.

The injuries of the two other soldiers also weren’t light, but as long as they could still move, they had to fight. One of them hefted a machine gun and aimed at the Destroyer standing in a current of water, and the other contacted the base, requesting support, then went to help the victims of the car crash.

“Huh?” The water type Destroyer raised his eyebrows. “My probe told me that there was a very powerful special ability user in the area. How come there’s only Zhen Li?”

There was a large lake beside the highway. The water type Destroyer had liked this. That was why he had chosen this place.

Between the pouring rain and the water in the river, he could use his powers to the fullest.

Zhen Li dragged the soldier who had been injured protecting him behind himself and quietly climbed over to the soldier wielding the machine gun to help him shield his teammate.

The water type Destroyer tossed out a high pressure water column. Zhen Li decisively opened his alternate dimension passage and drew a small circle in the palm of his hand, absorbing the high pressure water column in the alternate dimension passage.

“What? You’re not totally useless,” the water type Destroyer said in astonishment. “But you’re already soaked.”

When Zhen Li had been inside the car, naturally he hadn’t gotten a drop of water on him. After abandoning the car, he had been out in the pouring rain. Zhen Li had been drenched almost instantly. All of his clothing was soaked through.

When Zhen Li heard his opponent, he was instantly alarmed. He was going to take off his clothes, but it was too late. With the water in them being controlled, the clothes of Zhen Li and the soldiers contracted, their collars firmly squeezed their necks.

“Ahem!” Ignoring his own safety, Zhen Li returned his alternate dimension passage to his stomach and opened his mouth to absorb the water from the clothes of the soldier next to him. He didn’t have that much power. He could only absorb the water around his collar so he wouldn’t be throttled to death.

However Zhen Li struggled to protect his companions, he could only save the person next to him.

“It’s raining. What use is it drinking that little bit?” The water type Destroyer laughed lightly and slightly raised a hand. An enormous wave rose in the lake at his feet. Hundreds of tons of water towered high overhead, ready to crash heavily onto everyone.

“Boring. Just these few good-for-nothings.” The water type Destroyer looked at the energy probe with the serial number 5-3. “Is the probe broken? It clearly shows there’s someone powerful nearby.”

“Your probe isn’t broken.” A dignified voice came from under the lake. The huge wave raised by the water type Destroyer meekly returned to the lake.

While the water fell, it was visible that there wasn’t sand at the bottom of the lake. There was an underground fortress made entirely out of metal!

As Director Xiao rose out of the water, the water current that was about to break Zhen Li and the others to pieces went out of control. Zhen Li gulped big mouthfuls of air.

Before, Zhen Li had always been taken blindfolded or unconscious to the base. He had vaguely felt that the base was underground. You had to go down through some entrance to reach it. He totally hadn’t expected that the base would be under the lake at the outskirts, so close to him!

Seeing Director Xiao appear, Zhen Li nearly cried. He forced his breathing to calm and helped the two soldiers find places for the people injured in the car crash. From time to time he took note of the battle situation.

Director Xiao was very strong. The battle between him and the water type Destroyer had already reached the catastrophic level. The bridge on the lake had been shattered by the water the two of them had raised. All kinds of waterspouts, water arrows, high pressure water columns, and other such water attacks were more dazzling than special effects.

Zhen Li could see that Director Xiao was no weaker than the other side, but he had to be careful of the people around him. He couldn't use all of his strength.

Blood and rain mixed and rolled into the lake. Many people were at death's door, but they hadn't received effective aid. When the water type Destroyer noticed that Director Xiao was shielding the highway, he deliberately turned his attacks on the people. In order to protect the ordinary people, Director Xiao was forced to bear the brunt of an attack. He was seriously injured.

Zhen Li looked at the two people battling and at the soldier who had been wounded protecting him. He wiped the rain from his face despairingly and quietly said, "Who will save them?"

He didn't say "us." The people he wanted to save were the soldiers without special abilities, the innocent passerby who had been dragged in, and Director Xiao, who was struggling to hold on.

But there was nothing to be done. Support couldn't come. The whole Xuyang District was a battle. Every Protector was in such a difficult position. Zhen Li could only quietly call, "Great master, save them."

After his cry, a warm wind mingled with rain swept over. There was a power mixed into the wind that couldn't be disobeyed.

*All "common people" involved in this campaign who bear no ill will towards "the Tyrant" will not be damaged.*

All the wounded on the scene almost simultaneously heard this voice. Their fingers twitched slightly, as though they were dreaming. They opened their eyes wide. They were entirely intact. Even the soldier next to Zhen Li woke up.

These survivors held their family members and sobbed. Meanwhile, Director Xiao's reach hadn't been wide enough to block the destructive wave. The lake water crashed heavily onto the highway.

When the wave dispersed, everyone on the highway was unharmed.

"What? Are these special effects? Are they filming a movie? Is projection technology this advanced?" The people by the road inspected their bodies and found that the great wave hadn't done anyone any harm.

From one half of the armored car, Zhen Li got out a loudspeaker. He called out to Director Xiao, "Director, we're being protected by the black-cloaked man. No ordinary person will be injured. There are no casualties, not one. You go all out on the battle, don't worry about us!"

Hearing his cry, Director Xiao wiped the blood at the corner of his mouth, raised his hand, and said, "Launching a sneak attack above our base? You've got some nerve!"

As he spoke, Director Xiao's hand swept out like a cutting attack. The lake at his feet answered his power and opened entirely, revealing the true appearance of the base. Countless elevated cannons stood there, aimed towards the water type Destroyer.

"Fire!" Director Xiao ordered. All of the Protection Organization's firepower concentrated on the Destroyer.

The water type Destroyer wanted to run, but apart from the cannon fire, there was still Director Xiao.

He dodged and hid, wildly equipping defensive shields, but his arm was still cut open. Seeing that the Destroyer had taken an injury at last, the wrinkles at the corners of Director Xiao's eyes deepened in a smile.

A water current was released from Director Xiao's palm. It mixed with the rain water and silently seeped into the wound that the Destroyer had yet to take care of. Like a virus, it quickly infected all the blood in the Destroyer's body.

As long there was a wound, as long as there was water in the body, as long as he could operate the water he had trained for many years to control in his opponent's body, Director Xiao became the greatest killing implement in the whole Protection Organization.

The water type Destroyer couldn't budge. He wanted to use his phone to equip an item, but his body wouldn't move. All the blood in his body was disobeying his commands. His body no longer belonged to him.

Director Xiao kept his eyes on the water type Destroyer, considering whether to capture this person or eradicate him just like this.

Just then, his communications device rang. Director Xiao pressed a button on his chest. Luo Huai's voice came from his earpiece: "Director, we've succeeded in capturing a Destroyer. With Yuan Luori's help, we broke his link to the System. He's willing to confess everything!"

"Well done!" Director Xiao said heavily.

He turned off communications and said to the water type Destroyer, "Since that's the case, then I don't need to leave you alive."

It was as though someone had hit pause on the blood in the Destroyer's body. His blood no longer flowed. The Destroyer stared blankly at Director Xiao. Soon his heart stopped beating, and he fell heavily.

Director Xiao stepped on the water of the lake and picked up the fallen body of the Destroyer. Coldly, he said, "Injure my soldiers, destroy my infrastructure, harm my people, you won't stay!"

This smooth and crafty middle-aged man seemed like an old fox most of the time. Now he exhibited how completely different the demeanor and resolve of an older Protector were from those of a younger Protector.

The water of the lake delivered Director Xiao in front of Zhen Li. In the rain, Director Xiao said to Zhen Li, "You used your alternate dimension passage to shield your teammates in a dangerous moment, and when support arrived immediately aided the soldiers in rescuing the wounded. You didn't panic in the face of peril or run in the face of disaster. You have already become a qualified Protector."

Zhen Li excitedly wiped water from his face. He was going to say something when he heard Director Xiao said, "Pass on to the black-cloaked man from me, thank you very much for coming to our aid in this. As long as he doesn't violate the law or harm ordinary citizens, the Protection Organization will always be his allies!"

"Pass on... I can't contact him..." Zhen Li didn't forget to maintain his persona.

"Do you really think your shoddy lies can fool me?" Director Xiao asked. "While I don't concretely know the black-cloaked man's identity, I'm certain you can contact him. I'm only turning a blind eye. There are some things that, if I say them aloud, may disqualify you from joining the Protectors.

"People who sincerely protect this world shouldn't receive shabby treatment."

Director Xiao stretched out a hand and tapped Zhen Li on the forehead.

—

Zhen Li: I must be the luckiest person in this novel. I haven't had to lift a finger the whole time.

## CHAPTER 83

In the new complex under construction, Lian Yufan stayed out in the open, attracting Destroyer 217's notice. He used countless pieces of reinforced concrete to block the Destroyer's line of sight and ordered Huan Zixu in strong terms to take Feng Kui, leave the new complex as quickly as possible, and not hold him back any longer.

Feng Kui and Huan Zixu's constitutions were stronger than those of ordinary people. When they were armed, their combat power could be favorably compared to that of special forces, but without any weapons, their impact on the battle would truly be too small.

Destroyer 217 seemed to be very much on his guard against Huan Zixu. He kept pursuing him with attacks. Fortunately, Feng Kui wouldn't stint to sacrifice himself to protect him. Huan Zixu was unharmed, but there was hardly a patch of flesh left on Feng Kui's limbs. If not for his special physique, the initial item that had long ago integrated with his body, and his high pain threshold, he would have died of pain or blood loss by now.

Though Feng Kui's defensive abilities were greater than other people's, at this moment, he could no longer stand up. A portion of his leg bone had been severed by a wind blade. Lian Yufan wanted to repair it for him, but because he was held up dealing with Destroyer 217, he couldn't get to Feng Kui.

"Don't hinder me anymore, go!" Lian Yufan roared.

Right now, leaving him alone to hold up the enemy was the ideal choice. Lian Yufan had never been of a self-sacrificing disposition; he only wanted to keep losses to a minimum. It was always better for one to die than for three to die. This was the simplest possible math problem.

Huan Zixu also wasn't about to sacrifice his life for anyone other than Feng Kui. He looked deeply at Lian Yufan, then unhesitatingly hauled Feng Kui up and ran.

Feng Kui was too heavy. The highly dense mental skeleton made Feng Kui five times heavier. People of his build weighed a hundred kilograms, but Feng Kui weighed over five hundred.

Huan Zixu couldn't carry him on his back. He could only drag him while desperately fleeing. They moved very slowly.

Feng Kui couldn't move his limbs. He stiffly said, "A-Xu, leave me."

"Shut up!" Huan Zixu's tone wasn't at all nice.

"A-Xu—his attacks—you're the target. If you go, I'll be safe." Feng Kui smiled simply, as though he were telling Huan Zixu a joke.

When they had been levelers together, Huan Zixu had discovered that Feng Kui could obtain people's good opinion more easily than he could.

That was normal. All people were merely human. No one would like a person who was too clever and scheming. They wouldn't want to be caught in a trap. But everyone liked a simple, upright, and kind-hearted person. Even if the good opinion involved the malicious intent of wanting to trick that person out some money, at least it was still a good opinion.

Whether it was his ability or his scheming, Huan Zixu could always attract hatred. When he had been weak, Huan Zixu had always said to Feng Kui, “Fuck off, you’ll be safe away from me.”

He was weak and incited people to try to kill him. Feng Kui had no future with him.

Feng Kui, like a robot, would always crackle a laugh, ignoring Huan Zixu’s rude language, continuing to follow his teammate.

After passing one hundred levels, Huan Zixu gradually became powerful. The protector and the protected had switched places. But Feng Kui didn’t remember those times.

The words Huan Zixu had always said had now been spoken by Feng Kui, who had already forgotten those conversations. Huan Zixu stopped in his desperate flight from the complex and bent his head to say to Feng Kui, “Don’t think about it. I’ll die, and I’ll make you shoulder the blame!”

Crafty, paranoid, ferocious Huan Zixu... Feng Kui watched a teardrop or a raindrop slide down from the corner of his friend’s eye. In his mechanical voice, he stiffly said, “My shoulders are very strong.”

*Bang!* An air cannon smashed a huge chunk of concrete. Lian Yufan was crushed under it, dead or alive.

Destroyer 217 soared towards Huan Zixu and waved his hands. A long pole axe appeared in his hands. He aimed it at Huan Zixu. “I know you’ve lost your ability, but I’m still not going to listen to a word you say. What would I do if I accidentally got tricked by you again?”

Then he swung the pole axe. A wind blade many times stronger than before flew out, cleaving towards the two wholly defenseless people.

Feng Kui found the strength somewhere to press down with his hand, of which only five fingers of metal bone remained, holding down Huan Zixu, who was still standing. He used his large body to shield Huan Zixu, though who knew whether this wind blade would cut right through his body to Huan Zixu.

Destroyer 217 smiled faintly. The Protector with the assembly power had lost his combat ability. If he only took out Huan Zixu and Feng Kui, he could say he had accomplished his mission.

But just as the wind blade was about to hit Feng Kui’s spine, an alloy rib shot out from Feng Kui’s back. Immediately after, countless ribs shot out, merging with his spine. Almost instantly, Feng Kui turned into a pure metal armed vehicle. The awful wind blade only made a faint imprint on the armed vehicle.

“How could this be? Hasn’t Feng Kui lost the System?” Destroyer 217 was alarmed and let off dozens of wind blades in a row.



The armed vehicle stood up into a roughy ten meter high enormous mechanical skeleton. He waved a hand and scattered the wind blades.

Feng Kui, who had passed 199 levels, may not have had that much fighting value, and his combat methods were extremely unitary. But he was definitely the leveler with the strongest defensive abilities in the Clearing League. He was a lump of iron that couldn't be melted, softened, broken, or shattered. If he had determined to protect someone, then no one would hurt that person.

And the person he protected was Huan Zixu, the person no one in the Clearing League wanted to have anything to do with, the person Destroyer 217 had wanted to kill on contact.

*Ding!* A coin bounced off Feng Kui and into Destroyer 217's air shield. A drop of water wet the hair of the Destroyer, who had all along been protected by air from the rain.

His air shield had vanished.

"What's going on? Your 'false exchange' should only be able to change people's thoughts!" Destroyer 217 looked in fright at Huan Zixu, who was standing firmly on the metal skeleton's shoulder.

"I also think it's strange." A cold smile flashed through Huan Zixu's eyes. "I suddenly had my power removed, and now it's suddenly been restored, and my origin ability and initial item have suddenly fused. The clearer really is using me as a chess piece to deal with the System. It's a very unpleasant feeling having everything about you controlled by someone else."

On the point of death, Huan Zixu and Feng Kui had both felt the existence of the rules. They were probably the ones who reacted fastest. As soon as they noticed that their powers had returned, they had entered battle mode.

Feng Kui's origin ability and initial item had been unified long ago. He had entered battle mode even faster than Huan Zixu.

Huan Zixu, on the other hand, had taken a bit of time to adjust to his new ability. For the levelers, the System had forced apart the abilities of the bodies and the power of their souls. In battle, Huan Zixu had always had a sense of sluggishness. Now his power had entirely merged, filling Huan Zixu with happy surprise.

His initial item was the "Sales Champion," his origin ability "false exchange." When the initial and the origin were put together, they became "forced sale."

All Huan Zixu needed was a coin to trade for Destroyer 217's air shield.

Huan Zixu snatched the air shield and used it to protect himself and Feng Kui. It felt good to be out of the rain. Huan Zixu said, “While admittedly the black-cloaked man has given me an unpleasant feeling, you...destroyed the apartment I just bought! You’re dead!”

He took a second coin from his pocket. This had been to take the bus between the studio and the complex. Using money to deal with Destroyer 217 was really more than he deserved.

Huan Zixu flicked his fingers lightly. The coin flew like a bullet towards Destroyer 217. 217 quickly pulled out his phone to equip a mental type item to resist, but the coin stopped in front of him, not moving.

Feng Kui went to the pile of rock where Lian Yufan was buried and crooked his metal fingers slightly. The steel bars in the cement answered Feng Kui’s control, causing the tons of cement to fly away, quickly revealing Lian Yufan, who had been crushed by a stone and was on his last gasp.

Seeing Lian Yufan’s disastrous condition, Huan Zixu reached out his right hand, touched the tip of his thumb to the pad of his forefinger, and flicked lightly. The going that had been fixed in place in front of 217 tapped the center of his brow.

“Could you equip some medicine and give it to him?” Huan Zixu pointed to the dying Lian Yufan.

Destroyer 217 was unable to control his body. He quickly used a lot of points to equip high quality wound medicine. The enormous Feng Kui plucked the suddenly appearing bottle of medicine out the air and gave it to Huan Zixu.

Huan Zixu took the medicine bottle, jumped off the large skeleton, went up to Lian Yufan, and shook the medicine bottle at him.

Lian Yufan, on his last gasp, couldn’t speak anymore. He could only quietly look at Huan Zixu.

“I’m not the kind of person to give away something for nothing,” Huan Zixu said to Lian Yufan. “Next time Yu Hua wants to force me into a ship with someone, you’re going to help me. Even if it takes using your Protection Organization’s power, you still can’t let Yu Hua get everything he wants. Get it? If you agree, don’t move. If you don’t agree, shake your head.”

Where was Lian Yufan going to find the strength to shake his head? Huan Zixu laughed and said, “Then let’s call it a deal.”

He held Lian Yufan’s chin and fed him the medicine.

Instead of calling the System’s healing medicine “medicine,” it would be better to say that it was healing power. A power strong enough to bring the dead to life poured into Lian Yufan’s body and restored it.

While Huan Zixu was healing Lian Yufan, Feng Kui was playing swat the fly.

There was endless reinforced concrete in the construction site. The pieces mixed with Feng Kui's body, and the mechanical skeleton grew larger and larger. Feng Kui was already taller than the building where Huan Zixu had bought an apartment. He stood where the building had originally been positioned, swatting at Destroyer 217 again and again as though he were a fly. Destroyer 217 was resisting tenaciously, equipping countless items to attack Feng Kui, but they all seemed to do no more than tickle him; they couldn't do him any harm.

The fleeing workers had stopped by the road and taken out their phones to film Feng Kui. Their wounds had been healed, and they couldn't be hurt by the wind blades. With this "miraculous" phenomenon happening to them, it was as though they were dreaming. No one had attention to spare to flee. *Get your phone out and film! This kind of thing only happens one in a lifetime... no, once in ten lifetimes!*

In less than a minute, Lian Yufan was healed and stood up. He said to Huan Zixu, "You didn't use 'false exchange' on me just now. How are you going to guarantee that I'll help you?"

"I'll leave to your conscience." Huan Zixu shrugged. "I'm an unethical salesman. This is my first time doing a trade where I may sustain a loss. If I encounter an unethical buyer, then that will just be fate."

Lian Yufan suddenly thought that his luck was good. He had been gravely injured three times, but each time he had been healed by Destroyers. Was it traditional for Destroyers to fight over the System's medicines?

The two of them smiled at each other and quickly ran to Feng Kui's feet. Bracing themselves on the metal skeleton's legs, they leapt nimbly up to Feng Kui's shoulders.

Two powerful levelers and one already healed Protector—faced with this array, even if there had been two of Destroyer 217, he couldn't have won. Destroyer 217 didn't have an unyielding spirit. His head drooped. He quietly said, "I can't beat you. I'll wait to be captured. I..."

As he spoke, the bomb planted in his body by the System sensed Destroyer 217's betrayal. The System gave him no opportunity. It detonated the bomb.

"Run!" Clever as he was, Huan Zixu had guessed what the System would do while Destroyer 217 spoke. But it was already too late.

Feng Kui grabbed one person in each hand and converted to his armed vehicle mode once more, hiding Huan Zixu and Lian Yufan inside and piling all the steel bars in the construction sight on top of himself.

*Bang!* After the enormous explosion, Feng Kui climbed out of the heap covered in dirt and rubble. Huan Zixu and Lian Yufan were intact.

Lian Yufan looked unhappy. He contacted Director Xiao. “Director, with Huan Zixu and Feng Kui’s aid, we’ve won without casualties, but unfortunately we couldn’t take the Destroyer alive. He self-destructed.”

“Good, I’ve finished here, too,” came Director Xiao’s voice. “Yuan Luori arrested a certain Destroyer 183 at the amusement park. We can ask him for the relevant information. I’m getting ready to return to the base for the interrogation.”

“Really? That’s great. Yuan Luori has performed a valuable service this time!” Emergency calls weren’t suitable for idle chat. Lian Yufan reported valuable information: “The property damage is tremendous. A whole building complex has been blown up. Many people had bought apartments there.”

“As long as no one has been injured, it’s all right. The organization will help rebuild. We won’t make innocent people bear the losses,” Director Xiao said.

Lian Yufan put down his communications device and said to Huan Zixu, “Don’t worry about your apartment anymore. If you can just think of a way to cover up this business of misappropriating public money, the apartment is yours. I won’t pass it on to Yu Hua ahead of time. After all, I agreed to help you.”

“But I can’t find the receipt!” Huan Zixu searched the spot where Destroyer 217 had exploded. “When that bastard blew up, was he holding my folder or not? That was just the receipt for the advance, I have to exchange it for another receipt when I make the down payment, it can’t be gone!”

“Well...” Lian Yufan went through his pockets and got out a slip of paper that had been soaked by the rain and used his power. A ragged folder flew out of the ruins and assembled in Lian Yufan’s hand.

“How come you have a piece of the receipt?” Huan Zixu asked, snatching the folder.

“Professional habit,” Lian Yufan said, putting his hands behind his back. “Whenever I see something important, I tear off a piece and keep it. That way, it’s easy to get evidence later.”

“So when you tore a piece from the receipt, who were you getting evidence for?” While he had gotten his receipt back, Huan Zixu couldn’t avoid being suspicious.

Lian Yufan blinked. “I was going to report it to the organization. You want to buy an apartment using the falsified materials the organization provided. If there was some careless mistake, that would be bad. I was going to give it to our logistics department and have them go over the materials more carefully. I only wanted to help you! Help you!”

“You wanted to tell Yu Hua, right?” Huan Zixu said firmly. “You were going to tell him that I wanted to use public money to buy an apartment!”

Lian Yufan raised his hands, looking innocent. “No, definitely not.”

Huan Zixu took out a coin and aimed it at Lian Yufan. Clenching his teeth, he said, “Looks I really ought to give myself a safeguard. Conscience is unreliable indeed.”

Lian Yufan made a decisive getaway, and Huan Zixu chased after, holding up his coin. Behind him, the mechanical skeleton watched his retreating figure and crackled a happy laugh.

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Author’s Note:

Huan Zixu: What’s a conscience? How much money is it worth?

Lian Yufan: What’s a conscience? How many lives is it worth?

They look each other in the eye and shake hands to indicate that they share the same ideas.

They turn away and spit simultaneously. This person is too heartless, not worth associating with.

## CHAPTER 84

Yu Hua wasn’t a god, and he wasn’t all-knowing and all-powerful. The “Tyrant” ability had limits, and using the “rule writer” had preconditions.

He first needed to define the people he wanted to formulate rules for, for example, the “Tyrant” referred to himself, “common people” referred to ordinary people without special abilities, “soldiers” were special ability users who had come into contact with the black-cloaked man and who had been “controlled” by him.

“Control” didn’t mean that they had obeyed him. As long as they had once belonged to the category of his subordinates, whether willing or not, they were all “controlled.”

Of course, if he consumed all the true natural law power of this world, then he could formulate even more rules, and he wouldn’t be under so many restrictions. Though Yu Hua wouldn’t do that now.

Completely protecting this world’s ordinary people and stimulating the abilities of the studio’s members was all he could do without shaking the rule of the world law.

This world had struggled against the System’s oppression for hundreds of years without his protection. Right now, Yu Hua didn’t need to instruct each person step by step on how to reach a victory. He only needed to lend a helping hand.

The traffic on the road became heavier. This car could no longer be used.

Yu Hua opened the car door. The moment he got out, people passing in the street lowered their heads. Even the surveillance camera at the intersection changed direction, unable to look directly at the “Tyrant.”

Yu Hua pointed. The off-road car stopped in the middle of the road moved to the side of the road, crowding into a parking space.

He leapt onto a roof and looked at the only area that hadn’t been controlled by his law. The area by the estate near the studio had become a little world unto itself.

Law couldn’t prescribe law. Unless he entirely consumed the other person’s natural law power, his orders wouldn’t be able to take effect inside that person’s little world.

That Yu Hua could protect this world was because the world law had given way to a certain degree. But this person had no intention of yielding, staunchly persevering under Yu Hua’s law.

On the one hand, there was the trapped estate and his old friend back from the dead. On the other hand, there was the icebound You Zhengping. Which should he choose?

There was a balance in Yu Hua’s heart, weighted towards You Zhengping from the start. He didn’t need to hesitate.

But when he had just taken a step in You Zhengping’s direction, the “rule writer” in his hand began to shake fiercely.

Yu Hua released it, and the brush flew into the air and wrote with the rain: *I want to rescue more people, protect...*

The transparent writing slid and blurred from the effect of gravity, disappearing. Yu Hua didn’t have time to read clearly what was written after “protect” before it mixed with the rain and was gone. The brush was suspended in midair, the tip of it pointing towards the central park.

The “rule writer” was the name of Yu Hua’s initial item. Previously, this brush had entirely merged with his body, but presently he had only unsealed 50% of his power, so his soul ability hadn’t entirely fused with his origin ability; it could only manifest in the form of a brush.

Though it hadn’t merged with his body, not allowing him to use all the power of the brush, there was still no one but him who could use this brush.

There was only one exception.

The person with whom the “Tyrant” was willing to share his domain.

This was a “rule” that You Zhengping had unconsciously used the “rule writer” to write. He hadn’t deliberately formulated anything. It was only that the brush had sensed his fervent wish.

The “rule writer” had no self-awareness. It had only written those quickly disappearing words in the air because it had been touched by You Zhengping’s consciousness.

This wasn’t a rule for others. It was a rule he had set for himself. When the “rule writer” was used on the user himself, the user could command unprecedented power.

“I understand.” Yu Hua took hold of the brush. “I will carry out the rule that you’ve set, rescue more people. You...rescue yourself!”

The constantly shaking brush, which had been unwilling to be put into Yu Hua’s pocket, calmed after he said this and obediently allowed itself to be put away.

This was You Zhengping’s conviction. As the captain of the Xuyang District Protectors, he had to personally rescue more people; he didn’t need someone else to rescue him.

Yu Hua was an excellent family member to Captain You. How could he disturb the captain in the course of carrying out his mission?

All he could do was to rescue the people in that estate, providing firm backing.

Yu Hua changed direction, decisively running towards the estate.

You Zhengping, having no idea what he had done, was resisting the head of the league’s law bit by bit.

While the space holding the weapons had been shattered, the spaces stockpiling energy sources and hiding the other Protectors hadn’t been impacted by the temperature. In the ice coffin, Cen Xiao still seemed to be struggling.

The law that the head of the league had laid down was that  $-200^{\circ}\text{C}$  was absolute zero; everything would freeze.

But as long as it didn’t reach  $-200^{\circ}\text{C}$ , then the law wouldn’t go into effect. The natural law power that the head of the league controlled was only superficial; it wasn’t perfect at all.

Because they contained heat sources, the spaces hiding the energy and his teammates hadn’t dropped to  $-200^{\circ}\text{C}$  as the head of the league had expected. Inside the space, his teammates were still struggling tenaciously.

You Zhengping brought the space with the stockpile of energy closer to Cen Xiao. He wanted to bring out the energy in the space to support from the outside what Cen Xiao was doing from the inside, break the ice coffin, defeat the head of the league.

But he was really too sleepy. Even as a Protector, under the influence of the low temperature and the law, his thoughts were freezing. He couldn’t think, and he was gradually losing his grip over his spaces.

Just a little more, just a little bit more... You Zhengping struggled to hold on, but his thoughts were getting hazier and hazier. He was about to fall asleep.

Just then, in his trance, he seemed to hear a voice.

*Rule 1, Rule 2, Rule 3, the Tyrant...* Rule after rule poured into his brain, not through speech but by some more intense unspeakable connection.

Instinctively, You Zhengping knew that Yu Hua had acted. Faced with a large-scale attack from the Destroyers, the black-cloaked man had bravely stepped in once more.

Rules... He was even using natural law power. How much power had he unsealed? With this much power, was there still room to turn back? Could he...still live a peaceful life?

When others mentioned the black-cloaked man, what they said was “the black-cloaked man is powerful,” “how can he be so strong,” “I envy the black-cloaked man’s power,” but You Zhengping, who understood Yu Hua better than anyone else, though, “You’ve shouldered such great power, fought the System for so many years. Are you tired?”

In all these battles, You Zhengping had never had extravagant expectations of support, expectations that the black-cloaked man would come to rescue them. This world was their own. It was up to the Protectors to protect it.

After clearing, Yu Hua had wanted to live the life of an ordinary person. From among all the worlds, he had chosen this one. Why?

Because this was an unopened world that the System had been having trouble controlling for many years. Because the Protectors had kept the natural law intact countless times in the face of Destroyers. Yu Hua knew that it was safe here. That was why he had chosen it.

If the Protectors couldn’t protect this world relying on their own power, then what meaning was there in Yu Hua’s choice?

Here, at least, You Zhengping had to win this battle for himself!

He thought had he had overlooked something. What was it?

The power that the head of the league was using was the law of temperature. They had raised the threshold of absolute zero to  $-200^{\circ}\text{C}$  and could freeze energy. That was why his space had shattered.

But there was something wrong. What? You Zhengping struggled to recall what he had learned of physics, mathematics, chemistry, and other branches of learning. A notion appeared in his brain: space wasn’t energy. It was an objective reality in which matter existed. It was boundless and infinite.



Could such a thing be frozen?

He had only ever heard of objects being frozen, the microparticles within matter being frozen. Who had ever heard of space freezing?

No, if the head of the league's temperature could freeze the spaces, then You Zhengping's understanding of them was wrong.

His spaces were meant to exist within the world but also independently of the world. They were parallel to this world. They existed in a multidimensional universe. They weren't inside this park.

This was all wrong, for the first space, the second space, or the shape-changing third space. Space was boundless. Why would his spaces have set sizes?

If they had a size, then they weren't space. They were boundaries that could open doors to space.

It was his thoughts and perceptions that limited the boundaries of the spaces.

You Zhengping's head cleared a little. He didn't open the energy space to work with Cen Xiao like he had before. Instead, he attempted for the first time to link the first space, the second space, and the third space.

The spaces had never been first, second, and third. These supposed three spaces were only three doors.

What would happen if he merged all the doors together?

The "rule writer" understood its master's feelings better than even Yu Hua did. From the moment it had been unsealed, it had lent a portion of its power to You Zhengping. Under the impetus of this power, You Zhengping accomplished something never before brought about—combining the three spaces into one.

The head of the league, who had been sure of success, saw ordinary people coming over to look at the snow and realized something was wrong. But it was too late.

"So it's a law that power inside the spaces will be reduced to one tenth." You Zhengping, who had just been unfrozen, rubbed his shoulders. "I've been using a rudimentary form of natural law power without knowing it."

"When did you..." the head of the league asked in disbelief.

You Zhengping frowned. "It's kind of a pain to understand my ability. You could explain it by saying I just opened a spatial passage and jumped from the park to a parallel space where all power is reduced to one tenth. I also took my companions there."

Then he kicked the ice coffin, saying to Cen Xiao inside it, "Being reduced to one tenth means it's -20°C. A little chill like that, and you still can't get out?"

Cen Xiao smacked the ice coffin, and a small crack at last appeared in it. With You Zhengping and Cen Xiao attacking together, the ice coffin shattered completely. Cen Xiao walked out from inside, holding a small flame in his hand. He asked, "Did you forget that my power is also reduced to one tenth? This is all I have left!"

They dangled themselves like this in front of the head of the league. The head of the league doubtfully released countless ice blades to stab at them, but the ice blades passed through You Zhengping and the others.

You Zhengping spread his hands. "Didn't I say? We exist in a different dimension from the one you exist in. You can see us, but you can't touch us. Not unless I open a spatial passage—like this."

As he spoke, You Zhengping suddenly opened a spatial passage next to the head of the league. Cen Xiao threw out a punch, which landed heavily on the head of the league's face.

Then he quickly withdrew his hand. Shaking it, he said, "Good heavens, it's cold around them!"

"That's because your hand just went to the space where they are. The temperature is -200°C," You Zhengping said. "So we can only hit once and then pull back. If we stay too long, we'll be frozen by absolute zero again."

"Got it." The squad members made "okay" signs towards You Zhengping, indicating that he should focus on opening and closing spatial passages, leaving the coordinated attacks to them.

What followed was a one-sided brawl. The head of the league was separated by space. They could only see their actions, not attack them. But the six Protectors in You Zhengping's squad could cooperate closely to incessantly attack them through the spatial passages. It was simply unscrupulous.

A punch here and a kick there, a fireball here and a wind there—none of them had strong power, but added together, it was enough to exhaust the head of the league's energy.

Most importantly, the head of the league had been barely in control of the natural law power to start with. They couldn't hold out very long. There were more and more traces of cracked ice on their body. At last, under the combined attack of the six people, they turned into ice crystals and dissipated in midair.

After they disappeared, the snow in the central park instantly melted, and the rain fell with a patter.

You Zhengping opened a spatial passage, and his teammates walked out. There was no pleasure in their victory.

They hadn't defeated the head of the league. The head of the league had died from being unable to bear the natural law power.

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Author's Note:

Yu Hua: When the emperor is ill, the empress rules in his place. I think that's very reasonable.

You Zhengping: Actually, I did use my own power to win...

## CHAPTER 85

"Director Xiao says that Yuan Luori has captured a Destroyer. He wants us to hurry back to base to take part in the interrogation as soon as we're done with our battle," Cen Xiao said to You Zhengping, putting down his communications device.

Reporting on the status of the battle should have been You Zhengping's responsibility as captain, but after the ice person had vanished, he had stood unmoving among the unmelting ice crystals, as if he had forgotten to report. As deputy captain, Cen Xiao had taken his place in performing this task.

Cen Xiao didn't know what You Zhengping had seen. When his spatial ability had emerged just now, Cen Xiao had been aware that the world You Zhengping saw was different from what ordinary special ability users like them saw.

He and his teammates couldn't even comprehend what You Zhengping's so-called parallel spaces and spatial passages meant. They only knew that in the battle just now, the Destroyer head of the league's power had been unable to break through You Zhengping's space to harm them, while they could go through doors You Zhengping opened in the space to hurt the head of the league.

This multidimensional usage went far beyond the scope of the three-dimensional world. But if a human being absolutely had to use speech to comprehend this sort of power and tried to describe it, dropping a dimension and using a two-dimensional piece of paper could explain it.

Looking at the area around the central park as a picture hanging on a wall, You Zhengping's power amounted to reflection, photography, or some other copying method of producing a man-made forgery. Then he had instantly moved Cen Xiao and the others into the forgery.

In this forgery, all power was a tenth of what it was in the original picture. The Destroyer's power had also been suppressed to one tenth, so their body temperatures had naturally warmed up. Originally, the temperature had been lowered from 30°C to -200°C; the total

change was 230°C. After being lowered to one tenth, the change in temperature was only 23°C. Seven degrees above zero couldn't harm the Protectors.

To use a three-dimensional example, the forgery You Zhengping had created was ten centimeters away from the original pictures, and it was on a different dimension of the coordinate plane. The Destroyer couldn't break through the boundaries of dimension to attack the people in the other picture, but they could see them in the reflection, so they had mistakenly thought that those people were in the same space as them, but the attacks they had attempted had failed.

To explain two-dimensionally, You Zhengping could draw a line between the forgery and the original, and the members of the Protector squad could attack through that line. If the Destroyer wanted to hurt them, the only means was to counterattack at the moment of their attack.

One wonders who would be able to understand these rules in the midst of battle and then fight back while also outnumbered by the other side.

Under the absolute control of the law, the Destroyer had had no power to resist. If they had been able to entirely grasp the power of temperature, they might still have stood a fighting chance. Sadly, they had been unable to contain that power and in the end had been crushed between the internal and external attacks, turning into countless ice crystals floating through the air.

You Zhengping removed the parallel space and returned to the real world with the others. Standing where the head of the league had disappeared with the ice crystals falling on him, he gently closed his eyes.

"Save me..." The last words the head of the league had left behind using natural law power echoed in You Zhengping's brain. Cen Xiao and the others couldn't hear this sound.

The head of the league hadn't moved to kill them. They had emphasized that they were going to die, but they had launched their attack as quickly as possible, and had even let You Zhengping understand the true use of his spaces.

Had they truly not noticed You Zhengping's other spaces? At the time, You Zhengping's so-called spatial ability had been to trap objects between two passages. He hadn't truly established an alternate space. That was why Destroyer 192's bombs had been able to hurt him.

It was when the head of the league's ice power had shattered the first space's passage that You Zhengping had understood that it wasn't a true space, only something floating on the surface.

"Did they really want to kill us?" You Zhengping asked, opening his eyes and turning to Cen Xiao. "Maybe they wanted us to kill them."

This was Cen Xiao's first time seeing his friend look so lost. He sighed. "Maybe they weren't here of their own accord, but are you telling me that we're participating in this war willingly?"

The peaceful world behind the Protectors didn't allow them to retreat. They built walls with their flesh and blood, not letting the wind and rain outside harm the people within the walls.

"You're right." You Zhengping spread his hand. A few ice crystals were slowly melting in his palm.

"According to Yuan Luori's intelligence, there are five battlefields in all in the Xuyang District. Yuan Luori and Luo Huai's squad working together took Destroyer 183 alive. Director Xiao eliminated the water type Destroyer who wantonly destroyed property and harmed countless passersby near the base. Lian Yufan, along with Feng Kui and Huan Zixu, who suddenly recovered their powers, defeated Destroyer 217, but they don't have Yuan Luori's vision, so before they could arrest Destroyer 217, he self-destructed under the System's control. And we've defeated the head of the Clearing League," Cen Xiao reported the battle situation to You Zhengping.

"And the last one? Weren't there five? Who's over there?" You Zhengping asked.

"Yuan Luori said that that's where the most awful power is, but the black-cloaked man went there, and now the whole area's energy has disappeared. The black-cloaked man must have taken care of his opponent," Cen Xiao said. "Lian Yufan, who's closest, has already gone to investigate. He didn't find anything unusual. The estate's residents are safe and sound. Only Captain Liu of the criminal police's Junjun is missing. He went out before the rain started, and he hasn't come back. He must have gone somewhere far off. The civil police from the local station are looking for him."

"Lian Yufan didn't see the black-cloaked man?" You Zhengping asked.

He had just had a peculiar feeling, as though that person who was always on his mind had vanished and was nowhere to be found.

When the black-cloaked man had unfolded his natural law power, You Zhengping had still been able to sense Yu Hua's presence.

"He didn't, and there were no unusual signs of battle on the scene," Cen Xiao said. "It must be like before. He helped us dispatch the opponent, then left."

According to common sense, that should be right. The black-cloaked man was the clearer, the one the System was doing everything it could to get rid of. Who could defeat him? Since the enemy's energy had disappeared, then the black-cloaked man must have been victorious.

But You Zhengping's feeling of panic grew more and more intense. The lost child, the rescued estate residents... You Zhengping held his chest, hardly able to breathe.

He rushed to get out his phone and call Yu Hua, but he received a notice of “This party is not in service range.”

“Calling Yu Hua?” Cen Xiao said, nodding. “That’s right, at a time like this, you ought to be worrying about your family. His studio is so close to the battle. He may have been frightened. You have to call him.”

His friend’s heart was at last returning to his household. Cen Xiao was very glad. He also heard the “This party is not in service range” notice and consoled You Zhengping: “The battle knocked over some signal towers. There are many areas without service. That’s normal.”

You Zhengping put down his phone and suddenly said, “Get in contact with Yuan Luori. Ask him whether he sensed our presence while we were in the parallel space earlier.”

“How could he see from such a distance?” Cen Xiao muttered.

Though he still dialed Yuan Luori and passed the phone to You Zhengping so he could ask for himself. You Zhengping listened to Yuan Luori’s answer: “To survey the battlefields, I borrowed a telescope and stood high up observing the whole Xuyang District. I got such a scare just now. Your energy reaction disappeared completely. I thought that the head of the league had killed you.”

You Zhengping asked, “You can’t see a bit of the black-cloaked man’s energy reaction?”

“No,” Yuan Luori said, “he can withdraw his energy field. He must be hiding.”

“Understood.” You Zhengping broke the connection.

“What are you worried about?” Cen Xiao reminded You Zhengping, “The black-cloaked man is so strong. Nothing will happen.”

You Zhengping shook his head. “Apart from the black-cloaked man winning and leaving while hiding his identity, there’s another possibility—that they went into another space to fight. Yuan Luori is limited by the law and can’t see them, just like the Destroyer just now couldn’t attack us.”

You Zhengping returned the communications device to Cen Xiao and decisively said, “You take the squad back to base to attend the meeting. I’m going to have a look around the estate.”

He hopped onto his police-issue motor scooter and was just about to start it when Cen Xiao pulled his arm. “If it’s how you guessed and there’s a power that can trap even the black-cloaked man, what’s the use of you going? It’s just a suicide mission. Think of Yu Hua, why don’t you.”

You Zhengping pulled off Cen Xiao's hand. "I know that even though I can use natural law power now, my power is still just a drop in the ocean in front of them. But what if I'm the last straw that decides the battle? The black-cloaked man...has saved us so many times. I can't let him fight alone."

He firmly put on his helmet and opened the throttle as far as it would go, galloping as though flying towards Zhen Li's studio.

You Zhengping knew that Yu Hua was powerful, but he also trusted his instincts. The System had planned its move for over a month and then abruptly launched such a large-scale attack. They couldn't leave empty-handed.

The black-cloaked man had passed 3,841 levels and had fought hundreds of thousands of battles with the System. There was too much time in the past that You Zhengping hadn't taken part in. Did the black-cloaked man truly have no weak points? Was there really nothing the System could do to him?

That was impossible.

You Zhengping remembered Yu Hua's diary, remembered the lonely look that sometimes appeared in Yu Hua's eyes, and the morbid desire for control that he struggled to suppress. All of it showed that Yu Hua wasn't all-conquering.

Before he had perhaps been unable to help, even had only been able to cause Yu Hua trouble, but...at the very least, he could cheer Yu Hua on.

He had just used natural law power to protect all the ordinary people in the Xuyang District. He shouldn't be allowed to fight alone!

You Zhengping poured his power into the throttle. The motor scooter had long ago exceeded its top speed. The little police issue scooter sped along the road like a high grade engine. It nimbly drove through roads blocked with traffic, ran red lights, traveled along pedestrian paths, went against the flow of traffic, broke the speed limit... In a very few short minutes, You Zhengping violated all the traffic regulations. Right now, he didn't care about disciplinary actions. He only wanted to reach Yu Hua as soon as possible.

In less than five minutes, You Zhengping arrived outside the estate. The scooter's front tire was smoking, and the back tire had burst.

Just as You Zhengping reached the estate, it was as though he was confined by some power. It was a kind of rule, a rule that was hard for him to resist with his current powers.

He tossed aside the motor scooter, which had turned into a heap of scrap metal, and went into the estate, letting his instinct lead the way. He came to a patch of greenery in the estate. On one of the estate's pedestrian streets, a man in black clothes was standing in the rain with an open umbrella lying at his feet.

The man in black was clearly standing in the rain, but not a drop touched him. The rain couldn't reach him.

You Zhengping went up to the man in black and said firmly, "So you're the fifth Destroyer sent by the System!"

The man in black clothes swept You Zhengping with his gaze and spread his hand. There was an energy probe labeled 5-5 in it. He glanced at the energy probe and said in some astonishment, "So a world with intact law has a holder of natural law power like you. The world law would even weaken its own defenses to entrust you with spatial law power. Who *are* you?"

"Where's Yu Hua?" You Zhengping looked around the deserted greenery. He had a feeling that Yu Hua was here, was in front of him, but he couldn't see Yu Hua.

"He's here, but he's also not here," the man in black said. "I'm also here but not here."

Another person might not have understood this, but You Zhengping went up to the man in black and waved his hand at the man's head. His hand passed through the man in black's body.

You Zhengping picked the umbrella up off the ground. The umbrella really did exist, but the man in black wasn't in this space...

No, it wasn't that the man in black wasn't in this space, it was that the man in black didn't belong to this dimension of time.

"Are you a projection from the past or the future?" You Zhengping asked firmly.

Now that he understood something of natural law power, he could work out what was happening.

There was nothing wrong with the estate. It truly existed. And there was no other space here. The real illusion was the man in black. He didn't exist in this time.

"My time is half an hour slower than yours." The man in black tapped the watch on his wrist. The time it showed was 17:08.

You Zhengping's wristwatch showed 17:39. The man in black was from thirty-one minutes in the past.

He didn't exist in this minute, so the rain wouldn't wet him, just as rain that fell at 17:39 couldn't pass through time to fall on the ground at 17:08.

You Zhengping's ability was dimensions in space, while this person's was dimensions in time.



At its root, time composed a portion of spatial dimensions, but with You Zhengping's current grasp of natural law power, he couldn't touch time, which exceeded the three dimensional world.

"You've trapped Yu Hua in some natural law?" You Zhengping asked.

"I didn't trap him. He went in voluntarily for the sake of saving a dog and child," the man in black said, smiling. "I was shocked. If he was outside the law, he could have rolled right over my little world with his power and destroyed it. But when he found out that I was holding a person and a dog, he gave up on destroying my little world altogether and went in to save them."

A child and a dog... You Zhengping had heard Lian Yufan say that studio's dog was in a higher position than he was, and the dog was a traitor, only wagging its tail towards a little boy.

It was the missing Junjun and the studio's Director Ha. For the sake of saving them, Yu Hua had willingly gone into a trap.

You Zhengping wasn't surprised. He said, "What is there to be shocked about? He's always been very gentle."

"Really?" The man in black was slightly surprised. "We seem to have different information. Let me introduce myself. My name is Guan Shaoguang. I wield a bit of time natural law power. I'm...a dead man."

Hearing this last sentence, You Zhengping wasn't surprised. Outside the natural law of time, anything could happen. He calmly introduced himself. "You Zhengping. I'm Yu Hua's husband, the kind recognized by law. We're married."

"Married? That 'Tyrant' got married? You can bear his despotism?" Guan Shaoguang's expression became more and more astonished.

"Cut the crap. If I want to rescue Yu Hua, do I need to kill you?" You Zhengping wasn't going to listen to this person trying to sow discord in their relationship. "Don't think that just because you're a projection from the past I won't be able to take you on!"

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Author's Note:

You Zhengping: Violating traffic regulations is improper behavior. Kids, don't imitate me. Obey traffic regulations!

## CHAPTER 86

You Zhengping entered battle-ready mode. He didn't really know what was going on, but he couldn't give up ground in terms of being imposing.

But Guan Shaoguang waved his hand and said, "I'm only a projection from the past. I have no combat ability. The present world has no way to touch me, and I can't influence this world, either. My mission was only to lure Yu Hua into my little world. As for what traps there are in the little world, I'm not sure. Those traps were made by my main form."

He seemed to have a mild and cool nature. He had no aggression and also no sentiment.

You Zhengping understood him. "Time" was a man-made concept for the human experience of the passage of events. It was an extremely abstract concept.

A rather famous time paradox was that a person would go back to the past, and his actions would lead to killing his ancestor. So this person wouldn't have been born. But if the future him wouldn't be born, then how could he kill his ancestor? There was no way to explain this.

But it could be clearly understood with the Protectors' theory of special abilities.

If a special ability user only possessed a time ability, he only had the power to go back to a certain time on the coordinate plane. So even if he went back to the past, nothing he did would change history. His future self would be unable have any impact on the past.

But if this person simultaneously possessed a time ability and a spatial ability, after going back to the past, his spatial ability could open a linking dimension passage. Then he could change the past. The changed past would turn into its own space, forming a parallel universe from the original historical timeline. The original world would still be going on normally; nothing could change and nothing could disappear. It was only that a new world would have been created.

You Zhengping had studied this theory in individual study during middle school. Because he had a spatial ability, his instructors had found a physicist to come instruct him in this field. He had also been instructed that spatial power was a very dangerous ability. It couldn't be abused.

The Guan Shaoguang in front of him was a projection from the past. He couldn't harm this world. When the energy keeping him here was used up, he would naturally disappear. He could be ignored.

Top priority was to find the connecting point between the little world and the real world, open a "door," then go in to find Yu Hua.

Opening passages between spaces was You Zhengping's strong point. He only needed to find the rules that the space operated on.

You Zhengping walked back and forth through the greenery. He could feel that the linking point was here.

“Even if you don’t go in, he’ll still come out,” Guan Shaoguang said to You Zhengping. “I know his power. If he’s only willing to undo his seal, he can completely crush the little world. Then I’ll die.”

Speaking of his death, Guan Shaoguang’s face was serene. He didn’t seem to fear death at all.

“Right,” You Zhengping agreed carelessly, ignoring the subtext in Guan Shaoguang’s words.

He knew that everything Guan Shaoguang said was dropping hints about Yu Hua’s past. He probably wanted You Zhengping to question him. That way, Guan Shaoguang could show him a distorted past, twisting his impression of Yu Hua.

You Zhengping was a member of the Protection Organization, and he was the person closest to Yu Hua. If he told the organization about Yu Hua, Yu Hua would be under attack from the front and the rear, facing a pincer attack from the System and the Protection Organization.

Most importantly, if the person closest to him betrayed him, it would be a major shock to Yu Hua’s mind.

Guan Shaoguang’s scheme was mistaken. No matter what he said, You Zhengping wouldn’t believe it.

Who was You Zhengping? Yu Hua had filled their apartment with evidence that he was the black-cloaked man, and You Zhengping had still been able to pretend not to see. If he really wanted to understand Yu Hua, was there any need for Guan Shaoguang to speak? As long as he was interested, Yu Hua would perhaps write it all out in his diary, shove it into his backpack, and wait for him to find it.

Seeing that You Zhengping showed absolutely no reaction, Guan Shaoguang couldn’t resist asking, “Aren’t you curious about why he sealed his power? Aren’t you curious about how strong he truly is? Are you going to tell me that he told you everything?”

You Zhengping stopped in his tracks and sighed. “While you’re only a projection from the past, you’re kind of noisy. You say a lot of superfluous things, too.”

He took a stride towards Guan Shaoguang, picked up the black umbrella on the ground, and closed the umbrella. He aimed the tip of the umbrella at Guan Shaoguang and drew a door in the air.

If not for the rain going around the door frame, outlining the shape of the “door,” no one would have been able to see that there was an invisible but solid door there.

You Zhengping opened the umbrella and pushed the “door” with the top of it. The “door” kept moving back, forcing Guan Shaoguang through it.

It didn't matter if Guan Shaoguang didn't want to go in. The "door" could move. If he passed through the "door," he would be in the little space created by You Zhengping, and his power would be reduced to one tenth. Guan Shaoguang was a projection from the past created by time power. He would disappear ten times faster.

You Zhengping closed the "door" and waited for the past projection to disappear. He closed the space so it wouldn't have any impact on the real world.

In the parallel world, Guan Shaoguang kept saying something, but You Zhengping plugged his ears. He had closed the passage for sound. No matter what Guan Shaoguang said, he wouldn't hear it.

You Zhengping searched for the entrance to the little world like a headless fly, but he couldn't find it no matter what. He felt that Yu Hua was here, perhaps even beside him, but he couldn't touch him.

What should he do? You Zhengping stood among the greenery at a loss, considering what decisive thing could be lacking.

He lifted the black umbrella. This black umbrella was something that Guan Shaoguang had touched. Perhaps he had even opened the little worlds while holding the umbrella over himself. Reasonably speaking, normal touches would leave traces. With this umbrella as a medium, he had to be able to open the door to the little world. But how should he turn it into a medium?

You Zhengping seemed deranged, and he was wearing a police uniform. The estate's property management agent couldn't stand it any longer; he came over to see him, carrying an umbrella.

"Young fellow, you keep wandering around the estate. What are you looking for?" the man asked. "Has something happened in our estate? There have earthquakes and buildings collapsing today. Another young fellow just came by to investigate."

The property management agent must have been talking about Lian Yufan. Lian Yufan had just come by here to confirm that there were no casualties.

You Zhengping recalled Cen Xiao's report and bowed to the man. He said, "Because Liu Junjun still hasn't been found, I've come to look for clues. My colleague who came by before was responsible for summing up the impact of the calamity on the area. He wasn't responsible for searching for missing persons. The police bureau sent me on purpose to investigate the disappearance."

Because he and Yu Hua had been mutually concealing their identities from each other before, You Zhengping, who had been of a candid disposition to start off with, now had lies at his fingertips. He could easily think of a suitable reason. He suddenly felt a trace of sadness for this change in himself.

You Zhengping longed for candor more than anyone else, but at some point, he had become a liar.

“Oh, it’s to find Junjun.” The property management agent relaxed at once. “I just said to that young fellow that Junjun must be all right. I didn’t see him leave the estate.”

“Can you tell me in detail about Liu Junjun?” You Zhengping asked.

The property management agent, recalling, said, “He’s a good child. He used to always be playing with scooters or skateboards with a crowd of kids, but since he met a husky, he hasn’t been playing much with his little companions. He’s been getting up early every day to walk the dog, as if he’d been enchanted, and walking the dog after dinner. The walks are very boisterous.

“Today it was raining, so he put on his raincoat and was waiting outside early. I told him that he shouldn’t wait. Who walks dogs in the rain? He said he had arranged to meet with Xiao Ha, and Xiao Ha would come.

“I said that on a rainy day, the dog’s owner wouldn’t let it out. But he said that Xiao Ha could come on its own, just as if the dog could talk.”

“Did Xiao Ha come?” You Zhengping asked.

“No, and after waiting for a while, Junjun also vanished. There, he was waiting right over there.” The man pointed to a spot not far away. “I didn’t see Junjun leave the estate. That young fellow just now searched the security camera from the estate’s gate. The child didn’t leave. He must have gone somewhere to play in the rain, right? Children are naughty. They’re always worried about being found out by grownups when they play in the rain.”

“Thank you, sir,” You Zhengping said. “I’ll keep looking.”

“It really is fine, nothing’s going to happen in the estate. Of course, people feel uneasy if a child is missing, so I hope you’ll be able to find him soon,” the property management agent said generously. Seeing that the young police officer didn’t want to investigate any major case, he went back to the little pavilion at the gates with his umbrella.

You Zhengping went to the spot that the property management agent had pointed to and search in the grass, hoping to find a clue that would link to them.

In the space, Guan Shaoguang’s form became more and more transparent; he had nearly vanished.

You Zhengping knelt in the grass and searched here and there. There was nothing. He stared at the lawn for a while and saw that the rain had made a little ditch in it, bringing up scraps of stone and sand.

You Zhengping followed the direction of the flow of the water and found a tuft of dog fur caught on a rock.

Huskies shed enormously in the summer. Even a young husky whose body was still growing would shed quite a lot. Even as cleanly a person as Yu Hua would sometimes accidentally bring home a few dog hairs. Every time he found dog hair, Yu Hua would be unhappy, saying he wanted to stew the dog.

But now, this tuft of dog fur would become the passage that linked the little world to the actual world.

You Zhengping jumped up happily. He felt the power in the dog fur and finally found a spot where energy was twisted.

Guan Shaoguang's body was fainter and fainter. While You Zhengping glanced at him before departing, he said soundlessly to him from the space, "Even if you go in, you still won't find him. This is the distant past. Yu Hua's appearance, power, and temperament are completely different. You won't recognize him."

"There's no need for you to worry," You Zhengping answered coldly when he had understood the movements of his lips.

The energy in the space dispersed, and Guan Shaoguang vanished. You Zhengping withdrew the space and decisively used the twisted energy to open the entrance to the little world. He jumped in.

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Author's Note:

Guan Shaoguang: Listen to me—

You Zhengping: I'm not listening I'm not listening I'm not listening!

Yu Hua (soothing smile): Xiao You has always been an expert at turning a blind eye and a deaf ear.

Guan Shaoguang: Why is that something to be proud of?

Guan Shaoguang: You won't recognize him.

You Zhengping: I'm sure to fall in love at first sight!

## CHAPTER 87

Yu Hua was dreaming. In his dream, someone was saying to him, "You can ignore the lives of this person and this dog and kill me again. You can also enter this little world for the sake of rescuing them. Everything will return to the very beginning. You'll be at everyone's mercy."

The Yu Hua in the dream was very cold, as cold as a piece of ice. He heard “himself” haughtily say, “According to time law, the master of the law also has to return to the very beginning and be in the middle of things. It’s unavoidable.”

“I know, so my main form is already inside waiting for you,” said the man wearing black clothes and holding an umbrella who seemed to come from an earlier time.

“You’ve always liked doing superfluous things,” Yu Hua said, walking directly towards a twisted space.

When Yu Hua was about to step into the space, the man in black suddenly said, “So you would willingly return to a time when you had nothing, all for the sake of rescuing a dog and a child. Are you telling me you don’t know that in this little world, everything is fake, and only death is an unalterable truth?”

The Yu Hua in the dream paused and smiled scornfully. “What is there worth saving about a damn dog and a strange child? I only want to tell you that if you come back again, I’ll kill you again.”

He turned his head to look at the man in black. Written in his eyes was, “The disparity between you and me can’t be made up by trying again.”

Faced with Yu Hua’s taunt, the man in black smiled faintly. “Arrogant, despotic, controlling... You’re still you. In all these years, you haven’t changed. Since you’re so self-confident, be sure not to undo your seal. After all, given the current situation, if you undo the seal, then...”

Then what? Yu Hua woke with a start. He tapped on his own head. Why couldn’t the dream continue a little longer?

The self in the dream was completely different from the self in his memories. Yu Hua was a rather idealistic university graduate. He had always been class monitor in high school, on good terms with his grade. Throughout university, he had been president of the student union, and the year he had graduated, he had tested to become a teacher in underdeveloped areas, wanting to go to remote locations to teach.

His disposition was good. He was friendly with his fellow students and did what he could to help them and his teachers, and he regularly organized activities for his class. He would never treat anyone coldly.

But the self in the dream was like the man in black clothes had said—arrogant, cold, unfeeling.

Everything must be backwards in dreams. He could never become like that. Perhaps the dream had been caused by what he had thought about during the day.

After all, he was currently deeply sunk in a survival game. He didn’t know when he could return to his original world.

He got up off the grass and patted the dog by his feet.

The dog was a husky. It was sleeping soundly, hugging a little boy. When Yu Hua patted it awake, it still looked groggy. It rubbed its head against the little boy's neck.

This dog and the little boy Liu Junjun had come to this strange world along with him. Yu Hua had instinctively thought that he had a duty to look after them and had done everything he could to help them.

Right now, they had to sleep out in the open, gathering grass from the surroundings to cover up their scents. The nights were cold, and the child wasn't as resistant to it as an adult. Luckily Junjun had brought a dog. The husky's fur was lush. It was a natural large-scale hand warmer. Junjun went to sleep hugging the dog every night, and he slept better than the others.

"I told you to keep watch at night. How come you were sleeping more soundly than I was?" Yu Hua said, poking the dog's head.

The husky opened its eyes blearily. The instant it saw Yu Hua, its blue eyes filled with fear. It hid behind Junjun with a *swoosh*, tail tucked tightly between its legs, as though Junjun's body could shield its large form.

Since meeting on this level, this dog had been mortally afraid of him. Yu Hua remembered that he had always gotten along pretty well with small animals. He hadn't expected that to this rather good-looking husky, he would appear so terrifying. This made Yu Hua feel somewhat defeated.

He called out to wake his companions, instructing them, "Go wash up and eat your energy provisions. Brace yourselves. The matches continue today."

His companions got up with difficulty. They hadn't eaten the night before, and in the morning their strength was inadequate.

This was Yu Hua's eleventh level. The first ten had been on newbie mode. Most of the missions had just been to survive. People with good physical conditions, luck, and brains were highly likely to survive. For example, in one world there had been a homicidal maniac hidden in a school; all you had to do was survive until the homicidal maniac was caught. The lucky levelers didn't run into the homicidal maniac and made it through without lifting a finger. The ones in good physical condition encountered the homicidal maniac and ran away. The ones with brains analyzed the clues to find out who was the homicidal maniac and succeeded in capturing him.

The strange thing, Yu Hua didn't have a very deep impression of the previous ten levels. Thinking about it carefully, he did have vague memories of passing those levels, but he couldn't remember the details, as though these things had happened long, long ago. He had taken less than half a year to pass those ten levels. Why did he feel like it had been thousands of years?



During the first ten levels, he had fought alone most of the time. On the eleventh level, team mode had started. Their team had to face off against an opposing team in all kinds of contests, for which team members were chosen at random. There were physical ones, gambling ones, tactical ones, and so on. The victorious team could attain food, articles for daily use, even comfortable housing. The losing team would not only get nothing, they might also be attacked by a wild beast during the night.

Not every team member could draw a sort of game that they were good at. Yesterday they had lost very badly. Luckily, Yu Hua had made a tactical decision not to eat all the food from the last victory, leaving some behind. This way, they could still eat today, so that if they encountered contests of strength they wouldn't fail because their energy failed.

Yu Hua wasn't clear about how his teammates were distributed. When he had entered the level, there had been many teammates passing the level with him. None of them knew how to pass it. They only knew that they had to keep competing. Maybe they would pass when there was an outcome to the contests.

Apart from him, new members were gradually added to the team. Everyone spent each day in confusion with a feeling of living day to day.

Yu Hua had a great deal of confidence. His arrival filled his teammates with new vigor. He was a tactical leveler. He had passed his first ten levels by finding loopholes in them. He thought that there definitely had to be a way for everyone to pass. He just had to look for it patiently.

He quickly became the spiritual leader of the team. Everyone had a good deal of faith in him.

The little boy Junjun and the husky had arrived in this level at the same time as Yu Hua. This child and dog team was very strange. Junjun had no answers to any questions. He didn't have memories of his first ten levels. He said that he had been walking the dog in his estate, and while he'd been walking, he had suddenly arrived here. He didn't know anything.

The dog was an oddity. The System had taken the husky and the little boy as a single leveler. In a physical contest the day before yesterday, it was the husky that had helped Junjun escape and win, gaining quite a bit of emergency rations. These provisions had helped them hold out for two days.

In reality, the husky had won enough food for it and the little boy to eat for a week. But divided among everyone, it was just a mouthful a day.

Yu Hua didn't want to bully a little boy and a husky, but he knew that if they shared, they could preserve some food. If they insisted on guarding this bit of provisions, starving people might snatch their food, causing even more harm.

"Junjun, Xiao Ha, I made the decision to take most of the food you won. That was wrong of me. I'll help you win it back," Yu Hua told the little boy and the dog while they were washing up by the river.

They had lost in the contest yesterday and had been thrown out of a room like a hotel room out into the wild to sleep on withered grass and use river water to do their washing. They had heard that there were wild beasts at night. Yu Hua had told the husky to stand guard, and instead the dog had slept more soundly than the humans. They were alive because their luck had been good.

After apologizing to the child and the dog, Yu Hua also stroked the dog's head and used the river water to do a cursory cleaning of the husky's face, scaring the dog into looking like it had seen a ghost.

Yu Hua thought that he needed to say something to Junjun. He said, "Xiao Ha may be on its guard against me because I took the food it won. Xiao Ha really dislikes me."

While he said this, the husky shook its head wildly, indicating that it was merely a dog, how could it be in a position to dislike Yu Hua? Though its furry face couldn't make a "deadly earnest" expression. Junjun and Yu Hua both took its head shaking to mean loathing and resistance.

"I'll calm it down. Xiao Ha has always been clever, and very reasonable. It'll definitely be able to cooperate with Yu Hua-gege," Junjun said, nodding. "And mom and dad taught me that when you have something tasty, you should share it with other children. That's what I'm supposed to do."

"You aren't supposed to do it. There's no sense in sharing the food you won for yourself with others. Not sharing it is reasonable," Yu Hua explained to this pure child. "But in these circumstances, sharing is more likely to protect your life and safety than not sharing. You shouldn't be kinder than the Virgin Mary, and you also shouldn't be cold to the point of being ruthless. This is the doctrine of the mean in group relationships. Do you understand?"

"Not really, though I'll do what Yu Hua-gege says." Junjun smiled brightly. He was as innocent as though he hadn't experienced the first ten levels.

Yu Hua didn't understand how Junjun had arrived in this level. Maybe he was a luck type leveler.

Junjun stealthily got a piece of milk candy out of his pocket and offered it to Yu Hua. "Yu Hua-gege, this is from my private stash of White Rabbit candy. My mom says that my permanent teeth are growing in, and I'm only allowed one piece of candy a week. Though I hid a few when she wasn't looking. This is for you. The others won't find out about it."

Junjun normally ate some while he was walking Xiao Ha, so there were always a few pieces of candy hidden in his pockets.

Yu Hua hesitated, then put away the child's milk candy. He stroked Junjun's head. "I'll definitely take you through this world."

After putting the candy away, Yu Hua felt dimly that something was wrong. He thought about it, then said to Junjun, "Did you call me...gege?"

"Yes." Junjun put another piece of candy into his own mouth to replenish his strength.

"I just graduated from university. It's normal for you to call me gege," Yu Hua said, frowning. "But why do I think that you ought to be calling me uncle?"

"No way. Gege is too young," Junjun said naturally. "Though you have the same name as Xiao Ha's main owner, Uncle Director Yu Hua. You just look different."

Hearing Junjun call Yu Hua "young," Director Ha wildly dug a hole in the ground and buried its head inside, as though it didn't want people to see its expression.

His name wasn't very rare, so Yu Hua didn't take much notice. He only doubtfully touched his face, wondering why he should think that he wasn't that young.

He was barely over twenty.

After warning Junjun about some things he ought to take note of in the group, Yu Hua got out the food he had personally hidden and gave everyone a portion. There wasn't much food. Everyone only had half a piece of bread. But it was enough to give them energy.

After breakfast, they still had an hour before the start of the new contest. When the time came, they would be taken to a contest space.

This hour was so everyone could vote on whether or not to take part in the contest. They weren't forced to take part, and not taking part wouldn't impact their other teammates. But if the System randomly chose a team member who wasn't in the contest space, it would automatically determine that that team member had lost. No one was going to pass up taking part in the contest. It wasn't only because they did not want to hold their teammates back; it was also because the space supplied seating and warm water. Those participating could at least drink some warm water.

An hour later, the seven people and one dog on the team were all in position. They were taken to the contest space. The team members, who had slept on grass and had sore, aching backs, rushed towards the reclining chairs and poured themselves cups of warm water, drinking to warm themselves and letting out sighs of contentment.

Junjun, however, first put out a cup for Xiao Ha and warned Xiao Ha not to drink scalding water. Then he carried over a cup for himself and drank it slowly. Though he was only an eight-year-old child, he was self-disciplined. He could take good care of himself and the dog.

Yu Hua also hydrated himself and kept his eyes fixed on the big screen on the wall, waiting for the System to pick a contestant. He had been in the eleventh level for three days, and he hadn't been chosen yet.

While he was thinking this, the writing on the big screen began to constantly change. One screen showed the team member who could be chosen, and the other showed the types of contest. The team members themselves had to press the pause button to choose who would take part.

If no one pressed the button and chose a member within ten minutes, and the other side had already chosen, then they would be forfeiting the match.

But who would go press the button? No matter who was chosen, the responsibility would fall on the person who had pressed the button. They would bear the anger of whoever was chosen to participate.

Yu Hua advised everyone to put their hands on the button together, chorus "1-2-3," then all press down. This way, no matter who was chosen, everyone would have one seventh of the responsibility and wouldn't blame anyone.

Seven hands and one paw piled up on the button. After the chorus of "1-2-3," the constantly changing writing on the big screen changed, showing that the contestant was Yu Hua, and the contest event would be of the physical type.

Yu Hua didn't show much of an expression. In fact, it ought to be his turn.

Different teams couldn't see each other's names and appearances. They would go into the contest arena wearing masks to wait for the System's orders.

Yu Hua picked up a silver mask and was taken to the arena. Through the mask, he saw a male contests wearing a white mask with hair dyed rainbow colors coming in.

For some reason, the instant his opponent appeared, Yu Hua's heart skipped a beat.

—

Author's note:

The husky: I'm weak, pitiful, and helpless. I don't see anything.  
You Zhengping: Falling in love at first sight~

## CHAPTER 88

While his heart rate sped up, Yu Hua wanted to laugh. Luckily, he held it in.

Yu Hua had no malice against other levelers, though he knew that some levelers weren't good people at all.

Having gone through the ten newbie worlds, he knew very well that human nature couldn't withstand trials. Most people existed in ordinary surroundings, led regular and conventional lives. Sometimes, because of a bad mood, they might have a few ideas of wrecking society, but they were only thoughts to vent their anger. They wouldn't resort to actions, and it wouldn't impact their regular lives.

But in extreme surroundings, human nature would display all of its varieties.

Yu Hua thought that no man was a sage. He had been unable to avoid putting a foot wrong in these surroundings, so he wouldn't demand that others remain incorruptible.

Even in this battle mode world, he still maintained respect for his opponents.

You had to respect everyone's hobbies and choices. You didn't have to approve, but you couldn't mock.

Though it really was ridiculous.

Yu Hua remembered very well that this world didn't require changing your appearance. There were some worlds where you had to cooperate with that world's living beings and may have to become some different form of hominid. In some worlds, you had to assimilate by hiding your identity; the System would provide a fake identity and make the levelers equip masks to change their appearances. But that wasn't necessary in this world. You could use your own identity among teammates, though not with opponents.

From this he could guess that his opponent had deliberately chosen the rainbow hair. Normally, the sort of person who would choose such a striking style either didn't want a certain person to recognize them, or they were using this sort of eye-catching mode to be viewed in another light. People who used external appearance to attract notice generally looked down on themselves.

Whichever reason it was, it was still no reason for him to mock.

Yu Hua's mask was a half-mask, only hiding his eyes and nose, leaving his mouth uncovered. The corners of his lips didn't rise, but his eyes narrowed. He couldn't resist being amused; luckily he had the mask.

"Hello." Yu Hua politely stretched out his hand. "Though we're opponents in this round and I'll do my best to defeat you, that doesn't mean that we're enemies. Clearing is our common goal, so let's work towards it together."

Yu Hua extended the hand of friendship to each leveler. Though most of them wouldn't answer him, and some would even say he was hiding evil intentions with a smile, he still didn't give up on extending that hand of friendship.

The levelers weren't enemies. They were kindred spirits trapped in this game.

His rainbow haired opponent's hand didn't hesitate. He shook Yu Hua's hand in a friendly way, and even rubbed Yu Hua's palm with his fingers in an ambiguous way.

Yu Hua felt numbness spread from his palm to his whole body. He wanted to yank back his hand, but Rainbow Hair added his other hand, holding Yu Hua's hand in both of his. He said, "You seem very young? Are you twenty-two yet?"

Twenty-two was the legal age of marriage for males.

"I'm old enough." Yu Hua struggled to take back his hand while giving an answer that could mean anything.

*Beep-beep-beep!*

But Rainbow Hair held on tightly to his hand, looking into Yu Hua's eyes.

Looking past the riotously colorful but still tidy short hair, Yu Hua saw his opponent's very clear eyes with his own face reflected in them.

These eyes made Yu Hua feel composed. He didn't try to snatch back his hand anymore. He answered earnestly, "I'm twenty."

He had skipped grades and graduated two years younger than other people.

"Twenty..." Rainbow Hair whispered. "That's very young. A year younger than when I went on the blind date."

Yu Hua found to his surprised that his opponent's voice was very pleasant, bright and clear as the sun. The wariness he had felt because of his opponent's overly intimate physical contact was weakened by this clean voice. He softened his own voice. "Why would you reach the stage of blind dating at only twenty-one?"

Then he reconsidered and shook his head. "No, I'm not supposed to ask personal questions. Do you miss your original world? That's all right, the System says that our time in the game won't have an impact on reality. We only have to work hard to pass levels. When we've cleared, we can go home, and we can have a wish fulfilled. Let's work together to clear."

*Beep-beep-beep!*

“Is that what the System says to new levelers?” Rainbow Hair clenched his teeth. “What a cheat!”

“What did you say?” Yu Hua used his free hand to pinch his ear. He found that he hadn’t heard anything Rainbow Hair had said just now. He had only seen his lips moving. There had been no sound.

Yu Hua didn’t know how to read lips. He couldn’t understand.

“Is this because the System doesn’t let newbies know the truth about these worlds, or is it that I can’t change history?” Rainbow Hair said anxiously. “Pooh! You call this history? It’s not time travel in the real world, it’s only a little world!”

“What did you say?” Yu Hua once again hadn’t heard a word.

*Beep-beep-beep!*

“It’s nothing.” Rainbow Hair was still tightly holding Yu Hua’s hand. “My name is…”

Before he could say his name, Yu Hua quickly covered Rainbow Hair’s mouth with his free hand. “Levelers from different groups can’t exchange names. Don’t say it. You’ll be punished.”

Rainbow Hair was also wearing a half-mask. He blinked. His lips accidentally touched Yu Hua’s palm.

Yu Hua quickly drew back his hand, and simultaneously yanked back the hand tightly held by Rainbow Hair.

*Beep-beep-beep-beep-beep!* The urgent notice from the System had been sounding all along, and the two who had been chatting only now heard it.

They looked together at the System’s big screen and written on it: *The match is about to start. Levelers please get in position as soon as possible. If you aren’t in place after three seconds, both of you will be counted as forfeiting the match. The count begins: 3, 2...*

The two of them rapidly went to their places and were standing on high platforms before the count reached “1.”

As soon as the two of them got into position, the floor of the room, which was over ten thousand square meters in area, began to sink, while their high platforms moved towards two corners of the room, only stopping when they were in the two most distant corners.

On the ceiling, cable wires appeared at every meter. The room was a hundred meters wide. With a cable wire at each meter across the ceiling, it was one-hundred minus one, ninety-nine cable wires.

Then the area that had fallen away at their feet filled with thick acid. The high platforms were gradually corroded by the acid, leaving the two of them with nowhere to place their feet.

Yu Hua and Rainbow Hair jumped at the same time, grabbing hold of a cable wire. The high platforms collapsed entirely and dissolved in the acid. The originally bright and clean room instantly became an inferno. Anyone who couldn't hold on and dropped would fall into the acid and be dissolved like the high platforms.

From each cable wire hung a round little cookie with a radius of one centimeter, attached by twine. The positions of the cookies were arranged in a snake lemma pattern. The cable wire Yu Hua was hanging on was furthest to the left. The cookie on that cable was about ninety-nine meters from the left and one meter from the right. The cookie on the nearest cable wire, though, was two meters from the left, ninety-eight meters from the right.

It was the same for Rainbow Hair. He was hanging on the right most cable wire. On his cable wire, the cookies was at ninety-nine meters right, one meter left.

"No way. This kind of physical contest?" Yu Hua dimly guessed the rules of the contest.

As expected, a mechanical female voice came from the loudspeakers in the corners of the room: "Welcome to the cookie eating game! The rules are as follows—

"First, levelers may only eat cookies in sequence. They can eat from cookie 99 to cookie 1, or from cookie 1 to cookie 99, but the cookies may not be eaten out of sequence. You must begin at 1 or 99. You may not eat cookie 2 first, or eat cookie 1 and then skip cookie 2 to eat cookie 3. If you eat out of sequence, your cable wire will snap, and you will fall into the acid.

"Two, you may not use your hands to touch the cookies.

"Three, you may not touch the cable wires with anything but your hands.

"Four, of the 99 cookies, whichever leveler eats the greater number will win. If either leveler eats cookie 50 first, that will indicate victory.

"Five, anyone who falls into the acid will be considered as having lost.

"Six, this game is a game purely of physical strength. No special abilities are permitted. Levelers are asked to conduct themselves with dignity. Do not use special abilities to cheat.

"Seven, eating the cookies in order does not mean that the levelers must be on the same cable wire as the cookie. Levelers may move freely on the cable wires. There is no problem as long as you don't eat the wrong cookie.

"Eight, this game has no time limit. As long as your strength holds out, levelers may take as long as they like.



“Nine, the loser will fall into the acid.

“Ten, after a leveler is judged to have lost, they may use special abilities to protect themselves.

“Game begins.”

Neither person moved. They looked at each other from opposite ends of the room full of cable wires.

What kind of physical strength game was this? It was clearly a killing each other game! The seventh rule was hinting to the levelers that they could move to where their opponent was and kick him into the acid. Once the other leveler fell, there would be no need to struggle to eat cookies. The attacker would win by default.

It was either go directly to fight the other side at close quarters, or wait until the other side's strength was exhausted and he fell. Even if both of them were very strong, then when it came to the fiftieth cookie, they would still have to have a life and death struggle over it.

Yu Hua had an idea and hesitated over whether to share it with Rainbow Hair. This was his first time seeing Rainbow Hair. He didn't know whether he could trust this person.

But Rainbow Hair at once said acutely, “After we're judged to have lost, we can use our special abilities. There are two ways for us to lose. One is if we can't hold on and drop into the acid, and the other is for the other person to eat more cookies, or to make a stupid mistake and eat the cookies out of order ourselves.

“If it's the first type of loss, we can only be judged as having lost after falling into the acid. That way, we're dead for sure. But with the second type of loss, we'll be judged as having lost before falling into the acid, and we'll have time to bring our special abilities into use and protect ourselves.”

Rainbow Hair was effortlessly holding onto the cable wire with his right hand and holding his chin with his left as he pondered; his physical strength seemed excellent.

While Yu Hua was deliberating about what he should say, Rainbow Hair said, “My special ability will definitely be able to protect me from the acid. You go ahead and eat the cookies. When you eat the fiftieth one, I'll lose the contest. That way, at least we'll both survive.”

“You aren't going to try?” Yu Hua asked.

“Try what? Am I supposed to watch you go to your death?” Rainbow Hair asked. “I don't know what your special ability is, though it must be a special ability that's very weak to start out with and awesomely powerful later. As far as protecting ourselves against the acid, I definitely have the upper hand. So let me do it.”

He hung indolently from the cable wire, really looking as though he wasn't going to move.

Yu Hua licked his lips. "I have a proposal. Maybe it'll mean we both lose, and maybe it'll mean a draw. Will you try it with me?"

"All right," Rainbow Hair agreed cheerfully without even asking about his method.

Yu Hua was moved. He said, "We'll each eat the cookies in order, and when we both get to the fiftieth cable, we'll discuss it further, all right?"

"Fine." Rainbow Hair didn't suspect Yu Hua of treachery. He was even concerned about him. "Are you strong enough to get to the fiftieth cookie? Otherwise, I'll just eat a cookie out of order and lose."

"I can do it," Yu Hua said stubbornly, hearing him question his strength. "My arms and back are very strong."

"I know your back is strong..." Rainbow Hair whispered, though of course, as before, Yu Hua didn't hear this.

Rainbow Hair's strength really was exceptional. He held the cable wire with both hands, did a handstand on it, and easily travelled over the cables wire as though his hands were feet. In a few seconds, he reached cookie 99 at meter 99.

He lowered himself from a handstand to hanging from the wire, opened his mouth, and gently ate the first cookie.

Seeing his skill, Yu Hua felt a faint unwillingness to be defeated. While he was an ordinary university student, he regularly looked after his health, and after several months in the game, his physical strength was good.

But he couldn't move as easily as Rainbow Hair over the cable wires. He had to move his arms along toward the cookie.

Rainbow Hair saw that he was going slowly and stopped, moving at the same speed as Yu Hua.

"You don't need to wait for me." Yu Hua had the frustrating feeling of someone going easy on him.

But Rainbow Hair smiled and said, "It's all right. This time, I'll be the one waiting for you to grow up."

—

You Zhengping (hands proudly on his hips): I'm stealthily taking advantage while Yu Hua is fresh and tender.

Yu Hua (recalling after the fact): During the cookie eating game, Xiao You was tastier than the cookies...no, I mean he was stronger than me.

## CHAPTER 89

Seeing Rainbow Hair's skill and ease, Yu Hua felt an unwillingness to be bested.

To tell the truth, in a situation like this where falling meant dropping into acid, which was certain death, and your special abilities were sealed, anyone would be scared. Fear would make a person's breathing rapid, speed up their energy consumption. Under the stimulus of adrenaline, at first they might be able to display more strength than before, but in a game of physical strength where you had to eat at least fifty cookies, move at least 2,500 meters along the cable wires, and go over at least 49 meters of cable wire covered room, the initial rush of energy provoked by fear couldn't hold out that long.

The levelers had undergone ten levels of improvement to their physical strength. Their conditions were good. But they weren't this abnormally strong.

Yu Hua was out of breath by the time he ate the fortieth cookie. Meanwhile, Rainbow Hair went around the fiftieth cookie and came up next to Yu Hua to encourage him.

"Go on! There are only a few cookies left, you can do it!" Rainbow Hair's eyes sparkled, full of faith in Yu Hua.

They were opponents. Even when he had made the proposal to Rainbow Hair, Yu Hua had still maintained his caution. In this game, rather than going over 2,500 meters of cable wire to eat the cookies, it would obviously be easier to cross a 49 to 99 meter distance to attack your opponent. The result of eating the cookies might be that both sides would be unable to hold out, and they would both lose. The easier victory lay in disposing of your opponent first.

Yu Hua knew very well that when only one person could survive, a human would choose the means of victory easiest for himself. But if there was a way for both people to survive, as long as a person wasn't too antisocial, they would choose the more difficult means that would nonetheless let both people have a mutual victory.

Perhaps conscience wasn't worth mentioning in the face of death, but its influence on humans wasn't all that small.

He had originally wanted to first stabilize his opponent and then, if his opponent agreed, to discuss how they could win. But Rainbow Hair clearly had the ability to win hands down. Instead, he was still willing to wait for Yu Hua's method.

*He really is a good-hearted person,* Yu Hua thought inwardly.

Anyone who has done long-distance running has probably had this sort of feeling. When your strength is exhausted, if there's someone beside you running with you and cheering you on,

your strength and speed will increase significantly. This is the strength of fighting shoulder to shoulder.

With Rainbow Hair beside him, Yu Hua smoothly ate the first forty-nine cookies and came to the fiftieth.

Rainbow Hair meanwhile hung across from Yu Hua. The one centimeter radius little cookie dangled between the two of them.

“My idea is...”

Yu Hua was just about to explain his idea when he saw Rainbow Hair take the cookie between his teeth, then approach him with the cookie in his mouth.

Yu Hua instantly understood his intention. That wasn't what he had meant. Rainbow Hair had misunderstood.

But now, Rainbow Hair had already started to eat the fiftieth cookie. If he didn't cooperate, he really would lose.

Watching the approaching lips, Yu Hua gently closed his eyes and bit down on the other half of the cookie.

There was a sensation of softness. Yu Hua's heart beat like a drum. His senses instantly shut off, and all that remained was the banging of his pulse in his ears and the warmth and softness on his lips.

After a long time, the half a cookie dissolved in his mouth, and Yu Hua opened his eyes amid the sweet taste. He moved back and turned his face away, saying, “What I meant was that we should break the twine or the cable wire with the fiftieth cookie and drop the cookie in the acid. That way, we both would have eaten forty-nine. That would be a tie. Either there would be no way to decide it and we would both get the prize, or we could both lose, and neither of us would get the prize. But either way, we wouldn't have violated the rules, and we wouldn't have fallen into the acid. Both of us could survive.”

“Really? So that's what you meant.” Rainbow Hair's voice was a little empty, and there was a sliver of disappointment hidden in it.

“In this game, apart from the ways you mentioned, there's also a third way to win.” Yu Hua held onto the cable wire with one hand and took out a series of small knives, thin as a cicada's wings, from the back of his waistband.

He tossed a blade towards a cable wire, which snapped in response.

“There's a problem with this contest. The System claimed we couldn't use our special abilities, but it didn't limit our use of items,” Yu Hua said. “This is one of the items I collected during my

first ten levels, 'blades that can cut through iron like sand.' A one-time use item. Each blade can only be used once. The true way to win on my own would have been to toss a knife from my position at one of the cable wires in front of you. The cookies had to be eaten in sequence. As long as it was near your cable wire, no matter which one broke, you wouldn't be able to eat in order. If you lost one, you would be sure to lose."

"Is that so?" Rainbow Hair took a blade from Yu Hua's hand. "What if I had decided not to eat the cookies but instead went over to kill you?"

Yu Hua said, "After getting rid of that cookie, I would have kept throwing out blades, breaking ten more cable wires. We can only move along the cable wires. Without using special abilities, a distance of ten meters is a natural moat. My opponent would have been sure to lose."

"And those blades are just a coincidence? It's only luck that you brought those blades in," Rainbow Hair said.

Yu Hua shook his head. "No, the System knows what items the levelers have on them. It definitely targets levelers with the most suitable games. In a contest, both sides must have some trump card, and whoever is the most ruthless and the fastest will be the victor."

"Speaking of that, I have a water gun that I don't know how to use." Rainbow Hair pulled a toy water gun from the back of his waistband. He aimed at a distant cable wire and pulled the trigger. Strong acid shot out, melting the distant cable wire.

Rainbow Hair stared blankly and handed the water gun to Yu Hua. "You were right. That's how it is. But you didn't act while I was eating the cookies. You just watched me eat all the way to the forty-ninth cookie."

"Because if you meant to eat the fiftieth cookie, I could cut that cable wire in time. Even if you could switch to another cable wire in time, you still couldn't skip number 50. You'd go directly from 49 to 51. As long as I got rid of number 50, I could negotiate with you again whether I would bear the weight of a life, or whether we were going to come to a draw." Yu Hua suddenly blushed.

He had always been good at planning. When he had heard the rules, he had thought of countless methods. But the person in front of him had played a card too far outside of common sense.

When he thought of that, Yu Hua pursed his lips.

"You were running a risk again," said Rainbow Hair. "You were willing to give up on certain victory and run the risk of trusting your opponent. What were you thinking?"

"I want to find a companion," Yu Hua said. "A companion I can pass through levels with, a companion to join hands and advance with. We could mutually support each other and not betray each other. If I don't run a risk, how could I find a person worth trusting?"

The System seemed not to want to let them keep talking. The room quickly went back to normal, returning to the original big white room. Yu Hua opened his hand. There were red welts on his palm and varying degrees of muscle strain in his arms.

Yu Hua ignored these injuries. He looked ardently at Rainbow Hair. "Are you willing to be my companion?"

"I am..."

Before Rainbow Hair could finish speaking, they heard the System's notice: "Both sides have eaten the same number of cookies. There is no way to declare a victory. The reward will be evenly divided. The food from this contest will be split evenly among the two teams."

After the mechanical notice ended, the rainbow-haired You Zhengping was thrown back among his teammates. He pulled off his mask, looking regretful. He had wanted to look some more at the young Yu Hua.

The sweetness of the cookie was still lingering. You Zhengping licked his lips.

Just then, a person with a strange expression stood in front of You Zhengping and hesitantly said, "Why were you chosen as the contestant this time? According to history, I'm the contestant in this match."

This was Guan Shaoguang!

You Zhengping was surprised. He fiercely punched Guan Shaoguang in the face and angrily said, "So you were the one who ate the fiftieth cookie with Yu Hua?"

In this world, levelers from different groups couldn't use any force outside the rules to harm their opponents, but there were no limitations within a group. You Zhengping could beat Guan Shaoguang all he wanted.

This Guan Shaoguang didn't seem to be a past projection. You Zhengping straddled him and punched him repeatedly, and he only barely escaped by using a special item. The calm coldness from before had vanished from his face. He said rather urgently, "What are you talking about? Eating the cookie together? Yu Hua and I thought of the same method back then. He used his flying knives and I used my water gun to dispose of the fiftieth cookie, and we reached a draw."

"Oh." You Zhengping, who had wanted to vent his spleen by giving Guan Shaoguang another beating, calmed down. He straightened his clothes and put on a civilized look.

As long as they hadn't eaten the cookie together, then everything was fine.

"The acid water gun? This thing?" You Zhengping asked, getting out the water gun.

He had arrived in the little world less than a day ago. Just when he forced himself in, he had seen his name appear on the big screen, making him go take part in the match. Confused, he had chosen a mask and been taken to the contest room. Up to this point, he was still totally unaware of the color of his hair.

“You’ve even snatched my item? Who the hell *are* you?” The Guan Shaoguang in front of You Zhengping now seemed to be only eighteen or nineteen. He was very young, and the look in his eyes was clear. He wasn’t like the man in black he had seen in the estate with that deathly stillness in his eyes and no sign of vitality.

“Can’t you communicate with the Guan Shaoguang outside?” You Zhengping asked. “Do you have memories of the future?”

Guan Shaoguang said, “I’m the formulator of this little world’s rules. Of course I have memories. But I’m limited by the time law. My power now has returned to what it was during this level.”

“But my special ability...huh?” You Zhengping only now had time to investigate his special ability. It had returned to the level it had been at before he had met Yu Hua. He only had two spaces, one for people and one for things. He didn’t have the third space, which could change shape at will, or the second space, which he could use to teleport. Never mind natural law power.

Guan Shaoguang laughed coldly. “This little world was constructed with Yu Hua as the target. The target’s condition will revert to its historical state on all points, and people apart from the target will revert to what they were before they met the target and stop there.”

So that was it.

“So will Xiao Ha and Junjun also revert to their state before they met Yu Hua?”

“No, they won’t. They entered the little world before Yu Hua did, so their condition wasn’t impacted.” This Guan Shaoguang was very young. He was different from the one in the estate, who was mysterious and never answered any question to the point.

“So right now, Junjun and Xiao Ha remember everything, but Junjun may not know why he’s come to this world. He may think that he’s travelled to another world like in kids’ stories. I’ve reverted to what I was like before I met Yu Hua, while you’ve kept your memories and returned to this level,” You Zhengping analyzed.

“Right, this is the level where Yu Hua and I met. I originally meant to kill him in that acid hell. Though this is only a historical flashback that won’t impact reality, if Yu Hua dies in this little world, he’ll die for real. He’s too strong. If I want to kill him, this is the only means I can use,” Guan Shaoguang said. “Though my powers have also been suppressed, I can use the rules of the game to get rid of him!”

"I'll kill you right now!" You Zhengping took a dagger from his first space and aimed it at Guan Shaoguang.

But this time, he came up empty. When he brought down the knife, this turned out to be a past projection again. While he had been talking to You Zhengping, Guan Shaoguang had used You Zhengping's desire to collect information to stall for time and taken the opportunity to flee, leaving behind only a past projection.

"You're very treacherous," You Zhengping said in dismay when his attack failed.

"It was my blunder," Guan Shaoguang said. "The main body only receives information when the energy of a past projection vanishes. I only knew you were coming when you entered the little world."

He couldn't hit Guan Shaoguang, anyway, so You Zhengping might as well obtain information. "What is your aim?"

"Either kill Yu Hua or force him to unseal his powers to kill me," Guan Shaoguang said. "I chose this time node because it's the level where we met. We acted in concert without discussing it in the acid hell and approved of each other's ideas. We saw through the System's goal, brought each other's teams through the level, and became allies in the System's space."

"You two were like-minded companions before. Are you only trying to kill him because the System is forcing you?" You Zhengping said in confusion.

You Zhengping thought that with a person like Yu Hua, the more you understood him, the more you would like him. How could anyone stand to kill him? Guan Shaoguang must be under the System's control, like the other levelers.

"No." Guan Shaoguang suddenly smiled brutally. "The reason I chose this point in time is that I've longed countless times to turn back time, longed to kill Yu Hua the first time I saw him."

"Why?" You Zhengping couldn't understand what Guan Shaoguang was thinking. In his eyes, companions were like Cen Xiao, Luo Huai, and his other comrades in arms. They might play pranks on each other, they might fool around, they might be far away from each other and out of contact, but they wouldn't betray each other.

Guan Shaoguang didn't answer his question, saying to himself, "I just didn't expect that you would change fixed history. You stole my place in the contest, and you stole my acid water gun, and my current power isn't a match for yours now."

"Fortunately, the little world hasn't ended yet. In the next point in time, I'll be stronger than you are now."



Then Guan Shaoguang's past projection vanished, and You Zhengping felt the flow of time speeding up endlessly around him. In an instant, he had come to another time node.

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Author's Note:

Yu Hua now (feeling his lips): That rainbow-haired person promised me that we would become friends in the System's space.

He waited for hundreds of years.

## CHAPTER 90

The System had taken a long time to plan this time. It had sent five Destroyers at once and used the safety of the common people of the Xuyang District to force Yu Hua to unseal his abilities. It had also used others' lives to force Yu Hua into the little world. You Zhengping had thought that as the System's trump card, Guan Shaoguang should have been Yu Hua's enemy, or at the very least his former opponent.

But when he had seen the slightly childish Yu Hua, and Guan Shaoguang, who had yet to become deadly still, You Zhengping had realized that he had guessed wrong.

Guan Shaoguang had met Yu Hua during their eleventh level. They had been friends and struggled together, with the common goal of defeating the System. But now it seemed that they had fallen out. Why would it be like this?

When he had seen the twenty-year-old Yu Hua, You Zhengping had suddenly found that he didn't understand Yu Hua all that well.

The Yu Hua he had met at the very beginning was an ordinary person who longed for a family. He had hinted countless times that he wanted to get married. He was a good, domestic partner. After they were married, You Zhengping had felt that Yu Hua had some OCD tendencies, that he liked to look after people, but after an adjustment period, they had gotten along very well.

Following the black-cloaked man's appearance, You Zhengping had gradually become aware that his husband had many stories—a complicated, painful, unspeakable past. For the sake of his identity as a Protector, You Zhengping had chosen not to ask about Yu Hua's past.

He had thought that as long as Yu Hua wasn't the enemy of the Protectors, as long as their hearts were together, then the past wasn't important. There was no need to interrogate it. They only had to live well in the future ahead of them.

But when he had seen the young Yu Hua, You Zhengping had realized that he could no longer overlook Yu Hua's past.

How had he become the way he was now? Why would his former like-minded friend have fallen out with him and become his enemy? How had the once weak Yu Hua become powerful enough to seal half of the System's power? Why had the Yu Hua who possessed all that power been willing and happy to come to an ordinary world and become an ordinary person who would roll up his sleeves and cook soup for his husband?

Normally You Zhengping didn't dare to ask, couldn't ask. But the You Zhengping in the time law little world seemed to have been unfettered by something. Here he didn't need to hide his identity, and neither did Yu Hua. Through coming in contact with the Yu Hua of this time, he could understand another side of his husband.

The passage of time around him suddenly slowed. You Zhengping knew that this was the next time node chosen by Guan Shaoguang. He quickly made preparations to join in battle.

When the dizzying passage of time ended, You Zhengping found himself among ruins.

There was a blood red sun in the sky. Like the moon, the sun was only half a sun. The temperature of the surroundings was around  $-40^{\circ}\text{C}$ . You Zhengping was dressed in the cut up clothes and flip-flops he had worn to his blind date with Yu Hua. He was instantly chilled into a shivering fledgling. He quickly gathered his power to resist the cold.

Fortunately, when he had worn this outfit full of holes, he had already learned how to use his power to withstand extreme temperatures. Otherwise, the temperature alone would have killed him.

You Zhengping smacked his face to clear his head from being frozen just now and walked forward in his flip-flops. When he had gone only a step, one flip-flop got caught in a crack in the cement. You Zhengping yanked twice and found that he couldn't yank it out. He simply abandoned the shoes and went barefoot.

During the contest game before, You Zhengping had for some reason taken over Guan Shaoguang's identity. He had been wearing the green team uniform and sneakers issued by the System for the contest game. Yu Hua had been in a red team uniform. So You Zhengping hadn't realized then that under his team uniform had been his ragged jeans and ragged t-shirt. Now that Guan Shaoguang had changed the time node, You Zhengping's new clothes revealed their original form.

He wanted to see what kind of place this was. He climbed up a building that had been broken into two halves. This was the tallest building in the area. It was the only one that was relatively intact.

You Zhengping stepped barefoot on reinforcing steel bars. The soles of his feet ached from the cold. The chilly wind quickly chapped his exposed skin.

Before, in the fight with the head of the league, a layer of skin had been torn off his hand. It had ached faintly while he had been hanging off the cable wires, but it had still been bearable. Now

it was being worn away by the low temperature. The frostbite recurred. His palm itched unendurably.

During training, You Zhengping had suffered worse than this. He took no notice of his present station, though he missed being able to use his third space as steps. He tried to deploy his third space, but maybe he didn't have enough power. He failed.

You Zhengping relied on his strength to quickly climb up to the highest point of the half-building. He found a stable windowsill with room to stand with both feet and stood up on it.

Looking into the distance from a high place, he discovered what a hopeless place this world was. All the large buildings had collapsed. Only half of the sun that given people warmth remained. The sky was overcast, smoke or fog blocking the sun so only half of a dim red bloody sun was visible.

There was no life in the city. He didn't see humans or any other living creature. It was deadly still among the ruins.

Suddenly, You Zhengping seemed to see a human figure flicker behind a big stone at the base of the building. He quickly climbed down and strode towards the figure.

He went around the stone without finding anything. He was suspecting himself of having been infected by Yuan Luori's nearsightedness when suddenly he couldn't move.

No, it wasn't that he couldn't move, it was that the flow of time had been slowed down to infinitely slow!

Guan Shaoguang, wearing the black clothes from the estate, walked out from behind the stone and said, "I guessed you would appear near me. Standing and waiting for a windfall was the right thing to do."

He had passed many more levels now. He already had the ability to slow time down nearly to the point of stopping.

It was as if You Zhengping's time was static. If he wanted to move, it might take him a whole year, but Guan Shaoguang could move normally.

"I'm curious. Why would there be changes to the fixed track of history because of you? How did you take my place in the contest room? I think it must have to do with your spatial ability. I'm not sure how you managed to become a part of history, and I don't plan to understand the principle here. I just need to kill you." Guan Shaoguang didn't approach You Zhengping. He took a machine gun from the System's space and aimed at You Zhengping's forehead.

Guan Shaoguang was very cautious. He didn't know what means of counterattack You Zhengping would have during this period. Slowing time wasn't a move that couldn't be counteracted. In the interest of safety, it was better to attack You Zhengping from a distance.

If he shot a whole cartridge of bullets, You Zhengping would turn into a sieve.

“With the present flow of time for you, you probably haven’t heard what I said?” Guan Shaoguang put his finger on the trigger.

You Zhengping’s reaction was timely. The moment he saw Guan Shaoguang, he called up his second space so it would protect him. Though he would receive one tenth the power of any attack that hit the space, at least there wouldn’t be danger to his life.

But he didn’t know whether he would be in time. His time was flowing too, too slowly. Unless something approached the speed of light, he wouldn’t be able to protect himself before Guan Shaoguang pulled the trigger.

Just as You Zhengping thought he was going to die without attaining anything, a low voice spoke from the air: “Guan Shaoguang, what are you doing?”

After the voice, a man wrapped up in a black cloak appeared floating in midair and stood between Guan Shaoguang and You Zhengping.

A hand reached out from the black cloak. There was a brush pen in that hand with blood on the tip.

The man gently waved the brush in the air. A bloody mark cut open the stagnant air. You Zhengping found that he could move again.

You Zhengping displayed no intent to attack Guan Shaoguang. He looked at the black-cloaked man’s somewhat unfamiliar face and his cool eyes. He said decisively, “Yu Hua.”

The man’s expression didn’t change. He coolly said, “Have you seen me? Are you a leveler?”

This amounted to acknowledging his identity. You Zhengping excitedly ran towards Yu Hua, but Yu Hua didn’t give him another look. He turned to Guan Shaoguang. “What are you doing?”

Guan Shaoguang had put away his weapon the moment Yu Hua had appeared. Looking innocent, he said, “I’m clearing the battlefield, getting rid of all suspicious enemies.”

You Zhengping wanted to plead his innocence and say he wasn’t an enemy, that it was Guan Shaoguang who was harboring ill intentions and wanted to kill Yu Hua. But he didn’t speak. He was only a passerby now, and Guan Shaoguang was Yu Hua’s teammate.

He only approached Yu Hua in small steps and reached out his hand, which had been frozen into the form of a chicken’s foot, and carefully took hold of Yu Hua’s arm through the black cloak.

Yu Hua didn't even look at him. He shook his arm to throw him off. You Zhengping held on desperately and wouldn't let himself be thrown off. The frostbite wounds on his hand opened, and fresh blood stained Yu Hua's black cloak.

Yu Hua stopped trying to throwing him off, letting You Zhengping hold onto him. He kept his eyes on Guan Shaoguang and said, "I remember that my orders were to assemble in the city center, and to control any suspicious person you encountered and bring them to the assembly. Did I tell you to kill anyone? Who allowed you to disobey my instructions?"

Guan Shaoguang made a gesture of surrender. "I was too panicked. Can you let me off this time?"

Seeing him acknowledge his mistake, Yu Hua finally looked at the down-and-out and frozen You Zhengping. He lowered his gaze and saw this thin and pitiful person with his bare feet. There was ice where he stood. This person was so frozen that he could only stand on one foot, the other foot stepping on the first foot to warm it, switching feet from time to time.

"What did you use all your points on? You can't even afford to equip a piece of clothing?" Yu Hua said impatiently.

"I, I don't have points." You Zhengping licked the wound on his hand. It hurt.

Suddenly he was wrapped in warmth. Yu Hua had taken off his black cloak and dropped it onto You Zhengping's head. He used this gesture to throw off You Zhengping's tightly clutching hand. "Put it on."

There was no way to resist wearing the black cloak that held Yu Hua's body heat. You Zhengping wrapped the black cloak tightly around himself, giving off a "this is mine, no one had better steal it" look.

When he and Yu Hua had gone on dates in the winter, Yu Hua had always considerately taken off his coat and put it on You Zhengping. After each date ended, You Zhengping would carry the coat back to his dorm room and go to a dry cleaners to get it cleaned and pressed, then hang it in the wardrobe and not let anyone touch it.

After about a dozen dates, Yu Hua had had no more coats to wear. So You Zhengping had gone out wearing Yu Hua's coats. When Yu Hua was only wearing a thin jacket, he would drape the coat that had originally belonged to Yu Hua over him.

In fact, when it was cold, You Zhengping also really wanted to put his own coat over Yu Hua, acting the considerate boyfriend. But he didn't have any coats that looked so very high quality, so he'd had to borrow Yu Hua's.

After he had received the black cloak, his feet were still bare. You Zhengping hesitated over whether he should tear off a piece of the black cloak to wrap around his feet, but he felt it would be a shame.

Just as he was engaged in a fierce ideological struggle, Yu Hua waved his hand and dropped a pair of cotton slippers. You Zhengping quickly shoved his feet into them.

“They’re so warm.” You Zhengping narrowed his eyes in contentment and very naturally approached Yu Hua, hugged his arm, and leaned his head on his shoulder.

Under the black cloak, Yu Hua was dressed all over in form-fitting gray camouflage. There was a leather belt around his waist with two guns and a dagger hanging from it. He was wearing a pair of black combat boots, close-fitted and fairly tall. He seemed taller than when he was wearing a suit.

He was covered an austere energy that made people shudder. But You Zhengping was entranced. He had never seen Yu Hua look so grim and robust. He thought that after they went back, he would secretly get Yu Hua a custom-fit camouflage outfit. That seemed—that seemed pretty interesting.

“Let go,” Yu Hua said coldly.

You Zhengping entirely didn’t notice that Yu Hua had said this to him. He was still struggling to get close to his husband. He would soon be hanging off of Yu Hua.

Yu Hua took hold of You Zhengping’s chin. There was no emotion in his eyes. He coldly said, “Trying to throw yourself into my arms to save your life? You could at least clean yourself up a little, no?”

“What’s not clean about me?” You Zhengping felt his face. It was a little frozen, but it was still all right. He looked the way he had when Yu Hua had fallen in love with him at first sight.

Yu Hua released his chin and grabbed his hair. “Do you think this is attractive?”

His hair? You Zhengping released Yu Hua’s arm and grabbed his hair with both hands. Showing himself no mercy, he pulled a tuft of hair out from the back of his head. While his scalp smarted, he saw the rainbow-colored hairs.

Pants full of holes, torn up t-shirt, flip-flops, rainbow hair—when he and Yu Hua had met, how regrettable had he looked?

“I didn’t want it like this, it was...” *It was Cen Xiao and that crowd of bastards!!* You Zhengping couldn’t explain.

Yu Hua said, “The hair doesn’t matter. So you acknowledge that you’re attaching yourself to me? Do you think I’ll like you?”

“Yep.” You Zhengping covered his head and nodded naturally.

Anger flashed through Yu Hua's eyes. He ignored You Zhengping and said to Guan Shaoguang, "There won't be a next time."

"Yes." Guan Shaoguang looked hatefully at You Zhengping.

Seeing that they were going to leave here and go to some assembly point, You Zhengping no longer cared about covering up his hair. He hugged Yu Hua's arm. He had to follow Yu Hua, and he had to find an opportunity to get rid of Guan Shaoguang to end this little world.

This time, Yu Hua didn't shake You Zhengping off. He flew up into the sky, patrolling the whole city.

He seemed to have seen something. He landed on the ground with You Zhengping and kicked aside a dilapidated board. Under the board, a little boy was shivering and hugging a husky. The husky was also cold, but it was struggling to cover the little boy with its belly; its belly was the warmest place.

Seeing the board removed, the husky, whose head was so frozen it was dizzy, didn't care who had come. It opened its mouth wide and called out: "Awoooooooooo."

You Zhengping: "..."

This dog was angry enough that it would soon be speaking human.

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Author's note:

You Zhengping: You definitely fell in love with my hair at first sight, but now you're disdaining it. You liar!

Yu Hua: This pitiful frozen person I've picked up is kind of cute. I'm enjoying how he's throwing himself at me. But I'm a gentleman. I have to be patient.

Guan Shaoguang: I've had enough.

## CHAPTER 91

Director Ha was also dazed from the cold. In a few short days...or hours...or minutes... Never mind, that wasn't important, it didn't know what the difference in passage of time between the little world and the outside world was. It had no idea how much time had passed!

At any rate, in a very short span of time, it has successively experienced danger in the rain with Junjun, running around with Junjun in the contest game, managing to get food, and having a great demon with the same scent as Yu Hua taken it to share it among strangers. It had slept out in the open with Junjun. It had waited until the match started and drunk a bit of warm water in the lounge. While Yu Hua had been taking part in the contest, Junjun had found a room

where he could give Xiao Ha a bath. When it had been washed and its fur brushed, their surroundings had changed.

From the warm little contest room they had gone directly to ruins where it was -40°C. Only Director Ha's external fur had dried. The fur close to its skin was still damp. The cold wind blew, and the Siberian husky was instantly frozen into a popsicle.

And Junjun was only wearing a single layer of summer clothes. The child and dog yelled in the cold and finally found a board where they could avoid the wind and snuggle up against each other to keep warm. Director Ha used its belly fur to keep Junjun warm while Junjun brushed shards of ice off of Director Ha's back.

As they helped each other, the child and the dog thought that the board keeping them out of the wind was their only refuge. Now someone had overturned their sheltering board. How could Director Ha not be angry?

It hadn't seen clearly who had come. It hopped up and immediately let out an enraged howl at this person, its throat letting out a long "Awwwwwooooo!" Listening to it closely, it sounded something like human speech.

After it had called twice, Junjun pressed down on Xiao Ha's chest. Director Ha at once quieted down.

Junjun said, "Yu Hua-gege? Shushu<sup>28</sup>?"

In each world, levelers were impacted by the world's power and the upgrading of their own physical condition. There would be slight changes to their external appearances. These changes were very faint. You couldn't see them over the course of a world or two. But after hundreds and even thousands of worlds, compared to the person's original appearance, the difference would be very large.

This Yu Hua was different from the young man in the eleventh level. He was also different from Director Yu in the real world. He was somewhere between the two. This made Junjun very confused. He wasn't sure who this person actually was.

Director Ha had had experience with levelers' features changing, so it guessed at once that this was Yu Hua. It didn't dare to call out anymore. Tail between its legs, it hid behind Junjun. Junjun's short, skinny body couldn't block Director Ha's increasingly large form. A dog's face with a black nose stuck out from behind the little boy.

"This dog seems to have a special ability. Is it a local mutant or something else?" Guan Shaoguang asked deliberately while knowing the answer.

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<sup>28</sup> I normally just translate this as "uncle" but sometimes you just need a joke to work.



Yu Hua's gaze swept over the dog and the little boy's trembling bodies. He waved his hand slightly. Warmth flowed into the child and the dog.

The frost evaporated from Director Ha. Its fur was lush, and with the help of this warmth, its body was instantly no longer cold. Hiding behind Junjun, it called a grateful "awooawoo" to Yu Hua.

Junjun very politely gave Yu Hua a pioneer's salute. "Thank you, Yu Hua-ge-shu."

"Pft." You Zhengping couldn't hold back a laugh. What kind of address was "ge-shu?" The poor child.

Junjun also offered Yu Hua a piece of milk candy with both hands. Yu Hua-ge-shu had helped him. He had to be grateful, though he only had a few pieces of candy left.

Yu Hua took the candy from the child's hands, met the boy's sincere eyes, and nodded. "Take them to the assembly point and give them some clothes."

Guan Shaoguang frowned and got two sets of adult-sized padded jackets and padded shoes to give to the boy. Levelers accumulated goods like these so they wouldn't have to spend points at a critical moment.

You Zhengping gave Guan Shaoguang an odd look. He had thought that Guan Shaoguang would take this opportunity to kill Junjun and the husky, but instead he didn't make a move. He was even somewhat gentle towards them.

There were no other living beings in the ruined city. Yu Hua took the others to the assembly point. You Zhengping found that Yu Hua was probably using wind and fire type powers. The wind lifted him, Junjun, and Xiao Ha into the air, and the fire power kept them warm, keeping them from being harmed by the cold wind around them.

Meanwhile, You Zhengping's frostbite had been healed at some point, and Yu Hua had been able to stop Guan Shaoguang's slowing of time.

Zhen Li had said that the great master clearer had every type of power. He could use all the abilities.

But that was wrong.

Since understanding natural law power, You Zhengping had gained some practical experience in the use of special abilities. Apart from the origin ability, the abilities that Destroyers could equip from the System were mostly one time use. This showed that even the System couldn't let someone completely grasp a power attribute that didn't belong to their origin ability. Special ability users could only truly use their own power.

But Yu Hua was different. Healing, attack, illusion, space and time... He seemed to hold every kind of power, a special ability user across all attributes. Why? What was so special about his origin power?

You Zhengping kept his eyes on Yu Hua, not blinking. It was unclear whether he wanted to delve into the truth or whether he simply wanted to remember Yu Hua from every time period.

His gaze was too ardent. Yu Hua reached out a finger and poked You Zhengping's cheek to turn his head, moving his gaze away.

"Stop looking," Yu Hua said coldly.

You Zhengping opened his mouth and bit Yu Hua's finger. Yu Hua frowned and avoided his teeth. He unwrapped the milk candy Junjun had given him and tossed it into You Zhengping's mouth.

In a freezing world, eating a sweet piece of milk candy, feeling the warmth of it—You Zhengping smiled lightly and kept his attention fixed on Yu Hua.

Guan Shaoguang, borrowing the wind power to fly behind them, numbly turned his head away, not looking at these two anymore. Guan Shaoguang looked at the husky and Junjun. Director Ha was covering Junjun's eyes with its paws. Its doggy face was solemn.

With You Zhengping here, his little world kept going wrong. With Yu Hua here, he couldn't kill You Zhengping. Guan Shaoguang's brow furrowed tightly. He didn't know whether to change times again and look for another opportunity to get rid of You Zhengping.

As he pondered, Yu Hua had already taken them to the gathering point. This must have been a square in the city center. Some people had lit a bonfire and were already waiting.

There were a few people lying beside the bonfire. Their forms were covered with white cloths. They were obviously dead.

Yu Hua landed. When everyone saw him, they came to surround him. But he didn't pay attention to any of them. He took his arm candy You Zhengping over to the bonfire and pulled away a white cloth.

The person under the white cloth was a bloody mess, their features hard to distinguish. Yu Hua looked at this person's arm. There was an armband around their upper arm with a name written on it: Geng Yi'an. From the figure, this was a woman.

Yu Hua covered her face with the white cloth, then pulled away the second white cloth. The second person's face was intact. This was a middle-aged man with a little beard. From the rise and fall of the white cloth, it looked like the lower half of his body was gone. Yu Hua didn't continue lifting the cloth away. He covered the man's face back up.

There were four people in all. After looking at each of them, Yu Hua said in a cold voice, "Why did they die?"

A girl with her face covered in tear stains who had evidently been crying pointed at a grown man with his head down. She angrily denounced him: "It was him! He didn't listen to your orders and insisted on going to the quartz mine to absorb energy and search for the source crystal. We were attacked by a beast, and Geng-jiejie and the others died to protect us. There are two other teammates whose bodies we couldn't even bring back!"

"I held a vote to go in to look for the source crystal!" The man quickly raised his head to contradict her. "The world energy stored in the quartz mine can make us stronger, and the source crystal can upgrade our origin abilities and let us gradually escape the System's control. Weren't there many people backing me at the time? Why are you pushing it all onto me?"

Carrying a piece of blood red crystal with both hands, the man came up to Yu Hua and smiled ingratiatingly. "This is the source crystal. A source crystal with this degree of purity can upgrade the special abilities of a dozen levelers. It's worth a suitable loss."

Some others nodded and also chimed in, "That's right, that's right. All the ones who died are levelers with common power types. The healing types and the ones with unique attributes are all still alive. We haven't lost anything."

"Who voted?" Yu Hua said expressionlessly, not taking the source crystal.

The crowd couldn't clearly understand his intention. They helplessly exchanged glances, not daring to raise their hands.

The girl who had been crying also didn't know whether Yu Hua approved of this exchange for the source crystal or whether he placed more value on their companions' lives. She didn't speak.

"The purity of this source crystal is pretty good," Yu Hua added.

Now everyone began to get their bearings. About ten people raised their hands. Yu Hua said, "That's quite a few of you."

The leading man said, "We did it for the good of the group. Look at how much power that source crystal has!"

Yu Hua took the source crystal from his hands and smiled faintly. "You're right. So all of you can take this source crystal."

The leading man smiled in relief.

But the next second, the "rule writer" appeared in Yu Hua's hand. He quickly drew an "X" over the leading man's face.

“No, no!” The leading man only had time for a scream. Then it was as if he had been negated. He gradually became transparent and finally disappeared in midair.

Yu Hua tossed the blood red source crystal among the gathered crowd of those who had voted in favor. He coolly said, “Here’s what you wanted.”

The source crystal burst into blood red radiance. The faces of the voters changed. They scattered desperately in all directions, but a circle drawn with a brush had appeared on the ground, and they couldn’t walk out of that circle.

The source crystal exploded. Enormous power surged within the circle, not a drop of it leaking out.

The blood red radiance flickered constantly in the ruined central square. The people inside the circle shouted for help, but no one dared to intercede for them. Even the girl who had just been crying was scared into covering her mouth. She had only wanted to denounce them and ask Yu Hua to tell them off. She hadn’t expected that Yu Hua would act so decisively, not leaving them any chance to survive.

Guan Shaoguang closed his eyes and turned his face away, not looking at the people inside the circle calling for help. What Yu Hua had decided, no one could resist.

Someone carefully came over to Yu Hua and pleaded, “Cap-captain, there are levelers in there with healing, light, and plant powers. Isn’t punishing all of them too...”

“Are those abilities very important?” Yu Hua said.

“N-no.” The person who had pleaded didn’t dare to say anything else.

No one resisted. Everyone stood by and watched as those people died in the explosion of power. They watched as the energy of the source crystal exploded unstoppably within the circle Yu Hua had proscribed, unable to leave the circle.

The temperature around them gradually rose. It wasn’t so cold anymore.

Director Ha, wrapped in a human’s padded jacket, was so hot it stuck out its tongue and panted. For it, a bit of coolness was more comfortable.

It had once again covered Junjun’s eyes, not letting the child see this scene.

When the explosion of power ended, Yu Hua walked over to the white cloths. There was a ball of high heat flames in his hand. It instantly burned up the corpses.

“Collect them, then take them to places they liked and bury them,” Yu Hua said.

The girl who had protested picked up a few jars in a daze and divided the ashes up among them. She stuck them into the System's space.

No one dared to speak. They didn't even dare to breathe too loudly. They pretended to be busy, though it was unclear what they were busy about.

Yu Hua swept his gaze over the rainbow-haired head beside him and asked, "You still haven't let go?"

You Zhengping had just been dazzled by Yu Hua's power. He had found that Yu Hua was a little too strong. Wasn't it only after five hundred levels that you could grasp natural law power? None of these people looked like they had passed five hundred levels.

"How many levels have you passed?" You Zhengping asked, not answering Yu Hua's question.

"I don't remember clearly. Has it been four hundred?" Yu Hua said carelessly.

Liar! This person even remembered that he had passed 3,841 levels. How could he not remember how many he had passed now?

"398 levels," Guan Shaoguang answered. "After level 100, we started encountering people who had passed different numbers of levels. There aren't so many high grade levelers, after all, so we were matched at random."

You Zhengping ignored him. Instead of wasting his energy dealing with Guan Shaoguang, it was better to concentrate on gaining Yu Hua's trust, so that the current powerful Yu Hua would get rid of Guan Shaoguang for him.

"Let's put up the tents," Yu Hua said.

He casually raised two tents—one small one, which he gave to the husky and Junjun, and one big one for himself. The big tent was spacious with one person sleeping in it, but it would be a little crowded with two.

Yu Hua signaled with his expression for You Zhengping to let go. You Zhengping turned a blind eye.

Seeing that he was going to be like this, Yu Hua actually didn't say anything. He went into the tent with his arm candy, and You Zhengping crowded in.

The two of them lay down on the wool cushion inside the tent. Yu Hua took hold of You Zhengping's chin and asked, "Who told you that I like rainbow hair?"

"Hm?" You Zhengping clutched at his hair. "I didn't dye it like this willingly, it was... How about this, do you have a wig? I can put it on, and you can look at that."

"No one would waste their limited System space to carry along something like a wig," Yu Hua said.

"Then you'll just have to put up with it," You Zhengping said, pulling a long face.

Yu Hua found that he was very patient with this person. He had just been filled with murderous intent, but it had calmed the instant he had seen the rainbow-colored head.

He stuck his hand into You Zhengping hair, his palm pressed against the back of his head. Lowering his voice, he said, "Did someone tell you that I would feel well disposed towards hair like this, and so you dyed it like this to seduce me?"

You Zhengping licked his lips. A bit sadly, he said, "When have you ever been well disposed towards anyone?"

"During my eleventh level, I met a... Why am I telling you this?" Yu Hua said. "Do you want to stay with me?"

During his eleventh level? Wasn't that me? You Zhengping's eyes lit up. But this was wrong. Didn't he only arrive at time nodes? Given Guan Shaoguang's principles, nothing he did should have any impact on history. Why did Yu Hua still remember his rainbow hair from the eleventh level? He felt more and more doubts and suspicions. He was beginning to think that this little world was no longer as simple as Guan Shaoguang had said.

"Of course I want to stay with you," You Zhengping said frankly.

With one hand on the back of You Zhengping's head, Yu Hua moved the other hand from holding his chin to stroking his lips. In a husky voice, he said, "If you stay with me, you can't disobey my orders. If you disobey a single one, you'll end up like those people just now, understand?"

"Were you angry that they didn't listen to your orders, or were you angry that they got their companions killed and placed too much value on special ability attributes, not treating levelers with ordinary special abilities as people?" You Zhengping's words struck Yu Hua to the heart.

Yu Hua paused and very slowly said, "If they had only listened to me, they would have lived. Anyway, those who disobey me will die."

Remembering the pure university student he had seen only a few hours ago and looking at this increasingly cruel and cold Yu Hua, You Zhengping sadly touched his face and said in a gentle voice, "I know you want to protect everyone."

He was a Protector. He understood better than anyone else the feeling of wanting to protect everyone.

He also understood the pain of being able to protect everyone but failing because of some people's selfishness.

Yu Hua heard him, and it was as if his cold mask came off. He slowly approached You Zhengping, his lips drawing nearer and nearer.

You Zhengping closed his eyes, waiting for his husband's kiss.

But at the last moment, Yu Hua turned his head away and in a somewhat angry tone said, "You're a pretty good leveler. Why do you insist on throwing yourself at someone powerful and doing these things?"

You Zhengping: "???"

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Author's note:

Yu Hua (on the surface): Stop looking.

Yu Hua (inwardly): Keep looking.

Yu Hua (on the surface): Eat this candy.

Yu Hua (inwardly): Eat...

Yu Hua (on the surface): How could you seduce me with your arts?

Yu Hua (inwardly): I want to sleep with him, but I'm a gentleman.

You Zhengping: Seriously, Yu Hua, are you all right?

## CHAPTER 92

Yu Hua could sense that this rainbow-haired leveler was a spatial ability user. A person like this would be welcomed no matter what team he joined. What need did he have to use these means to attach himself to Yu Hua?

He slowly closed his eyes, his thoughts floating to hundreds of years earlier when he had been young and his thoughts very simple. In a desperate contest, he had met a person with an open and casual disposition who had agreed to team up with him to clear. When the eleventh level ended, Yu Hua had searched for him for a long time, but he hadn't found him again.

He didn't even know this person's name. Along with the confusion of the awakenings of first love, this had made Yu Hua ask many of his former friends about this person's whereabouts, but he had come up empty.

Later Yu Hua had stopped searching and had slowly turned into a person who struck fear into the hearts of levelers. Many people investigated him and had uncovered his hundred year search.

Many people dyed their hair rainbow colored to get close to him, but what Yu Hua missed wasn't the hair color. It was that leveler's bright eyes.

When he saw people with that hair color, Yu Hua would without exception take his frustration out on them. Their outcome was tragic. Gradually, no one dared to dye their hair like that again.

But now, he hadn't killed this rainbow-haired person on sight. Was he going soft, or did not want to give him up?

It was probably because there was no obvious malice about this person.

Yu Hua lay with his back turned. The rainbow haired person behind him stuck to him, head pressed against his back, occasionally touching him with his leg.

The inside of the tent became quiet. Only their even breathing remained.

Yu Hua's cold voice broke the silence: "What's your name?"

"Me? My name is..." the person behind him answered.

"What?" Yu Hua didn't hear. His hearing had always been acute. It must have been that this person wasn't willing to say his name.

"You can call me Xiao You," the person behind him said.

Xiao You? "You" as in the preposition? "You" as in "drawn-out?" "You" as in "outstanding?"<sup>29</sup> Was it a family name or a personal name? Slightly dissatisfied, Yu Hua said, "Only people with bad intentions won't give their true names."

"It's not that I don't want to," Xiao You mumbled. "Let's say I have a hidden difficulty."

"As you like." Yu Hua used his fire power to warm the inside of the tent a little. "Rest. We're going to complete a mission in two hours."

"What mission?" Xiao You pressed close to Yu Hua, gently blowing on his ear.

"Hunting and killing the giant mutants in the gorge. What about you?" Yu Hua asked. He didn't suspect Xiao You. Low level and high level levelers who came to the same world would have different missions.

"It's different from yours." Xiao You didn't answer directly.

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<sup>29</sup> The last of Yu Hua's three guesses is You Zhengping's actual surname.



Yu Hua said, "Even if you don't say it, I can guess. I need to kill the strongest mutant beast, and the others need to kill the smaller ones. You must also have been assigned a certain number of the smaller mutant beasts."

Xiao You became bolder and bolder. He even kissed his ear and quietly said, "Mutant beasts. Aren't they this world's primary intelligent beings?"

"Enough." At the end of his endurance, Yu Hua turned and pressed Xiao You down. He bundled him up in the black cloak he had given him and quietly said, "I can temporarily protect you during this world. You don't need to do this sort of thing. Have some self-respect while you pass the level."

Xiao You said, "I didn't come looking for you because I wanted to pass the level."

Yu Hua brought his fist down on his cheek. Propping himself up, he looked loftily down on Xiao You, full of murderous energy. "Do you think I wouldn't dare to do anything to you?"

"Go ahead, do it." Xiao You threw back his head and exposed the graceful line of his neck, looking entirely yielding. Ignoring the hair, he was actually very good-looking.

Yu Hua swallowed, his throat shaking. He stared at Xiao You for a while, then turned his back to him. It was two hours before the mutant beasts appeared. He needed to conserve his energy.

Xiao You, bound up in the black cloak, didn't disturb him. He only kept looking at him with a scorching gaze. Yu Hua felt as though it was burning a hole in his back.

After some quiet, the two of them really did fall asleep. They were both alert. If any danger had approached the tent, they would instantly have been startled awake. This was their combat instinct.

Guan Shaoguang, standing outside the tent, at last put away his weapon. This wasn't a good opportunity to act. When they went to the gorge to hunt mutant beasts, Yu Hua's attention would be the most distracted and subject to gaps. It would be most convenient to act.

The only difficulty was You Zhengping, who was like a lingering spirit. He had to think of a way to get someone to kill him or control him.

Guan Shaoguang looked all around and saw some people sitting around the bonfire, not resting. They were looking at the circle where the source crystal had exploded, their expressions either desolate or furious.

Guan Shaoguang went over and casually picked a place not too far from them to sit down. He fed the bonfire a stick. A spark flew up, like the energy explosion earlier, exploding.

“Ah!” The girl who had picked up the ashes of Geng-jiejie and the others was scared into a low scream. Her expression was somewhat absent. Clearly she still hadn’t recovered from Yu Hua’s wrath.

“I’m sorry,” Guan Shaoguang said, his expression meek. He lowered his eyelids, screening the indifference in his eyes.

“It wasn’t your fault. I’m just a little...” The girl squeezed her arms. “Scared.”

“You can’t be so timid. We have to go hunt mutant beasts soon.” Guan Shaoguang gave the girl a bag of cotton candy. His tone was gentle. “I got this on a fairly peaceful world before. If you’re still scared when we go out to hunt, eat some sweets. At least it’ll give you some energy.”

“Thank you.” The girl clutched the bag.

“Why are you all still gathered here? Go rest. If you’re all half-dead when it comes time to hunt, Yu Hua will be angry.” Guan Shaoguang seemingly unintentionally mentioned Yu Hua.

Hearing the name “Yu Hua,” all the people around the bonfire trembled simultaneously.

The girl was silent for a long time. She swallowed, and carefully said, “Guan-ge, those people...did I kill them? I just wanted to get justice for Geng-jiejie. They did something wrong, but it was for the sake of getting the source crystal to increase our rate of succeeding at missions. They-they shouldn’t have been punished with death.”

“It’s nothing to do with you. They died because they defied Yu Hua’s orders. That’s the kind of person Yu Hua is. He doesn’t permit other voices in the team, just like a ‘tyrant.’ As deputy captain, I’m very concerned for the stability of the team’s mood.” Guan Shaoguang was hinting to them that Yu Hua was a ruthless person.

But a male team member suddenly said, “Guan Shaoguang, Yu Hua went too far this time, but how about not making yourself look good? What kind of deputy captain are you? In this team, it’s always been what Yu Hua says goes. Where is there room for a deputy captain? You’ve known Yu Hua longer than us and have a more unique ability, but that doesn’t make you deputy captain!”

“What...” Guan Shaoguang wanted to say, “What are you talking about, I established this team with Yu Hua. When the first squad was set up, I was its deputy captain.” But when the words came to his mouth, his expression changed. He held down his head.

Countless memories surged up in his mind. The memories he was familiar with merged with the memories of the Guan Shaoguang of this time node. He found to his shock that in this time node, he hadn’t become Yu Hua’s opponent in that contest. There really had been a rainbow-haired person who had taken his place. The rainbow-haired person had appeared miraculously and then disappeared just as miraculously.

He had only met Yu Hua after over fifty levels. Yu Hua had already organized his squad then. In the early stages, Guan Shaoguang's time power had been very weak. He had had a very hard time in his first fifty-some levels. He had been rather dejected and in search of shelter when he had joined the squad.

But in the original timeline, Yu Hua and Guan Shaoguang had met in the eleventh level and joined forces, complemented the shortcomings of each other's abilities. Guan Shaoguang hadn't been seriously inconvenienced and had naturally become the team's deputy captain.

This was only a little world that he had constructed. Why would the track of history truly change?

The strangest thing was that the change to the track of history hadn't created an entirely different parallel world. Instead, it had returned to its original track after fifty-some levels, revising the disordered plot.

It was as if someone had knocked the track of history out of alignment in the eleventh level, and after a bit of deviation, the track had quickly restored itself after that person had vanished.

No, this was obviously a fragment of memory. It was a fake little world. How could it be changed?

The time power was the ability to section off a certain time node or to change the flow of time. The essence of time was movement. Relying solely on a time dimension power, it was impossible to cross space and time, unless...there was someone in this space who held the power of spatial law!

You Zhengping! Guan Shaoguang quickly recalled everything that his past projection in the estate had experienced. You Zhengping had opened a small parallel space and trapped his projection inside it.

You Zhengping's spatial ability was to open paths to parallel spaces. In other words, it was opening "doors" between the real world and little fake worlds.

From the moment You Zhengping had found the twisted crack in space-time and had arrived in this time in pursuit of Yu Hua, he had opened a door in space-time, bringing everyone back to true over-and-done-with history.

"A person in an ordinary world with a smattering of natural law power—how could he connect to so distant a past? Even if he had wanted to, an intact world law wouldn't permit it." Guan Shaoguang squeezed his knuckles so they cracked continuously. He thought inwardly, "Unless this is something that the world law is in favor of, unless it was even promoting the distortion of space-time, helping You Zhengping do this."

Doing this would cause harm to the world law itself. It amounted to cutting apart its own natural law power, turning what had been whole into something incomplete. The world law had no feelings, it wouldn't deliberately favor a certain person. Since it was willing to harm itself in order to help You Zhengping, then this must have been the outcome of countless calculations.

Why? Guan Shaoguang didn't understand.

"Hey!" The man who had just called Guan Shaoguang's identity as deputy captain into question saw him frowning and clenching his fist and couldn't resist coming over to Guan Shaoguang. Brandishing a fist, he said, "If you want to be deputy captain, you first at least have to convince the masses."

"Shut up." Guan Shaoguang flicked his fingers, speeding up the man's time flow.

The man stood there, not moving. It wasn't that he didn't want to make trouble for Guan Shaoguang. It was that for him, time was flying past. The two hours took a few seconds. What could a person do within a few seconds? Probably only blink his eyes.

"Guan Shaoguang!" The others saw Guan Shaoguang attack one of their own and look at him suspiciously.

"I was only avoiding a dispute among companions," Guan Shaoguang said steadily. "Was I supposed to fight him? In two hours, the flow of time will return to normal for him."

Hearing him say this, everyone dropped the subject. After all, if they really did fight, Guan Shaoguang couldn't be defeated. The time ability was too frightening when it had developed. They had no ability to resist.

Guan Shaoguang said, "To get back to the main point, I'm concerned that that rainbow-haired person with Yu Hua has a dubious background. I'm concerned that he'll cause mischief during our operation later. While we're battling the mutant beasts, we should equip a special ability suppressor and find an opportunity to trap him."

Seeing everyone hesitate, Guan Shaoguang said, "What are you worried about? Yu Hua hasn't said anything about how we're supposed to treat him. We won't be disobeying his orders."

Everyone relaxed, letting themselves be brainwashed by Guan Shaoguang's brief words and planning on how to deal with You Zhengping.

Not far off, in a small tent, Director Ha's ears trembled.

A dog's hearing was excellent. It hadn't been able to sleep because of the noise!

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Author's note:

Yu Hua: Do you think I wouldn't dare to do anything to you?

You Zhengping: Well, don't just talk about it, do it already!

Yu Hua: No, we aren't married, I have to be reserved.

Guan Shaoguang: Why would the world law help You Zhengping?

The world law: Well...you may not know this, but this is my little prince, whom I've chosen from among hundreds of thousands to act as a marriage tribute.

## CHAPTER 93

Two hours passed in a flash. Yu Hua's biological alarm clock was precise. Like before, he opened his eyes after precisely one hour and fifty-nine minutes, one minute before the arranged time.

This view of time was probably carved into his genes by now. Even when he was completely exhausted, even if he could only rest for ten minutes, he would still wake up a minute in advance and prepare for battle ahead of everyone else.

This awakening was different from before. At some point he had turned over so he was eye to eye with rainbow-haired Xiao You. Xiao You's legs in their tattered jeans were pressing heavily against his waist. The black cloak he had given Xiao You was draped over both of them. The wretch was even letting out quiet, happy snores.

There was still a minute to waste. Yu Hua put on a frosty expression and pinched Xiao You's nose. He still didn't wake up. How could he sleep so soundly?

There was an unnoticed smile on Yu Hua's face. He drew back the hand pinching Xiao You's nose. His gaze fell on Xiao You's lips, and he slowly lowered his head.

His mind as always resisted close contact with a stranger, but his body was unusually honest. In his sleep, he had unwittingly turned over and embraced Xiao You, letting him get close without any defenses. All of his body's reactions spoke of how attracted he was to this person.

It was an attraction that was impossible to resist.

Yu Hua couldn't imagine how a leveler of unknown origin could have such a fatal attraction for him, but it had indeed happened.

Luckily, his willpower was strong to a psychotic degree. Just before he kissed Xiao You, he drew back, his gaze falling on Xiao You's bare feet.

The frostbite had been healed, but...the sight of the bare feet was irksome.

Yu Hua got a pair of socks and leather boots from the System's space. He always collected these things and gave them to people who needed them to lighten the strain on the System's space.

He put the socks onto Xiao You's feet. This person could really sleep. This movement still didn't wake him. If his alertness was so low, how had he passed this many levels?

After putting on the socks, there were still the shoes. The brief minute had passed. The temporary camp's alarm sounded, startling You Zhengping awake.

He sat up at once and blearily mumbled, "I'm dead, I'm dead, I'll be late..."

You Zhengping's gaze fell on Yu Hua. He saw Yu Hua holding a pair of black leather boots and holding You Zhengping's somewhat slender ankle, putting a boot on for him.

Seeing Yu Hua doing this while wearing his camouflage outfit instantly brought You Zhengping back to when they had first been married. He had slept very late then, and there was never enough time in the morning to get out of bed. Yu Hua would scoop him out of bed while he was still muddled from sleep and pass him a cup and a toothbrush with toothpaste squeezed onto it. When he had blearily brushed his teeth and washed his face, his breakfast and clothes would also be ready. With a bun in his mouth, he would hold out his arms, and Yu Hua would help put on his clothes so he wouldn't be late.

At the time, he'd simply been looked after like a baby. Later he had insisted on getting up early. Apart from worrying about Yu Hua, he also didn't want to be an overgrown baby anymore.

Yu Hua holding the boots now brought You Zhengping back to their honeymoon period.

"You..."

You Zhengping had just gotten one word out when the new leather boots were thrown against his chest. His face like winter frost, Yu Hua said, "Put them on or you'll slow down the team."

"Okay." You Zhengping obediently put on the brand new warm leather boots. Seeing Yu Hua was still sunk in the shock of having been found out, he sidled over to stealthily kiss Yu Hua's face. Smiling, he said, "The shoes and socks are very warm. Thank you."

"You!" Yu Hua said coldly. "Behave yourself!"

"Yes, yes." You Zhengping nodded perfunctorily. "You did it for the efficiency of the team."

Yu Hua didn't explain further. He pursed his lips and left the tent. You Zhengping wrapped himself in the black cloak and ran after him.

When he walked out, he saw a man howling angrily by the burnt out bonfire. "Guan Shaoguang, if you... Huh? Where's Guan Shaoguang? He was just showing off right in front of me."

Yu Hua dismantled the tent and said to everyone, "Hurry up. When the red sun and the purple moon alternate, the mutant beasts are at their weakest. There's only a moment's opportunity. We have to grab it."

The man who had been brought forward in time by Guan Shaoguang could only restrain himself, put away his tent, inspect his weapons, and get ready to set out.

You Zhengping looked up at the sky. He saw that the half-sun was sinking on the east, while to the west a purple full moon was slowly rising.

This world truly was totally different from his.

Yu Hua put away the small tent nearest to theirs. The fully dressed Director Ha and Junjun ran over. Yu Hua vaguely remembered this child and dog. In the eleventh level, Junjun had also given him a piece of milk candy. His memories had originally been blurry. Xiao You's appearance had made Yu Hua gradually recall those memories that had been deeply buried in history.

During level eleven, Yu Hua had been very curious about Junjun and Xiao Ha. He had never seen a player that was a group consisting of a child and dog using the same System. They didn't fit in with the world, and over hundreds of years, their appearance hadn't changed at all.

He had asked before, and Junjun had been unable to say anything to the point, while Xiao Ha couldn't speak. He hadn't found out anything.

Yu Hua could only keep Junjun and Xiao Ha close to himself so they wouldn't be harmed by this world's mutant beasts or other levelers.

"The three of you, keep close to me," Yu Hua said.

But Xiao You quietly said to Yu Hua, "My second space can hold people. All attacks will be reduced to one tenth by the second space. How about I hide them?"

"Your ability..." Yu Hua was somewhat surprised by Xiao You's ability. He had seen from the start that Xiao You could store things, but he hadn't thought that he could not only store things, he could also hide people, and that the spaces would have rules to restrict other types of abilities.

This wasn't an ordinary spatial ability user. Xiao You held a rudimentary version of natural law power.

Having gone through 398 worlds, Yu Hua had long ago encountered the idea of natural law power, and he had tentatively held a bit of it. He just hadn't fully grasped it yet.

Xiao You didn't wait for Yu Hua's permission. He went over to Junjun and Director Ha and said to them, "We're going to go to a very dangerous, very cold place. I'm going to hide you two somewhere safe. Don't cry, all right, Junjun, Xiao Ha?"

Junjun had always been well-behaved. At the very beginning, during the attack on the central park, his performance had been better than the majority of adults. He had experienced too much these last few days, and he could still maintain his childish heart. He ate and slept as he ought to, and he didn't cry. Admittedly having Xiao Ha's company to comfort him helped, but it was also because of Junjun's own good mental condition.

"Awoo-oo!" Xiao Ha looked very unwilling. It had already guessed that You Zhengping was the handsome uncle Protector who had thwarted it countless times that day on the rooftop. Of course it didn't want to enter its enemy's space and let its enemy protect it.

It was this spatial ability user ruining its plans that had brought it to its current state! Director Ha's blue eyes filled with hatred—though this wasn't visible.

But Junjun agreed. Leading Xiao Ha by its leash, he politely said, "Thank you, dagege. Xiao Ha, say thank you."

"Awoo." Xiao Ha nodded unwillingly, tapping Junjun with its paws.

Junjun took a strip of cloth from his pocket and stealthily put it into You Zhengping's hand. Then he obediently led Xiao Ha into You Zhengping's space.

You Zhengping waved the black cloak and unfolded the strip under the cloak's screen. He saw that some orderly horizontal and vertical strokes had been torn in the cloth. Put together, the tears made a few crooked characters: "Battle, Guan, and, people, control, you."

This strip of cloth was obviously torn from Junjun's sleeve. Its size was limited. There was only room to make tears to form a few characters. And however you looked at it, the tears didn't look as though they had been made by a child's hand. They looked more like they had been scratched by a dog's paws. There was even dog fur clinging to it, and faint marks of a dog's teeth were visible.

However you interpreted these characters, what they meant was, "During the battle, Guan Shaoguang is going to assemble the others to control You Zhengping."

You Zhengping calmly tore the strip of cloth to bits and stuffed them into his pants pocket.

Yu Hua saw that he had hidden the child and the dog and approached Xiao You. Seeing Xiao You naturally take his arm, he flew up to lead the team.

You Zhengping was just thinking about Xiao Ha. He had never had any contact with Xiao Ha and had always thought that it was just an ordinary dog. Now that seemed wrong. It possessed acute hearing, it was literate, and it knew how to succinctly and forcefully convey messages. It



had definitely taken Xiao Ha a lot of effort to tear up this strip of cloth. It had had to control its strength to the utmost, and also use the briefest language to describe the information.

This whole time, Xiao Ha had taken very good care of Junjun. It had been so clever it didn't seem like a dog. Regarding its origins, Lian Yufan had said that Yu Hua had bought it on a rainy night to humiliate him. It was the day of the event at Xincheng Mall. Yu Hua had said he wanted to interview a new public relations directors, and then he had brought back Director Ha.

After the battle at Xincheng Mall, the black-cloaked man had killed Destroyer 192. 192 had had the ability to change bodies. Yu Hua had returned to the studio that night with a dog. Director Ha, who was literate. Director Ha, who treated Junjun much more favorably than it did Lian Yufan...

Putting all the clues together, You Zhengping guessed Director Ha's identity.

Thinking that Destroyer 192, who had caused him so much suffering, was now inside his space with Junjun, You Zhengping felt uneasy. But thinking of the way Director Ha protected Junjun and the way it had run the risk of being exposed to pass him a message, You Zhengping decided to trust it this time.

"What are you thinking about?" As they traveled, Yu Hua noticed You Zhengping's absent-mindedness.

You Zhengping looked at Yu Hua and quietly said, "I'm thinking that actually you're very good to all the levelers."

Yu Hua laughed coldly. "What gave you this confidence? Don't you remember what happened yesterday?"

"They got their companions killed," You Zhengping said. "If it had been only way to protect more people, or if their companions had happily sacrificed themselves, then I could understand it. But for the sake of the source crystal, for the sake of upgrading their own power, to kill those people and then try to use the source crystal to pass it off, that doesn't accord with my convictions."

"But I killed them because they disobeyed my orders." A trace of appreciation aimed at Xiao You flashed through Yu Hua's eyes. "What are your convictions?"

"Protect the world, protect ordinary people, protect my companions, protect my family. That's the meaning of my life." You Zhengping smiled. "Of course, I also want to go on a blind date to find a like-minded lover, get married, and live a peaceful life with my husband."

"You really want a lot." Yu Hua snorted. "Greedy."

“That’s right, I’ve always been this way. I want everything. I won’t pass anything up.” You Zhengping leaned his head on Yu Hua’s shoulder. The tears he had just shed were blown dry by the warm wind. “Yu Hua, don’t make me wait too long.”

The track of history prevented You Zhengping from telling the truth. He couldn’t even communicate his own name. He didn’t know whether Yu Hua could hear this last sentence of his.

Even so, he still had to take Yu Hua out of this little world, take him back home, take Xiao Ha and Junjun back home.

The tears fell drop by drop into the wind. Yu Hua felt a moment of tenderness. Softly, he said, “After I complete this mission, I’ll take you back to the System’s central world. It’s safe there. Though I don’t know whether you have enough points to equip a time stop.”

“It’s not that home,” You Zhengping thought inwardly.

The team landed near the gorge. Yu Hua had sent people earlier to scout out where the mutant beasts moved and what their habits were. He had sent several team members to split up and investigate and gone by himself to the most dangerous place.

When the team members had reported their information, Yu Hua had analyzed what the best opportunity would be and had come over beforehand.

Apart from him, there were quite a few levelers in this world. Everyone had different missions. There were those who had to kill three, five, ten, or some other number of small mutant beasts; some had to kill medium-sized ones, and some had to kill huge ones.

After teaming up, the missions could be combined. As long as the group reached the total, that was enough. Individuals didn’t need to personally kill the beasts.

There were many mutant beasts around the gorge. Seeing their team arrive, other levelers hid one after another. Someone said, “It’s Yu Hua’s team. Damn it, they’re going to snatch all the monsters. We won’t have any way to get by.”

Yu Hua landed at the top of the gorge with You Zhengping. He waved casually, and a blinding light flew into the air. All the people and mutant beasts instantly lost their vision!

—

Author’s note:

Yu Hua: I can’t resist wanting to help Xiao You change his clothes, wash his face, feed him treats. What’s going on?

You Zhengping: Just your wifely instincts lighting up because you ran into me. Stay calm, I’m used to it.

## CHAPTER 94

Guan Shaoguang looked coldly at Yu Hua. Everything was proceeding normally according to his memories.

Yu Hua released his light ability, instantly depriving the levelers and the mutant beasts on the scene of their vision. Then there was a wide-ranging rain of fire and wind blades. He handily wielded the powerful attacks of both wind and fire.

Soon, under the force of the attacks, there were hardly any mutant beasts who could move normally remaining.

Yu Hua would drop a line of “Go ahead and pick your own targets,” then leap into the gorge to deal with his own mission target—the abyss level mutant beast.

Yu Hua hadn’t given the mutant beasts at the edge of the gorge a beating in order to make it easier for the other levelers to carry out their missions. It was that these mutant beasts had been guarding the gorge, not letting anyone approach the huge abyss beast. In order to complete his own mission, Yu Hua had to clear the field.

At the time, Guan Shaoguang had never thought that Yu Hua could encounter any difficulty. The huge abyss beast had actually been linked to the whole planet. It had wrapped Yu Hua up in silk-like threads like a cocoon and had meant to self-destruct, taking Yu Hua with it.

At the critical juncture, Yu Hua had absorbed the giant abyss beast’s power and had leapt up among exploding dust and saltpeter to become a high level holder of natural law power.

Yes, ordinary levelers could only attain godhood after passing level 500; but this step was too hard. If you held even a bit of natural law power, the System would regard you as a dangerous article and give you the most difficult missions. Many people died before level 500. Only a small number of people could truly grasp natural law power.

But Yu Hua was lucky. The giant abyss beast whose power he had absorbed had held a fragment of this world’s natural. Benefiting from a misfortune, Yu Hua had indirectly obtained natural law power, becoming a god before level 500.

After that, he had become an out-and-out tyrant. Everything he did was irresistible. All levelers trembled under his command. He had become more frightening than even the System.

The System still had its rules. The System strictly observed its own rules. But Yu Hua was different. His moods were changeable. You might die at any time at his hand.

Back then, Guan Shaoguang had still been a core member of Yu Hua’s team, and his best friend, the team’s deputy captain. He had counseled Yu Hua many times not to go too far in oppressing the levelers. Everyone already had it very hard under the System’s oppression.

But Yu Hua had given Guan Shaoguang a cold glance and said dully, “None of you understand.”

His eyes seemed to be beholding an ant. They were ruthless and indifferent. It was only at that moment that Guan Shaoguang had known that Yu Hua was no longer their friend.

He stood up on high, looking down upon them with his unfeeling eyes.

“So you’re a god? I can do that, too, once I reach level 500.” A thought like poison appeared in the minds of the good friends who had faced life and death with Yu Hua. *When I reach level 500...*

Guan Shaoguang recalled his drifting thoughts. His gaze fell on Yu Hua, who was releasing large-scale attacks to injure the mutant beasts.

He had to take advantage of this opportunity. Before the giant abyss beast self-destructed, he would slow Yu Hua’s time flow to keep Yu Hua from absorbing the giant abyss beast’s energy. This way, everyone would die in the explosion, himself included.

Unless Yu Hua unsealed 100% of his powers.

Die, or break his seal. Guan Shaoguang left no other choices. There was no other path.

It was best to resolve the battle at level 398, not drag it out to level 500. Even Guan Shaoguang himself didn’t want to experience level 500 again.

Before that, he had to get rid of that lingering ghost of a stumbling block. Guan Shaoguang’s gaze fell on You Zhengping.

Up to this moment, Guan Shaoguang still didn’t understand why Yu Hua would have chosen a peaceful life and marriage to You Zhengping. What had happened in the worlds after level 500 to make Yu Hu choose such a future?

Of course, that wasn’t important. The important thing was that Yu Hua would either die or become a god. He shouldn’t be a mediocrity.

Guan Shaoguang’s expression was firm. He shot looks at the teammates he had brainwashed last night.

At this point, Yu Hua had already gotten rid of most of the mutant beasts. He quietly instructed Xiao You: “How many mutant beasts are your mission target? Chose some that will be easy to deal with and complete your mission.”

Then, following his fixed orbit, Yu Hua said to the other levelers, “You all go ahead and choose your own mission targets.”

“I’ll be right back.” Leaving these words behind for You Zhengping, Yu Hua leapt into the gorge.

You Zhengping had unexpectedly lost Yu Hua. He was about to leap down after him without a second thought, but he couldn’t move.

It was Guan Shaoguang. While Yu Hua was dealing with giant abyss beast, he had taken this opportunity to slow down You Zhengping’s time flow.

In order to leave himself power for dealing with Yu Hua, Guan Shaoguang had only slowed You Zhengping’s time flow down to one tenth. What would take another person a second to accomplish would require ten seconds for You Zhengping.

The difference didn’t seem large, but it was enough to deal with You Zhengping. Anyway, he wouldn’t be the one doing it.

“Who has the power suppressor? Put it on him,” Guan Shaoguang said. “There are so many mutant beasts, but he isn’t in a hurry to fulfill his mission and wants to chase Yu Hua instead. He must want to attack Yu Hua while he’s taking care of the giant abyss beast and can’t split his attention. Capturing him would be a great service.”

The team members whose brains had failed under the influence of his trickery were indeed taken in. Hearing the words “great service,” they even fought over who would get to catch You Zhengping.

Guan Shaoguang had just had time for a satisfied smile when he saw some mysterious space suddenly open in front of You Zhengping. A fluffy husky jumped out of the space. Stepping on the team members’ shoulders at a speed impossible for humans to imagine, it threw itself at Guan Shaoguang and fiercely bit his neck!

After delivering this single attack, Director Ha didn’t stick around to continue fighting. Having wounded Guan Shaoguang, it returned to the space at the same speed. While passing You Zhengping, it called an “awoo” to him.

This was Director Ha’s special ability, which had awakened in order to rescue Junjun when they had been trapped by Guan Shaoguang in the little world.

Destroyer 192 had lost his special ability and become one with a husky. He had no origin ability; the husky, which had grown up in an ordinary world, had its instincts. These were the speed, explosive force, and stamina that belonged to a Siberian husky. When Junjun had met with danger, Director Ha had been able to run to him. This wasn’t because it hadn’t been limited by the rules of the little world, it was because its speed had far exceeded the limits!

The round trip only took 0.03 seconds. No one even had the opportunity to react before Director Ha stepped on them like a bridge, there and back. Guan Shaoguang, meanwhile,

couldn't maintain his special ability because of the fierce pain. You Zhengping's time flow returned to normal.

"Nicely done!" You Zhengping put Director Ha back into the space and unhesitatingly leapt into the gorge.

Given his current power, he couldn't deal with this many people. The most important thing was that if Guan Shaoguang dared to take action now, it must be because Yu Hua was going to encounter danger in the gorge, so Guan Shaoguang was secure in the knowledge of his own safety.

The gorge was fully five thousand meters deep. The bottom of the gorge was lost in darkness.

In order to control his special ability, You Zhengping had gone bungee jumping and parachuting. He had experienced the weightless feeling of falling. But then he'd had the protection of safety measures. He hadn't been as helpless and uncertain as now, not knowing what was below.

A lengthy howl came from the bottom of the gorge, like a lament, like indignation.

You Zhengping couldn't see what the bottom was. He rapidly determined based on the echoes of the mournful howl how far he was from the bottom. With a thought, just as he was about to hit the ground, he seized something like a plank in midair. This was You Zhengping's third space, which could change shape and be used as steps.

He had indeed lost a lot of power due to going back in time, but these were all his abilities. If You Zhengping only had time, he could awaken each kind of ability once again!

Though he had grabbed onto the third space, his downward momentum was too strong. You Zhengping's shoulder dislocated instantly. Fortunately it was his left arm, so it wouldn't get in the way of battle. He gritted his teeth and endured it. He felt that he was only a couple of meters from the ground, so he bravely let go and lightly jumped down.

His feet touched solid ground. Unexpectedly, it felt soft. You Zhengping only learned then that what he had stepped on might not be the ground; instead, it might be the giant abyss beast hiding at the bottom of the gorge.

"Yu Hua, where are you?" he called out quietly.

He didn't get an answer from Yu Hua. Instead, the mournful howl sounded again. This time, the sound bypassed his eardrums and went straight into his brain. A thought that didn't pass through speech but relied only on mental energy was transmitted into You Zhengping's brain: *Destroyer!!!*

No one was more familiar with this term than You Zhengping. The giant abyss beast hadn't used language. After its idea pierced You Zhengping's brain, it naturally turned into this term.

Only a Protector would understand the significance of this term.

You Zhengping touched the giant abyss beast with his hand, trying to convey his own thoughts. These were notions of comfort, protection, and firmness, an entirely different palette of feelings from a Destroyer. They were ardent, magnificent, full of vitality.

You Zhengping didn't know how to transfer mental energy, but the giant abyss beast seemed to have the ability to receive strong feelings. It earnestly received You Zhengping's convictions.

*Protector?* the giant abyss beast asked.

You Zhengping didn't speak. In his heart, he recalled each moment he had spent protecting the world, his companions, and his determination to protect Yu Hua.

He didn't know whether the giant abyss beast had understood. You Zhengping felt a sinking at his feet. He was going to be drawn into some frightening place. You Zhengping instinctively wanted to resist, but remembering the despairing cry of "destroyer," he held back in time.

Following the draw, he arrived in a place suffused with white light. This was something like a huge cave. In the center was a cocoon made of countless silk-like white threads tied together.

Instinct told You Zhengping that Yu Hua was in that cocoon!

He went to the cocoon without hesitation and tried to touch the white threads. Countless mental pulses poured into You Zhengping's brain from the white threads, and he was caught in them, tied up along with Yu Hua.

These white threads were the giant abyss beast's... No, they were the fragments of the world law's consciousness. This giant abyss beast had absorbed the power of the law fragments; that was how it had become so powerful.

The world law had no feelings. These consciousnesses were the assembly of intelligent beings within the law. These intelligent beings were former humans.

One day, as disaster approached, the world law had broken. There had been no one to protect these ordinary people. Their world had been invaded and occupied by the System.

War, plague, natural disasters, levelers, mutation... After hundreds of years of torment, most humans had been wiped out. Only those who had transformed into mutant beasts had survived. They had remained in this world and continued to struggle against the System and the levelers, not stopping until death.

No one understood this sort of feeling better than You Zhengping. If it had been him in their place, even if the world had been destroyed, even if he had become a mutant, he would still have picked up his weapons and fought the Destroyers to the death.

The giant abyss beast was created from countless hopeless people assembling under the guidance of the law fragments. Its body was linked to the center of the planet, protecting the remaining natural law power.

Among these various ideas, You Zhengping searched for Yu Hua. He called out desperately, hoping that Yu Hua would be able to answer him.

But Yu Hua didn't.

Why wouldn't he answer? Yu Hua was so powerful. He couldn't have lost his will to fight because he had been controlled. Unless... You Zhengping had a bad thought.

You Zhengping had guessed right. Like him, Yu Hua had touched the white threads. Like him, he had discovered that the mutant beasts had once been human, and the levelers were the System's executioners.

There had never been any chance of going home. The fact that he had been chosen as a leveler showed that his home was gone. During these lengthy hundreds of years of passing levels, his world, like this one, had turned into ruins and been consumed by the System.

He had no home. Not only that—under the System's manipulation, he had constantly harmed other worlds. He was an accomplice!

*Destroyer! You are too strong. I cannot defeat you, and I cannot protect the remaining natural law power. But I can die and take you with me!* These were the giant abyss beast's wild and despairing thoughts. Yu Hua, caught in the depths of these thoughts, knew that the giant abyss beast was about to self-destruct.

The impact from the explosion would destroy this planet. Not a single one of the levelers on the planet would escape.

No matter. The deaths of a crowd of stupid accomplices would be nothing to regret.

Yu Hua gave up resisting and decided to receive his due punishment. But he heard someone calling.

"Yu Hua! Yu Hua! Yu Hua!"

Each cry was more urgent than the one before. There wasn't only worry in that voice; it also contained love.

A face that he would always like, no matter what, appeared in his mind. Yu Hua suddenly remembered Xiao You. Xiao You was still on this planet.



He slowly opened his eyes and spread out his mental senses, lightly touching the owner of that voice. Like countless times before, this person followed his mental energy to find him and hugged him tightly.

“Xiao You...” Yu Hua said quietly.

In a rapid voice, Xiao You said, “Yu Hua, listen to me, I know you’re upset, I know you blame yourself, and I know you’ve made a lot of mistakes because the System was using you. But in all these countless worlds, if there’s anyone who can defeat the System, it’s you. There’s only you. I beg you, don’t give up.”

“Xiao You, I’m not a savior, I’m only a...” *...stupid butcher.*

“No.” Xiao You didn’t stop consoling him. “Believe me, being upset and blaming yourself is never the way to atone for your crime. You have to live, and then...”

*And then clear, and meet me in the future.*

Yu Hua didn’t hear what came after “and then.” He heard a buzzing in his ears. But this time, he understood why he couldn’t hear what Xiao You was saying.

“Xiao You, did you come to find me under the limits of some space-time law?” Yu Hua asked.

At this moment, Guan Shaoguang stood outside the gorge holding the wound at his neck and frowned faintly. “This is wrong. Someone has touched my time law. If we remain in this time node, the whole little world will collapse!”

He looked down into the depths of the gorge. The energy of the giant abyss beast had been stable all along, while the person who had touched his time law seemed to be Yu Hua!

Perhaps his plan had been spoiled once again by You Zhengping.

Guan Shaoguang clenched his teeth. The moment that Yu Hua advanced a step in probing his time law, he abandoned this place and changed to another time node, right that instant.

At the bottom of the gorge, Yu Hua had just asked about the space-time law when he could no longer sense Xiao You.

He released his mental energy and searched among the gathering of the mutant beast’s thoughts, but he couldn’t find him anywhere.

Xiao You had suddenly appeared before his eyes, then quietly disappeared again.

Just like the rainbow-haired person before, he had appeared in his time without any forewarning and then left quickly; Yu Hua couldn’t find him anywhere.

They were the same person.

Yu Hua knew very well right now that he was standing at the edge of space-time law. He had touched a barrier of natural law power that there seemed to be no way to pass.

The mutant beast's thoughts were frantic. They wanted to kill Yu Hua, get rid of all the levelers on the planet. Their voices made Yu Hua unable to think. He cried angrily, "Shut up!"

The grouped thoughts were quieted by Yu Hua's force alone. Faced with countless hateful thoughts, Yu Hua released his mental energy: "My origin ability is 'control.' I can control all 'subjects' with my power.

"If an intelligent being gives me their 'allegiance,' their power will increased two- or threefold. The price of my 'protection' is that I can 'make use of' their power at will.

"If you give me your 'allegiance,' then, with 'eradicating the System' as the price, I'll obtain your natural law power!

"It's either be forced to extinction by the System now, or give me your 'allegiance,' be 'controlled' by me, become my power, and join in a revolt with uncertain hopes.

"Which do you choose?!"

Yu Hua's mental energy transmitted to each thought. The rioting thought group stabilized. They quietly "looked" at the invader Yu Hua.

Should they resist to the death, or should they trust him?

The law fragment made a decision faster than the thought group.

The law fragment's incomplete processing ability was constantly calculating. It had determined to give Yu Hua its "allegiance."

Tremendous energy poured into his body. Yu Hua felt the System's controlling device in his brain, the device that could make him self-destruct at any time, vanish without a trace under the assault of the natural law power.

At this moment, he had thrown off the System's control, thrown off the category of man, and stepped into the terrain of gods.

After the law fragment had given him its 'allegiance,' the giant abyss beast sighed and closed its eyes forever.

The thought group also lost its shelter when the law fragment had given its 'allegiance.' They gradually scattered.

Before each of the thoughts left, each one yearningly left behind a last thought with Yu Hua—*I'm waiting.*

Waiting for the day the System will be eradicated.

Yu Hua stepped on the giant abyss beast's body and slowly flew out of the gorge. Amid the envious, admiring, jealous, and reverent gazes, he stood in the sky.

His feet landed on the corpses of countless mutant beasts. The "Tyrant" had appeared.

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Author's note:

You Zhengping: Guan Shaoguang must die, must die, aaaaah!!! When I see Yu Hua again, will he be crazy?

Yu Hua (already gone evil): Ha.

## CHAPTER 95

When space-time fluctuated again, You Zhengping dimly sensed that this was his last chance.

He had disrupted Guan Shaoguang's plans twice in a row. This time, Guan Shaoguang wouldn't let him get close to Yu Hua again. And as the number of levels ascended, Guan Shaoguang's power would be stronger and stronger. This must be the moment when Guan Shaoguang would be most able to kill him.

Each time space-time fluctuated, he had ended up near Guan Shaoguang, not near Yu Hua. Why was that?

Also, according to what Guan Shaoguang had said, this was only a false memory space that he had created with time law. The track of history was unchanging. So why would Yu Hua remember him?

There were too many questions. You Zhengping had no way to analyze them one by one. He only knew that when the space-time fluctuation stopped, he might be faced with a merciless attack from Guan Shaoguang at his prime.

You Zhengping felt agitated, but he didn't fear battle. If he could grasp natural law power once, then he could grasp it a second time. Even if time had been turned back, his body, his memories, and his experiences couldn't be erased. His gift for combat had always been the best in the organization. If Guan Shaoguang wanted a fight, then he would fight!

You Zhengping clenched his fists and waited for Guan Shaoguang's attack.

The time lapse stopped, and You Zhengping found himself standing inside an estate with abundant greenery. There was a manmade lake next to him. The temperature was neither cold nor hot. The sky was as blue as a computer desktop. The white clouds were absolutely still. The sun shone like a searchlight hanging in the sky.

Another person might have thought that this was a peaceful world. But You Zhengping's intuition was very acute. He instantly noticed that the supposed sky, white clouds, and bright sun were artificial products. Even the wind blowing on his face strengthened and weakened according to certain rules. In this bright and spacious area, everything had a sense of falseness.

You Zhengping walked along the lake, carefully examining the surroundings. The more he looked, the more he thought that this was like an ordinary estate on an ordinary world. There was a residential building about thirty floors high beside the lake. Some windows were open, and some were closed. It seemed to be inhabited. There was a strong aura of life. But there was no one in the estate.

Just as he was thinking that there were no people active inside the estate, You Zhengping faintly heard the sound of conversation from the other side of the lake.

You Zhengping's spatial instincts told him that this estate was probably some space or little world, but the people talking were outside of it, so he could only hear their voices but not see them.

Since that was the case, with his ability, he should be able to pass through the restrictions of space and see the people speaking. You Zhengping attempted to use his ability to approach the place where the voices were coming from. He held out his hand in the air, and a light screen the size of a big movie theater screen appeared in front of it. You Zhengping could see who was speaking, but it seemed that the other side couldn't see him.

He reached out to touch the light screen. His hand passed through as though through rays of light, but he couldn't touch the people on the screen. They were in two dimensions in the same space, something like a two-dimensional projection into a three-dimensional space. You could see them, but there was no way to touch them.

"Guan Shaoguang, haven't you decided yet?" There was an exceedingly handsome man on the screen. You Zhengping had never seen him.

There were five people in all on the screen. Guan Shaoguang was one of them. Faced with the handsome man's question, he didn't answer.

All five people had excellent appearances. They were high grade levelers and had undergone countless upgrades to their bodies. Their attractiveness and their physical capabilities had both reached the pinnacle of humanity.

“Whether you agree or not, I’ll take action in the next world,” said a short-haired woman who was playing with a knife. “The next world is our five-hundredth level. After we pass this level, the five of us can all grasp natural law power. Only then will we stand a fighting chance.”

“And if I don’t agree?” Guan Shaoguang said.

“They you aren’t qualified to fight in the five-hundredth level,” the short-haired woman said with an emotionless smile. “A dead person isn’t qualified to pass levels.”

“We’re all friends who have crawled up together from the bottom. Why is this necessary?” Guan Shaoguang said with a sigh.

“Controlling and being controlled isn’t being friends,” said a robust man.

“The whole central world is already within his reach,” said the last man, who was soft and feminine. “He holds every type of ability and can punish levelers however he wants. If he clears, do you really think he’ll help all of us return home? No, he’ll only become an even more awful new System!”

Guan Shaoguang said, “Then...I’ll go ask Yu Hua again. I want to know why he’s become the way he is today. He wasn’t like this to begin with.”

“Do all those with time abilities like dwelling on the past?” the feminine man said mockingly. “You may remember everything, but that doesn’t mean he does.”

The conversation among these people stopped there. Guan Shaoguang left the picture, and the light screen disappeared.

From their conversation, You Zhengping had gotten quite a bit of information.

First, this was the border between level 499 and level 500.

Second, level 500 was the boundary between man and god. These people were all levelers who were about to fight through level 500. They wanted to use that level to team up and kill a certain person.

Third, the person they wanted to kill was Yu Hua.

Finally, they were like Guan Shaoguang, former friends of Yu Hua’s who had faced life and death with him.

Was this true history? So Guan Shaoguang hadn’t only wanted to kill Yu Hua when he was resurrected by the System. In the original track of time, he and Yu Hua’s other friends had betrayed Yu Hua together, had attempted to join hands and kill Yu Hua during level 500.

Thinking about it carefully, this wasn't impossible. Guan Shaoguang had said that he was already dead and that the System had brought him back to life. The System wanted to kill Yu Hua, so it had had to choose someone who had the chance and also the courage to kill Yu Hua. How could it have resurrected an enemy?

So Guan Shaoguang and the others had truly betrayed Yu Hua and tried to assassinate him. That was why Guan Shaoguang would have been chosen by the System to be brought back to life.

"Why?" You Zhengping absolutely couldn't understand what they were thinking. Since they had been sworn friends, why would they betray Yu Hua? What was there that they couldn't say directly to him?

As he was wondering this, another light screen appeared at his side. This seemed to be a dark and gloomy wide room with a very high ceiling. Guan Shaoguang walked through the doors and said to the person reclining in a chair in the room, "Yu Hua."

"What is it?" came a familiar voice. It was Yu Hua.

He was hidden in the shadows. His face was invisible, and his expression even more so.

His voice was cold and unfeeling. There was no emotion to be heard in it.

"Didn't you kill some more levelers recently?" Guan Shaoguang's tone was extremely respectful. He even kept his bearing meek.

"Yes," Yu Hua answered very pithily.

Guan Shaoguang said, "Why? They were only low grade levelers. Was it just because they didn't obey your instructions and chose to carry out a world opening mission? They just wanted to choose the mission that would give them the most points, so that when they came to the next world with a high difficulty level, they would have a guarantee of survival. Why did you... No, you're keeping the levelers from passing levels!

"You force the high grade levelers to transfer their points to newbies so the newbies will be able to stay on the central world longer and only leave when they have no choice but to pass levels. You've trapped the high and low grade levelers alike in the central world, but you yourself have constantly entered new worlds and constantly gotten stronger.

"Everyone says you're a 'Tyrant,' that you want to squeeze out all the levelers' points and abilities to become all-knowing and all-powerful yourself. You want to seize the System's power and become a savage new System. You..."

"None of you understand," Yu Hua interrupted Guan Shaoguang in a dull voice.

“Because we haven’t grasped natural law power, we aren’t worthy of being your friends anymore?” Guan Shaoguang looked at Yu Hua. “Your ‘control’ power will always hold us down?”

“If you want to understand it that way, then it is so,” said Yu Hua.

Guan Shaoguang clenched his fists and gritted his teeth. “What the hell do you want?”

Yu Hua put his hands on his chair and walked down from his high seat. He passed by Guan Shaoguang and left behind a sentence: “When you’ve passed level 500, you’ll know.”

Yu Hua was dressed in a black cloak. His features were very similar to the office worker Yu Hua that You Zhengping was familiar with. He strolled out of the dark and gloomy hall, leaving Guan Shaoguang alone.

Guan Shaoguang’s expression had been very pained at the beginning. After Yu Hua left, his expression returned to normal. He looked coldly at Yu Hua’s receding figure. “Since you want to undertake everything yourself, then let me see whether you have this kind of power on your own!”

Guan Shaoguang’s initial hesitation and discomfort had vanished. He ferociously returned to the room where they had plotted to assassinate Yu Hua and said to the other four, “I agree. What are your plans?”

The picture disappeared altogether. Quiet returned to the estate. You Zhengping suddenly sensed his surroundings darken. He looked up at the sky. The sun, blue sky, and white clouds were gone. They had been replaced with a full moon and a sky full of stars.

Was the transition between day and night so abrupt? What kind of world was this?

While he was considering where he had found himself, You Zhengping also had to analyze the images he had just seen. Had they happened before, or were they happening now?

He inclined towards thinking they were happening now. The reason was Guan Shaoguang.

In the images that had unfolded before him just now, Guan Shaoguang and the others had chosen to betray Yu Hua because at this time they didn’t understand Yu Hua’s behavior. Guan Shaoguang also must not have known, so he had gone to question Yu Hua before making a decision.

But after Yu Hua had left the room, Guan Shaoguang’s expression had changed greatly. He had clearly known all of Yu Hua’s reasons and had hoped to reach a conclusion, but he had gotten a contradictory answer.

From this it could be seen that these things had truly happened, and this track of history had once existed, but Guan Shaoguang was the one who had died and been resurrected. He had

gone back in time and at the same point in time had once again asked Yu Hua the same questions and gotten the same answers. Then he had once again chosen to plot against Yu Hua.

From the scenes just now, it seemed that Guan Shaoguang was actually...

"You're very content with your lot in this strange space," a voice said behind You Zhengping while he pondered.

He turned at once and saw Yu Hua, in a black windbreaker, standing behind him.

"Huh? How come you're here?" You Zhengping turned his head and looked at the place where the light screen had just appeared. Shouldn't Yu Hua be in the hall on the central world?

"It's my little world, with my rules. Why shouldn't I be able to come?" Yu Hua sat in a chair in a pavilion by the side of the estate's lake and lightly waved a hand. Two cups of steaming tea appeared on a table.

"No, well, you..." You Zhengping was dumbfounded. What was even going on?

"Have some tea." Yu Hua placed a cup of tea across from himself.

"Okay." Like countless times in the past, You Zhengping obediently sat down across from Yu Hua, picked up the cup, and drank a mouthful of warm tea.

—

Author's note:

Yu Hua: It's dark and chilly. Drink hot tea to warm up.  
You Zhengping (agreeable and obedient): Okay.

## CHAPTER 96

"So well-behaved." When he had seen You Zhengping drink the tea, Yu Hua's tone was faintly cheerful.

The next second, Yu Hua, who had been sitting across from You Zhengping, appeared beside him. His chair had turned into a recliner. Yu Hua leaned back slightly against the back of the chair and quietly looked You Zhengping over.

Every place his gaze scanned, You Zhengping felt numbness. The hair stood up on the back of his neck.

"Why would I show up in your little world?" You Zhengping was full of doubts and misgivings, and he vaguely thought that if he didn't say something now, something awful would happen.



“Where else would you show up?” Yu Hua picked up the teacup and brought it up to You Zhengping’s lips, having him drink it. “Inside Guan Shaoguang’s time rules?”

“Pfft!” You Zhengping spat up tea over the whole table. He was about to use his sleeve to wipe his face when Yu Hua got out a paper towel from somewhere and wiped his mouth for him.

It was as though You Zhengping had returned home in his dreams. This Yu Hua resembled the Yu Hua who had discovered a problem with his pants, but he was a little more frightening than that.

You Zhengping didn’t resist. He also didn’t take the paper towel. He didn’t even ask any questions, letting Yu Hua carefully wipe his face for him, and then his hands.

He only quietly looked at Yu Hua, his eyes full of trust and reliance.

Yu Hua tossed the paper towel aside and gently said, “I remember the last time I saw you, Guan Shaoguang wanted to kill you. He’ll do things to aid the team members, but he rarely personally steps in unless there’s someone he needs to kill.”

“Yes, yes!” You Zhengping saw that Yu Hua had guessed it at last and he no longer needed to speak at cross-purposes; he quickly nodded repeatedly.

You Zhengping couldn’t resist pulling his chair closer to Yu Hua. He said, “In the thought group last time, you guessed that I was being limited by time law and there were many things I couldn’t say. Now you’ve guessed that it’s Guan Shaoguang’s time ability making mischief. Is the reason I didn’t show up near Guan Shaoguang that you noticed the time fluctuation ahead of time and rescued me?”

Seeing You Zhengping get close to him, entirely ignoring the forbidding air he gave off, Yu Hua looked at him with a faint smile. “Yes.”

“You’re so clever!” You Zhengping was overwhelmed with joy. He didn’t know whether he could say more. He could only collect the important things to tell Yu Hua. “Listen to me, Guan Shaoguang wants to kill you, I came...”

“I know,” Yu Hua interrupted You Zhengping.

“You know? You Zhengping’s train of thought was entirely disrupted. He looked at Yu Hua in surprise.

“You saw their plans inside my little world. Do you think I didn’t see?” Speaking of his plotting subordinates, Yu Hua drew back his smile.

“Right, you must also have been able to see.” You Zhengping nodded hurriedly. “So you have to look after yourself! Level 500, five holders of natural law power will be hard to handle. Why

don't you expose their plot and simply root them out one by one? First go talk to one of them on their own, say you already know their plot, that it was Guan Shaoguang who spilled it. Then go to the second one and say the last person you talked to spilled it. That way, they'll lose trust in each other and break apart. Their assassination plan won't have a chance of succeeding."

You Zhengping had done his best to think of a method that would avoid hurting Yu Hua's former friends but would still keep Yu Hua safe.

"Your imagination is cleverer than mine." Yu Hua had listened earnestly. Seeing that You Zhengping had talked his mouth dry, he passed him a cup of warm water. "Drink."

"Okay." You Zhengping gulped it down in one go and went on, "But this Guan Shaoguang, he..."

At this point, You Zhengping paused. He thought of the Guan Shaoguangs he had come into contact with at different times and could help wondering, did Guan Shaoguang really want to kill Yu Hua? Did he have some inexpressible personal difficulty?

"Guan Shaoguang should be killed?" Yu Hua said. "Then let's kill him."

You Zhengping looked at Yu Hua and thought that this person was a little unfamiliar. The Yu Hua from level 11 and the Yu Hua from level 398 had both been his husband Yu Hua; neither of them would have so casually and ruthlessly said such a thing about killing someone.

You Zhengping did want to kill Guan Shaoguang. Never mind his reason—whether he was being controlled by the System or had some inexpressible personal difficulty, Guan Shaoguang had trapped them in this little world. If he wanted to get out, then he had to kill him. On principle, You Zhengping wouldn't hesitate. But Yu Hua...

He didn't say but only thought, *Yu Hua shouldn't be like this.*

He almost truly seemed the way Guan Shaoguang had described him, doing whatever he wanted, running riot, like a "Tyrant."

"After the last time we parted, did you go through a lot of things?" You Zhengping said in concern.

"It was all right." Yu Hua pressed his hand to the back of You Zhengping's neck. "Let's not talk about the 'past.' Tell me about the 'future.'"

"The-the-the future? What future?" You Zhengping felt a chill go up his spine. His body wanted to escape Yu Hua's hold, but his instincts nailed him to the chair. He didn't move a muscle.

Yu Hua leaned close to You Zhengping, lips pressed to his ear, and quietly said, "Tell me how you came here from the future. Tell me what you came to do. Tell me what relationship you and I have in the future."

You Zhengping's mouth and lips went dry. He licked his lips and looked earnestly at Yu Hua. "I don't know what I can say under the natural law power. How about you guess, and I'll nod or shake my head? You're so clever, you'll definitely be able to guess close to the truth."

"Do you have so much faith in my intelligence?" You Zhengping's manner seemed to please Yu Hua. He smiled in gratification.

"Of course I do! Your IQ and EQ are both first rate!" You Zhengping said decisively.

He had been able to test into a top three school and be senior management at a top one-hundred enterprise with a very high annual salary with everyone around him praising him, and he had operated right under the noses of the Protection Organization and the Destroyers without his true identity being found out and completely duped Lian Yufan. Of course Yu Hua was clever if he could do this!

"Fine." Yu Hua immediately asked his first question. "You getting so nervous when I mention the future means that you're from the future, right?"

"Right." You Zhengping nodded.

"Guan Shaoguang was the one who brought you? I'm the target. Guan Shaoguang wants to kill me, and you want to rescue me."

"Exactly!"

"If you kill Guan Shaoguang, you'll go back?"

"Yes, and so will you."

"Really? Go back?" The meaning of Yu Hua's smile was unclear. "In your eyes, is this a little world that the future Guan Shaoguang created out of history using time law, or is it true history —time travel?"

You Zhengping hesitated at this question. He thought about it and said, "I thought at first that it was the former. It can probably only be the former. But you still remember me, so..."

"Since you can't answer this one, let's change to another one." Yu Hua looked at You Zhengping and asked, "You don't avoid close contact with me. Your attitude is very open. What is our relationship in the future? Friends? Companions? Lovers?"

You Zhengping's face flushed. Quietly, he said, "A step closer than the last one."

Yu Hua undid a button at his collar and asked, "Can I?"

You Zhengping instantly burst. He still remembered when he and Yu Hua were dating, the first time they had exercised together. Yu Hua had been just like this, standing next to the fitness room downstairs at a five star hotel, unbuttoning one of his shirt buttons, asking, "Can I?"

"There-there's nothing you can't..." You Zhengping mumbled. "We're an old married couple, after all."

Yu Hua gave a contained smile. The surroundings in the little world changed once again, going from night in a pavilion in the estate to a dark room.

A little boy and a dog bounced out of You Zhengping's little world. They were both confused and disoriented. Yu Hua casually waved his hand; the child and the dog disappeared.

"Where'd they go?" You Zhengping held his waist and sat up with difficulty.

"I sent them to another room." In the lightless surroundings, Yu Hua quietly said, "Are you all right?"

"I'm fine," You Zhengping said, waving his hand.

Though it had been a little more tiring than in the past, he was in good physical condition. He'd always been able to handle it.

He heard a light laugh in the dark. A strong hand gripped his ankle. There was a *click*. There was something ice cold hanging off You Zhengping's ankle.

"What is this?" You Zhengping bent over with his sore waist and back to touch the metallic object.

Yu Hua grabbed his hand and softly said, "A special ability suppressor."

You Zhengping: "???"

In the dark, he couldn't see Yu Hua's expression. He could only hear his tone, which was as mild as always yet made a chill of terror go up your spine.

"Why would you put a special ability suppressor on me?" You Zhengping asked in confusion.

In the room that was so dark you couldn't see your hand in front of your face, Yu Hua patiently explained, "Guan Shaoguang's ability, even if he possesses time law power in the future, still can't truly reverse time. I understand the sort of person he is. He couldn't do it. You suspect that this is truly history, and I've also guessed that that's the case. But it wasn't Guan Shaoguang who brought you here. You did it yourself. Only with time and spatial abilities combined could you truly travel in time, personally bring yourself and Guan Shaoguang into true time."

“Then haven’t I changed history? Has a parallel world appeared?” You Zhengping was apprehensive. He got out of bed in a hurry to look for his shoes. “No, I have to go back as soon as possible.”

The Xuyang District was still a mess now. Three Destroyers had died, one had been captured, and he and Guan Shaoguang had both disappeared. He couldn’t be stuck in a parallel world thousands of years ago. He had to go back as soon as possible!

“Go back? Go back where?” Yu Hua grabbed You Zhengping’s ankle. “Who are you going to see?”

“I’m going to take you back with me!” You Zhengping said.

Yu Hua’s fingers were on the special ability suppressor. Recalling, he said, “During level 11, you appeared briefly and promised to defeat the System with me. You disappeared, and I spent hundreds of years looking for you. During level 398, you woke me in the thought group and told me I had to defeat the System, that I was the only one who could do it. Then you disappeared again, and I waited for you again for almost a thousand years. You used space-time abilities to come to my side, and now you want to go to the side of some other ‘self’ that I’ve never known. How many thousands of years do you want me to wait this time?”

“I...” You Zhengping had no idea how to explain this. And if this really was a parallel world where history had changed, if he returned to his own original time and left Yu Hua behind, would he be able to meet a second You Zhengping?

He was switching between time nodes quickly, staying there for brief moments, but Yu Hua had experienced over a thousand years.

This Yu Hua was completely different from the one during level 398, who had been cold on the outside but warm-hearted, willing to help other levelers. There was no smile in his eyes. He was contemptuous towards everything in the world. He didn’t trust a single person.

“What have you experienced in all this time?” You Zhengping touched Yu Hua’s face, trying to distinguish his expression in the darkness.

“Nothing.” Yu Hua gently kissed You Zhengping’s lips.

It was just that he had experienced what loneliness was.

## CHAPTER 97

If you were to describe You Zhengping’s life during this period in one phrase, it would be—completely lightless.

In the pitch-black surroundings, he didn’t even know how much time had passed. He also didn’t know where Director Ha and Junjun were.

Each time he asked how Director Ha and Junjun were, Yu Hua would say, “They won’t die.” If he kept asking, Yu Hua would impatiently say, “I gave them some elementary school homework and dog food.” If he still kept asking, Yu Hua would say, “Do you want to run away from me?”

You Zhengping would say, “It’s not that I want to run away from you, I just have work...”

Before he could finish speaking, he would always be cut off by Yu Hua’s exercise tempo so he couldn’t get out a complete sentence.

After all these years of marriage, You Zhengping was just learning that Yu Hua had always been holding back. Only now did he understand how strong Yu Hua was when he held nothing back and went 100% all out.

You Zhengping could sense that the husband in front of him really was his lover. Instinct told You Zhengping that there was no so-called parallel world. Yu Hua was Yu Hua. From beginning to end, his “core” hadn’t changed.

And-and it wasn’t like he was unsatisfied with the intensity and frequency of the exercise. He was just faintly concerned about Yu Hua’s current situation, feeling that his “core” was being stifled by some power and couldn’t truly unfold.

What had actually happened between level 398 and level 499 to make Yu Hua become like this?

Become seemingly brutal and cold, indifferent towards everything, but in reality afraid of loss.

You Zhengping was worried that resisting would make Yu Hua fall deeper and deeper. He could only set aside his worry about the real world, be content with his lot and obey Yu Hua’s instructions, occasionally trying to indirectly ask some questions about time law.

Yu Hua’s answer was, if this was Guan Shaoguang’s little time world, then the passage of time in the little world would have no impact on the outside world. If this was time travel caused by You Zhengping’s powers, then it was up to You Zhengping’s power to determine what time stream he returned to. It had nothing to do with the present flow of time.

In other words, even if You Zhengping spent a thousand years in this world, he could still arrive right after the big battle.

When he received this explanation, You Zhengping actually stayed where he was with a clear conscience. Anyway, he and Yu Hua had been in love and married for so long, and they hadn’t even had a two-person world honeymoon. There was always someone to disturb their dates, and that Maldives vacation had never happened because of his job. Yu Hua had seemed not to care, but You Zhengping had sensed that he was inwardly resentful. So right now, they—could treat this as a honeymoon!

The only thing You Zhengping was concerned about was whether the honeymoon would run too long. His ordinary person's body couldn't live more than a hundred years. After some decades, he would be old and feeble.

But when You Zhengping quietly questioned him about the time law, Yu Hua laughed coldly in the darkness.

This period of being unable to sense time or space lasted for some unknown time. Suddenly, one day, Yu Hua said to You Zhengping, "I have something to take care of. You be good."

Then the surroundings of the little world changed once more. The pitch-black room turned into a bright, sunny large house. In the next room there was Junjun, biting his pen as he solved a problem and Director Ha next to him, helping him with the answers.

You Zhengping went over to Junjun. Junjun saw him and politely said, "Good morning, Xiao You-gege."

"Good morning. About how many days has it been?" You Zhengping asked.

Junjun picked up his homework notebook, looked at the dates on it, and said, "I've done three days of homework."

Only three days? Why did he feel like it had been three months?

You Zhengping checked his body and determined that not much time must have passed. If a very long time had passed, his muscles would have atrophied, and his vision would have worsened. But neither of these phenomena had occurred. The most that had happened was that going from dark surroundings to light surroundings hurt his eyes a little. It was fine when he adjusted to it.

Psychologically, he also didn't have the unpleasant feeling of having spent a long time in dark surroundings. It was as though he had instinctively felt that not too much time was passing.

You Zhengping thought, this was Yu Hua's little world. He was the master of this world. Yu Hua could control all sense of the passage of time in this little world. If he wanted to keep time from passing, then naturally You Zhengping's sense of time would stretch out.

Once he had understood this, You Zhengping felt a faint blunt pain in his heart.

Yu Hua hadn't done wrong. He possessed fearsome powers and always wanted to behave unscrupulously, but at the critical moments, he would forever use reason to suppress his impulses; he would never really harm You Zhengping.

Yu Hua had also given the elementary school student who had crossed to a strange world on his own some homework. He must have known that in strange surroundings, something familiar would calm him down.

You Zhengping stroked Junjun's head and said soothingly, "You're very strong."

So young, and he had gone through complicated experiences that an adult might not possess in a whole lifetime.

Junjun pulled a long face and said, "Xiao You-gege, I don't know how to do this problem."

"Which one?" You Zhengping picked up his homework notebook. His expression stiffened.

"This solid geometry problem. It wants the area of that little piece," Junjun said.

You Zhengping hadn't grown up in the environment of the standard nine years of compulsory education. He wasn't very familiar with what students currently studied. But despite that, second graders probably shouldn't be doing solid geometry?

"Shouldn't this...be a subject for high school?" You Zhengping said doubtfully.

"Uncle Yu Hua said it's for elementary school," Junjun said, his face full of innocence. "My math grades have never been very good. I may not have learned this yet. Oh, well."

His small shoulders curled up. He looked especially mournful.

"Awooo!" Director Ha cried angrily.

Unexpectedly, You Zhengping heard the dog's cry to mean, "Bastard, is this Yu Hua's own elementary school?" It couldn't be that he understood dog language. It was that in Yu Hua's little world, he could get information directly from the dog's thoughts.

"Aw-aw-awooo!" Director Ha called at length to Junjun. You Zhengping heard terms like "the square of  $a$ " and "the dihedral angle." This was Junjun's problem.

"You know how to solve high school solid geometry problems?" You Zhengping said in astonishment. It had been a pretty good explanation.

"Aw-aw-awwoo!" Director Ha looked haughtily at You Zhengping.

*—It's not like you don't know what my ability used to be. Do you think I could control it if I didn't understand math, physics, and chemistry?*

That did make sense. Looking at Director Ha strutting around arrogantly and looking down on him from the heights of mathematics, You Zhengping rather wanted to laugh.



Junjun chewed on his pen for a while, then nodded repeatedly. “I know how to do it. Thank you, Xiao Ha!”

He quickly scribbled the correct method, steps, and answer to the problem in his *Elementary School Math (Yu Hua Edition)* exercise book. After he answered, he didn’t forget to show off in front of You Zhengping: “The problems in this book are very hard. Xiao Ha has been teaching me.

“Let me tell you a secret,” Junjun said mysteriously. “I might have superpowers! I can understand when Xiao Ha talks!”

“Aw-aw-awoo!” Director Ha said sternly.

*—What superpowers? Study hard, you have to get into university. Don’t be a special ability user. It’s a hand to mouth life, and you have to battle with Destroyers. It’s dangerous!*

You Zhengping said to Director Ha, “Not bad! So you know how bad the Protectors have it. So Destroyers are very dangerous?”

Director Ha went stiff. Then it started waving its tail towards You Zhengping and begging for mercy: “Awoooo, woooo.”

*—I’ve already been sentenced to “ten years to start, followed by the death penalty,” what else do you want with me?!*

You Zhengping had a grudge against Destroyer 192. At the beginning, if Yu Hua hadn’t stepped in, one of his arms would simply have been blown up by Destroyer 192, and Lian Yufan’s spine would have been fractured to dust. There would have been no way to heal those wounds. Even with the Protectors’ startling healing capabilities, they still wouldn’t have healed.

But now that he heard Director Ha saying the most desperate words in the most cowardly voice, he actually neither hated nor despised it.

Remembering the mournful cry of the giant abyss beast in the previous world and Yu Hua’s pain, You Zhengping suddenly thought that Protectors and Destroyers were the same people originally. Only they had been placed in different surroundings and had gone in opposite directions, gradually getting further and further apart.

Having finished the problem that exceeded his syllabus, Junjun suddenly said, “Xiao Ha, you’re wrong, it isn’t ‘ten years to start, followed by the death penalty,’ it’s ‘ten years to start, the death penalty as the highest sentence.’ Those are different punishments. My dad taught me.”

“Awoo-awoo-awoo!”

*—Those are your punishments. With me, it’s “followed by the death penalty!”*

You Zhengping gripped the scruff of Director Ha's neck. "Don't talk about that in front of the child. You've been in this little world for three days. Have you seen anything strange? Also, where did Yu Hua go? I have a bad feeling."

"Aw-aw-wooo," Director Ha called to You Zhengping and Junjun.

*—There's a place that feels off. I'll take you there. Junjun, don't go out before you've finished your problems. I'm going to have this person walk me for a while.*

"Oh, all right." Junjun gritted his teeth and wrote at top speed. He couldn't let Xiao Ha look down on his math skills, could he? He had to study hard!

Director Ha let You Zhengping out of the house at a trot and ran towards the depths of the estate. The sun outside was bright and the weather was fine. It was just the sort of climate Yu Hua liked.

The estate had more than thirty buildings. After turning a corner at a rock garden, a garbage spot appeared in front of them. There was no garbage in the garbage can, and there was no foul smell. But there was a faint sliver of danger.

"Aw-aw-awoo!"

*—It's right here, but I feel that it's very dangerous. I didn't dare to get close. I don't know where Yu Hua went. He didn't say anything to me.*

"Thank you. You go back to Junjun," You Zhengping said to Director Ha. "Don't leave the house again. That's definitely the safest and steadiest place in Yu Hua's little world."

"Awwwool!"

*—I don't need you to tell me that.*

Director Ha rolled its eyes at You Zhengping and ran back with its tail between its legs.

You Zhengping stood in front of the garbage spot and tried taking a step forward. He felt an obvious obstruction. He wasn't going to admit defeat. He kept going forward.

The garbage spot was surrounded in black mist, a giant beast with its mouth open waiting for someone to walk into the trap. There was a feeling that any intruder would be sure to die.

But You Zhengping ignored this feeling and insisting on charging in. When he met an obstruction, he braced himself and charged forward, going in by brute force.

This place was like Yu Hua. It had very little resistance to You Zhengping. It held out a little, then made way for him in spite of itself.

You Zhengping walked into the black mist and saw countless motes of black dust like smog. He stuck his hand into one of the smaller ones, and an image poured into his brain—

A still young and tender seeming Yu Hua roared to his companion, “I told you, don’t mess around, don’t mess around, so why did you still have to go and touch it? Do you know that because you touched that mechanism, an entire other team was wiped out?! Can’t you listen to me?”

His companion argued on strong grounds, “I’m also pained by their deaths, but who can guarantee that everything you say is absolutely right? Anyway, there was a voice luring me to touch the mechanism. I didn’t do it on purpose!”

Yu Hua looked at his companion in disappointment. “I also warned you that there might be lures and you had to resist them. I also told you that one person’s actions involve all the others. No mistake can be redeemed.”

“But are you all-knowing and all-powerful? What are we supposed to do if what you say is wrong? I need my own judgment, don’t I?” the companion said.

The team members around them came to intervene. There were those aimed at Yu Hua, but there were also those aiming at the companion who had made a mistake.

Yu Hua didn’t speak again. Through the black dust, You Zhengping heard his inner voice: “Was I wrong? Am I not powerful enough yet? No, it’s that trust isn’t enough to guarantee that the team will listen to me, not enough to suppress their selfish desires. If trust won’t do, then let’s go with fear.”

This black dust memory ended. You Zhengping quickly went to look at another, larger grain. The image floated up—

Yu Hua stood in the center of a crowd, looking austere. He said to the protesting companion from the previous image, “I’ve already said that anyone who disobeys my orders will be killing their companions. A life for a life. Go ahead and count, how many people did you kill with your stupidity?”

“I-I-I didn’t mean to. Spare me, I’m begging you!” The person who had dared to resist Yu Hua before now knelt and begged for mercy, and the people around him didn’t intercede for him again.

“Orders are orders.” Yu Hua pressed down on his head and applied a bit of pressure with his fingers. The person disappeared.

Some people looked disturbed. Yu Hua swept his gaze over the crowd and slowly said, “Anyone who doesn’t want to follow me can leave. But my ability can increase my team members’ powers and raise their chances of survival. Those who leave me will have their power reduced to its original one half or one third.”

The people who had been somewhat dissatisfied quickly drew back their expressions and one by one indicated that they were willing to obey Yu Hua.

“With the lure of power and the bonds of orders and the intimidation of harsh punishments, I can protect more people’s lives,” Yu Hua thought inwardly.

The black grain disappeared. You Zhengping walked further inside. This wasn’t black smog anymore; these were larger and larger black stones. He put his hand on a stone half as high as a person and felt even dimmer feelings well up in his heart—

“Are you crazy? You want to establish a kingdom of levelers on the central world, split our points evenly, not let newbies pass levels—what kind of autocratic regime is that? Do you want to be another System?” said a companion that You Zhengping hadn’t seen before to Yu Hua.

Yu Hua said to him, “You’re controlled by the System and can’t know too much. I can’t explain. But I’m doing this for everyone’s good.”

The companions laughed and shook his head. “You don’t mean that the worlds are real and that everything we do is helping the System encroach on other worlds? The System has been tricking us all along, our homes are long gone, and we harm the ordinary people of other worlds, right?”

“You know?” Yu Hua’s eyes lit up faintly.

“Of course I’ve guessed it. Anyone with half a brain can guess it. Nothing is free.” He pointed at his own head.

“I’m doing this to protect other worlds and prevent the levelers from continuing to do wrong,” Yu Hua said.

“Bullshit!” the person said. “The weak are prey to the strong. It’s natural. And it’s not like the levelers don’t get benefits. We have superhuman abilities and lifespans and endless pleasure on the central world. Even if the world ends one day and the System swallows me up, I’ll at least have lived this many years, not like those idiots on the shattered worlds who don’t even know how they died!”

Yu Hua smiled sadly. “So that’s how it is. What you say makes sense.”

“I’m glad you understand. Stop clinging to your idealism. You can’t save everyone, so take care of yourself,” the person said coldly.

Yu Hua put a hand on his shoulder. His expression became grave. He quietly said, “You’re right. I have the power to become another System. All the power of those who have given me their ‘allegiance’ and are under my ‘control’ belongs to me.”

He applied a bit of pressure with his hand and absorbed that person's ability. The number of levels on his virtual interface descended nonstop until at last it became one level.

Yu Hua smiled cruelly. "The weak are prey to the strong? Now you're weak."

Amid this person's screams and pleas for mercy, he turned and left without any forbearance.

This Yu Hua now had no inward voice. He had sealed his heart and no longer considered anything.

You Zhengping's pulse became faster and faster. He kept going deeper inside. In the end, he arrived in front of a black mountain and put his hand on it—

Yu Hua was inside the little world, quietly watching the scene of his once most trusted companions plotting to kill him during level 500.

This time, he wasn't saddened, wasn't grieved. He picked up a cup of wine and sipped it gently. He quietly said, "If you won't accompany me in resisting the System, then you can give me your power."

Yu Hua had at last understood that on the road to resisting the System, he would always be alone.

—

Author's note:

You Zhengping: I'll accompany you.

## CHAPTER 98

Here were Yu Hua's deeply hidden negative emotions. They repelled everyone, only willing to let You Zhengping charge in.

Or perhaps Yu Hua's intellect also didn't want You Zhengping to enter, but he couldn't trick his innermost being. He was willing to open the doors of his heart to You Zhengping.

You Zhengping walked out the garbage spot and looked at the estate's false sun. He understood where Yu Hua had gone.

He had gone to level 500.

He knew very well that the friends who had accompanied him all along were going to use level 500's difficulty level to deal with him, but he still had to attend this Hongmen Banquet, personally break off those connections, from then on becoming truly isolated.

The whole way, Yu Hua seemed to match the “Tyrant” label from start to finish.

It’s impossible for a human not to have negative emotions, but Yu Hua had hidden all those that represented his frailty, disappointment, and hesitation. He didn’t seem to be actively advancing; his was a more superior attitude.

It was divinity.

You Zhengping found the answer soon.

He had recently grasped spatial power and had understood that the unprecedented strength that came with natural law power made it easy for people to lose themselves. It required sufficient conviction to be able to resist the lure of power.

You Zhengping had received ideological and political education since he was young. He had firm convictions and proper guiding principles. These bone-deep things had made him quickly awaken from the inflated thoughts that came with power. There had only been an instant of swollen arrogance, and in the blink of an eye it was gone, so brief it was as if it had never been. Only You Zhengping had caught that momentary arrogance of “I’m so powerful, why do I have to protect these ants, listen to the commands of ants?”

Guan Shaoguang, who held time power, had a more serious problem. He looked down on Director Ha and Junjun. He believed that he and his former companions weren’t of the same class; during level 398, he had used those people without any hesitation to deal with You Zhengping. In Guan Shaoguang’s eyes, You Zhengping, who held spatial power, was his enemy, and Yu Hua was a former friend and also an eminent presence. Only these two people were worth looking directly in the eye; the others were all ants.

He and Guan Shaoguang were like this, so what about Yu Hua? He had already grasped the power of a god during level 398. He had experienced over a thousand years of time. The influence of divinity had to be heaviest on him. It could be seen from the memories just now that later, Yu Hua had been infected with the “Tyrant’s” habits, a typical case of “those who resist shall perish” thinking.

In Yu Hua’s eyes, levelers were divided into two types. One type obeyed him; Yu Hua could grant these some favors, make them continue to submit to him. The other type, however, were those who didn’t approve, who didn’t obey; they opposed, resisted, betrayed, and so on. They were all one sort. Yu Hua didn’t give these people any opportunity. He chose to simply cast them off or blot them out.

Divinity was constantly eroding his innermost being while giving the fake blue sky and white clouds in his little world the false appearance of lasting peace and tranquility.

But You Zhengping’s appearance had changed the status quo.

You Zhengping touched the silver-colored special ability suppressor on his ankle. Without question, the Yu Hua who had put this on him had undoubtedly been the human side. You Zhengping thought of their past and suddenly realized that Yu Hua probably very much wanted to build a golden room to keep him in<sup>30</sup>.

So in his heart, did Yu Hua want to be a god or a man?

The answer was exceedingly obvious.

Yu Hua wanted to be an ordinary person. He had sealed all of his power and cautiously preserved his humanity, using the greatest willpower to refuse divinity. He had spent fifteen years content with his lot, until the System had broken his seal.

Once again, You Zhengping heard voices beside that manmade lake. He quickly ran over, wanting to see what was happening outside like he had before, but he remembered that his special ability was sealed, so he had no way to see.

He paced where he was, very anxious, trying to use his hands to open the special ability suppressor, but he found that the thing was seamless and very sturdy. It wouldn't open.

You Zhengping anxiously went around in circles. He wasn't concerned about the lives of the levelers who wanted to kill Yu Hua. For him, these people weren't only strangers, they were also one-time Destroyers, and they were plotters who wanted to betray Yu Hua. He only cared about whether Yu Hua would be swallowed up by divinity.

These companions had passed from the lowest levels to level 499 with Yu Hua. They had hundreds of years of history. If he killed the traitors with his own hands, wouldn't he be bidding farewell to his humanity?

What was there to be done? You Zhengping stared at the special ability suppressor on his ankle and suddenly had an idea. He quickly strode towards the estate's garbage spot. Ignoring the obstruction and the black mist, he went all the way to the tallest and largest mountain. He patted the mountain and pointed to the special ability suppressor, entreating it, "Could you get rid of this thing for me?"

This was a last ditch effort. There was nothing else to do. Since this was Yu Hua's little world, then these negative emotions ought to also have control.

There was absolutely no reaction from the black mountain and the surroundings rocks, grains, or snow. You Zhengping considered and said, "I'm worried about the you in level 500 and want to take a look at how you're doing. This thing is sealing my special ability, so I can't use my spatial ability. I can't see you."

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<sup>30</sup> Reference the idiom 金屋藏娇, referring to keeping a wife in a beautiful house, or just marriage.

When he said this, the small mountain beside him trembled faintly. The stones at his feet began to bounce. The speed of the smog's movements became lively. It spun around You Zhengping.

They seemed to be happy... Seeing that there was an effect, You Zhengping quickly said, "Open it, and I'll be able to see you. I can even go to you, keep you company."

The choices a person made with their intellect would often contradict their emotions. Yu Hua had chosen to shut up You Zhengping; apart from wanting to keep You Zhengping with him, he had also meant to protect him. Speaking purely from the point of view of feelings, he definitely wanted You Zhengping to be with him at all times, never mind the negative emotions of his dark moments that made him want to imprison You Zhengping.

The black grains wrapped around the special ability suppressor on You Zhengping's ankle. The silver-colored mental ankle speedily broke down and disappeared. These grains weren't nearly as harmless as they seemed; no wonder Director Ha had thought that this place was frightening.

You Zhengping said thank you and dashed towards the manmade lake. But he found that the black mist followed him out of the garbage spot.

Everywhere the black mist passed, all objects disintegrated. The tall buildings, the rock garden, the blue sky, the white clouds, the sun, the manmade lake...

You Zhengping looked at the building where Junjun and Xiao Ha were. It was still far away. They wouldn't be hurt. He relaxed slightly.

He had inadvertently released Yu Hua's sealed mental emotions and didn't know whether that was right or wrong. He also didn't know what change they would bring about in this little world.

You Zhengping found the place where the voices originated and brought his power into action. An enormous light screen floated into view. It displayed a deserted area. Yu Hua stood in the center with a knife stuck in the back of his neck. Under his feet were three corpses, and he held a person's head with his hand. This person had evidently also lost their life force.

Only Guan Shaoguang was still holding on. Yu Hua dropped the corpse of the traitor he was holding and pulled the knife out of his neck. The wound didn't bleed. In an instant, it had healed.

Looking at the bodies on the ground, You Zhengping at last directly experienced how powerful Yu Hua was. Each of these people had nearly grasped natural law power, but they had been killed so easily by Yu Hua.

Yu Hua strolled up to Guan Shaoguang. There was disappointment on his face. "I was forced to act because I believed that you truly wanted to resist my dictatorship, but would you guess what I discovered when I absorbed their Systems?"



Yu Hua casually waved his hand, and an image like a control panel appeared. This must have been the System's interface before it degraded. There was writing on the screen: *Leveler Yan He's Level 500 mission is, in the world of nothingness that the System has prepared, to defeat Yu Hua along with his companions, absorb Yu Hua's little world, and obtain his natural law power.*

"If you had truly been rebelling against me, I could have praised you." Yu Hua laughed mockingly. "But what is this? Are you willing to be used by the System like this?"

"Do I care what their missions are?" Guan Shaoguang was looking quietly at Yu Hua. He actually smiled in satisfaction. "In killing so many former companions, how much of your energy have you unlocked? Has it reached 100%?"

"What did you say?" Yu Hua's expression was grim. He found that he, who had always seen through all stratagems, couldn't understand what Guan Shaoguang meant. This surpassed the information he possessed.

Guan Shaoguang got out a smartphone and opened the System app. He saw that the mission completion percentage on it was 80% and smiled in spite of himself. "You really are awesome. You've only unsealed 80% of your power, yet you've wiped us all out. It seems this is as far as I can go."

Resigning himself to his fate, he dropped the phone and sat right on the ground, casually putting his arms on his knees, raising his head to look at Yu Hua.

Yu Hua suppressed his killing intent and picked up the phone Guan Shaoguang had tossed aside. He read the information on it—

*Name: Guan Shaoguang*

*Level Count: Defeated challenging Level 500*

*Cause of Death: Betrayed Yu Hua, personally killed by Yu Hua*

*Ability: Time*

*Time of Duplication: 2,410 years after death (planet coordinates)*

*Mission: Force Yu Hua to fully unseal his power and release the System's energy; means unlimited*

*Victory Reward: Obtain a new life*

*Current Mission Progress: 80%*

There was too much information. Yu Hua and, outside the light screen, You Zhengping, simultaneously noticed the word “duplication.” The term the System used was completely different from Guan Shaoguang’s “resurrection.”

Yu Hua forced himself to temporarily not consider the information about “2,410 years after death” or “80% progress.” He determined what took priority and asked, “Duplication means that your original form hasn’t truly been resurrected, and you’re only the System’s duplicate?”

“You can see me as a reconstruction,” Guan Shaoguang said. “Each leveler has a data record within the System. The System only needs to use energy of the same class and all of Guan Shaoguang’s data to make a duplicate of him.”

“Not even the System can create life out of nowhere,” Yu Hua said gravely.

Even though people who held natural law power were always calling themselves gods, they still couldn’t produce true life with souls, including the System, which ceaselessly consumed world law. Only a normal and healthy world that had evolved life over billions of years could give birth to living beings with souls and consciousness.

“When you make a copy, don’t you take a piece of A4 paper and copy onto it?” “Guan Shaoguang” pointed himself. “I’m that piece of paper.”

Since the System had told him he was called “Guan Shaoguang,” he had lived as “Guan Shaoguang.” He only had Guan Shaoguang’s memories. All his past was Guan Shaoguang’s, including his hatred, jealousy, worship, and other feelings of all kinds for Yu Hua. All of them were Guan Shaoguang’s. As for which leveler he had originally been, how many levels he had passed, what memories he had had—that had all disappeared.

He knew that Guan Shaoguang had been worried that Yu Hua would turn into a new and even more brutal System. Under the encouragement of his companions, the enticement of the level 500 mission, and Yu Hua’s secretiveness towards him, he had determined to kill Yu Hua and had been killed in return.

Having received Guan Shaoguang’s memories from the moments before his death, he madly wanted Yu Hua to die, and he was urged by the System to constantly arrange traps to make Yu Hua unknowingly unseal his power.

As for his own ideas, who cared? He was Guan Shaoguang now. He could only be Guan Shaoguang and say the words “Guan Shaoguang” wanted to say.

“Guan Shaoguang” said, “When I saw you in the estate, happy and willing to go into the little world to save a child and a dog, I knew that Yu Hua would always be Yu Hua. You hadn’t changed. I couldn’t understand you at the beginning. I didn’t understand how much pressure you had undertaken.”

Yu Hua said to him, “The more time law power Guan Shaoguang held, the more he believed that time was irreversible. Everything went forward. Each moment was the present. If he found one day that he had come to his starting point, that wouldn’t have been time running backwards, but that the road ahead of him had always been a circle. The beginning was the end.

“So he wouldn’t say anything that revealed remorse. He believed that for things that had already happened, there was no meaning in repentance.

“What you said just now are your thoughts arising from comparing Guan Shaoguang’s memories to reality.

“The System can only destroy life and absorb its energy. It can’t create life or change its essence. You aren’t Guan Shaoguang. You’re an individual with your own independent thoughts.”

## CHAPTER 99

Hearing Yu Hua, “Guan Shaoguang” whispered, “My own thoughts? I don’t even know what I’m thinking.”

All of his memories were so clear, scene after scene endlessly replaying in his mind. The app in his hand occasionally notified him on his mission progress. If he didn’t complete the mission, he would be wiped out. All of his materials were written down in the app, as though this was his whole life.

The Guan Shaoguang in his memories was Yu Hua’s friend. The two of them had helped each other pass levels all the way. At the beginning, both Guan Shaoguang and Yu Hua’s abilities had been very weak, but Yu Hua’s ability had aided his teammates from the start, making them become more powerful. Adding in the fact that he constantly accepted new teammates, his weak period had passed fairly smoothly.

Then Yu Hua had changed bit by bit, and Guan Shaoguang’s thoughts had also constantly changed. From beginning to end, he had always trusted and faintly worshipped Yu Hua. He had thought that with such a strong power, having received all of their “allegiance,” he should stand up and protect everyone so they could all clear together.

But Yu Hua had not only not helped everyone clear, he had held everyone back. Guan Shaoguang’s worship had turned to disappointment, and he suffered from having previously given his ‘allegiance.’ His power could be taken away by Yu Hua at any time. He didn’t dare to act.

The System issuing its Level 500 assignment had torn through his last layer of caution. The System had promised that during this level, it would suppress Yu Hua’s ‘control’ power so they could do battle without any qualms.

Everyone admires the strong, but when they have the opportunity to become strong themselves, they'll choose betrayal without any hesitation.

The reasoning was simple. Because Yu Hua didn't conform to their ideals, then they would kill him and replace him, realize their ideals themselves.

Friendship seemed so fragile before power and personal benefit. They had acted in the end, engaged in a hopeless battle with Yu Hua. In the end all five of them had been wiped out. Yu Hua had also been seriously injured.

Guan Shaoguang had thought that after their deaths, Yu Hua would definitely become insufferably arrogant. In the end, he would replace the System and become an even more fearsome being. But 2,410 years later, the Yu Hua that "Guan Shaoguang" had seen was a mediocre married man who would enter the little world in order to rescue an insignificant child and dog, and the dog was a ridiculous Destroyer who had once attacked Yu Hua.

He had used his time ability to see Director Ha's past and had seen an equally autocratic but not cruel Yu Hua.

Yu Hua would absorb the Destroyers' System abilities, shatter their delusions, and at the same time use his actions to tell them to atone for their crimes and live well. He would use high pressure policies to force the levelers to submit, but they would quickly get accustomed to the differences between the new world and their original worlds.

Yu Hua never expressed it in words, but he showed the Destroyers with practical actions that the past was already past, in the future, they could still live steady, realistic lives.

The clash between the different memories had caused an extremely conflicted emotional state for "Guan Shaoguang." He began to consider. Had the past Guan Shaoguang truly not understood Yu Hua? Had Yu Hua never changed? Did he, a duplicate of a person, still have hope?

The memories implanted in his brain told him to hate Yu Hua, kill Yu Hua; the System's mission told him to make Yu Hua undo his seal at any price.

Between the two orders, a third thought had slowly arisen. If the seal was entirely undone and Yu Hua became that powerful, would he be able to eliminate the System?

At some point, his mission had changed from being forced by the System to his own will.

"Why would you seal yourself?" "Guan Shaoguang" looked at Yu Hua. "You're so powerful. If there's one person among all the hundreds of thousands of worlds who can defeat the System, then it must be you. In that case, why would you seal yourself, be perfectly willing to be an ordinary person? Why didn't you kill It? Why didn't you...save us?"

He couldn't hold out anymore. He reached out a pleading hand towards Yu Hua.

Having witnessed this fearsome power with his own eyes, seen four natural law grade masters with the support of the System all killed by Yu Hua while he had only undone 80% of his seal, “Guan Shaoguang” couldn’t resist wanting to give his “allegiance.”

The true Guan Shaoguang had been a natural law grade master. His great power had made him want to replace Yu Hua. The duplicate Guan Shaoguang may originally have been only an ordinary leveler with an ability related to time. He wouldn’t have the vain wish of replacing Yu Hua; more than that, he wanted someone to come to his rescue.

Yu Hua stepped over the bodies of his four colleagues and raised his hand over “Guan Shaoguang”’s head. He was silent for a long time.

Far away in the little world, You Zhengping suddenly found that the black grains that had been surrounding him were passing through the spatial passage he had created, spilling out of the little world bit by bit, sinking into Yu Hua’s body.

You Zhengping had awakened these human emotions and opened a passage for them, letting them return to their original place.

But Yu Hua seemed not to have noticed this change.

Yu Hua only suddenly remembered many things while in a trance. When the black grains had entirely sunk into his body, he slowly spoke: “I can’t save you.”

“You don’t want to save us?” “Guan Shaoguang” raised his head to look at him.

“No.” Yu Hua shook his head.

Grasping natural law power, he had undertaken the hatred of the thought group. He had attempted to consume the System, but he had found something unexpected. All the levelers closely tied to the System, each part affecting the whole. If he eliminated the System, it would amount to eliminating the countless worlds the System had occupied and the levelers under the System’s control.

A single person’s power was limited. However strong he was, he still couldn’t save everyone.

Unless another leveler or several of them came to hold natural law power and were willing to protect all those people and worlds from being touched by battle while he fought the System to the death.

He had been waiting for his companions to become powerful while suppressing all the levelers, patiently waiting for level 500.

Unfortunately, what he had waited for turned out to be betrayal.

In his disappointment, Yu Hua had sealed his frustrating humanity, and divinity had begun to take the ascendant.

And divinity was nothing to crow about. For the other worlds and the levelers, the System also amounted to a god.

The root of divinity was after all compliance with the universe's scientific laws for the creation and change of all living beings. All of creation came into existence, then all of creation came to the same end. Everything had its origin in the Bing Bang, the explosion of extremely high density matter, and in the end was attracted and coalesced into all living beings. Around and around, multiplying without end.

The bodies of his former companions lay on the ground. Yu Hua, gradually recovering his humanity, looked at his own hands. He had in the end lost to divinity, lost to the constantly consuming, increasingly stronger instinct and desire.

Everyone lost themselves to power. No one was an exception.

"You're as strong as a god. If even you can't save us, then what should we do?" "Guan Shaoguang" didn't understand Yu Hua's thoughts. He only knew that he had been refused by Yu Hua with "I can't do it" as the reason.

"I can't even save myself. How could I save you?" Yu Hua said dully.

How much longer could he defeat his divinity? It was only a matter of time until he was submerged.

If he let his power continue to expand, he would definitely become a second System. Then it wouldn't matter who won or lost. The outcome wouldn't change.

"You ask me to save you. Who will come to save me?" Yu Hua asked himself soundlessly.

He said these words in the direction of the little world. Even though there was no sound, You Zhengping still heard. Seeing Yu Hua like this, You Zhengping went around and around in agitation.

You Zhengping felt that Yu Hua was currently standing at some boundary. If he took a wrong step, there would be an abyss.

He didn't know whether he could resolve such a deep ideological problem, but right now, he ought to be beside Yu Hua. He couldn't let him struggle to think it through by himself.

Yu Hua had always been the sort of person to easily get stuck bashing his head against a brick wall. At the least weight on his mind, he would go investigate worst cases; when he had discovered that there was a secret between them, he had gone to watch suspense dramas on

the ethics of a wife getting back at her husband. Was that the kind of TV drama a normal person resolving an emotional problem should watch?

You Zhengping tried several times to break the barrier between the little world and the outside, but he couldn't find a way to break it. Yu Hua's human emotions had forgotten him after sinking into Yu Hua's body. It was all a lie about wanting to be together!

He was as agitated as an ant in a boiling pot. The power gap was too large. Even with his spatial ability, he still couldn't break through the barrier.

When You Zhengping was at the end of his tether, a vast power suddenly welled up from inside his body. No, it wasn't from inside his body. It seemed to come from somewhere deeper. It seemed to be a power carved into the depths of his soul from the time he was born.

Each time he had a breakthrough during combat, there was also this power like divine aid making him understand a new power over and over.

This time was the same. With the aid of that propelling force, You Zhengping used his spatial ability to open the barrier between the little world and the world outside. He appeared in the sky above the wilderness, charging into Yu Hua's field of vision.

Yu Hua, who had just asked "Who will come to save me?", suddenly saw a crack in space rip open in the sky. A person walked out of the space. The blood red sunlight shone on his hair. In a trance, he had the feeling that a rainbow had ascended into the sky.

"You again!" "Guan Shaoguang" said hatefully.

You Zhengping had thwarted "Guan Shaoguang"'s plans again and again. If not for him, Yu Hua might already have died or awakened 100% of his power!

You Zhengping ignored "Guan Shaoguang." He fell into Yu Hua's arms and tightly clutched his hand. "I'll save you."

When the words came out of his mouth, You Zhengping felt a little awkward. He had always thought these vague words had no purpose. He clutched his head and struggled to organize his wording. "I'm sorry, I saw your memories. It's like I've intruded on your privacy. But I want to say that you do have companions, our Protection Organization..."

At this point, You Zhengping stopped again. He thought that the Protection Organization and Yu Hua weren't friends. They had always taken precautions against each other.

Fortunately, Yu Hua was looking at him patiently from beginning to end, waiting for You Zhengping to organize his wording. Right now, Yu Hua seemed to need some positive speech.

"I can't say it clearly!" You Zhengping pointed to his own head and said, "You can use all kinds of abilities, right? You've already defeated Guan Shaoguang, so can't you break through the

limits of the time rules? Look at my memories, look at my thoughts—all the education I’ve received, my past with you, it’s all here. I don’t know whether I can save you, but you’re clever, if you understand the future a little better, you’ll be able to find a way, right?”

Yu Hua saw his urgency and suddenly gave a light laugh. He quietly said, “I wanted to look in the little world. Even though you were restricted by the time rules and couldn’t say, they couldn’t prevent me from investigating on my own. But are you really willing to completely open the doors to your thoughts to me? Just a bit of resistance, and your mind will be injured.”

“Go ahead and look!” You Zhengping raised his head compliantly.

Yu Hua gave Guan Shaoguang a cold look and casually knocked him out. Then he pressed his forehead to You Zhengping’s.

He held too many powers. Reading memories was a very simple one. His consciousness poured into You Zhengping’s awareness—

*“I’ve fallen in love at first sight with him, hurry up and help me think of a way to ruin the blind date!”*

*“Do you people have any decency? I’m going on a date, and you still want to follow?”*

*“Cen Xiao, lend me some money, I defaced a tree in the park and I’m being fined.”*

*“Ow, my waist. You had all better start exercising more. When you start dating, you’ll understand how important your waist is.”*

*“Cen Xiao, Cen Xiao, help me think of a way to propose! Should I just take him to the Bureau of Civil Affairs?”*

*“Wise up a little, why do I have to take you guys on my honeymoon?”*

*“I’m saving up my salary to buy a phone for Yu Hua. I’ll have to tighten my belt for a while. You guys can help me out with some food, right?”*

*“Yu Hua has been ignoring me recently. He didn’t even kiss me this morning. What do I do!”*

*“The first Destroyer has appeared. I have to throw myself into battle once more. To protect Yu Hua’s peaceful life, I can’t tell him.”*

*“Hiding things from Yu Hua is exhausting and feels so awful. I can’t bear it any longer.”*

*“So Yu Hua is the black-cloaked man. I...I don’t know that, I don’t know that, I don’t know that! All right, I don’t know!”*



*“Seeing Yu Hua oppressing the Destroyers makes me feel secretly pleased. Nicely done, go on, go on, don’t stop.”*

*“When can we get rid of the System? The Maldives tickets are about to expire.”*

*“Is the last Destroyer with natural law power where Yu Hua is? I have to go save him now!”*

*“Guan Shaoguang says that Yu Hua is so strong he doesn’t need me to save him. Is his strength what I depend on him for? No, it’s clearly his cooking I depend on him for!”*

*“I may not be as strong as you, but whatever you do, I’ll be with you.”*

*“In a peaceful life, I’ll be with you. Trapped in a little world, I’ll be with you. Fighting the System, I’ll be with you!”*

Yu Hua slowly opened his eyes. So this was where his lost humanity was.

—

The duplicate Guan Shaoguang: You’re a god, so you should save us.

You Zhengping: Haven’t you studied history? It’s never a single person who determines history—it’s people. What is this cult of personality you have going on? Power comes from uniting!

## CHAPTER 100

Yu Hua only now clearly understood his innermost being. He was afraid.

When he had his humanity, he had been afraid that his ideas wouldn’t be supported. When he had stretched out tentative feelers and been rejected in everything, he had hidden his humanity away and used what he believed to be his firmer divinity to “control” everyone.

After he had his divinity, his self-awareness had gradually been swallowed up and his emotions had cooled day by day. He no longer cherished life, and he wasn’t willing to give people another chance.

He looked at the ground littered with the corpses of his companions. What had he been thinking when he did this? He had been thinking, you were the ones who betrayed me first; you were the ones who were beguiled by the System into harming me. I’m absorbing your power not because I yearn to become stronger, but because you were the ones who acted first.

While no doubt there was no error in this way of thinking, what had his original thoughts been?

In You Zhengping’s memories just now, Yu Hua had seen his long-forgotten self from level 11. He had only then faintly recalled his past self. He wouldn’t have thrown down his humanity. He had known very well then that human nature in extreme circumstances could more easily

produce malice. He wouldn't have attempted to force levelers who weren't yet his companions in an even darker direction.

But now, he had forced his companions step by step to the point of deserting him so he could abandon his humanity with a clear conscience, absorb their power, his behavior moving closer and closer to the System's.

He was afraid that the self he was now would gradually be consumed by his so-called "divinity" and become the next System.

Though now...

Yu Hua gently kissed the center of You Zhengping's brow. Here was himself as a human being.

No matter when, Xiao You had stored up the humanity he hadn't given up and had strode across time to offer it up with both hands.

You Zhengping felt that gentle kiss. He opened his eyes and looked at Yu Hua. His face flushed slightly. They had already been married for many years. His and Yu Hua's feelings should have been those of a comfortable established couple, no more passion, only warmth.

But Yu Hua was like a treasure trove. If you only searched through it diligently, you could always dig up a new aspect, live daily life like a novel, each moment filled with happy surprise.

As a matter of fact, right now You Zhengping was once again starting to be moved by Yu Hua's expression.

Within a short time, he had seen the innocent Yu Hua who had just started passing levels, a somewhat callous Yu Hua who still liked to take care of others, a Yu Hua who had been poisoned by power but was still preserving his humanity, and the Yu Hua in front of him, who had accepted and reconciled with himself.

No matter which one it was, all of them could make his face flush and his heart pound. All of them were treasures he wanted to store away.

"How many times am I going to fall in love at first sight?" You Zhengping touched his forehead and sighed a little helplessly.

Yu Hua thought of You Zhengping "falling in love at first sight" with him in different identities. He took Xiao You's hand and quietly said, "The next time we see each other, will you also fall in love with me at first sight?"

"Of course I will," You Zhengping said, resigning himself to fate. His eyes lit up. "Have you moved on? Will you come back home with me? I don't completely understand how the axis of time has changed, but I think this isn't a parallel world. You're still you."

Yu Hua said, "Indeed it isn't."

You Zhengping thought that Yu Hua was agreeing to come home with him. But how should they go back?

He considered it and thought that the person who started the trouble ought to end it. So he let go of Yu Hua's hand and went up to "Guan Shaoguang." He picked him up and shook him. "How do we get back?"

"Guan Shaoguang" had been defeated by Yu Hua. He didn't have much energy left. He had lost the strength to fight. After admitting his true identity from frustration, he had lost the desire to fight and had turned around to beg Yu Hua to save him. He hadn't had such deep-seated hatred to begin with. Everything had been implanted by force by the System. Without the support of real emotions, even deep memories would slowly be forgotten.

But he still didn't like You Zhengping. Now You Zhengping was shaking him awake. When he opened his eyes, he saw a cheerful rainbow head. He frowned in disgust and turned his head. "I don't know."

"What did you say?" You Zhengping was mad enough to want to hit him. "This is a little world you made. You can just remove the little world. What are you playing dead for?"

He brandished his fist.

"Guan Shaoguang"'s appearance said he could hit him if he liked. "If this were still my little world, then reasonably speaking, when Yu Hua knocked me out just now, we should have returned to the original world."

"Oh, that-that's right." You Zhengping lowered his fist. "This place really does seem completely different from what you said at the beginning."

"Guan Shaoguang" said, "Time is only a human description of the sense of the passage of life using the rules of the planet's motion. The time ability I control changes that sense."

You Zhengping remembered the sense of having his time slowed down by "Guan Shaoguang." His power in fact was something of the "time is fleeting" or "a day feels like a year" change to the perception of time. It was a perception of a certain individual or certain group. It wasn't a true change to time. The speed of the earth's rotation didn't change, and neither did its speed orbiting the sun.

And "Guan Shaoguang"'s little world, reasonably speaking, was a certain fake world. You were controlled into believing that you had gone back into the past, the surroundings would change along with your perception of time.

"So that means that my hair and my clothes shouldn't be like this," You Zhengping said.

As he spoke, the clothes under the black cloak became the police uniform he had been wearing during the battle with the ice sculpture head of the league. From Yu Hua's slightly disappointed expression and "Guan Shaoguang"'s expression of "at last you look normal," he determined that his hair had also returned to its original form. He relaxed slightly.

Even though Yu Hua liked it, he still wouldn't go around with rainbow hair, impossible!

"Guan Shaoguang" said, "There's a viewpoint in the theory of time that time is one dimension in multidimensional space. My ability can be used to find a position from the outside. The only ones that can truly span time are spatial ability users."

It was as if You Zhengping had been struck by lightning. He pointed to his own nose and said, "You're saying that the reason this dimension of time happened is because of my spatial ability? That's impossible. I'm a special ability user who's only just grasped the barest hint of natural law. I definitely can't have that kind of power."

"You truly couldn't do it," "Guan Shaoguang" acknowledged readily. "It was some being using you as a lead that did it."

You Zhengping and "Guan Shaoguang" simultaneously looked at Yu Hua. They had only guessed this far. They hoped that Yu Hua could give them an answer.

While listening respectfully to their dialogue, Yu Hua had also been pondering some things.

He was looking at his own hands. After a long time, he said, "Perhaps I'm the only person who truly passed level 500."

You Zhengping hadn't expected that Yu Hua would not only not answer his question, he would even bring up a new one. He said doubtfully, "Hm? I remember Huan Zixu said there quite a few people with over five hundred levels?"

"Those were five hundred levels after I had absorbed half of the System's power," Yu Hua said. "Before that, no one could pass level 500. The System wouldn't let people hold natural law power."

You Zhengping said, "That does make sense. After you grasped natural law power, the self-destruct device the System placed in your head naturally disappeared. According to what Huan Zixu said, he saw with his own eyes how masters with over five hundred levels were blown up by the System, and they had absolutely no ability to resist. The System's power was reduced. That just means that the System's control over little worlds decreased, and that's why the difficulty of levels was reduced. It became easier for levelers to pass levels, but if they wanted to grasp natural law power, they would need to come to a certain barrier themselves. It wasn't just passing a level and being able to grasp it."

Like the ice sculpture head of the league—holding natural law power by force, the outcome was vanishing like smoke after one battle. Their body couldn't bear such a strong power.

With the System's power weakened by half, level 500 was like the prior level 250. If you wanted to reach the height of the previous level 500, then you needed at least 1,000 levels. And Huan Zixu hadn't seen any levelers with a four-digit level count.

Yu Hua glanced at "Guan Shaoguang." "Their level 500 missions were to kill me and obtain natural law power from me."

"What about you?" You Zhengping asked.

Yu Hua didn't answer. He was thoughtful.

Looking at Yu Hua, an absurd idea appeared in You Zhengping's mind. "Do you not have a level mission?"

Last time, Yu Hua had mentioned that his mission was to kill the giant abyss beast, but during level five hundred, Yu Hua hadn't mentioned any danger he would encounter.

"After level 398, the System hasn't issued me any missions," Yu Hua said.

"Guan Shaoguang" mobilized his memories. In the database the System had given him, after level 398, Yu Hua in fact didn't tell him his assignment again. He would only participate in others' assignments, using his own power to help his companions pass the level.

Because Yu Hua was too strong and the "Tyrant" power of natural law was simply a bug level ability, their levels had become easy, and they had gradually come up with the ideas that "we can also pass five hundred levels," "we'll also be this strong after getting natural law power."

Before Guan Shaoguang could question him, he saw You Zhengping hug Yu Hua and say, "Did you hope that if you helped your teammates obtain natural law power, they would fight shoulder to shoulder with you?"

Yu Hua had been waiting quietly, waiting for the people who would fight shoulder to shoulder with him to appear.

"I was only cutting my losses. If they had been reclaimed by the System, it would have been my loss." Yu Hua patted Xiao You's back. "Why do you always say things that make me sound so good?"

You Zhengping completely ignored him saying one thing when he meant another. After all these years, could he still not understand Yu Hua's character? Anything he truly wanted, he wouldn't come out and say it. He would only quietly wait for you to find out, wait for you to be concerned about him.

You Zhengping suddenly remembered something. “No, wait, if you didn’t take any more missions, why did you go through 3,841 levels? Even if we get rid of the first five hundred, there’s still 3,341 afterwards. What were you doing?”

“That’s right, what was I doing?” Yu Hua seemed to be raising a question, but from his expression, it was as if he already knew the answer.

The phone that had issued a mission to “Guan Shaoguang” suddenly lit up, flashing fierce red light. “Guan Shaoguang” rushed over and picked up the phone. He saw written on it: *Warning, warning! Please complete the assignment at once, please complete the assignment at once! If the host refuses to complete the mission, he will be erased in 10 seconds! 10, 9, 8...*

“I-I...” Guan Shaoguang looked at Yu Hua, his expression helpless. He had just begged Yu Hua for help and had been refused. He didn’t know how to ask again.

Yu Hua put his hand on his shoulder. “All I can do for you is to make you lose all your power and memories.”

As for who “Guan Shaoguang” had been originally, that couldn’t be restored. After the energy of System was absorbed, he would become a blank sheet of paper, forget everything to do with “Guan Shaoguang,” start afresh.

“At least I can survive.” “Guan Shaoguang” quickly made his choice.

Yu Hua put his power in motion, absorbing the energy the System had imbued him with. This energy was very strong. The System had created a natural law grade master out of nowhere. This had consumed an enormous amount of the System’s energy. Acquiring this energy sealed another 10% of his power.

“Guan Shaoguang,” having lost his energy, fell in a faint. You Zhengping picked him up and put him over his shoulder. He said to Yu Hua, “Have you already thought of how to go back?”

“Yes.” Yu Hua beckoned with his hand. A child and a dog rolled out of his little world. Junjun was still hugging a stack of workbooks.

You Zhengping stepped forward to help Junjun get his footing. The child really had it too hard. Now they were finally going home, he had to look after Junjun.

“Yu Hua, we...” Before You Zhengping finished speaking, a rope flew out of Yu Hua’s sleeve and tied him and Junjun together. The other end of the rope tied itself to Director Ha’s leash.

Yu Hua patted Director Ha on the head and said, “Do you see that passage? Use the speed you used when time slowed down, run until you can’t run anymore, and you’ll be home.”

“Aw-aw-awooo!”

— *What passage? I can't see it.*

"Yu Hua, what are you doing? This rope can't hold me!" You Zhengping struggled desperately, but he found that he couldn't even escape from this thin rope.

While Director Ha considered with a serious look on its dog's face just where the passage was and whether it was in a place a dog's eyes couldn't see, the world began to overturn.

In the originally boundless wilderness, countless cracks suddenly appeared in the sky. There was a frightening pressure. The whole world nearly collapsed.

The earth cracked open and magma spurted out. Lighting chopped through the chinks in the sky. The moment of catastrophe had befallen this world. At this moment, Director Ha looked where Yu Hua was pointing and saw the road.

This was a road leading up to the sky. There was a swirling passage in the sky that was drawing them in.

The road was being swallowed by the destructive energy around it. Director Ha knew this was no time to hesitate. It strode with its four paws, darting towards the exit.

Junjun, You Zhengping, and Director Ha all simultaneously had the sense of coming home when they saw that passage. They instinctively understood that this was the origin of all special abilities. It was a complete existence, an origin power that had produced countless lives—their world law.

Using "Guan Shaoguang"'s time positioning, with You Zhengping's ability as a lead, it was the world law helping them open the passage.

"Why would it be like this?" You Zhengping suddenly understood something. He turned his head and called to Yu Hua, "Did you make some deal with the world law that I don't know about?"

Yu Hua waved his hand towards You Zhengping. He smiled and said, "Don't worry, I'm already waiting for you over there."

"What are you saying?" You Zhengping struggled desperately, but he couldn't use his strength.

It wasn't that Yu Hua's rope was so magical. It was that the world law was suppressing his power, forcing him to go back with Director Ha. He couldn't remain here.

You Zhengping's mind was clearer than it had ever been. He quickly thought back over what Yu Hua had said: "If you found one day that you had come to your starting point, that wouldn't be time running backwards, but that the road ahead of you had always been a circle. The beginning was the end."

He suddenly understood what Yu Hua wanted to do and shook his head wildly. “Let me stay with you, don’t do it alone, okay?”

Yu Hua slowly shook his head. The world became more and more broken. Heaven and earth, sun and moon, all disappeared. All that remained was the road under their feet and the boundless darkness.

Director Ha ran faster and faster. It used speed that surpassed the speed of sound to outstrip the planet’s gravity and sprinted forward, constantly approaching the speed of light. It could feel the terrifying power behind it. This was the System’s power.

Run, run, the end was up ahead.

Director Ha outran the speed of the explosions. It had never been so desperate as at this moment. It ran so fast its fur caught fire, ran so fast its legs ulcerated, ran so fast its tongue hung out of its mouth and couldn’t be pulled.

It knew that behind it, You Zhengping would protect Junjun. It had watched with its own eyes how this Protector protected children from Destroyer 192 time after time. It had faith in the Protector’s convictions and will.

Not needing to worry about what was behind, only needing to run forward, was a truly good feeling. A Siberian husky’s instinct was to run, run forward with its team, find the only way to survive in a frozen world.

In order to run even faster, in order to reach the end point before the world was swallowed up, Destroyer 192’s soul fused entirely with the husky. For the sake of taking the child it had gotten involved in this home, it no longer resisted its fate.

Why should it struggle so hard for the sake of this child?

Probably it owed him a life.

Also, there was the warmth of the countless times he had stroked its head.

In the sky that was splitting apart in all directions, a not yet fully grown husky with its entire body burning with raging flames streaked across the sky like a meteor and passed the boundary of time.

## CHAPTER 101

A person’s time was always going forward. There was no turning back. If time flowed backwards, it was only some individual dimension in space changing, not history reversing.



Yu Hua knew that he could go back with You Zhengping. He didn't need to walk the timeline once again. But when he had seen that spatial passage leading home, Yu Hua had understood how the world law would help them return to that dimension of time.

Because everything was moving forward.

Yu Hua had understood what the world law wanted to do, so he had to stay behind.

The whole level 500 world had become a void and turned into a vast, boundless celestial body. It revolved at extremely high speed, constantly attracting world power coming from different dimensions in the void. Its tentacles were connected to countless levelers. These were Its provisions.

"I know you've also discovered the world law's goal. Though that doesn't matter. You'll forget," Yu Hua said calmly at the center of the vast celestial body.

Yu Hua deeply admired You Zhengping's world law. During hundred of years of the System's attacks, it had made countless plans, and had at last seized the one chance to defeat the System.

For this chance, Yu Hua's timeline had turned from a straight line to a circle. He had to once again walk a road he had already passed along.

Enormous power erupted from the center of the System's body. It wanted to swallow Yu Hua whole. Yu Hua said, "No, we haven't come to the decisive battle yet. I won't take you down with me yet."

The System already knew everything. In the next world, he couldn't let It disturb him.

Yu Hua barged into the System's power center. In order to resist the System's power, which was sufficient to destroy a planet, he had to incessantly unseal his own power. 70%, 80%, 90%, 95%, 99%...

100%

The moment he completely undid the seal, the System also recovered the power of Its prime. It was going to consume Yu Hua.

Yu Hua, however, used the System's avaricious gobbling of the unsealed power to charge into the System's core data storage.

He couldn't directly destroy the core data storage. That would only provoke a backlash from the System. Before Its death, It would kill all the worlds and all the levelers. Yu Hua had come to do only one thing—to seal the System's data concerning him after level 500.

Yu Hua knew that the seal couldn't last too long. He was only buying time like this.

He had to conceal things from the System, conceal what happened during those 2,410 years, conceal his and the world law's goal.

The System's data wasn't like a human's memories, which could be forgotten. If he wanted to seal a certain segment of data, he needed to encrypt it using an extremely similar segment of data. Encrypting data with similar data was along the same lines as sealing power with similar power.

Yu Hua had similar data—memories from the same time.

For this person, he needed to use his own data storage to seal the System's, create countless hard to break encryptions.

Doing this, he would also temporarily forget that period of time.

But that didn't matter. Everything was for the sake of a better meeting.

For the sake of meeting you again, I've decided to temporarily forget you.

The endless original data signal plunged into the System's database storage. The System realized what Yu Hua was doing. It furiously wanted to consume Yu Hua, but there was no time.

The mysterious original data signal firmly locked all the data concerning Yu Hua after level 500. An enormous energy attack burst towards Yu Hua. He was seriously injured, but still firmly encrypted the data.

The System struggled several times and at last gradually calmed. Yu Hua was sent flying by the energy attacks and returned to the System's central world.

Yu Hua awoke on the central world covered in wounds. Holding his aching head, he remembered that he had been bewitched by his expanding power during level 500 and had killed his former companions. Yu Hua's heart ached as though being twisted. He entirely hadn't thought that he could do such a thing. It contradicted his original intentions.

Yu Hua determined not to be consumed by power from then on. He would preserve his humanity and battle the System.

Luckily his head had cleared in time during level 500. His humanity had gotten the upper hand. He wouldn't continue to do wrong.

But—how had his head cleared?

Yu Hua touched his wounds. He felt that there was something important missing in his mind. What was it?

He left the empty palatial room and went outside of the central world. He got out the “rule writer” and wrote in the air—

*Rule 1, The “Tyrant” will not hold authority again. All levelers may act freely and pass levels normally.*

*Rule 2, The “Tyrant” will enter among the masses and others will be unable to see the “Tyrant”’s identity.*

*Rule 3, From now on, no one will know the “Tyrant”’s name and title.*

He put away the brush. Yu Hua quietly looked at the sky.

Allowing the levelers to complete their mission would certainly cause harm to different worlds. But it was no use holding them down excessively. In order to obtain points and greater power, the levelers would secretly accept missions. It was better to clear the way than to block.

He would masquerade as an ordinary leveler, join others’ groups, set foot onto each world that could be saved.

The three rules spread to each person’s consciousness. All the levelers felt a load lift from them, as though a heavy stone pressing on their heart had disappeared.

A rainbow appeared in the sky. Yu Hua raised his head and looked at the seven-colored rainbow light. He reached out a hand towards the sky, wanting to grab that light, but it was too far. He couldn’t touch it.

If you wanted to ascend to the clouds, you could only walk one step at a time.

Yu Hua pretended to be a leveler of neither high nor low grade. He formed groups with others and entered world after world.

While his teammates completed their missions, he stealthily left the team and looked for the fragments of that world’s natural law.

There were world laws that were mostly complete, and there were world laws that had been torn to shreds. Yu Hua communicated with the world law. Sometimes the communication was easy, and sometimes they might fight. Luckily, Yu Hua had time and he had patience. He would persevere in his dialogue with the world law, telling It his goal, giving It a segment of calculation data and letting It make the choice.

The world law, having accepted Yu Hua’s data, would chose to voluntarily give Its “allegiance” and have Its power “controlled” by Yu Hua. But Yu Hua didn’t absorb Its power. Instead, he quietly left a rule in the world, giving up “control” over it.

The rule lay hidden in the world. Because it had been written with Yu Hua's "control," the System couldn't notice the rule's existence. It had no idea what Yu Hua was doing.

Yu Hua didn't participate in leveling missions at all. He would only choose teams going to different worlds, then vanish when they arrived at the world.

His former teammates were unsatisfied. While fulfilling their missions, they incessantly cursed him, and they decided that when they returned to the central world, they would tell everyone not to let Yu Hua into their teams. This was a person who freeloadered on missions, treading water the whole way. As soon as they arrived at the mission world, he would disappear without a trace.

They would return bearing their anger to the central world, but when others asked them the name of this lazy cheating leveler, they couldn't say anything to the point.

No one could remember Yu Hua's name. They were only temporary teammates for one world. As soon as they left that world, they couldn't remember who it was who had joined their team.

Yu Hua left tracks on countless worlds, but he left no memories in any leveler's mind.

Before, he had imposed the heavy weight of resisting the System onto the levelers. He didn't say so, but inside he resented them as useless and forced them to do things that were impossible to begin with, hanging the levelers' lives from a cable wire over a towering precipice and complaining that they didn't have the courage to walk across the cable to the opposite bank.

The Yu Hua then hadn't thought that not everyone had the ability to walk the cable. Natural endowments were different. Using himself as a standard to make demands on others was a sort of cruelty to the levelers.

It was very lonely passing levels on his own, and doing the same thing again and again was boring. At times like that, Yu Hua would control the light rays and the atmosphere to create a rainbow in the sky of that world. He would quietly look at it for a day, two days...until he had seen enough of it.

At times like this, the levelers would sometimes also sigh about how beautiful the rainbow was, and the native residents of that world who had never seen a rainbow would stop their weary steps and take a look at the rich and diverse colors.

Seeing a rainbow always made people happy.

Yu Hua's tracks were left behind on world after world. Yu Hua himself didn't know how long he had to go. He only knew that the road was still very, very long before he reached the end, but he had to persevere.

Luckily, as long as they didn't lose, a leveler's life was endless. With a lifespan this long, time became meaningless.

He no longer counted the passing days. He counted the passing worlds. One world would count as a day.

1,000, 2,000, 3,000...

On the 3,841st world, Yu Hua stopped. He felt that the appointed time had arrived.

He said to the System, *I'm tired. Neither of us can defeat the other. Let's stand down. I'll choose some world and go rest.*

The System agreed, though Yu Hua knew that It was only compromising because there was nothing It could do to him for the moment. As soon as there was hope, the System would attempt to consume his power.

Yu Hua chose an unopened world at random to prevent the System from disturbing his rest. He used 50% of the System's power to seal his own power. In the midst of the System's explosion, he entered that unopened world.

This time, he wanted to start from a person's childhood, though he would certainly have an identity without father or mother. Too young a person would be hard. Yu Hua chose twelve years old, the beginning of the period of maturation. He wanted to start from twelve years old and live bit by bit to a ripe old age. When his life ended, he would take the System's power to the grave.

As soon as he entered this world, he only had time to pass through a heavy fog. He saw a ten-year-old little boy sleeping quietly in the upper bunk of a dormitory bed.

Yu Hua thought that his days had been too lonely. It would be better to choose to grow up in this training camp, have companions who could support him and be supported from his youth.

"I'm here," Yu Hua said quietly.

Just then, data entered his mind: *You have returned as arranged.*

*Returned?* Yu Hua thought doubtfully. He didn't think he had ever been to this world.

Yu Hua had communicated with countless world laws. He knew that this data had come from this world's law.

The world law continued to convey Its message to Yu Hua: *Entering the world on your scheduled time dimension may alter the world's current progress. In order to guarantee the accuracy of the outcome of the calculations, the law will convey you to the appropriate time dimension.*

What was it saying? Yu Hua didn't entirely understand what the world law meant. Were all complete world laws this willful? What was the appropriate time dimension? He had chosen this world at random. How could there be an appropriate or inappropriate time?

Yu Hua wanted to refuse. He had chosen twelve years old, but the world law insisted on throwing him fifteen years afterwards. Why?

Unfortunately, he had sealed his powers. He couldn't resist the world law. He only looked deeply at the little boy, and then he was taken away from this time node.

He was forced fifteen years in the future. It was a rainy afternoon.

Yu Hua stood in the greenery of an estate. A black umbrella had been tossed onto the lawn. He was wearing a button-down shirt and suit pants. On his feet were a pair of black leather shoes commonly worn by society's diligent workers. On his wrist was a watch worth less than 1,000 yuan.

He looked at the time. 17:45.

The rain pattered down, though it was getting lighter and lighter. Yu Hua raised his head to look at the increasingly thin dark clouds in the sky. He thought, will I get to see a rainbow?

For no reason he understood, he liked rainbows. This seemed to be a place where he could see a rainbow.

Yu Hua picked up the black umbrella and stood in the estate with his head raised to look at the sky, quietly waiting for the sky to clear.

At 17:50, space-time suddenly twisted. The space in front of Yu Hua twisted. A husky wrapped in flames charged out of the space at an unimaginable speed.

It was pulling three people behind it. There was a young man in a police uniform holding a sleeping child in his arms, with an unconscious grown man over his shoulder.

Yu Hua walked over curiously and raised the umbrella over the young man in the police uniform to block the wind and rain.

The young man in the police uniform hurriedly patted out the flames on the husky's body. Seeing that someone was holding an umbrella over him, he angrily said, "Don't you see I'm using the rain to put out the fire? Don't block..."

The young man raised his head and met Yu Hua's curious eyes. He stopped patting out the flames.

That one look unlocked Yu Hua's data, which had been sealed for thousands of years.

The instant he saw You Zhengping, the lengthy data that had encrypted the System's data storage, uncontrollably returned to Yu Hua's consciousness.

The memories lying unused for thousands of years were instantly unsealed. Scene after scene appeared in his mind. The umbrella in Yu Hua's hand fell to the ground.

Countless emotions surged up in his heart. Thousands of years of unspoken words turned into a single line. Yu Hua's fingers trembled. He smiled faintly. "Look, what did I say? When you get back, I'll be here waiting for you."

"Bastard!" You Zhengping dropped Junjun onto the unconscious "Guan Shaoguang" and ran towards Yu Hua. He hugged him, his tears flowing uncontrollably.

"To hell with your already waiting here. How many years have you waited?" You Zhengping hung off of Yu Hua, wailing disgracefully.

"It wasn't so long." Yu Hua gently stroked You Zhengping's hair. "It passed in the blink of an eye."

The rain stopped. After the rain, the sun refracted off the water droplets and formed a rainbow.

Under the rainbow, Yu Hua at last once again met You Zhengping.

## CHAPTER 102

"Awoooo-awoo."

Director Ha lay on the ground. Its back leg twitched twice. It emitted a mournful cry.

With the blessings of the damp grass and the rain that had still been drizzling when they had just returned, the flames on its body had already been put out. But its fur was scorched, its whole body giving off the smell of burned fur. It had used too much of its strength to run. Its four paws were worn out. It had used up too much strength, making it starved and thirsty. Its belly undulated weakly. From time to time, it stuck out its tongue to lick leftover water droplets from the grass.

Its whole body hurt. Was this how bad it felt to be burned? It swore that it would never again touch bombs, never.

"Awoooooooo," it called quietly, hoping someone could help it.

Yu Hua gently put the tip of his foot onto Director Ha. The scorched fur slowly grew out, and Director Ha's paws healed.

Its drooping ears instantly stuck up. It leapt up where it was and wanted to run around happily, but it saw Yu Hua's gaze, which seemed to be emitting death rays, and it instantly went down on the ground and didn't get up.

It opened its mouth, tongue hanging out, entirely playing a dead dog. The only evidence that it was still alive was its fluffy tail, placed on Junjun's belly, which stuck up from time to time.

You Zhengping and Yu Hua had no choice but to separate. They couldn't even bear to take their eyes from each other's faces; they had been separated for so many, many years. But it had also only been a few minutes.

The real world had just gone through a great battle. The new complex where Huan Zixu had just bought an apartment had been destroyed and was now a total shambles, and it seemed that there was a crew over there filming *Transformers*—a giant mechanical skeleton had suddenly appeared inside the complex. There had been a pile-up by the lake on the outskirts. The recently repaired amusement park had grown a mountain. The central park, which was supposed to open tomorrow, had had a once-in-ten-thousand-years snowstorm in the beginning of autumn, freezing the whole park into a glacier and making everyone marvel.

Fortunately Director Xiao had notified the relevant departments in a timely manner to cut off the Xuyang District's internet and communications apparatus. Director Xiao wouldn't have disclosed anything to outsiders, but there were memories in the minds of countless people, and videos recorded on their phones. Even the faces of the ice sculpture auxiliary policemen You Zhengping and Cen Xiao had been photographed.

Of the over three million permanent residents of the Xuyang District, at least fifty to sixty hundred thousand had witnessed these scenes or heard about them. This mess was a large one. Even if Luo Huai could remove their memories, he still couldn't accomplish such a large workload in a short time.

And breaking off the internet and communications for the whole district was only a stop-gap. If it lasted over an hour, it would lead to losses for the whole area's finances, economy, and public safety. In half an hour at most, the internet and communications would have to be restored.

Even if all the members of Huaxia's Protection Organization were dispatched, and the government departments of the whole Xuyang District and its surrounding area, the administrative establishment of the public security authorities, the project, and the temporary staff all threw themselves into work after the event, they still would still be far from being able to resolve the problem in a short time.

"Captain You, Huan Zixu's special ability has awakened. He can put a mass brainwashing into action. The director has ordered us to take him to a police station to have the internet police department use internet groups to send out red packets as a means to change the 'impressions' of all those in the Xuyang District aware of these events. Have you arrived at the



estate? Aren't you the closest? If you've found Junjun, then go meet Huan Zixu right away," Cen Xiao's voice sounded from the communications device.

The notice of the assignment shook You Zhengping and Yu Hua awake from the joy of their reunion. You Zhengping had to do his job, and when such a major event had taken place in the Xuyang District, the leaders of Huaxia's Protection Organization might all assemble there. In the future, there might be half a month to a month in a row of overtime and meetings, maybe...they wouldn't see each other.

What could they do? You Zhengping clutched Yu Hua's hand tightly. He absolutely didn't want to let go.

"I...might be very busy, I..." You Zhengping didn't know what to say. He couldn't get it out.

"Why not request me to help you erase everyone's memories and repair all the damage?" Yu Hua asked. "You know I can do that."

You Zhengping naturally said, "It's Protector work."

However powerful Yu Hua was, the Protection Organization still didn't want to depend on the black-cloaked man, didn't want to appeal to him for help. Earlier, even during the Destroyers' five-sided pincer attack, the Protection Organization would have been able to hold out until support arrived and defeat the Destroyers. It was just that if Yu Hua hadn't stepped in, more ordinary people would have been harmed, so the Protection Organization was very grateful to the black-cloaked man, willing to give him a certain level of trust, but they wouldn't insist on him doing the follow-up work.

This world's Protectors were like their world's law. They made exchanges and arrangements. They were independent and wouldn't rely too much on a strong power, wouldn't place all their hopes onto a single person, wouldn't set aside their dignity to ask for his aid. But faced with goodwill and assistance, they wouldn't obstinately reject it. They wouldn't let emotions affect their decisions and refuse help, leading to harm to ordinary people. Even more than that, they wouldn't burn their bridges by responding to kindness with enmity.

They would severely punish the Destroyers encroaching upon their world. And because Zhen Li and the others had helped them, they had also accepted Zhen Li as a Protector.

They were neither servile nor overbearing—that's about the sort of group they were.

"Even if you won't ask me, I'm still going to help out." Yu Hua extended two fingers. "First, doing this will decrease your workload, so your overtime will finish sooner and you'll come home. Second..."

He took out his phone and pulled up the record of the last message Huan Zixu had sent. He had told Yu Hua that the advertising company would send the advertising fees and percentage from their last livestream promotions in three months.

It was normal in business for people to get behind on their payments, though Yu Hua had contacted the advertising company afterwards and learned that the funds would be deposited into their account in three days.

Three days, three months... Huan Zixu's skills at deceiving his superiors and subordinates was truly powerful.

Yu Hua looked at the collapsed complex and smiled coldly. Such nice buildings. It was such a pity they had collapsed.

"Don't force yourself," You Zhengping said. "We can take care of it."

Yu Hua stroked his head. "I never force myself."

During the days that were placid as water, waiting for Xiao You to come home from work had also been a sort of pleasure.

Of course, waiting was dull. Oppressing the employees a little could be counted as finding joy in sorrows.

Before coming to this world, Yu Hua had once again sealed the System, though he had gone to fifteen years later in the timeline. At this time, he had already unsealed 50%, plenty to establish new rules.

The "rule writer" began to write in midair—

*Supplemental Rule 1, Because the "common people" suffered no damage during the "conflict," this will be seen as the "conflict" having no impact on the "common people." Apart from injury, impact also includes perceptions, memories, and changes to the objective world (material losses caused by the "conflict" as well as visual and audio recordings) related to all elements of the "conflict."*

*Supplemental Rule 2, "Soldiers" harboring ill-intent will be deprived of their weapons after battle.*

*Supplemental Rule 3, After the battle, the "common people" will be able to look directly at the "Tyrant."*

The three rules spread through the Xuyang District following Yu Hua's power. They melded with the rules Yu Hua had set down before and quickly changed the world.

The collapsed new buildings incessantly restored themselves. The installations in the amusement park that had grown a small mountain returned to their places. The highway by the lake in the outskirts returned to its former condition; the overturned cars were as good as new. In the central park, the snow and ice melted and ran into the enlarged manmade lake.

The video and audio recordings on people's phone were deleted by a certain mysterious power, and all the ordinary people in the Xuyang District had a second of blankness.

A second later, drivers stuck in traffic at intersections pressed on their horns, sticking their heads out windows and cursing. "Isn't it just a rainbow after the rain has stopped? Is it worth getting out and taking pictures? Do you understand traffic regulations? You're stopped at a red light!"

All the people standing by the road filming were completely confused. They looked at the time on their phones and were instantly astonished. What was this? Had they been looking at a rainbow for an entire half hour? Were they crazy? They still had so many things to do!

Instantly, all the people who had to pick their kids up from school, rush to dinner parties, head to work for the night shift, go on a date, go home to cook...all these assorted people returned to their original positions. The whole city began to move.

Because they had missed half an hour, many people were late and missed appointments. They hurried to fish out their phones and call, but the Xuyang District's internet hadn't been connected yet. A whole crowd of people began to curse the internet.

"You can tell Director Xiao to connect the internet, or else the relevant departments will take the heat for this," Yu Hua said.

"Right, right." You Zhengping nodded repeatedly.

He had just taken out his communications device when Cen Xiao's voice came from it again. "Captain You, you don't need to go meet Huan Zixu. Everything in the Xuyang District is normal. Director Xiao has already notified the relevant departments to connect the internet and the communications signal. Everyone is returning to the base for a meeting. Lian Yufan should be near you. He has a car going back to the base. Go and find him."

"No need to notify them." You Zhengping put down the communications device. "But I still have to go to the meeting. Though the overtime should be short this time. I should be able to go home in two or three days."

Yu Hua sighed faintly. As expected, no matter the time, Cen Xiao was always such a noticeable person. Was this an innate special ability of fire type Protectors?

"As for the business about the black-cloaked man, I..." You Zhengping looked at Yu Hua, soliciting his view.

Yu Hua said, "I'm only an ordinary entrepreneur and a husband who takes care of domestic chores. As for when the black-cloaked man wants to tell the Protection Organization his identity, that's up to him to decide."

You Zhengping understood what Yu Hua meant. But his phone rang, and he picked up. It was Lian Yufan.

“Captain You, send me your precise location. I’ll come to pick you up,” Lian Yufan said.

“No need, you send your location to me, I’ll go meet you.” You Zhengping put down the phone as soon as he finished talking.

“Go on,” Yu Hua said quietly.

“Well...I’ll support you, okay?” You Zhengping said and grabbed Yu Hua’s hand, reluctant to leave.

“Oh?” Yu Hua’s heroic brows drew together slightly.

“Yes! My salary is actually pretty high, and they add a subsidy for going on assignment. My annual salary may not be a million, but it’s several hundred thousand. If I’m demobilized in the future, I can still get my share of a considerable settlement allowance and an 80 square meter... No, I’m of captain rank, I get a residence with an area of 100 square meters,” You Zhengping said somewhat awkwardly. “So my salary is actually pretty high. I have over three million saved. It’s enough to pay back the mortgage early, and there’ll still be income afterwards.”

“So?” The more Yu Hua heard, the more he thought that the Protection Organization’s remuneration was indeed good.

“So there’s absolutely no need for you to work. I can support you! You can just stay at home and cook for me!” You Zhengping quickly finished saying this, kissed Yu Hua’s face, picked up the unconscious Guan Shaoguang and Junjun, and ran off like a streak of smoke.

“Aw-aw-aw-awoo!” Seeing You Zhengping carrying Junjun away, Director Ha, who had been playing dead, leapt up and chased after with its leash in its mouth.

When they passed the estate’s sentry post, the property manager stuck his head out. “Young officer, didn’t I say that Junjun didn’t leave the estate? Hey, where are you taking him? Whose husky is that walking itself? How was it trained?”

In the estate that had once again taken on an atmosphere of life, Yu Hua lifted the corners of his mouth, then once again became grave.

What was the good of being supported?

Well, it did sound nice.

—

Author's note:

The long unseen little theater —

Yu Hua: Xiao You is working overtime, I'm unhappy, I'll go torture the employees.

Yu Hua: Xiao You wants to support me, I'm happy, I'll go torture the employees.

Yu Hua: How should I torture the employees?

Yu Hua looking at the collapsed building: No, this building can't collapse. If it collapses, I don't have an excuse.

Therefore, the collapsed buildings rise up in place.

Huan Zixu: Did I fucking rescue the new complex's developers and owners?

## CHAPTER 103

Before getting into the car, You Zhengping got out his nanotech mask and put it on, and took off his police badge, rank insignia, and so on. He still remembered that he needed to cover up his identity in front of Huan Zixu and Feng Kui.

"Why did you bring a child and a dog?" Lian Yufan said in surprise. "Is this our studio's Xiao Ha and Junjun? And who's this person?"

"It's crowded." Seeing You Zhengping bring so many people, Huan Zixu frowned and shifted closer to Feng Kui.

"Aw-aw-awoo!" Director Ha called unhappily when he heard Huan Zixu say it was crowded.

"Feng Kui is the one doing the crowding, all right?" You Zhengping forced himself onto the seat, bringing along a grown man, a child, and a dog. There were two rows of seats facing each other inside the armed car. Feng Kui and Huan Zixu sat on the same side, while everyone else crowded in across from them.

Like this, the young soldier driving the car couldn't resist saying, "Could the people on the left move across to even it up? The car is tilting..."

"Even it up how?" Huan Zixu disagreed. "There are three grown men, a child, and a dog across from us, and only two of us here."

But Feng Kui by himself took up the better part of the seat, and he might have been heavier than the car. Lian Yufan wanted to make an impartial remark, but he remembered that Huan Zixu and Feng Kui only got to see each other once a week and might be separated again after seeing each other this time, so he kept silent.

But Feng Kui himself got up and went to the center of the car and sat down cross-legged right on the floor. He pointed to his own head and said to Huan Zixu, "On the seat, it's too low. Here, it's perfect."

With Feng Kui sitting in the middle, the car could finally keep its equilibrium. It drove smoothly to the base.

“Why did you bring the people and the dog?” Lian Yufan asked.

You Zhengping said, “It’s too complicated. I’ll explain to everyone at the base. We need to examine Junjun. I think the child has had a special ability awoken.”

Lian Yufan looked You Zhengping up and down and doubtfully said, “Why do I have a feeling looking at you that you’ve changed a lot in a very short time?”

“Bark!” Director Ha called to Lian Yufan.

“Yes, you, too, you’ve also changed a lot,” Lian Yufan said perfunctorily to Director Ha and casually stroked the dog’s head.

“Aw-aw-awoooo!” Huskies were lively and energetic dogs. It had recovered its vitality after its wounds were healed. Seeing the members of the studio, whom it hadn’t seen in a while, it was excited and couldn’t stop crying out.

“Really? You went somewhere very far away? Separated by time and space? No wonder you all look like so much time has passed,” Lian Yufan said. “So the unconscious stranger is a holder of time law? No wonder Yuan Luori saw a clock in a vortex over the estate before. You’ve all done a good job.”

“Aw-aw-awoo!” Director Ha proudly help up its furry face.

“So you’ve been protecting Junjun the whole time! You’re an ideal police dog.” As a reward, Lian Yufan stroked Director Ha’s head.

Huan Zixu, Feng Kui, and You Zhengping: “...”

The three of them were all watching Lian Yufan and Director Ha’s conversation.

Lian Yufan sensed that the atmosphere inside the car was a little heavy and looked around. “Why are you all looking at me?”

Huan Zixu pointed at Director Ha. “You can understand what it’s saying?”

“The tone of a dog’s voice and its body language can convey a lot of meaning,” Lian Yufan said.

“Can it convey that it experienced time travel and protected a little boy?” Huan Zixu asked.

Lian Yufan: “...”

“That’s right, why can I suddenly understand you? And I didn’t even notice I was talking to you without relying on speech, I just...very naturally understood the meaning in your voice and body movements,” Lian Yufan said in belated realization. “Have you awakened a mental communication sort of special ability?”

“Director Ha awakened a speed ability, very suitable for a husky,” You Zhengping explained. “I think it’s Junjun who’s awakened the mental communication special ability.”

At the moment, Junjun was sleeping soundly with his head pillowed in Lian Yufan’s lap. Since returning from level 500, he had been fast asleep. It very much had the look of an awakened special ability user.

You Zhengping had thought before that even if Director Ha was proficient in math, physics, and chemistry and was highly skilled at teaching, Junjun still wasn’t a genius elementary school student. How could he do high school solid geometry problems? Even with ten personal tutors, with the development of an elementary school student’s brain, he still might not possess complete spatial reasoning.

He had been able to understand Director Ha in Yu Hua’s little world. At the time, You Zhengping had thought that this was because communication was unrestricted in Yu Hua’s little world. Now it seemed that it had been Junjun’s special ability!

Lian Yufan stroked Junjun’s head. He got out the car’s medical kit and checked Junjun’s temperature. It was 37.5°C. Unconsciousness and a sustained low fever—these were symptoms of an awakened special ability.

“So the reason I can communicate with Xiao Ha is that Junjun is touching me?” Lian Yufan asked.

“That’s about right,” You Zhengping said, nodding. “Just now, I really didn’t understand its barking.”

Lian Yufan sighed and stroked Junjun’s hair. “Let’s perform an examination when we get back to the base.”

Lian Yufan’s expression wasn’t optimistic. He didn’t think that having a special ability awaken was anything good. As a Protector, he was willing to give up everything, but seeing a special ability awaken in such a small child, thinking of what sort of road he would walk in the future, Lian Yufan couldn’t help sighing.

It was no bad thing to live a perfectly ordinary life.

Huan Zixu didn’t understand Lian Yufan’s depression. He had felt a little puffed up since regaining his special ability. He drew close to Junjun and said, “Not bad. Mental type special abilities like mine are rare. I wonder what abilities he’ll develop apart from a communication power.”

“The more unique the special ability, the worse time he’ll have,” Lian Yufan said.

“That’s the perspective of you Protectors. We don’t think that way,” Huan Zixu said casually.

Lian Yufan frowned. “With your ideas, how could the world law acknowledge you?”

When they had been fighting together earlier, he had thought that Huan Zixu was all right. He had used Destroyer 217’s System to get medicine to heal him. But now he had only had his power back for a few minutes, and he was once again starting to act above it all.

“It wasn’t necessarily the world law’s acknowledgment.” You Zhengping was the only person who knew the full contents of the three supplemental rules. “Do you want to check whether you still have your special ability?”

“How could I not...” Huan Zixu’s expression suddenly stiffened. “Where did my special ability go? Where did it go?”

His expression was miraculously similar to Yuan Luori’s saying “Where are my glasses? Where did they go?”

Seeing that Huan Zixu had lost his special ability, Feng Kui spread out one big hand. The flesh of his palm opened, and the mechanical skeleton reached out and turned into a metal glove covered his hand. He made a fist and said, “I still have mine.”

“Huh? Then what about mine?” Huan Zixu’s expression was shocked.

He had just been thinking of how to communicate with the Protection Organization now that he had his special ability, how he would barter to get Feng Kui to work beside him, and how, with sharing the workload to reduce the pressure on Luo Huai, he would think of a way to be promoted to captain rank. Also, he would have to use the Protection Organization’s authority to oppress Yu Hua, force him to cough up all his money.

You Zhengping said, “When we get back to base, I’ll explain everything.”

Then You Zhengping stroked Director Ha’s head. Director Ha instantly put its tail between its legs, not daring to call out at random.

Before, others couldn’t understand its cries. It didn’t matter how it cursed Yu Hua. Now, it didn’t know to what degree and within what range Junjun’s ability would be effective, so it didn’t even dare to think.

The ride passed with Huan Zixu shaken and distraught, Feng Kui beside him silently comforting him.



Medicine couldn't alleviate the low fever of an awakening special ability. The special ability user would have to get by on their own. Lian Yufan applied a temperature reducing pad to Junjun's forehead so the child would be more comfortable.

When they reached the base, they handed Junjun over to the medical group. Director Ha followed. It also needed to be tested for its special ability.

The others went to the conference room. Everyone else was already waiting for them.

Yuan Luori's sitting posture was arrogant. His legs were up on the table, and he was humming a song from when he had been recording with the show group, shaking this way and that.

Luo Huai tried a couple of times to talk him out of it. Yuan Luori's appearance said "I've rendered a service, who's going to do anything to me?" The word "smug" was written all over his face. Director Xiao was looking at him with his face livid, and Yuan Luori acted like he couldn't see.

Just then, You Zhengping walked into the conference room. Yuan Luori casually glanced at the person by the door and instantly got up and stood on the table.

"*Hic!*" Yuan Luori gave an enormous hiccup.

"Don't go overboard. Never mind putting your feet on the table, you're also standing on it." Luo Huai yanked at Yuan Luori's pant leg to make him get down.

But the parrot on Yuan Luori's shoulder suddenly fell down. Luo Huai scrambled to catch the rather heavy parrot in both arms. He saw that its eyes had rolled up and its legs were sticking straight up, as though it had been struck gloriously dead on the spot.

"What have you seen?" Luo Huai asked.

"*Hic!*" Yuan Luori hiccuped again and nimbly climbed off the table. He tore off a corner of his shirt and wiped the table he had just stepped on until it was spotless.

Everyone: "..."

"What is it?" Zhen Li also thought something was wrong with Yuan Luori. He was only this modest when he had seen the great master clearer.

Luo Huai saw that the parrot occasionally opened one eye, glanced at You Zhengping, then closed its eye once again as quickly as though it had seen a ghost.

Then everyone looked at You Zhengping. You Zhengping was also all at sea. This wasn't his first time having dealings with Yuan Luori. What was wrong with Yuan Luori this time?

Seeing Yuan Luori looking like he didn't know what to look at, Zhen Li picked up the glasses hanging around his neck and put them on for him. Yuan Luori finally calmed down. The glasses gave him a sense of security.

The parrot whose vision was linked to Yuan Luori's also "came back to life." It gathered its wings and crouched properly on the arm of the chair, neck drawn in, eyelids drooping. It didn't seem like a parrot. It seemed like a large-scale, multi-colored quail.

"Since you're all here, sit down." Director Xiao glanced at Yuan Luori. "Report as quickly as possible. No one may exceed five minutes. An hour from now, the highest leaders of Huaxia's Protection Organization will come to the Xuyang District base and begin an online conference with the World Protection Organization. This meeting will be for the purpose of determining the ownership of the 'source project.' We have to take care of matters relating to this battle before the meeting and vie for the right to have ownership of the Source Project."

The Destroyers had launched a large-scale offensive this time, giving the World Protection Organization a strong sense of crisis. The Source Project was imperative. But it was indeed a very serious question who would hold such a vast power. No country was willing to let another country have such a strong power. This was practically impossible.

Furthermore, it wasn't just any Protector who could take on the power of a nuclear weapon with his flesh and blood form.

"You go first." The first person Director Xiao pointed to was actually Yuan Luori. "Tell us what you saw. Your five minutes begin now."

The assistant beside Director Xiao expressionlessly pressed down on a stopwatch. The other assistant prepared to type everything that everyone said into a text file. It would be printed out and distributed to the leaders at the conference.

"When he walked in the door just now," Yuan Luori said, pointing to You Zhengping, "the whole base turned into countless parallel spaces. It made my eyes hurt."

"That's all?" Director Xiao asked.

Was it only a spatial ability that had made Yuan Luori so terrified when just before he'd looked like he was second only to heaven?

"There's a very big energy ball following him," Yuan Luori said.

"How big?"

"As big as the whole world." Yuan Luori's head drooped lower and lower. "The world law follows behind him."

Yuan Luori's special ability had only awakened after he had obtained the acknowledgment from the world law. He was especially sensitive about it. He had recognized You Zhengping's backer at once. He could clearly sense that this power could easily strip him of his special ability. He had instantly been scared out of his arrogance.

Yuan Luori had originally ranked the clearer as number one and himself as number two. Now that he had seen the world law behind You Zhengping, he knew that he was third.

"Those who came earlier have already given their general reports. These are the materials." Cen Xiao, who had remembered to put on his Plain Face Number 1 mask, handed You Zhengping and the others stacks of materials. "Hurry and read through it so you don't give an overlapping report and waste time."

They took the materials. As Yuan Luori hemmed and hawed his way through answering questions, they quickly skimmed through them.

Feng Kui glanced at it and felt a headache coming on. He gave it up and dropped the materials, deciding to leave it to Huan Zixu to talk. But Huan Zixu looked like he had lost the will to fight after losing his power. He wasn't in the mood to read.

Only Lian Yufan earnestly read it, then briefly reported to Director Xiao what had happened in the building complex, adding some emphasis to Huan Zixu and Feng Kui's contributions. He also explained that after the battle, Feng Kui had retained his special ability, while Huan Zixu had lost his.

"Why is that?" Director Xiao said doubtfully. "Everyone else has kept their powers, and only yours are gone?"

Director Xiao was pretty disappointed, because Huan Zixu's power was very strong. It could organize and let out information with high efficiency and speed, its effective range was very wide, and it wouldn't cause him psychological harm. It could reduce the stress on Luo Huai to the greatest degree.

Of course, this ability was a double-edged sword. If Huan Zixu had bad intentions, it would be hard for the Protection Organization to keep him down.

"Because his ability wasn't bestowed by the world law. It was given to him by the black-cloaked man," You Zhengping said, having finished reading the materials.

Annoyed, Huan Zixu said, "When he needed me to take care of the System, he gave me my ability. When he didn't need me, he took it back. What does he take us for?"

You Zhengping explained the three rules and the three supplemental rules, then added, "At first you recovered your power because the black-cloaked man's rules viewed you as a 'soldier,' but after the battle, 'soldiers' harboring ill-intent would be deprived of their weapons. If you're

asking why you lost your ability, then you also have to ask what ill intentions you have. Feng Kui kept his ability.”

Huan Zixu: “...”

Director Xiao was also an old fox. He saw Huan Zixu’s intention at once and said to him, “I think that for you, the best method is collaboration. Each time the Protection Organization asked you to step in, you would demand an exorbitant price in money or power. You weren’t planning on joining the Protection Organization. You were hoping to use your unique ability to coerce the organization. If the black-cloaked man hadn’t erased the people’s memories for us and you had reached the internet police department and sent out red packets on a large scale, what request would you have had?”

“What are you talking about? I was genuinely and sincerely going to help you,” Huan Zixu said unflappably.

Just then, a voice drifted through the room: “I was going to bide my time at the internet police department, force the Protection Organization to let Feng Kui go and give me that apartment for free before I would act.”

This voice was clearly Huan Zixu’s. Who knew why it would float into everyone’s ears?

“I didn’t say that. That wasn’t me.” Huan Zixu was a little panicked.

Just then, a soldier knocked on the door from outside. Through the monitor outside the door, everyone could see that the soldier was holding a child, and there was a husky following after him.

An assistant opened the door and sternly said, “A meeting is in progress. Interruptions are not permitted.”

“But after the child woke up, he insisted on seeing...” The soldier saw how many people there were in the room and didn’t dare to say You Zhengping’s name aloud. “That captain over there.”

The moment he saw the child, Huan Zixu instantly understood how his thoughts had leaked out.

“But the child is still unconscious? How did he insist?” Director Xiao asked, pausing the meeting and going to the door.

The soldier was struck dumb. He gave himself a shake and said as though just waking from a dream, “That’s right, Liu Junjun didn’t wake up. I was checking his temperature and thought I heard his voice and unconsciously brought him here.”

“Go ahead and put him down. This ability truly isn’t something a soldier without a special ability can cope with,” Director Xiao said to the soldier.

The soldier put Junjun on the chair beside You Zhengping and handed a box full of temperature reducing pads to You Zhengping. Then he left the conference room.

Junjun was on an IV drip. His low fever hadn’t fallen. Medicine was no use, but a fluid infusion could suitably reduce his body temperature. There was normal saline in the IV bag to keep Junjun from being harmed by the fever.

Director Ha obediently trotted in and crouched beside Junjun’s chair, occasionally touching Junjun’s forehead with its front paws.

“This is my first time seeing a person who can use his special ability during the low fever period,” Director Xiao said in surprise. “It’s also my first time seeing a special ability user who can influence others without deliberately releasing his power.”

Luo Huai recognized this as the child whose memories he had taken before and also went over to Junjun. He reached out a hand to check his temperature.

The moment Luo Huai’s hand made contact with Junjun’s forehead, a star flew up from Luo Huai’s arm and sank into the center of Junjun’s brow. This was the memory that Luo Huai had taken from Junjun.

Luo Huai’s face, which never displayed his emotions, broke precedent. He said in disbelief, “I’ve absorbed so many people’s memories. This is the first one that’s been returned to its owner.”

Lian Yufan looked at Luo Huai, clenched his fist, then slightly relaxed it.

“I’m not surprised.” Director Xiao held Junjun’s little hand while saying something untrue to test whether the thought would float out of his head as had just happened to Huan Zixu, but there was no such phenomenon.

Director Xiao had seen countless special ability users awaken. With a bit of thought, he could guess at Junjun’s current state. “His power is currently being used unconsciously. Special ability users have the protection of their powers and won’t be forced to say what they’re thinking. Non-special ability users, like Huan Zixu and the soldier just now, will be controlled by his special ability.”

Huan Zixu was about to fall over from the attack. He was so adept at scheming. If each of his thoughts was publicly broadcast, what was the point of his intelligence! This little boy was simply his nemesis.

Feng Kui put a large hand on Huan Zixu’s back, not letting him fall, and considerately said, “A-Xu is very good. It’s for my sake.”

“Why is his power so strong?” Lian Yufan thought of how he had inadvertently understood Director Ha’s speech when they had been in the car. “It’s unusually strong. What actually happened to all of you?”

This last sentence was addressed to You Zhengping. He hadn’t yet finished reporting.

“I don’t think it has to do with our experiences,” You Zhengping said thoughtfully. “He’s been influenced by the power of the black-cloaked man. That’s why he’s so strong.”

Zhen Li said, “The black-cloaked man told me before that he hold all types of abilities. I didn’t understand it then. I thought that all powerful people would be like that. But there were so many high grade levelers at once, but none of them had abilities as complex as that.”

“That’s because his ability is ‘control.’ For each person who gives him their ‘allegiance,’ their power will increase, and he’ll be able to use that person’s power at will,” You Zhengping explained. “Like a ‘king’ to his ‘subjects’—an ideal leader can bring out his subordinates’ powers to the greatest extent, and the better the subordinates are, then the stronger the leader’s, or rather the group’s, power will be.”

While Junjun had shuttled through the little world, he had taken part with Director Ha in one contest game during level 11. That must have been when his power had activated. And during all the levels, 11, 289, and 500, Junjun had been very obedient towards Yu Hua. He had shared his food when Yu Hua had told him to, struggled through high school math when Yu Hua had told him to.

Unwittingly, he had fulfilled the requirements of giving “allegiance,” and that was how he possessed such a frightening potential power when it had just awakened.

“Why don’t you tell us about your experiences,” Director Xiao said to You Zhengping. “I think they must be vital.”

Next, all the meeting’s time was handed over to You Zhengping. He briefly related everything that had happened in the little world, and finally said, “It was the world law that took us to that timeline. I don’t know what goal It has or what deal It made with the black-cloaked man. It probably isn’t something we can understand.”

“You spent so long in the little world. Did you see the black-cloaked man’s identity?” Director Xiao asked.

Zhen Li, Yuan Luori, and Director Ha simultaneously swallowed nervously. The two men and the dog turned their six eyes to stare fixedly at You Zhengping.

You Zhengping didn’t avoid Director Xiao’s gaze. He said solemnly, “I did. I know his true identity. As far as that goes, I won’t deny or cover it up. I can’t lie to the organization. But I also can’t tell you. This is a promise I made to him.”

When Cen Xiao heard this, he couldn't control himself. He stood up anxiously and grabbed You Zhengping's shoulder. "What garbage are you talking?"

"I'm not talking garbage." You Zhengping smiled at his friend. "I'm concealing something from the organization, and I'm willing to receive punishment. But no matter how you ask, I'm not going to say, not until he's willing to tell everyone his identity himself."

"You're going to be placed in confinement if you act like this!" Cen Xiao was angry enough for flames to erupt from his head. "Think of Y...your family, waiting for you to come home and eat."

You Zhengping didn't speak. He was looking with concentration at Director Xiao.

As a Protector, he fully knew the black-cloaked man's identity, appearance, and past. If he had still acted like he didn't know, his sense of mission and all the education he had received couldn't have allowed it. But he had also promised Yu Hua. He had to protect Yu Hua's peaceful life.

Director Xiao said, "Are you certain you won't say?"

"Yes." You Zhengping nodded.

His expression was calm. On the way here, You Zhengping had already prepared himself.

"It's time for the conference. I'll report your circumstances to my superiors. Until the organization has resolved this, return to your room and wait for the outcome," Director Xiao said.

## CHAPTER 104

Since Director Xiao didn't punish him directly, You Zhengping could still move around inside the base within a small range. So he stayed in Junjun's lounge, occasionally looking after the child, helping control his temperature.

Director Ha crouched beside them, head tilted, keeping its eyes fixed on the fluid solution bag, watching the remaining fluid solution amount for Junjun.

Junjun occasionally babbled in his sleep, terms like "numerical series," "permutations and combinations," "trigonometric function," "exponential logarithms," "electromagnetic fields," "organic chemistry." Listening to it made You Zhengping blush with shame.

He kept thinking that Junjun having this special ability awaken had to do with Yu Hua making the child study high school math and science too young. In order to do his homework, Junjun had been forced to grow up too quickly.

Yu Hua...

You Zhengping laughed.

When he had told Director Xiao that he already knew the black-cloaked man's identity but couldn't tell the organization, You Zhengping had been inwardly unperturbed.

Unfortunately, even if he didn't say, when Junjun woke up, he would probably say it. Junjun didn't know that Yu Hua was the black-cloaked man, but if he only related what he had seen in the little world to the Protection Organization, with Director Xiao's intelligence, he would very quickly link Yu Hua with the black-cloaked man.

As You Zhengping changed temperature reducing pads for Junjun, he considered this with concern.

But just then, Junjun's feverish ravings went from "segmented functions" to "I won't, ge-shu," "I won't say," "Xiao Ha, I don't blame you," and other such phrases.

You Zhengping's hand paused. Probably the only person Junjun would use the address "ge-shu" for was someone who sometimes appeared to have just graduated university and other times looked like he had lived for ages.

"Aw-aw-awooo." Director Ha lay on the ground, covering its head with its paws, head hanging down low, looking sorry.

You Zhengping understood what Director Ha meant. It was saying, "I'm sorry, Junjun."

Remembering Director Ha's ruthlessness towards children at the start and comparing it to this change now, while no doubt it involved Destroyer 192's soul constantly merging with the dog and being influenced by the body's instincts, there was also another reason—no one is born good or evil. Of course, extreme cases exist, but they're a minority, after all. Many more people only lack the environment in which to grow up and change.

This is the principle of being influenced by one's surroundings.

You Zhengping had a feeling that in his attitude towards the levelers, Yu Hua had chosen two completely opposing methods. From high-pressure dictatorship to leaving them only a path towards good—it seemed that Yu Hua was trying to persuade himself of something.

"Thank you." You Zhengping tucked in the corners of Junjun's quilt.

Having made a resolution, You Zhengping settled something that had been weighing on him. He lay down beside Junjun's hospital bed and fell heavily asleep. He didn't even notice when Cen Xiao and the others came one after another to look at him.



Cen Xiao had come to counsel You Zhengping, though it wasn't to counsel him to reveal the black-cloaked man's identity; he wanted to make him properly look after Yu Hua. When he came through the door and saw You Zhengping sleeping, he didn't say anything. He sighed and left.

Zhen Li and Yuan Luori wanted to tactfully thank You Zhengping for keeping the secret, but they didn't know what to say. Yuan Luori sent his parrot to scout for them. Seeing that You Zhengping was asleep, the two of them turned circles by the door and left.

Lian Yufan's feelings were very conflicted. On the one hand, he wanted to criticize You Zhengping for being impulsive, for not recognizing what was important, for not considering the bigger picture at a time like this and sticking to his usual vile habit of "wanting it all," for being truly immature. But he also remembered the times the black-cloaked man had repeatedly helped him, as well as the safety of the common people of the Xuyang District and the restored buildings, and he hesitated. At this point, could he still carry out his idea that reason took precedence?

No, perhaps he still could. The black-cloaked man had rescued the Xuyang District's three million permanent residents and prevented the whole Xuyang District from sustaining massive economic losses. These contributions... It seemed that in order to guarantee that the black-cloaked man would continue his work in aiding the Protection Organization, a mutual tacit understanding would get the best results.

When he thought of this, Lian Yufan made a decision. "You win this time," he said to the soundly sleeping You Zhengping. Then he returned to his room to summarize all the materials and prepared to stay up late preparing a report concerning whether they should investigate the black-cloaked man's true identity. He wrote this report from the point of view of how the organization could obtain the most benefit, not from the point of view of helping You Zhengping escape blame. If You Zhengping could avoid punishment because of this, then that was just You Zhengping's good luck; it had nothing to do with him.

Luo Huai was the only one who wasn't planning to visit You Zhengping. He had come to visit Junjun.

Seeing the adult, the child, and the dog inside the room all sleeping, he went over and lightly stroked Junjun's head. He quietly said, "Thank you."

Luo Huai had absorbed too many people's memories in his life. Each time, he said, "If one day, you have the authority to take it back, then I'll personally return it to you," as well as, "I hope that then, you'll be able to see my face." But the memories had never been returned.

There was only this child, who had taken back the memory that belonged to him. When he had seen that star return to Junjun's brain, Luo Huai had suddenly felt a beam of light pierce his gloomy heart, as though a window had been opened for his closed off spirit.

"I don't know if the next time we see each other, you'll be able to see my face, or whether you'll remember me," Luo Huai said quietly. "My name is Luo Huai."

Only Huan Zixu and Feng Kui didn't come. This was primarily because Feng Kui was busy comforting Huan Zixu, while Huan Zixu was considering what his next step should be.

The present circumstances weren't yet at their worst. The bad news was, he had lost his ability and his thoughts had been revealed, though that didn't matter very much. There weren't many people who could sincerely trust him anyway. The good news was that Feng Kui's ability hadn't disappeared. Director Xiao had helped Feng Kui and Yuan Luori submit application forms; they had the right to become reserve Protectors, too. This way, Feng Kui would be able to leave the base.

In sum, things were developing in a positive direction. Now he only had to consider the apartment.

While Huan Zixu ground his teeth and thought of how to hoodwink Yu Hua and use public money to make the down payment, Feng Kui somewhat helplessly stroked Huan Zixu's long hair.

While he was no longer developing in the direction of a robot and was gradually learning human knowledge, gradually acquiring human ways of thinking, Feng Kui was still exceedingly pure. There was nothing he could do about the things that were worrying Huan Zixu. He could only quietly keep him company and console him.

But just then, while he was stroking Huan Zixu's hair, there was suddenly a strand of long hair hanging from his large hand. Feng Kui drew back his hand guiltily, thinking that he had overdone his strength and pulled out some of Huan Zixu's hair.

Just then, Huan Zixu ran a hand through his hair. Feng Kui's vision was much better than Yuan Luori's. Sharp-eyed, he saw another strand of hair falling naturally and floating to drop onto the floor.

Under the chair Huan Zixu was sitting in, quite a lot of hair had fallen.

Feng Kui: "!!!"

He looked at the time. It was 11:30 PM.

During this period at the base, Feng Kui had studied quite a lot of information about the human body. In accordance with his characteristics, the Protection Organization had drawn up an entirely different course of study for him from Yuan Lori's. The Protection Organization's intention was to tell Feng Kui that ordinary people didn't have mechanical skeletons, their bodies were very frail, and what he thought of as normal strength would be likely to cause devastating harm to frail ordinary people.

So Feng Kui had been forced to memorize quite a bit of *Human Anatomy, Traditional Chinese Medicine Study of Energy Channels*, and such related knowledge. Because it had been too long since he had lost his human body, he rather liked studying this. He went on purpose to the library to borrow quite a few related works. He understood that staying up would lead to hair loss!

Feng Kui picked Huan Zixu up and put him on the bed. Brooking no argument, he said, “Lights out. Close your eyes. Sleep. No more thinking.”

“What are you doing?” Huan Zixu struggled and tried to get up. “Go to sleep this early?”

Feng Kui pressed his chest down with one finger. With the precise position he had chosen and the force he used, Huan Zixu was actually subdued by one finger. He couldn’t move.

“Staying up late makes you bald.” Looking grave, Feng Kui used his other hand to press on Huan Zixu’s head, gently massaging his scalp.

Perhaps he had a true talent for recognizing acupoints. He precisely found the acupoints on Huan Zixu’s head and massaged them to promote blood circulation. Huan Zixu felt at first that his scalp was unpleasantly sore. Then it gradually became numb and pleasant. In spite of himself, he closed his eyes and whispered, “I’ll keep thinking...tomorrow...”

Before he had finished speaking, Huan Zixu fell fast asleep.

Overthinkers often slept lightly. Especially lately, when Huan Zixu hadn’t had Feng Kui beside him, and he had had to strive against Yu Hua to scrape money together, as well as gathering all kinds of data to understand this world’s economic conditions, he had truly been sleeping very little. He had been severely sleep-deprived for a long time.

Seeing Huan Zixu sound asleep, Feng Kui smiled simply and honestly.

There were some who slept well, but there were some who didn’t sleep all night.

By the time Director Xiao left the conference, it was past four in the morning. He went to Junjun’s room and assigned someone to take You Zhengping’s place watching. He woke him up and took him to his office alone.

You Zhengping entered work mode as soon as he woke up. His mind lively, standing straight and tall, he saluted Director Xiao and waited for the outcome of the organization’s decision.

“The organization is giving you one last chance. If you will only reveal the identity of the black-cloaked man, you won’t be penalized. Have you considered?” Director Xiao asked gravely.

“My answer hasn’t changed,” You Zhengping said, his shoulders squared and his head raised.

Director Xiao picked up a stack of files and said, "All right. I will now declare the disciplinary action against you. The organization affirms the black-cloaked man's aid and contributions to the Xuyang District, and is very grateful to the black-cloaked man for helping us understand the truth about the Destroyers, the System's existence, and the secrets of the world law. We have fought bravely for hundreds of years, and we never understood what we were fighting against. It's thanks to him that we now know everything.

"It is righteous to thank the person who helped you to become clear-headed."

You Zhengping looked at Director Xiao's face, which was full of stories, and nodded heavily.

Everything that Yu Hua had done, the organization had seen it and remembered it. They wouldn't deny these contributions because he was covering up his tracks.

After affirming the black-cloaked man, Director Xiao changed the subject. "But that's a completely different matter from your conduct. For an outstanding soldier of the Protectors, concealing matters from the organization is a serious crime. Are you prepared?"

"I'm willing to receive the organization's punishment," You Zhengping said, decision all over his face.

Director Xiao sighed and took out an official red-letterhead document. "Protector You Zhengping, in the battle to safeguard the Xuyang District, you have defeated a master of natural law, rescued all the common people in vicinity of the central park, protected your six teammates, and brought Liu Junjun and the husky Xiao Ha, two future outstanding soldiers, back from amid the time law. You have used your life to protect the lives and safety of the people from the invasion of individuals from outside this world, preserved relatively intact the historically significant spot of the central park, prevented the people's public assets from suffering damage. You ought to have received commendation and praise, been given a Merit Citation, First Class in accordance with your achievements."

"Hm?" How come this red-letterhead document of Director Xiao's didn't sound to You Zhengping like it was delivering a punishment?

He listened earnestly. The general meaning of the document was that owing to the unique nature of their work, a Merit Citation, First Class, couldn't be publicly issued. They could only praise him openly within the organization and wait for an opportunity to publicly award the auxiliary policeman You Zhengping.

Comrade You Zhengping had experienced time travel, had exhausted his efforts, and would be given three months of extended leave. During his rest period, he would regularly receive psychological counseling.

Though for the time being, he couldn't leave the Xuyang District during his extended leave. If Destroyers appeared, he had to be prepared for battle.

“Is that it?” You Zhengping blinked.

“Declaration complete.” Director Xiao put down the document.

“What about the punishment?” You Zhengping asked. “Where am I going to spend my extended leave, at the base?”

If he was going to spend three months at the base, that would amount to a confinement. That counted as a punishment.

“Of course you’re going to return home to rest during your extended leave,” Director Xiao said.

You Zhengping: “!!!”

If he rested for three months, wouldn’t Yu Hua die of happiness?

Director Xiao pointed to a chair next to him. “What are you standing for? You’re making me look up at you. Sit down.”

“Okay.” You Zhengping pulled the chair over. All at sea, he sat down across from Director Xiao, not understanding at all what this punishment meant. How come it felt like more like a reward?

“I have a question to ask you. Answer truthfully. Your answer will determine whether this document will go into effect,” Director Xiao said.

You Zhengping listened seriously.

Director Xiao said, “In concealing the black-cloaked man’s identity, apart from his kindness in bringing you, Liu Junjun, and the husky back from the little world, are you also taking the organization into consideration? If you disregarded the black-cloaked man’s intentions and disclosed his identity, would the organization suffer a blow?”

“Yes, actually, that really might happen,” You Zhengping said after thinking about it.

Yu Hua probably wouldn’t really hurt the organization, but him using stifling intimidation to compel the organization to acknowledge their marriage, causing the organization a serious spiritual attack—that was absolutely possible.

You Zhengping remembered the dream he had had about the Xuyang District turning into a sea of fire and the black-cloaked man stealing him away from the organization. He shuddered in spite of himself. That had perhaps truly been a predictive dream.

So he solemnly and decisively nodded again. “It might be very serious!”

“So can the organization take this to mean that your actions are for the sake of protecting the organization?” Director Xiao asked.

“That’s a factor,” You Zhengping answered sincerely.

Director Xiao said, “Since that is the case, we ought to understand you from the standpoint of both emotion and reason, yes? The Protection Organization’s fundamental goal is to protect this world. If we overlook the safety of the world, the contributions of our soldiers, and the aid of our allies for the sake of stubbornly clinging to certain ideas, wouldn’t that be too unreasonable?”

“Director...” You Zhengping, touched, looked at Director Xiao.

“However, in view of the fact that you spoke of this openly in a meeting, and at the meeting there were present, apart from Protectors, former Destroyers who later became Protectors—Zhen Li, Yuan Luori, and Feng Kui—as well as Huan Zixu, who is always looking for a way to take advantage of the organization’s slip-ups to gain benefits, you must appear on the surface to receive a punishment,” Director Xiao said.

“I understand,” You Zhengping said.

Director Xiao said, “During your three-month extended leave, for outside purposes, we will say that you have been suspended for investigation. Though that’s only a manner of speaking. It won’t be entered into your file. Take no notice of it. It’s for the sake of stopping the mouths of people with aspirations.”

“Yes, sir!” You Zhengping’s emotions were gradually becoming cheerful.

“Child, next time there’s a confidential matter, remember to first report it to your leaders, then decide whether to broadcast it in a meeting!” Director Xiao said, shaking his head.

“Thank you, director.” You Zhengping considered and said, “I keep thinking that you’ve helped me out in a lot of ways, right?”

For example the point about covering up the black-cloaked man’s identity also being to protect the organization. If Director Xiao hadn’t given him a hint, You Zhengping really wouldn’t have noticed that he had such a hidden thought.

“I’m only attending to my proper business,” Director Xiao said, frowning. “After you attend psychological counseling in the morning, you can get out. Remember to contact the psychologist on time, and when you go home, make sure to study one or twice a week. When your extended leave is over, your study notes and the knowledge you’ve learned will be examined.”

“Yes, sir!” You Zhengping decided to have Yu Hua study along with him.

You Zhengping happily left Director Xiao's office. After he left, Director Xiao took out a form with the words "Source Project Candidate, Huaxia Regional Recommendation Form" written on it. The name on the form was You Zhengping's.

During the meeting last night, synthesizing all the intelligence obtained from this last malicious attack, the World Protection Organization had finally voted unanimously to restart the Source Project. The country had already used You Zhengping's record of achievements to convince the other Protection Organizations of the other countries. If nothing unexpected happened, You Zhengping would undertake all the power of the Source Project.

—

"Suspended for investigation?"

First thing next morning, everyone received a public notice of the disciplinary action. Some thought that it was all right, and the punishment wasn't too severe—there was latitude to come back. There were also those who thought that You Zhengping had always protected the Xuyang District; he was covered in glory; he shouldn't receive such a punishment. Cen Xiao and the other members of You Zhengping's squad charged over to Director Xiao's office to protest fiercely, indicating that only You Zhengping could subdue difficult people like them. They wouldn't agree to another person being made captain!

Then they had their heads held down by Director Xiao, received a fierce thrashing, and got the hell out of Director Xiao's office looking like drowned rats.

Lian Yufan, hugging a stack of documents, was leaning against the wall beside Director Xiao's office door. After submitting Cen Xiao and the others to a round of mockery, with black eyes like a panda's, he went into Director Xiao's office with his 30,000 character report and walked out entirely unharmed. He didn't forget to taunt Cen Xiao: "All you can do is make noise at a problem. Are you Director Ha?"

Cen Xiao was struck dumb by this. Only a long time after Lian Yufan had left did he say to the team members under his command, "So he acknowledges so candidly that the husky is a director? Do you remember during the livestream, what did Yu Hua say the husky had been hired to be director of?"

"Public relations director," said the group of team members, who were burning with rage from Lian Yufan's mockery.

"With his eye-rolling, Director Ha is the only one he can work with!" Cen Xiao said angrily.

Director Ha wasn't aware of the controversy surrounding it. It was very concerned about Junjun now. After he woke up, all signs of Junjun's special ability had disappeared. All the tests showed that he was only an ordinary elementary school student.

He did in fact remember what had happened in the little world, but for the elementary school student Junjun, what had he experienced? Roughly that he had won a race with Xiao Ha, that he had slept in the open for two days, that he had camped in the cold for half a day, and that he had done homework for three days in the estate.

During the husky's fiery run, Junjun had fallen unconscious because of his special ability awakening. He hadn't seen the world collapsing and the passage through time.

According to the appraisal of Director Xiao and other veteran special ability users, Junjun's special ability had probably sealed itself off for self-protection.

When his special ability had awakened, because he had been unconscious, it had involuntarily leaked out. But after he woke up, Junjun believed firmly that he was an ordinary elementary school student. Though he had become a hostage during the park bombing case (his memory had been restored), though he could occasionally understand Xiao Ha explaining homework problems, he was still an ordinary elementary school student. He absolutely didn't believe that he had a special ability.

Because of this unconscious protection, Junjun had sealed his special ability in self-defense after waking up. This would last until the next awakening point.

Unlike during Luo Huai and Lian Yufan's generation, the Protection Organization now had amply learned to look after the mental health of special ability users. They understood that they couldn't be overhasty about these things. They had to let Junjun internally accept that he was different from others, and do proper ideological work with his family before taking Junjun for centralized training. Forcing things would produce the opposite of the desired effect.

Especially with a mental type special ability user like Junjun, psychological impressions would be unusually serious. It would be easy for something major to go wrong if he wasn't properly reassured.

During the course of a meeting to discuss, they determined to first convince his father, Captain Liu of the criminal police, to have Junjun go to Zhen Li's studio to walk the dog every day before summer vacation ended. The studio was close to the estate. It was a familiar environment for Junjun. The majority of the employees were special ability users and Protectors, including Lian Yufan, an expert captain, in the lead, as well as the emotionally comforting pet Xiao Ha with them. They could help subtly influence Junjun to accept his own uniqueness.

Of course, according to the veteran Protectors, Director Ha, whose special ability had just awakened, would also be taught by the dog training master Lian Yufan. They couldn't let a single opportunity go by.

Feng Kui had become a reserve Protector and didn't need to stay trapped in the base. For the moment, he was being assigned to the studio as director of security.



Lian Yufan: "..."

The studio employees and Cen Xiao and the rest of the squad separated into two carloads to leave the base. In the car, Lian Yufan counted off those present and felt strange.

"Don't you think that this studio is very peculiar?" Lian Yufan said doubtfully. "Apart from Yu Hua, an ordinary person, the rest are all special ability users. Even the dog and the child not on the permanent staff aren't exceptions!"

Zhen Li and Yuan Luori guilty lowered their heads.

"Though Junjun is also an ordinary child who had a special ability awaken due to unexpected circumstances, and Xiao Ha is an ordinary dog. You can't say that Yu Hua is suspicious," Lian Yufan expounded.

"I think that Director Ha's awakening may have to do with the law of power convergence." Huan Zixu had slept well last night. His skin was looking great, his face full of collagen, and the look in his eye was quick and nimble. "There used to be a line of thinking among levelers that said that while the System randomly matched us to levels, it was always easier for levelers with the same or similar power attributes to be matched to the same world. In common phrasing, like calls to like—special people always end up gathering together. According to this reasoning, would Yu Hua have joined the studio only because he also has the potential for a special ability to awaken?"

Lian Yufan thought of You Zhengping and Yu Hua's marriage, as well as the dramatic means by which Yu Hua had become the studio's first employee. He also thought that it was overly coincidental, but it could be understood with Huan Zixu's explanation.

"But he's already passed the ideal awakening period," Lian Yufan said. "Children older than fifteen won't have combat abilities, even if their ability does awaken."

"But he's under the influence of all of our power. Perhaps his will awaken," Huan Zixu continued to reason.

Just then, the car drove out of range of the base's signal blocker, and everyone's phones simultaneously received a notice of a group message.

The only group they all had in common was their work group. Everyone simultaneously opened the group and saw that Yu Hua had sent a message first thing in the morning: *The day after tomorrow, the advertising company's remaining balance will be deposited into our company's account. Owing to how hard everyone has been working lately, I have determined to distribute this money among everybody as bonuses. The concrete distribution is as follows: Zhen Li, for promoting products during livestreams, 30%; Yuan Luori, for the future traffic participating in the talent show will attract for the studio, 30%; Director Lian, for taking responsibility for legal safeguards and product quality investigations, 30%; the remaining 10% to go to Director Ha's*

*future dog food costs, vaccination costs, housing costs, and other pet expenditures. Director Huan has already received his commission and has no need for a bonus.*

Everyone's expressions were different.

Zhen Li and Yuan Luori, who knew nothing of Huan Zixu's plans, were wild with joy, eyes brimming with tears. They quickly calculated how much money they could get their hands on.

Zhen Li, face streaming with tears, said that he could plan to properly refurbish his new apartment. While the Protection Organization had given him an apartment, they hadn't taken care of the decorating. Zhen Li's loft apartment was beautifully done up, but he still wanted to change the closets and the vanities. If he had money, he could arrange his little house according to his feelings!

And Yuan Luori had already thought of where he would go to eat a big meal, eat two big meals, eat three big meals...and buy a cushion to put under the folding bed. Always sleeping on the floor hurt his back!

Director Ha thought of new dog food, dog toys, dog snacks, and so on, and happily waved its tail.

Only Lian Yufan, who was aware of everything, looked quietly at Huan Zixu.

Huan Zixu said, "Yu Hua, do you already know that I...and that's why you... You black-hearted capitalist, you absolutely, absolutely can't have a special ability!"

—

Author's note:

Yu Hua: Xiao You has three months of vacation. I'm delighted. I'll celebrate by torturing my badly behaving employees.

Huan Zixu: ...My apartment, my apartment!

Feng Kui: Hair, hair, hair!

## CHAPTER 105

"What does Director Yu already know about you?" Zhen Li asked curiously, simplicity written in his eyes.

Yuan Luori was also interested in getting in on the fun. "What does he know? I've been away from the studio for over forty days. What's new?"

"Bark?" Director Ha also widened its blue eyes and tilted its head.

Huan Zixu uncomfortably turned his face away under the blankly stupid gazes of the two men and the dog. He swallowed down his bitterness and obscurely said, “Nothing, I’m just mad that he didn’t give me any money.”

Yuan Luori knew Yu Hua’s identity. Remembering Huan Zixu’s disdainful attitude towards Yu Hua and the treatment he’d had before, only being able to eat expired instant noodles, he felt that they were wanderers along the same path. While he couldn’t reveal Yu Hua’s identity, he could still comfort someone who, like him before, was unknowing. So he said, “I was just the same before. You’ll be fine as soon as there’s someone new in a lower position than you.”

Then he proudly raised his head, crossing his arms in front of his chest, displaying that his position was higher.

Zhen Li tugged at Yuan Luori’s clothes to tell him not to irritate Huan Zixu again. Yuan Luori’s comfort would bring him more enmity than a direct provocation.

Lian Yufan, reveling in the misfortune of others, said, “But the studio does have someone new coming. Isn’t Feng Kui new? We haven’t informed Yu Hua yet. I’m not going to do it this time. Whoever feels like it, go ahead.”

Each time someone new came to the studio, they got a layer of skin peeled off. Everyone was well aware of this. They all looked sympathetically at Feng Kui.

Feng Kui was entirely unaware. He squeezed Huan Zixu’s shoulder, quietly telling him that it didn’t matter if he had to give up the apartment.

“I’ll introduce Feng Kui,” Huan Zixu said. “Feng Kui’s disposition is simple. He’s kind and easily bullied. I’ll personally attend to the contract. If Yu Hua dares to exploit Feng Kui, I won’t let him join the studio. Anyway, Zhen Li and Yuan Luori are already enough to attract levelers. Why do you have to keep adding new people?”

Lian Yufan looked at Huan Zixu and didn’t answer.

This was something that the Protection Organization had in fact discussed and resolved upon, in view of Zhen Li and Yuan Luori’s changes for the better, their ability to even become true Protectors. The organization believed that placing the Destroyers in surroundings where most people were like them would make them calm. When their feelings settled, they would be able to see Zhen Li and Yuan Luori’s treatment. The disparity in benefits would make the Destroyers inevitably develop in the direction of Zhen Li and Yuan Luori, long to become Protectors, make contributions towards protecting the world.

Without noticing it, the Xuyang District Protection Organization’s treatment of Destroyers had become gentler.

When those captured during this last operation, Destroyer 187 and the “Guan Shaoguang” whose memories had been wiped by the System and who had yet to awaken, had been fully educated, they would probably also join the studio.

Lian Yufan considered this scene and suddenly felt weary. Mainly this was because the studio was too small. It would be crowded enough adding just Feng Kui.

They had already arrived near the studio without noticing it. Everyone got out of the car under a shelter. Feng Kui’s foot tread heavily on the ground. When he got out, the armed car next to him shook.

Lian Yufan: “...”

Wait, wasn’t there something he’d forgotten?

They swiped their works cards and went into the office building. They got on the elevator and heard the overload notifications. That was when Lian Yufan realized what he had forgotten.

With Feng Kui’s weight, could he ride an elevator?

*Beep-beep-beep, beep-beep-beep.* The elevator screamed sharply. There were office workers from other floors of the building in the elevator. Everyone looked left and right, counting up how many people there. A man in a suit said, “Strange, there aren’t too many people, are there?”

The staff of the Zhen Li Studio didn’t make a sound. They guiltily lowered their heads.

Then Feng Kui scratched his head and said, “It’s me. Too heavy. I’ll take the stairs.”

He had read the sign stuck on the inside of the elevator and knew that his weight was too much, so he awkwardly walked out.

Seeing Feng Kui standing all alone outside the elevator, Huan Zixu said, “I’ll take the stairs with you.”

Watching the two of them, one sturdy and one beautiful, leave the elevator, the other people felt a little awkward. One female office worker said to Zhen Li, “Is that long-haired handsome man with your company? And the tall one, too? I haven’t seen them before.”

As the president of the studio as well as its makeup expert, wardrobe angel, and friend to women, Zhen Li got along well with the workers on the floors above and below the studio. He answered naturally, “Yes, Feng Kui is our company’s new security director.”

“Oh, he really does give you a sense of security,” the female office worker said. “With his height and those sturdy muscles, he must weigh between two hundred and two hundred fifty pounds at least, right?”

With the proportions of Feng Kui's height and muscles, reckoning by the standard of an average person, he ought to have been about 230 pounds. The skeleton makes up about one fifth of a person's weight, but Feng Kui's skeleton was five times denser than an ordinary person's. With that conversion, Feng Kui's weight was between six and seven hundred pounds. After silent calculating this, Zhen Li hung his head guiltily. He was now a little worried about whether the stairs would be able to bear Feng Kui's weight.

The female office worker stealthily looked at Zhen Li, Yuan Luori, and Lian Yufan. She quietly said, "Your studio's faces really are property that needs to be strictly protected. Director Yu alone wouldn't be able to protect all of you."

Lian Yufan didn't like hearing this. He asked, "Why would it be Yu Hua protecting us? He's not any taller than we are, is he?"

"No, he seems comparatively fierce and unapproachable," the office girl said. "Anyway, when he's standing at the door, none of us dares to go ask you for autographs."

Lian Yufan: "???"

While he puzzled over this, all the young females in the elevator took out pen and paper and brought them up to Yuan Luori. "Could you give me an autograph? I watched the preview for 'Idol's Light' last night. I really like you and Director Ha!"

Yuan Luori hadn't expected that he would have his own fans. He dizzily gave a few autographs. Director Ha even had its paw shaken. In the commotion, someone even kissed Director Ha's furry face, leaving behind a lipstick mark.

"Awooo?" The smell of unfamiliar perfume made Director Ha uncomfortable. It wildly scrubbed at its face with its paws.

In the past, it had taken only half a minute to get to the 21st floor, but today, someone had pressed the buttons for all the floors below twenty-one. It took them all more than ten minutes to get to the studio. Director Ha ran out of the elevator first of all and swore that afterwards it would take the stairs. It definitely wouldn't ride the elevator again!

The others tumbled awkwardly out of the elevator. Someone wanted to follow them but saw Yu Hua standing at the elevator door with his arms crossed. He coldly said to the employees, "Collectively running late?"

The girl who had set one foot outside the elevator instantly drew it back. The elevator doors closed, and it continued to go up.

Lian Yufan, head dripping with sweat, said, "Director Yu, before, we only livestreamed and promoted products, going the way of personal appeal. But yesterday, the preview for 'Idol's Light' aired, and I feel that it's not such a good thing! The show will formally air next week. Shouldn't we reinforce our security?"

At this point, just at the right moment, Feng Kui arrived on the 21st floor, carrying Huan Zixu on his back. When Huan Zixu heard what Lian Yufan was saying, he instantly noticed that this was a good opportunity. He resourcefully added, “I predicted this in advance, so I assigned a headhunting company to find an expert director of security. I deliberately had him carry me up the stairs. You can see he didn’t sweat at all.”

Everyone: “...”

Lian Yufan truly did somewhat admire Huan Zixu’s capacity for adapting to the circumstances. He had changed the awkwardness of the fact that, having lost his special ability, he couldn’t get up to the 21st floor, into a test of strength. He had introduced Feng Kui and fabricated a headhunting company. Wait, didn’t headhunting companies take an intermediary’s fee? About 20-30% of the annual salary?

In spite of himself, Lian Yufan inwardly gave Huan Zixu a thumbs up. This person was truly adaptable to any circumstances, and his survival instinct was extremely powerful. He could use any opportunity to find benefits for himself. It amounted to being admirably tenacious.

“First let’s go to the office. We still have to go through an interview process.” Yu Hua gave everyone a cold look. “Today, the group was ten minutes late. Your salaries will be deducted.”

While waiting for everyone to come to work, Yu Hua had received You Zhengping’s message. When he had learned that his husband had three months of extended paid leave starting today, he had instantly decided to rest today. No, he would rest for the next three months. He had closed the studio’s door and was about to go home when he had met these people at the elevator door. This meant Yu Hua couldn’t leave the office.

Displeased, Yu Hua returned to the studio and sat at his desk, ready to interview Feng Kui. Everyone came in one after another. Yuan Luori had an irascible nature. He charged into the studio first of all to look at his instant noodles and folding bed. After all, he had been gone for over a month.

Feng Kui had a gentle nature. He walked at the back. When he walked through the door, he took care to lower his head and not bump the doorframe. But as soon as he set foot on the floor, the studio’s weak floorboard let out a *crack* and broke into three pieces.

Everyone: “...”

Huan Zixu nervously looked at Yu Hua’s expression. Showing resourcefulness in an emergency, he had thought of the excuse of the headhunting company, hoping that Yu Hua could employ Feng Kui for a high salary. That way, he could take a substantial intermediary’s fee and at least first pay off his credit card. He would keep thinking about what to do for the rest of the money. If he really couldn’t think of anything, he would discuss an installment plan with the building’s sales team.

The cracked floorboard provoked bitter memories for Lian Yufan. He instantly said to Yu Hua, “I told not to buy such cheap materials. Now we’re getting the worst of it, aren’t we?”

Huan Zixu’s heart left his throat. With Lian Yufan saying this, they could succeed in shifting the blame onto Yu Hua for buying cheap materials in the first place.

“My fault. Too heavy. Wasn’t being careful.” But Feng Kui voluntarily accepted the blame himself, smiling at Yu Hua apologetically.

He carefully controlled his internal magnetic suspension installation to keep the soles of his feet a distance of 1-3mm from the floor. Without touching the floorboards, he could still appear to be walking. It took a great deal of effort.

“Sit.” Yu Hua tersely pointed at the plastic stool across the desk from him.

Feng Kui had heard from Huan Zixu that Yu Hua was a first-rate unscrupulous businessman who was very hard to deal with. He knew he was stupid and didn’t want to make trouble for Huan Zixu, so he was careful about everything. He sat across from Yu Hua as gently as possible.

*Pop-crack!* Though Feng Kui had been as careful as it was possible to be, the plastic chair still broke.

Helplessness appeared on his pure and simple face, and his head drooped dispiritedly. “I’m sorry.”

Lian Yufan actually saw a sign of delicate charm in this taciturn giant. He sighed and brandished a broom, sweeping up the fragments of the stool. At the same time, he bitterly attacked Yu Hua: “What a great office. We sit on five yuan red plastic stools bought from the wholesale market. It’s completely normal for them to break. It’s not your fault.”

Lian Yufan also glared at Yu Hua, risking his life to resist his miserliness.

Zhen Li and Yuan Luori didn’t dare to say a word. Yuan Luori broke apart a package of instant noodles and passed it to Zhen Li. The two of them sat in a corner on the floor, chewing instant noodles while watching the drama. Occasionally they exchanged a look that only they understood.

Director Ha silently chewed on a chew toy and lay by Zhen Li’s feet, acting like a calm and elegant husky.

Huan Zixu couldn’t stand for Feng Kui to be taken advantage of. He stepped up to take Feng Kui’s hand and said, “You didn’t damage property deliberately. The stool is too fragile. It’s like an insurance scam. There’s no need for you to apologize.”

“Have I said anything since walking through the door?” Yu Hua said slowly. “Have I opposed hiring a security director? Have I criticized him for breaking the floorboard or the stool?”

At this, Lian Yufan and Huan Zixu exchanged helpless looks. They didn’t understand why Yu Hua seemed somewhat gentle today.

Yu Hua sighed faintly. “I think that from the standpoint of both figure and ability, Feng Kui is very suitable for the position of security director. Even if you hadn’t recommended him, if I had met such a person in the street, I would still have wanted to invite him to work at our company.

“The destruction of the floorboard and the stool further demonstrates Feng Kui’s personal strength—especially since, with such strength, he can still be so modest and unassuming, such an ideal employee. It would be our loss if we passed him up.”

Lian Yufan relaxed inwardly. Thinking back over Yu Hua’s conduct, while it was rather severe, his conduct had always been very fastidious, orderly, and regular. He did everything from the standpoint of reasoning. Thinking it over carefully from the company’s point of view, it was hard to find anything wrong.

But Huan Zixu, observing from a different angle, felt alarmed. If things didn’t go as expected, something had to be wrong. If Yu Hua was saying this, it meant he had planted a trap somewhere. So he got in first and said, “Feng Kui is a security director. You can’t package him up for internet celebrity. His contract can’t be like ours. He needs to have a normal annual salary and commission, as well as the safeguards of the five insurances and one fund. Also, given his strength and talents, his salary has to match the industry standard, or else you’ll be doing him an injustice. A security director like him can hardly be found for any amount of money!”

He had already crossed swords several times with Yu Hua. He knew that you couldn’t let yourself be led around by the nose in everything by Yu Hua. You had to strive to seize the initiative, defeat him with irrefutable reason.

While Huan Zixu was scheming how he should haggle with Yu Hua, he saw Yu Hua’s fingers fly over his computer’s keyboard. Soon he had produced an employment contract. Huan Zixu took it and read it. He was dazzled by the sight of the remuneration written down on it.

Feng Kui’s salary evidently met the standard—a base annual salary of 500,000, with overtime pay and a bonus after all business activities; counting it all up and excluding the money for the five insurances and one fund, he would likely get about 800,000 per year. Seeing this number, Huan Zixu got dizzy and toppled backwards and only managed to remain standing with Feng Kui holding him up.

Lian Yufan also read the contract. These wages were higher than his total income as a Protector, and the contract also promised that the salary would increase 5%-10% per year according to rising prices, inflation, and so on.



Lian Yufan, lacking Feng Kui's support, held himself up staunchly against the wall and managed not to collapse from envy.

"I'm going to read this contract thoroughly, wait a moment!" Then Huan Zixu dragged Lian Yufan and Feng Kui into the relatively soundproofed bathroom and studied the contract by the dim lighting.

Outside the door, Zhen Li, Yuan Luori, and the husky, all looking like they had been through this before, held hands and paws. The bathroom really was the place where their company's new employees were received. Huan Zixu acting like this showed that he had fully integrated into the studio and become a qualified social animal!

At that moment, inside the bathroom, Huan Zixu and Lian Yufan carefully read the contract word by word and line by line, going through it over and over with scrutiny. They actually couldn't find any verbal traps. Huan Zixu whispered, "Did I guess right? Is it the law of power convergence?"

"What do you mean? What does Yu Hua producing a good contract have to do with the law of power convergence?" Lian Yufan asked quietly.

Feng Kui examined the bathroom and made a gesture towards the two of them indicating that it was safe and there were no monitoring devices. Then he pointed to the wall of the bathroom and reinforced its sound insulation to make certain that their voices wouldn't leak out.

"Because this studio is full of special ability users, Yu Hua was also slowly becoming a special ability user. But a person like him can't have something like that just fall into his lap. So during yesterday's operation, he was possessed by a Destroyer!" Huan Zixu said, narrowing his eyes.

Lian Yufan said, "I see."

Huan Zixu didn't notice Lian Yufan's nervous expression suddenly calming. He continued his analysis: "Thinking carefully, even though the black-cloaked man stepped in yesterday, don't you think matters were resolved too smoothly? The System went to so much trouble, but in the end it came up with nothing. That's evidently impossible. I think it must have had a backup plan."

"I see," was the dull and insipid answer he received.

"My guess is that Yu Hua is that backup plan. While things were going on yesterday, he was at the studio, and the studio is very close to the estate where 'Guan Shaoguang' appeared. I think it's very likely that he encountered 'Guan Shaoguang' and had a confrontation with him. After 'Guan Shaoguang' killed him, his body was taken over by a Destroyer we've never seen."

"I see." Lian Yufan yawned.

“The new Destroyer must know me and Feng Kui. Issuing such benefits, he must be displaying goodwill. Perhaps he’ll even attempt to question us in secret. You’d better hurry and contact the organization and have this ‘Yu Hua’ properly investigated!” Huan Zixu analyzed reasonably.

Looking at Huan Zixu, Lian Yufan seemed to be seeing his past self. He sorrowfully patted Huan Zixu on the shoulder, shook his head, and walked out of the bathroom. He returned the contract to Yu Hua. He felt that he had wasted ten minutes of his life.

Yu Hua, meanwhile, had quietly waited for the three of them to come out. He also amiably asked Feng Kui, “Are you satisfied with your new work environment and remuneration? If you have any objections, we can discuss it.”

“I have an objection,” Huan Zixu said. “Where is the company going to get the money to pay Feng Kui’s salary? Are you going to get behind on payment?”

“The salary account indeed doesn’t have that much money, but you’ve seen our cashflow for this month. The studio has gone through the stage of early investment and marketing and is getting its initial returns. When ‘Idol’s Light’ airs, Yuan Luori’s status will only increase. Are you telling me I don’t have the authority to issue such high wages?” Yu Hua asked in his turn.

Hearing that he was so well aware of the studio’s plans, not at all as though he had been possessed by a Destroyer, Huan Zixu, full of suspicion, said, “You can be this kind?”

“The most important thing our studio has is talent. To keep talent, I’ll issue any benefits necessary,” Yu Hua said with a faint smile.

That did make sense.

Huan Zixu deliberated for ages, then finally let Feng Kui sign the contract. No matter what, the salary really was good.

When the contract was signed, Yu Hua said, “Give me the contact information for the headhunting company. I’ll settle their intermediary’s fee.”

“There’s no need. It’s my personal connection, and I don’t especially want to give it to you. You can just give me an intermediary’s fee of 25% of the 500,000 annual salary.” Huan Zixu had already thought of an excuse to pocket the intermediary’s fee.

Yu Hua glanced at him and actually didn’t probe further. He told Huan Zixu that he would pay the intermediary’s fee tomorrow. Then, taking Feng Kui’s contract and personal materials he left the studio, supposedly to go enroll him in social insurance.

After he left, everyone in the studio let out a long breath. Never mind Huan Zixu, Zhen Li and Yuan Luori both felt that Yu Hua was being especially gentle today.

“Has something good happened recently?” Lian Yufan remembered You Zhengping’s vacation and dimly thought that that was one factor.

While everyone was full of doubts, Feng Kui had found materials left over from putting in the floorboards in the storeroom. He personally repaired the floorboard he had broken.

—

Yu Hua had meant to go home, but what had happened in the studio today had given him some new ideas. So he drove to the sales office of Huan Zixu’s new estate.

When Yu Hua had heard about the headhunting company, he had guessed what Huan Zixu was attempting. He had developed a new level of respect for Huan Zixu.

In Huan Zixu, Yu Hua had seen the staunch and unyielding qualities of human nature. He was a little moved by this spirit, which wouldn’t let go no matter what. He had decided to help Huan Zixu buy his apartment.

He made inquiries about the development range of the new estate. He found that the office building across the street from theirs was also owned by this developer, as well as some commercial apartment buildings in the area.

Yu Hua contacted the head of the sales office directly and spent a large sum to buy two floors of the office building across the street and a few commercial apartments.

The money he used was naturally the hundred million he had wanted to launder into his household account but had never had the opportunity to do.

He had originally meant to merge this money into his household account to increase his household’s risk-resistance. But yesterday Xiao You had come clean about his private savings and had said he wanted to support him. Yu Hua thought that he didn’t need to work so hard to earn (launder) money anymore. It would be better to change it into fixed assets and exchange those fixed assets for company stock so he could continue to oppress his employees.

Yu Hua bought two floors of the office building that had their own elevator, free and clear. The total area was over two thousand square meters, and the floors were finely decorated. They could pack up and move right away.

The commercial apartments were also decorated. They couldn’t be more suited to being employee dormitories.

He signed a confidentiality agreement with the sales office, requesting that they announce publicly that he had made the purchase with credit, not that he had paid the full price.

After spending so much money, Yu Hua became the sales office’s honored customer. He produced Huan Zixu’s employment contract and indicated that he wished to buy Huan Zixu’s

new apartment in the company's name and was turned down by the sales office on the grounds that they couldn't take under the table reservations for buildings under construction.

Yu Hua proposed a different condition. If Huan Zixu asked to pay by installments, he asked the sales office to be sure not to agree, and be sure to sell the apartment to him, and furthermore be sure not to return Huan Zixu's hundred thousand yuan advance payment. He wanted to give his employee a nice surprise.

Because it was an "advance" and not a "down payment," the sales office had the power not to return it.

After all, this was a major client who had spent nearly ninety million in ready money in one fell swoop. He was extravagant. The sales office naturally agreed and promised Yu Hua that if there was any change concerning Huan Zixu's apartment, they wouldn't immediately notify Yu Hua.

The sales office's saleswoman watched this "generous," "broad-minded," "considerate of his employees" Director Yu leave in big strides and was filled with envy and some jealousy towards this Huan Zixu. Why didn't they have such a good director?!

Yu Hua, having been awarded the title of "kindest manager in history," drove home. He bought fresh ingredients in his estate's convenience store. Humming a tune, he happily returned home to cook for You Zhengping.

After all, he really didn't have any money left now. He was a kept man who had to rely on Xiao You's support. If he didn't cook and do the chores, how could he be worthy of Xiao You, who worked so hard?

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Author's note:

Interviewer: Why aren't there any female employees in your studio?

Zhen Li: Probably because they aren't suited to our environment for welcoming new employees. Our Director Yu is very gentle.

Huan Zixu: For some reason I'm feeling a chill. It feels like there's a plot coming my way!

## CHAPTER 106

Yu Hua was a controlled person. As a leveler, he hadn't wasted his points. He had put every point where it counted. He wouldn't have indiscriminately used his points to fulfill unnecessary desires. As an ordinary person, he had also very rarely squandered money. Whether at home or at work, each sum was used on a knife's edge. Undoubtedly the decoration of the studio had been done to make life unpleasant for Lian Yufan, but he had also truly been economizing.

Yu Hua, who had practically never been self-indulgent, had spent a vast sum of money today and felt that it really felt good to spend money. No wonder TV dramas often had plots about retaliatory shopping. The astonished look on the saleswoman's face when he had swiped his card and transferred accounts had made Yu Hua very satisfied.

Today he had cheerfully spent ninety million. He was planning to use the remaining ten million to buy some livestreaming equipment, then leave some money to pay Feng Kui's salary.

The studio, which had at first been used to attract the notice of the Protection Organization and the Destroyers, was making more and more money. The appearances and figures of the levelers who had been altered by the System were perfect. The studio's volume and performance became more flourishing by the day. This made Yu Hua attach value to the cyclical use of the Destroyers and their sustainable development. If they were only given new education and overawed by favors, these people could also become his money-making slaves... Ahem, that was wrong. These people could also slowly integrate into this world.

With his mood as clear and bright as the sky, Yu Hua came home humming the intro music for the news broadcast. He was pondering today's meals. When he reached the door of his estate, he nervously adjusted his shirt, worried that it would be wrinkled.

After all, he was meeting Xiao You again after thousands of years of separation. Yu Hua didn't know whether his nature had changed. He didn't know whether he was still that social elite that Xiao You had fallen in love with at first sight at the very beginning. The closer he got to the door, the more nervous he became. He involuntarily activated "super memory images," reviewing his blurred memories like watching a movie, getting a clear impression of them in his brain, so it was as if they had just happened.

When he reached the door of his apartment, Yu Hua once again took inventory of the ingredients in his bag. He hadn't cooked in over two thousand years. Yu Hua didn't even know whether his culinary skills could still hold up to half of what they had been before. He rapidly recited the menu of dishes he would make today, then started recalling what to do when he came through the door.

According to his living habits of over three years of marriage, he ought to walk through the door and first change his shoes. If Xiao You was home, he would kiss his cheek, then go wash his hands. He would change into indoor clothes, then turn around and give his husband a hug. He would turn on the TV to the news channel and listen to the news while cooking.

Thinking that there would be a coming home kiss when he walked through the door, Yu Hua smiled a neglected senior citizen's smile, the smile of someone who hadn't been kissed in over two thousand years. He expectantly swiped his fingerprint and opened the apartment door. He put on a smile like a spring breeze that he thought was the most charming, most gentle, most likely to fascinate Xiao You, and walked through the door.

"Hahaha! Can't Lian Yufan move his arms and legs in coordination? I remember his nerves always seemed good during physical activity, and here he's done this hip-hop dance with the

bearing of a public square dance. Zhen Li's standing there next to him so upset his flat face has folded up into a lump."

As soon as he walked through the door, he heard a voice as warm as a fire laughing to the fullest. Yu Hua saw a man sitting on his sofa with an arm around his husband's shoulders. He was eating fried chicken and French fries and drinking beer while watching the studio's livestream program.

The smile on Yu Hua's face froze. He raised his hand slightly towards the back of the man's head.

You Zhengping stood up when he heard the sound of the door opening. He leapt directly over the coffee table, vigorously came up to Yu Hua, and hugged him, holding down his raised arm. He kissed both his cheeks and took the supermarket bag out of Yu Hua's hand. He happily said, "You're home! I've been waiting so long for you. Didn't you say you'd be home in the morning? It's already five in the afternoon."

There was a bit of complaint in his voice, but Yu Hua liked this alluring "the emperor didn't appear at morning court" tone. He enjoyed it very much. He kissed You Zhengping back and said, "A new employee came to the studio at the last minute. I had to interview him. I couldn't get away for a while."

"It must be Feng Kui. We were just watching Zhen Li's livestream and saw that there's a new security director." The man sitting on the sofa stood up and naturally waved to Yu Hua. "Hey, Xiao Rui and I have come to scrounge a meal off of you."

The hand Yu Hua had raised against this man had been held down by You Zhengping just now. The man's light and breezy attitude made him hesitate over whether to light him up. Then the man put down the piece of fried chicken he was holding and casually wiped his hands. Without washing his hands, he shook Yu Hua's hand with his fried-chicken-scented hand and even said, "You're really too polite. We're all old friends here, there's no need to shake hands. Should I help you out in the kitchen, chopping vegetables or something? We're always coming to your house to freeload and not lifting a finger. I feel awkward about it."

Yu Hua glanced at his own hand, which had some fried chicken oil on it. He squeezed it into a fist. He raised his other, unpolluted hand and took a pen from his front shirt pocket.

The original form of the "rule writer" was a brush pen, but after Yu Hua had grasped natural law power, he could change it into a fountain pen, a pencil, a ballpoint pen, a watercolor pen, a felt-tip pen, and other forms.

Seeing that Yu Hua had even taken out the "rule writer," You Zhengping snatched it away and said, "Is that a new pen for me? I love it! Love you!"

Hearing the words "love you," Yu Hua calmed down slightly and connected the man in front of him to the name "Cen Xiao."

When he had used “super memory imagery” to watch his memories, Cen Xiao had been an indelible presence. When he had met Xiao You, Cen Xiao had been cutting up Xiao You’s pants; on his first date with Xiao You, they had made barbecue in Cen Xiao’s backyard; after the first time he and Xiao You kissed, Cen Xiao had paid 500 yuan towards the fine for defacing the old tree in the park.

Oh, and the phone he had hidden under the bed—Xiao You had bought that with Cen Xiao’s assistance.

Since that was the case, when he wanted to have a candlelight dinner with Xiao You upon reuniting after over two thousand years, how could Cen Xiao not be there? After all, Cen Xiao was a fire type special ability user. He could supply the candlelight!

Yu Hua at last suppressed his temper and forced out a courteous smile towards Cen Xiao. Faking politeness, he said, “You’re treating yourself like too much of an outsider by saying you feel awkward. You always used to come hang out at my house, but lately you’ve come much less often.”

“I’ve been busy at work,” Cen Xiao said. “I’ve finally got a few days off, so I can drink a bit and chat about old times. It’s like the old idle days back at the subdistrict office.”

Cen Xiao had actually come to console You Zhengping. You Zhengping had been suspended for investigation for three months. Cen Xiao didn’t know that the suspension was actually an extended leave. He was very concerned about You Zhengping’s psychological state, so he had come to drink and chat with him to relax his friend’s mind.

When Cen Xiao mentioned those days, Yu Hua remembered how at the time his special abilities had been sealed. He had been a worker who occasionally worked overtime, working hard every day to make money to pay back his mortgage. He had always been glad to save an extra ten thousand yuan. It wasn’t like now, when he was only somewhat happy when he had spent ninety million.

So he sighed and said, “That’s right, those were very happy times.”

Cen Xiao didn’t know that the recollection of past times had made him escape a calamity. After Yu Hua had changed his clothes and gone into the kitchen, he feelingly said to You Zhengping, “It seems that this studio is making Yu Hua very weary.”

Third underling Xiao Rui pointed to the livestream image on his phone. “It is pretty wearying.”

Cen Xiao had come at noon to You Zhengping’s home, bringing fried chicken, French fries, popcorn, peanuts, and beer. It had been a long time since they’d gotten together like this to play games. These past few months, if they hadn’t been patrolling, then they’d been having meetings at the base about Destroyers. They’d hardly had any free time, and they’d hardly touched their phones. This time they’d formed a group to play and had lost a dozen times in a

row, so badly that all three of them were looking sick, so they'd simply watched Zhen Li's livestream to make fun of Lian Yufan as stress relief.

Because the floor needed to be repaired, Zhen Li hadn't livestreamed in the morning. He only opened for business at 2 PM. When Cen Xiao and the others entered the livestream channel, he had just started.

For the last month and more, Yuan Luori had been filming the talent show. Lian Yufan didn't cooperate with the work, so Zhen Li had spent the evenings mostly promoting products and had been sluggish during the daily livestreams. The fans had complained that they were on summer vacation and had time to watch hot guys during the day, but they weren't in business.

This morning, Zhen Li had posted an announcement saying that Yuan Luori had returned and that they would be livestreaming at precisely 2 PM. Word passed among the fans; right at the start of the livestream, the number of people watching climbed to third place in the rankings.

The livestream camera was aimed at a wall. There were no people. Only Zhen Li's voice could be heard: "Hello, everyone. In order to welcome back Yuan Luori, the four of us have put together an old style dance for everyone. Yuan Luori and I will be the chief performers. Don't criticize Director Lian and Director Huan too harshly."

[An old style dance! You never know what's going to come out President Zhen's wardrobe. I want to see Zhen Li change his clothes!]

[Hurry up, it's been such a long time since we've seen Yuan Luori-xiaogege. We heard he went to take a course. Let's see the results!]

[Director Huan knows how to promote goods. Every time, as soon as he opens his mouth, I can't resist buying, buying, buying, all of it. President Zhen and Director Yuan can dance. But Director Lian...does he have anything put his teardrop mole?]

[Nonsense! Our Director Lian can also compete with Director Ha for the position of public relations director!]

Though there was nothing on screen but a blank wall, the barrage was unprecedentedly active. As a zither prelude began to play, the camera slowly panned to four people.

First all of there was Zhen Li in white, with gold feather designs embroidered on his chest and sleeves. He was wearing a white feather hair ornament on his head. Two strands of long hair were tucked behind his ears and fell down in front of his collarbones with two strings of azure feather ornaments at the ends. He held a white feather fan in his hand. With Zhen Li's face, which was as beautiful as a peacock, he truly did look like a mystical bird turned human.

A parrot flew over Zhen Li's head and sat down on Yuan Luori, standing to right and back of Zhen Li, dressed all in skintight black clothes. Yuan Luori had tied a black cloth over his somewhat foolish-looking eyes, making the sharpness of his features more obvious. He had a



dagger in his hand and was standing in the studio's open window as though weightless. A breeze gently rustled the curtain, now hiding him in the shadows, now revealing him, like an assassin in the night.

Because of the curtain, the parrot couldn't stand firmly on Yuan Luori, so it had to fly over to the man sitting on a plastic stool at the very center. Lian Yufan wore a wide-sleeved, dark gown with a zither placed in front of him. His long, slender fingers stirred over the zither. The ancient melody was actually coming from his hands.

Zhen Li had found a wig of loose hair for Lian Yufan. The long hair occasionally brushed the mole at the corner of his eye. Accompanied by the sweet, mournful ancient tune, Lian Yufan's expression really did make it seem like he was crying. It was pitiable.

Placed to the left was Huan Zixu. His hair was long to start with. He didn't need to wear a wig. He had just casually done his hair up in a high bun, making his phoenix eyes look even slyer in contrast. The color of Huan Zixu's ancient dress was green. On another person, that color would have been completely ridiculous, but he could actually dominate that color. He looked a supple and strong as a green willow.

First the barrage went blank for a moment. Then there were waves of screaming and fans constantly sending gifts. The number of viewers soared in a straight line. It rose to second place in the number of people online and neared first place.

Zhen Li and the others weren't impacted by the gifts. They danced strictly according to the arrangement. Most of the work was done by Yuan Luori and Zhen Li. Lian Yufan only needed to sit alone plucking at the zither and looking lovely. Huan Zixu only walked around.

Though two people weren't pulling their weight, the attractiveness of all four of them, as well as Yuan Luori and Zhen Li's dance technique, still shook all those present, and there were people wildly writing [CaoYuanLuoRiLiMing is real!] high-level comments. Without turning off the barrage, you were likely to have an attack of trypophobia.

The song came to an end. As Lian Yufan plucked out the final note, a howl just like a lone wolf howling at the moon reverberated through the livestream. Director Ha shot out from some corner, crossing half the space of the office like an arrow and landing in the camera's dead spot so the fans couldn't directly see Director Ha. It left an afterimage the picture of a happily waving fluffy tail.

At that moment, the number of people online in the livestream had soared to first place, and it was still increasing constantly.

[Requesting a recording. There must be a recording. I want to watch every day!]

[Requesting a recording +1. I watched the first half with the barrage on. I'd like to watch on my own.]

[I was going to have an attack of tryphobia from watching the barrage. Requesting a recording without the barrage.]

[What was that flying by at the end? Does the studio have a wolf? That's a little too cool!]

[It's not a wolf, it's the studio's Director Ha. I haven't seen it in a while, and now it's so big.]

[Www, why are other people's huskies so attractive and elegant, with such a sense of security? I'm so mad I kicked the stupid husky tearing up my couch right now.]

[Www, Lian Yufan, I was wrong about you. You aren't just a pretty vase with a teardrop mole. You're the zither-playing beauty of my heart.]

[Requesting the studio to release merchandise! Clothing similar what's in the recording, a body pillow of Director Ha, Zhen Li's fan, Yuan Luori's dagger, Beauty Lian's zither. Print your logo or photograph on it, and I'll buy it all.]

[What's the marketing director doing? I can put up with you being dead weight and spoiling the aesthetic the whole way through the dance, but aren't you supposed to take care of merchandise in advance? Do your job, don't keep promoting products. Make your own products!]

"Thank you, everyone! After the event, we'll release a recording of the dance." Zhen Li loved to let the fans see his beautiful self. Seeing so many people in the livestream now, he felt that his dreams were coming true. He was so excited that there were tears spilling from his eyes. "Next Friday evening, 'Idol's Light' will be broadcast. Our studio's Yuan Luori will be on it. I hope everyone will be able to support him!"

One after another, the barrage comments said [I'll definitely support him] and [Yuan Luori dances so well, the show must be good]. The count of fans watching the livestream now had reached its pinnacle. Huan Zixu quickly took a screenshot to record the numbers. This was part of their advertisement for the 'Idol's Light' show group. This could be counted as having fulfilled their requirement. They could collect money from the show group according to the number of people watching the livestream.

After the opening dance ended, the studio's people answered the fans' questions one by one.

Yuan Luori: "Are there handsome young men on the talent show? None of them are as handsome as me, I think. I can't say anything specific. You'll have to wait and watch the show."

Lian Yufan: "That really was me playing the zither, I wasn't faking it. My technique isn't very good. It's no match for a professional. I only have some slight knowledge."

Huan Zixu: "You said I was dead weight? This isn't what I'm here to do. Zhen Li insisted on forcing me to make up the number. I still have to prepare for tonight's livestream."

Director Ha: “Aw-aw-awooo! Awoooo!”

Zhen Li: “As for the merchandise, we have to wait for Director Yu to return to decide. Where is Director Yu? Is he skipping work? No, no, no, he’s definitely not skipping work. We have a new employee, and Director Yu went to enroll him in social insurance.”

Hearing that a new employee had joined, the barrage excitedly debated what style of handsome man this would be. Just then, one of the cubicle partitions behind the people on the screen gave a clatter, and they all fell down like dominoes, followed closely by a *pitter-patter*, as though there was someone behind the partitions tearing them down.

[What’s going on? Is it Director Ha, finally unable to resist tearing things down?] someone asked in the barrage.

“Aw-aw-awoo!” Director Ha appeared in front of the camera in protest, remonstrating that it hadn’t done it.

As the barrage wondered, a two-meter tall figure walked out from behind the partitions. His figure was strong and muscular, his chest muscles so well-developed that his t-shirt couldn’t cover them up. He looked like a bodybuilder in a European film. It was one thing to be big and tall, but there also wasn’t a bit of excess fat on his whole body. It was the perfect combination of strength and beauty.

He wasn’t of the pretty sort the other four employees were. You could only say his face was rugged. But he gave you an indescribable sense of security.

“This is our new director of security, Feng Kui,” Zhen Li introduced. “Director Feng isn’t one of the studio’s signed internet celebrities. He protects us. Reasonably speaking, he won’t normally appear on camera, though our studio is really too small, and we’ve had a bit of an accident, so there’s no avoiding him appearing.

[It’s fine, it’s fine. We like looking at him.]

[So...would your studio be interested in developing a fitness service? Like a fitness livestream or something. I’m very interested in Director Feng’s muscles. I crave his body... No, I mean, I want to get in shape.]

[That’s right. What’s going on with Director Yu this time? He didn’t sign an unfair contract? Such excellent muscles... Ahem, such an excellent person, aren’t you going to let us see him later?]

[@Yu Hua, look into promoting exercise products. If Director Feng promotes it, I’ll 100% place an order.]

The fans had already gotten used to seeing all the different beautiful men of the Zhen Li Studio. At first, they really hadn’t had any interest in the new person. Placed among the entertainment

circle, all of this studio's internet celebrities would be first-rate. No matter what sort of beautiful man was added, he wouldn't stand up to them.

Only Feng Kui was different. He was a brand new being for the aesthetic senses of the spoiled fans. He was completely different from the others. His height, which was a head taller than the others, and his body-building physique were unusually prominent in this studio, which tended towards male beauties.

The fans wanted to see more of Feng Kui, but Huan Zixu pulled a fan out from somewhere, opened it with a swish, and blocked the camera. "Feng Kui won't be participating in livestreams."

"A-Xu, I broke stuff again," came Feng Kui's somewhat helpless voice.

"It's all right, it's because Yu Hua bought cheap materials, it's nothing to do with you," Huan Zixu reassured. "If Yu Hua dares to make trouble for you tomorrow, I'll fight him to the death."

"Don't talk about it now, let me turn off the livestream." That was Zhen Li's voice. "Sorry, our studio is a bit of a mess right now, we're temporarily going offline for an hour. We'll start again later."

An hour later, the livestream started again. It could be seen that the studio had been straightened out, but the cubicles had completely fallen over. There was probably no way to repair them. And Feng Kui, who had appeared earlier, had disappeared.

Before Zhen Li could explain anything, the whole barrage started asking what Feng Kui and Huan Zixu's relationship was. What kind of person could make the product promoting fiend Director Huan stick up for him like that? He would even dare to fight to the death with the demon Director Yu! What kind of poignant feelings were these?!

Zhen Li explained that Feng Kui and Huan Zixu were only ordinary coworkers, though Feng Kui was simple and honest, so Huan Zixu was just looking after him a little.

On the screen, Zhen Li was saying things not even a child would believe. Outside the screen, You Zhengping and Cen Xiao were quietly looking at Yu Hua, who was just bustling around the kitchen. Then they silently lowered their heads.

If the partitions hadn't broken during the livestream, Lian Yufan certainly would have used his special ability to repair them and cover the business up. But there had been so many people during the livestream, and there were always busybodies sending private reports to Yu Hua. Lian Yufan couldn't use his special ability. Tomorrow Yu Hua would probably have to spend money to refurbish the office.

Cen Xiao laughed awkwardly. "Haha, entrepreneurial work is pretty tiring."

He and Xiao Ruo thought at the same time that Yu Hua was working so hard, but his employees were all people who could casually cause mass destruction. The only one who had lost his special ability was Huan Zixu, who was so clever he gave the Protection Organization incessant headaches. Managing a group like that really was hard on Yu Hua.

The saddest part was, Yu Hua wanted to use the studio to establish himself. He had quit his original job, a lofty and brilliant elite of the business world going to work at a crappy studio, but this brave irrevocable commitment had brought him to a crowd of dangerous elements. These people couldn't work properly to begin with. Poor Yu Hua!

"You...should pay more attention to Yu Hua's psychological state and comfort him promptly," Cen Xiao instructed You Zhengping. "Let him have his way a little in daily life. You'll be on vacation, so you should do whatever he likes with him!"

You Zhengping: "..."

He remembered back in the little world, those apparent three days that had actually been months in the little dark room. He thought, *Cen Xiao, what exactly are you advising me to do?*

Just then, Yu Hua brought over a plate of fish boiled in chili oil to the dining table. He had heard what Cen Xiao had said, and the corners of his lips turned up faintly. He deleted his mental plans for such dishes as "all Cen Xiao feast," "Xiao variety dish," "cuts of Xiao," etc. He gently said to everyone, "Do you object if I turn on the TV to the news channel?"

"Go ahead!" said Cen Xiao, not knowing he had avoided a calamity. "We're just sitting around. It doesn't matter what you put. It'll be good to have some noise."

Yu Hua used the lid from the fish boiled in chili oil to waft the fragrance around and covered it up. He picked up the remote from the couch and turned on the TV. He changed the channel and didn't forget to crook a finger towards You Zhengping.

You Zhengping: "..."

The facts demonstrated that even though he hadn't cooked in over two thousand years, Yu Hua's cooking was still first class. Cen Xiao and the others ate to their delight. Seeing that You Zhengping's mental state seemed all right and that his relationship with Yu Hua was good, they finally relaxed and left.

That night, while You Zhengping was sleeping soundly, Yu Hua quietly went to the study, opened the desk calendar diary, and gently stroked the date with his fingertips.

—XX/XX/XX

*I've been away, and it feels like I'm in another world.*

*Many years ago, I was always considering one thing—what was truth? In my daze, I thought that all experiences were merely illusion.*

*It's only right now, putting my pen down to write the date, that I had the feeling of having my feet firmly on solid ground.*

*In the past, I never thought that writing down the year, month, and date could make a person feel so calm. When I read the date on the calendar, I finally had the feeling that I had returned.*

*It must be because the truth is every minute and every second of experience that I'm willing to remember and trust.*

—

Author's note:

Cen Xiao: Up to the present, I don't know how many times I've wavered on the border between life and death.

## CHAPTER 107

You Zhengping woke up to the aroma of breakfast. He looked at his phone. 7:12 AM. Excessive exercise last night, and today he had still woken up according to his biological alarm clock. A Protector's constitution truly was good.

Of course, however good it was, it still wasn't as good as that of a certain neglected senior citizen.

You Zhengping looked at the desk calendar spread open on the nightstand. Each page was full of dense writing. All the empty space from before had been filled in. A certain person had spent half the night filling it.

The desk calendar, which had originally been in the study, right now seemed to be saying to You Zhengping, "Hurry up and flip through me," "Hurry up and read my feelings," "How could I possibly tell you myself?" You Zhengping rubbed the corners of his eyes. He had only slept for three hours last night. He was light-headed now. How did a certain person have so much energy? He'd been up half the night filling up his diary, and he could still get up in the morning to cook. He probably hadn't slept all night.

While inwardly You Zhengping was ridiculing a certain person, his hand uncontrollably reached for the desk calendar diary. He'd just...read it like a novel.

He had just casually flipped through a few pages, looking this way and that. While he was getting emotional about it, he read the meaning between the lines—can Xiao You spend some more time with me?

You Zhengping rubbed his temples. He was just about to continue flipping through when Yu Hua came to the bedroom door and said, "Time to get up and have breakfast... Why are you going through my diary?"

You Zhengping said, "...can't I read it?"

"Of course not, it's private." Looking full of righteousness, Yu Hua stepped up to take back his desk calendar diary. "And if you do read it, you have to do it when I'm not here. You can't let me know you've read it."

Then he took the desk calendar diary back to the study and put it into a drawer with a lock. He stashed the key to the lock in You Zhengping's pocket.

You Zhengping: "..."

Okay, then. When Yu Hua was asleep, he would quietly scan it, print it, and bind it into a book as before, then read it in private.

The table was covered with a sumptuous breakfast. There were savory vegetable crêpes, fried rice balls, little wontons, green onion pancakes, pumpkin congee and milk, an assortment of bite-sized pastries, all available to eat.

"I haven't made breakfast in years. I don't know if it'll suit your tastes. You can try a bite of everything. If there's anything you don't like, just give it to me," Yu Hua said.

How could he not like it? It was Yu Hua's homemade food—there was nothing You Zhengping didn't like to eat.

He made a clean sweep of all the breakfast foods. Yu Hua, watching him, ate a little more than he usually did.

After breakfast, Yu Hua listened to the morning news while washing the dishes and cleaning the apartment. You Zhengping lounged on the couch digesting. He was once again grateful that he was a Protector and could eat a little extra without getting fat, or else in another couple of years he would be losing his looks young.

"Was breakfast good?" Yu Hua asked while he ironed after cleaning the apartment.

"Delicious!" You Zhengping resolutely jumped off the couch to praise Yu Hua.

"I also thought it was good." Yu Hua smiled faintly. Reservedly, he said, "It's too bad I have to go to work today and can only eat take-out for lunch. The taste is insipid."

You Zhengping blinked. Without being told, he felt the loneliness in Yu Hua's words. He turned his head and watched Yu Hua finish ironing the shirt, then take out one of You Zhengping's shirts and begin to iron.

Watching him carefully smoothing the wrinkles in the shirt, You Zhengping had a flash of intuition and suggested, "I have to be on call while I'm on vacation. I can't leave the Xuyang District. But...I want to spend more time with you. Can I come to work with you? You work, I'll play games. Would that bother you too much?"

"It won't!" Yu Hua seemed to instantly appear in front of the couch after hanging up the iron. "We sit around doing nothing all day. There's nothing to bother."

"But with Yuan Luori's ability, my identity may be exposed," You Zhengping said hesitatingly.

Yuan Luori had already seen his spatial ability and natural law power at the base. The organization currently wasn't planning to have him reveal his identity. You Zhengping wasn't sure whether he could conceal himself from Yuan Luori.

"Don't worry. With me there, he won't see a thing," Yu Hua said.

Owing to his faith in Yu Hua, You Zhengping didn't take any precautions before going to the studio. They had gotten up quite early. It was only 8:30 AM when they arrived at the studio. There were few people in the office building who went to work so early. The two of them enjoyed an elevator to themselves. Apparently, during this time, the surveillance camera in the elevator blacked out for about ten minutes. The elevator went up very slowly. No one knew what happened inside the elevator during this time.

Yuan Luori hadn't gone to pick out the apartment promised to him by the Protection Organization yet. He had still slept in the studio last night.

Last night, Yuan Luori had started a livestream as before, though this time he hadn't read and pet the dog as usual. He had asked his followers to raise questions during the livestream. He wanted to see how much he could remember without referencing the books.

This interactive mode had greatly increased the fans' interest. The question and answer mode had lasted until two in the morning. Finally, Yuan Luori had thanked everyone for their help. With everyone's support and encouragement, he had more confidence in himself.

The fan who had witnessed Yuan Luori grow up all said that they would support him. Yuan Luori had also instantly given an advertisement for the talent show. According to common practice, he took a screenshot of the numbers so it could be sent to the show group with the rest to reap the rewards.

Having stayed up late last night, Yuan Luori got up rather late in the morning. He hastily walked Director Ha and quickly swept the office so Yu Hua wouldn't see dust and get mad when he got there.



The office's cubicles had been ruined by Feng Kui the day before. Huan Zixu had found superglue and managed to force the partitions to stay in place. Yuan Luori knew that the partitions weren't sturdy. He had to be careful when wiping them clean.

In order to clean up every dog hair in the studio, he took off his glasses and asked the parrot to help him clean using a lint roller.

The parrot told him that there was quite a bit of dust on the partitions. Yuan Luori held the lint roller and lightly leapt up to the ceiling. His feet, as if glued, firmly stuck him upside down to the ceiling. He was in a good mood. He hummed a tune he had learned on the talent show while seriously cleaning the dust off the edges of the partitions.

Suddenly, Yuan Luori's eyes went black. As if he had gone blind, he couldn't see anything. He knew that Yu Hua had come. He panicked and forgot that he was hanging off the ceiling in defiance of gravity. He frantically wanted to hide. He ran a single step and fell down, crashing right into the unsteady partitions. The partitions, which had been glued so they looked all right collapsed again.

"Our studio is much better since it was redecorated," Yu Hua said to You Zhengping before walking through the door. "It's small, but it has everything it needs, and it has the look of a proper office."

As soon as he opened the door, he heard a *crash-bang*. All the office's partitions came crashing down in front of Yu Hua. Yuan Luori, covered in dust, lay on top of the partitions, groping around on the floor with both hands. "My glasses, my glasses..."

If he only put on his glasses, he could suppress his special ability and not have to look at Yu Hua's energy field anymore.

The parrot's vision was even darker. It fell stiffly beside Yuan Luori, not daring to move a muscle. After all, birds didn't operate well at night; they didn't dare to change positions lightly at night.

Yu Hua had wanted to take You Zhengping to see his work environment. But the moment they walked through the door, half of the office had collapsed. His smile immediately broke down. Darkly, he said to Yuan Luori, "Is this how you do the cleaning?"

"No, I didn't, it wasn't me!" Yuan Luori didn't dare to keep looking for his glasses. He hastily denied responsibility three times over.

All he could see was black, and his hearing wasn't especially good, either. He couldn't tell where Yu Hua was. He could only bow and scrape in the general direction of the wall. "It was Feng Kui who crushed the partitions yesterday. Huan Zixu said, first let's use superglue to stick them in place, then when Yu Hua gets here tomorrow, find a way to blame it on him. We can criticize him for using cheap building materials, too. Two birds with one stone."

Watching Yuan Luori sell out his teammate without any hesitation, You Zhengping inadvertently remembered how he had looked at the base when he had been ready to stand on the table and crow.

Such were the summits and troughs of human life.

You Zhengping couldn't stand it. He picked up the glasses by Yuan Luori's feet and put them into his hand.

"Thank you." Yuan Luori didn't know who had helped him. He quickly put on the glasses, looked up, and saw You Zhengping's young face. He involuntarily backed up a few steps.

He still remembered that this was Yu Hua's husband. The first time he had seen him, Yuan Luori had shot You Zhengping in the chest with a crossbow.

Yuan Luori took two steps back and plopped right onto the floor. His face was pale. Shaking, he asked, "An-and who might you be?"

"My husband." Yu Hua took the opportunity to put an arm around You Zhengping's waist. "The person I have decided to be with in this world and any other."

You Zhengping wanted to laugh but held himself back. Yu Hua must have been wanting to say this for a pretty long time.

Yuan Luori didn't display the envious and respectful expression that Yu Hua had imagined. Instead, hugging the parrot, he curled up in a corner and quietly said, "Hello."

The scene was extremely awkward for a time. Just then, Zhen Li happily walked into the studio, carrying breakfast. "Yuan Luori, I bought you breakfast, don't keep eating expired instant noodles, we're both going to have bonuses soon!"

You Zhengping had used the handsome uncle face to interact with Zhen Li many times. He had long passed the stage of being the young auxiliary policeman who would be jealous of Director Yu and President Zhen's interactions. He greeted Zhen Li naturally: "Hey, Chief Zhen, do you still remember me? Officer Xiao You."

*Clatter!* Zhen Li's breakfast fell to the floor. Soy milk spilled all over. Some drops even splashed on Yu Hua's leather shoes.

Zhen Li leapt to the corner with a swoosh. With one hand, he grabbed Yuan Luori. With the other, he covered his face. Fearfully, he said, "I have a private arrangement with our studio's janitor. I like young, skinny, near-sighted and astigmatic employees. I'm not interested in someone as old as Director Yu."

Neglected senior citizen Director Yu: "..."

Yu Hua, his face ashen, pointed at the soy milk on the floor with the tip of his foot. "Clean it up now."

"Yes, yes!" Yuan Luori quickly pushed Zhen Li away, diligently picked up a cleaning rag, and went to Yu Hua's feet, ready to wipe his shoes for him.

"Not that," Yu Hua said, grinding his teeth.

Yuan Luori was thunderstruck. Could the great master be so angry that he wanted him to lick his shoes clean? While he worshipped the great master, this was too...

Fortunately, You Zhengping figured out what Yuan Luori was intending in time and held him back. "Yu Hua means clean the floor."

"Ooh!" Yuan Luori's forehead was covered in sweat. He quickly ran into the bathroom for the mop.

While no one was paying attention to him, Zhen Li shuffled towards the door a step at a time with his back to You Zhengping. Zhen Li didn't dare to skip work. He was only going out to buy a face mask. He would feel safer if he put one on.

He had just shuffled his way to the wide open door when he bumped into Lian Yufan. Zhen Li was unsteady on his feet and fell backwards. Lian Yufan caught him in time.

"Director Lian," You Zhengping called to Lian Yufan.

Hearing You Zhengping's voice, Zhen Li was so scared he didn't dare to turn his head, petrified that his face would cause trouble. He seized the opportunity to bury his head against Lian Yufan's chest.

You Zhengping: "..."

Lian Yufan pushed away Zhen Li, who was sticking to him like gummy candy, while looking at the floor and the fallen partitions. He said, "What happened here?"

"I'm coming, I'm coming!" Yuan Luori charged out of the bathroom, energetically twirling the mop, making scrawling figures towards the soy milk.

Just then, Huan Zixu's dissatisfied voice came from the hall: "You don't have to carry me up the stairs every time. I'm not that weak."

When the two of them arrived at the door, they saw Zhen Li with his head buried against Lian Yufan's chest. Huan Zixu yawned and said, "Why are you hugging in the middle of the doorway? Move over, don't block people's way."

Before he could squeeze into the office, he heard Yu Hua's grim voice: "Huan Zixu, who was planning to make me take the blame for wrecking the partitions?"

When he heard this voice, Huan Zixu's face stiffened. He wondered inwardly who had sold him out. But he casually said, "Fundamentally, it happened because the quality was too poor. Don't think of deducting Feng Kui's wages."

The two of them walked into the office. Lian Yufan had finally succeeded in prying Zhen Li off of himself. He asked, "What's going on with you today? Why do you keep covering your face? Are you having an allergic reaction or something?"

When he heard this, Zhen Li had a flash of inspiration. He quickly took a lipliner out of his pocket and drew red dots all over his face. He nodded to Lian Yufan. "Yes, an allergic reaction."

Lian Yufan: "..."

Just then, Huan Zixu saw You Zhengping and also stared blankly. When he had wanted to kidnap Yu Hua at first, he had briefly met You Zhengping. But he remembered that he had used "false exchange" to change You Zhengping's "impression" twice, so he casually said, "My name is Huan Zixu. I'm the studio's marketing director. This is Feng Kui, our security director. Could I ask who you are?"

"You Zhengping, Yu Hua's husband." You Zhengping somewhat awkwardly shook hands with Huan Zixu. "I have the day off work, so I've come for a visit. Sorry, I'm getting in the way of your work."

"Oh, Director Yu's husband." Huan Zixu looked at You Zhengping, wondering whether there was a way to use him to get more money out of Yu Hua.

Feng Kui only smiled straightforwardly at You Zhengping. He still remembered how the two of them had looked in the escape room when they had refused to be parted no matter what. He was a little envious. His attitude towards You Zhengping was very friendly.

Yuan Luori dried the floor and finally relaxed. He stood with Zhen Li, who had succeeded in "disfiguring" himself, doing his best to pretend not to exist.

"There's really nothing worth seeing in this crappy place," Lian Yufan said towards the messy office. "How about I don't take the 30% bonus and put it towards redecorating the office. You see, it's such a mess here, Officer You doesn't even have a place to sit."

Lian Yufan didn't care about the bonus. He wanted to take this opportunity to improve his working environment. It was hard work being an undercover agent. Lian Yufan had been prepared for that; he had submitted in silence to Yu Hua's oppression. But if he could make his undercover work a little more comfortable, Lian Yufan was willing to pay for it.

“Of course we can’t use your money.” Hearing that Lian Yufan wanted to use money that had originally belonged to him to do repairs, Huan Zixu instantly got in his way. “If you’re not short on money, you can give it to me. The office has to be repaired with office funds. Director Yu has made so many deductions to our salaries. He ought to pay for repairs out of that money.”

Yu Hua, who had been ashen-faced the whole time, said to Huan Zixu, “You’re right. So we’ll move right now. This is simply no place for people to exist, and a roomful of formaldehyde is unhealthy. Come on, Xiao You, I’ll take you to the new office.”

Everyone: “...”

Wait, could you explain? We’ve existed in this office for months, but now that You Zhengping is here, it’s no place for people to exist?

—

Author’s note:

Before You Zhengping comes to visit the office—

Yu Hua: The company is poor. Who cares about formaldehyde and working conditions. Everyone can put up with it.

After You Zhengping comes to visit the office—

Yu Hua: This crappy place is simply no place for people to exist. We’re moving!

Everyone: So none of us count as people?

## CHAPTER 108

The studio had a lot of manpower, making the move convenient. They started to pack up. They quickly packed the computers, materials, contracts, forms, and other objects into boxes and carried them all out on their backs. There was no need to call a moving company.

Of course, this was primarily because the Zhen Li Studio basically had no belongings. Apart from the computers, files, and other comparatively easy to move objects, what the company had invested the most in was the office decoration and the livestreaming equipment. These objects were entrusted to Lian Yufan, who could repair items at any time. If they were smashed or hit during moving, he could fix them without revealing anything.

Yuan Luori insisted on taking his folding bed and the cushion kept under it. He put the wash basin, mop, cleaning rags, broom, and other articles onto the folding bed, tied them up with rope, put it over his shoulder one-handed, and prepared to go.

Zhen Li handed his suitcase full of makeup products to Yuan Luori and put a camera over his own shoulder. He turned on the livestream to broadcast a livestream of the move.

“We hear that Director Yu has rented us a new office. We’re moving today,” Zhen Li said into the camera.

[What a fright! A face full of red pockmarks suddenly appeared on camera. I'm going to have an attack of tryphobia.]

[I was just getting ready to cleanse my eyes by looking at a beautiful man, and now I've lost my purpose in life.]

[When I saw the livestream start, I came to watch excitedly, then I quietly took off my glasses. Today, I'm going to be Yuan Luori not wearing glasses.]

[Is President Zhen having an allergic reaction? Turn on a filter or use some thick foundation to cover it up! I know you're beautiful without makeup, I understand, but our relationship is built entirely on shallow appearances. It's better to preserve that kind of simple relationship.]

"Oh, I applied some disfiguring makeup today." Zhen Li sighed in some distress. "I'll do my best not to appear on camera afterwards and honestly demonstrate to everyone the travails of moving."

The camera focused on Yuan Luori. The mop he was preparing to take away was really too long. It was simply inconvenient. He was just fretting about the mop.

Just then, Yu Hua walked by carrying a box of files. He frowned and said, "What are you taking that for?"

"These are articles for daily use, aren't they?" Yuan Luori shoved a shower nozzle into the washbasin.

The vein stood out in Yu Hua's forehead. "Why did you take the nozzle off the water heater in the bathroom?"

"For showering," Yuan Luori said frankly. "The old nozzle was blocked. I borrowed 15 yuan from Lian Yufan to buy this one. It's very useful. I'm worried the nozzle at the new office won't be useful, so I screwed this one off."

"Fine, then bring it," Yu Hua said coldly. He determined to take off all the shower heads in the employee dorms in the commercial apartments and replace them with these nozzles that cost 15 yuan each.

"Wait." You Zhengping walked out of a cubicle, also carrying a box. "Doesn't the new office building you rented have washbasins and mops?"

Yu Hua coolly said, "All the installations are new, and there's a sweeping robot and a vacuum cleaner. Since the janitor likes these things, we can sell the smart cleaning items secondhand online."

“What?” Yuan Luori was shocked. “The new office has something as classy as a vacuum cleaner? I was so envious when I was with the show group that their cleaning ladies used vacuum cleaners.”

[Hahaha! What sort of classy item is a vacuum cleaner? Yuan Luori is so funny, I’m dying.]

[CaoyuanLuori: natural beauty, near-sighted and astigmatic, dance genius, legal studies nut, angel of economizing. How did he film the show? I’m very curious about ‘Idol’s Light’ now!]

[We’ve already settled that we’re waiting to watching Yuan Luori-xiaogege.]

“What are you carrying all that stuff for?” Yu Hua said unhappily when he saw that You Zhengping was also holding a box.

“I’m helping.” You Zhengping flexed his muscles towards Yu Hua.

“With your strength, you can only lift two or three hundred pounds. It’s too much work carrying something so heavy. Give it to Yuan Luori,” Yu Hua said, brooking no argument. He stuffed the box You Zhengping was carrying into Yuan Luori’s arms.

Yuan Luori: “...”

He was gradually realizing You Zhengping’s position in the great master’s heart. Reacting quickly, he said, “There’s no need for you to move anything, leave it all to me!”

Then he snatched up all the boxes at You Zhengping’s feet, shuffled over, and stuffed them into the elevator along with Lian Yufan.

Feng Kui was the strongest person there. He carried the sound equipment and so on over his shoulder with one hand, held up Huan Zixu with the other, and went down the stairs. You could hear Huan Zixu’s voice faintly saying, “Put me down,” and, “It’s only twenty-one floors, I can walk for myself.”

Director Ha carried its toys, dishes, dog food, snacks, drinking fountain, and other items into its cage, closed the cage with its paws, tied its leash to the cage, and dragged it into the elevator like a sled dog. The things in the cage rattled and clanked the whole way.

The scene of it filling up the cage hadn’t been caught on camera. The fan only saw a husky pulling its belongings and were already very shocked. If they had also seen it tying the leash, they probably would have been struck dumb.

Since the studio truly had few belongings, they could move everything in one round. Zhen Li told the fans that they were going to change places, then restart the livestream at the new office. He temporarily turned off the livestream and squeezed into the elevator.

In the elevator that could hold twenty people, You Zhengping and Yu Hua stood together, while Lian Yufan, Zhen Li, and Yuan Luori crowded into a corner. Lian Yufan felt it was too warm and wanted to stand in the center, but Zhen Li held him back.

“Did you get all-purpose adhesive on yourself today? You keep pasting yourself to my chest. Then there’s your face. What kind of new makeup style are you investigating? It’s so ugly,” Lian Yufan said in exasperation.

You Zhengping was well aware of the reason and secretly squeezed Yu Hua’s hand. Yu Hua squeezed back.

You Zhengping was of a mischievous disposition to start with. Lately he had completely undertaken the work of looking after the Xuyang District, so he had steadied a bit. He rarely joked around anymore. Now that he had relaxed and saw how Zhen Li was looking, he couldn’t help “quietly” saying, “Your President Zhen has a private arrangement with Director Yuan, and he’s also got something going on with Director Lian. Isn’t that a messy way to do business?”

Though he spoke quietly, the elevator was only so large, and the other three had excellent hearing. Naturally they heard it clearly.

Zhen Li nearly fainted. Fortunately, Lian Yufan objectively remarked, “If it’s a mess, that’s down to your Yu Hua doing anything it takes to get popular. He’s always forcing us into ships. If you’re going to blame anyone, blame him.”

“No, no, no! Don’t blame him!” Zhen Li and Yuan Luori said simultaneously. “We’re all willing!”

Though he knew that all of You Zhengping’s “jealousy” and “concern” were playacting, Yu Hua still enjoyed it very much. Pulling a long face, he said, “I don’t appear on camera with them. I preserve my purity. If you don’t believe me, you can ask the fans when they start the livestream later.”

Seeing that Yu Hua could pay attention to nothing but You Zhengping, Lian Yufan really wanted to expose him. But he remembered in time that they might have to do repairs if the move went badly, so he kept his mouth tightly shut, not saying another word.

Reason told Lian Yufan that indulging his personal feelings could result in endless renovation and compensation. Silence was golden.

Everyone waited downstairs for Feng Kui and Huan Zixu, then they all crossed the street to the office building across from them. The floors Yu Hua had purchased had two dedicated elevators that went all the way up, solely for employee use, one elevator for people and one for freight. Feng Kui looked at the spaciousness of the freight elevator and its weight limit and laughed silently. He happily took the freight elevator. Huan Zixu’s expression also looked better. He got on along with Feng Kui.



Zhen Li worried that, as an ordinary person, You Zhengping would get suspicious, so he explained, “Feng Kui is too tall. He prefer spacious freight elevators.”

You Zhengping looked at Yu Hua and thought, had Yu Hua chosen this office building for Feng Kui’s sake?

Yu Hua was wearing an expression that said “all Destroyers are slaves,” so You Zhengping couldn’t be sure. They carried their stuff to the new office and were instantly stupefied by the new office’s space, daylight, and decoration.

Zhen Li ran ahead of the others into the largest room. This room had flooring of the highest quality, and it was fully three hundred square meters large. Zhen Li didn’t care that You Zhengping was there. He screamed and plastered himself against a wall, loudly saying, “Director Yu, I don’t want my 30% bonus anymore, spend it on putting a big luxurious mirror on this wall instead!”

“As long as you have the money, you can decorate it as you like,” Yu Hua said coolly.

As long as the money Huan Zixu was aiming for all got used up, that was enough.

Zhen Li refused to unstick himself from the dance room wall. Yuan Luori, meanwhile, began to worry. An area this large would be hard to clean. He went to the dance room’s washroom, saw the individual shower stalls inside it, and was so excited he was about to cry. If Zhen Li hadn’t held him back, he nearly would have unpacked and moved right into a shower stall.

Director Ha, seeing such a large hallway, started darting back and forth along the hall, perfectly letting off its energy. If it hadn’t been scared of being seen by ordinary people, it might have used its speed to escape the force of gravity and flown up into the sky!

Lian Yufan was comparatively rational. He didn’t get excited. He looked into every room, determined that they were perfectly decorated and didn’t need any big changes, and further that the materials were environmentally friendly. There was no formaldehyde. Then he gave a satisfied and solemn smile and said to Yu Hua, “You’re doing things properly at last.”

Even the extremely insightful Huan Zixu nodded slightly. It wasn’t only because Feng Kui liked the freight elevator and he wouldn’t have to get carried up and down the stairs anymore. More than that, it was because the office environment was good, so there would be more potential for him to negotiate business with advertising companies. He could easily invite them to the office, let their collaborators see that theirs was a company with potential and presence. Seeing surroundings like these, many advertising companies would consider driving down prices.

Everyone was very satisfied with the new work environment. Yu Hua said, “This floor is for all of you. Each person has an individual office, though normally when you’re livestreaming, you’ll go to the dance room. During rest periods, you can return to your own rooms. I’ll be upstairs. Whatever happens, don’t come looking for me.”

Then he took You Zhengping's hand and was about to go upstairs. Lian Yufan said, "Wait, another floor in an office building like this? How much rent are you paying?"

Yu Hua's expression didn't flicker. "The public relations director has no authority to inquire into the company's financial affairs."

"Who manages our company's financial affairs?" Lian Yufan took a second to react, then said, "Isn't that you? Hiring, recording attendance, negotiating business, and financial affairs are all taken care of by you. That's unprofessional. But that's not important. Does our company have enough savings to rent such a large space?"

"Yes!" Zhen Li remembered Yu Hua's hundred million and quickly helped him cover up. "Even if there isn't enough, with our company's current resources, we can bring in investments and obtain loans."

"No, you can't get a bank loan this quickly. Though I haven't inquired into the company's financial affairs, I've followed every sum of money we've made. I have a rough idea of what our profits are. An office building like this rents by the day by the square meter, and there needs to be an advance payment. Adding up all of our studio's money..." Lian Yufan calculated quickly. "It would actually be enough for one month's rent, but you've wasted so much money, and especially rented an entire floor for your own office. Isn't that too wasteful? Return the second floor! You're giving yourself special treatment!"

Hearing that Yu Hua had reserved a whole floor for himself, Huan Zixu instinctively took this money to be a part of his down payment. He came over and said, "If you want to return it, I can discuss it with the landlord so they won't keep part of the advance payment and rent."

When the discussion was successful, he would take that money for his down payment. There were only six days left in his arrangement with the developer. No matter what, he would first get the money to them, then think about the rest.

Watching Huan Zixu rack his brains to put together the down payment, Yu Hua gave him a cruel smile and gently said, "I used my personal profits to rent the floor upstairs. None of you have a right to concern yourselves with it."

"Anyway, Director Huan, regarding the headhunting company's fee that you mentioned yesterday, I propose transferring the money directly from the company's account as a better method of settling the fee. It can't touch your personal account, or else we won't be able to account for it in our taxes."

"Find out what the headhunting company's account number is. Let's avoid accidental tax evasion."

When Yu Hua finished, he appreciated Huan Zixu's expression, which looked at though his apartment had flown away. Holding You Zhengping's hand, he happily went up to his private floor.

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Author's note:

Yu Hua: Do you see how hard he's working for his apartment? I feel moved in spite of myself. I want to help him out. I want to see how much force he can expend for the sake of this apartment.

Huan Zixu: ...

Lian Yufan: Today's Yu Hua still won't do things properly.

## CHAPTER 109

Yu Hua wasn't actually the sort of person who wanted to spend all day exercising. He was just unusually protective of their time alone together. He had no other aims in taking You Zhengping upstairs. They simply sat together in an office, Yu Hua taking care of business and You Zhengping sprawled next to him playing on his phone.

There was a big couch in the office with a full set of cushions and a temperature controlled quilt. It wasn't very different from at home. You Zhengping comfortably played on phone, occasionally looking up at Yu Hua. If Yu Hua was busy, he would keep playing his game; if at that moment Yu Hua happened to look up at him, their gazes would meet and You Zhengping would smile, then he would go back to playing his game.

Apart from maintaining old customers and renewing contracts, Yu Hua also made a few new arrangements.

One was for Director Ha. This husky was growing bigger and bigger. After its special ability had awakened, its fur was sleeker than ever, its bearing more robust. At first glance, it looked very healthy and happy. Many pet advertising companies had taken a liking to Director Ha. Apart from the advertising companies, there were also some invitations from production teams filming movies relating to pets. They had taken a liking to Director Ha's cleverness on the livestreams and wanted to invite it to do a screen test for a leading part.

Yu Hua sifted out the obvious rotten eggs among the movies and the advertisements for shoddy products. He meticulously picked out a pet movie production team and a dog food brand for Director Ha, ready to make Director Ha earn its food.

Next came Yuan Luori. After Yuan Luori had filmed with the "Idol's Light" crew, many investors had heard rumors about him. There was an entertainment company that wanted to sign Yuan Luori and package him up to be part of the new generation of idols. There were also some idol dramas hoping Yuan Luori could come film with them. They were giving him the role of the secondary male lead, with excellent pay.

Yu Hua rejected these invitations and contacted a tutoring agency, saying he wanted to place Yuan Luori in a tutorial class focused on preparing him to take the university entrance exams in one year, so he could try to get into a well-known national political and legal university. Yu Hua's black heart wasn't only aimed at his own people. He was the same toward outsiders. He arranged with the tutoring agency that Yuan Luori would first study without paying tuition, and when he tested into the school he hoped for next year, they would pay. Also, the tutoring agency would have to give Yuan Luori an endorsement fee. If he didn't test in, they would sell Yuan Luori's contract and make him repay the debt himself.

You Zhengping got tired of playing games and quietly went up to Yu Hua's desk. Seeing several folders stacked up on the desk already, he opened them up to read. He found that Yu Hua had made future development plans for each of the studio's members.

Zhen Li had suspended his studies to start a business. Yu Hua was in contact with his university so they would let him take the rest of his credits online. The studio would provide a fieldwork certificate for him. When Zhen Li finished his thesis defense, he could get his diploma and degree.

Feng Kui's physical circumstances were unique. If he lost the protection of his special ability, his muscles would gradually be unable to bear the weight of his skeleton. The burden would soon become too great, and he would die. They had to think of a way to replace his skeleton. Even if they couldn't replace it with an ordinary skeleton, at least they could replace it with a relatively lightweight alloy.

Huan Zixu's folder was empty. He had done a strain resistance report and an employment report for him. The strain resistance report concluded that his survival ability could be compared to that of certain living creatures that humans wanted to crush with their slippers. His strain resistance far surpassed that of the average person. He would live very well if left to himself. The employment report, meanwhile, was for Yu Hua's own entertainment. Employing Huan Zixu added a great deal of enjoyment to work.

There were even forms for the Destroyer 187 Yuan Luori and the others had captured, as well as the blank slate "Guan Shaoguang." Yu Hua really had thought of a way out for all the Destroyers.

"Did you..." You Zhengping looked at the new office. "Did you really rent this place?"

The planning charts gave consideration to each person's future. This showed that Yu Hua had seriously considered it. He wouldn't freely squander their hard-earned money. Renting high quality office space that exceeded the studio's capacity absolutely contradicted the thought process in the development plan charts.

Hearing You Zhengping's question, Yu Hua felt a chill go up his spine. He felt the guilt of his private savings being discovered. Yu Hua was the sort of person who acted calmer the guiltier

he felt. He would only give the impression of weakness when he had a well-thought-out plan to trap someone.

After going through the little world, You Zhengping fully understood Yu Hua's character. Seeing him looking stern, he asked, "You didn't buy these floors, did you?"

Yu Hua didn't speak.

You Zhengping instantly understood the meaning behind his silence. "Where did you get so much money?"

He only had three million and some in savings and already thought he was a winner and could start supporting Yu Hua any time, make it so Yu Hua didn't need to worry about trivial life problems and be secure in doing whatever he wanted to do.

You Zhengping had felt very proud of his little treasury. He would check the balance on the bank's text messages at idle moment and feel pleased. Now, seeing that Yu Hua had truly bought two floors of an office building, he quickly went online and checked the market prices for the office buildings in the area and was instantly dazed.

Two floors came to around eighty million. Looking at that number, You Zhengping suddenly experienced Yuan Luori's feelings.

Before, Yuan Luori had passed thirty-seven levels and had gone around boasting about it everywhere, thinking that he was very powerful. When he heard that the clearer's level count was 3,841, Yuan Luori had been shattered. This was like You Zhengping with his three million and some in savings, thinking himself a little tycoon able to support a household and put food on the table. Now it turned out that Yu Hua could afford office space for eighty million. You Zhengping felt that right now he was also kind of brittle.

"How much money do you actually have?"

"One hundred million." Yu Hua carefully stuck up one finger.

You Zhengping shook and nearly fell in a faint. He lost the will to struggle.

"Wh-where does the money come from?" You Zhengping asked, gritting his teeth. "Is it legal?"

Yu Hua quickly stepped up to hold You Zhengping up. Awkwardly, he said, "It's from the System. It found a childless rich person abroad who hadn't made a will and made them my secret relative, then left their money to me. It's completely legal. Even the world law acknowledged it."

If Yu Hua had used the power of his rules to get that money, or if the System had interfered in the world's regulations for printing money, You Zhengping wouldn't have been this struck. After all, those were unique abilities; he didn't have to acknowledge them. But instead...the money

had already existed in society. It was legal! This made You Zhengping's little treasury instantly lose its meaning.

He seized Yu Hua's collar and pushed him down onto the couch. He brought up one knee and lightly pressed it to Yu Hua's chest. His gaze was extremely dangerous, but his tone was exceedingly gentle. "When did you get the inheritance? Before or after we were married?"

Yu Hua looked at You Zhengping looming over him and swallowed nervously. His intellect told him that this question had no good answer. No matter what he said, it would be wrong!

If he had gotten the inheritance before they were married, then when they had been dating, he had hidden property he'd possessed before the marriage. If it was after marriage, then it was definitely all over for him. How could he not tell his husband about news that big?

"You're not going to answer? Are you thinking of an excuse?" You Zhengping pressed his other hand to Yu Hua's temple. "Hm?"

Before, Yu Hua had gripped the back of You Zhengping's neck. Now it was You Zhengping looking loftily down on him, pressing on Yu Hua's temple. The sense of danger made Yu Hua's forehead break out in a cold sweat. He felt that he had never in his life faced such a great danger!

"I had it when I arrived here. I never planned to use that money!" Yu Hua said. "I treated it like it didn't exist. I kept it in an account to lose value. I was a completely commonplace ordinary person, relying on my two hands to make a profit and support my household. Even in the most difficult times, I didn't plan to use it! This time, I used it because...because..."

"Because what?" You Zhengping gently rubbed Yu Hua's temple.

"Because I wanted to give the Destroyers a way to survive." Yu Hua had finally found an excuse. "I'll treat it as the company's fixed assets. It's entirely the company's assets. This way, at least the Destroyers will have somewhere to take shelter."

Hearing this explanation, You Zhengping's mood improved slightly. The hand pressing on Yu Hua's temple moved to stroke his cheek. In a low voice, he said, "Tell me the truth, did you use it before?"

"I did," Yu Hua answered sincerely. "When the phone you bought me broke, I used that money to make up the lack in our finances. I used about twenty thousand. For the broken phone, the furniture, the kitchenware, and some cash I put in the safe to be misleading."

"The phone?" You Zhengping took a phone out of Yu Hua's pants pocket. "Lian Yufan fixed that phone a long time ago, didn't he? Why haven't you switched back to it yet?"

"I'll switch back tonight!" Yu Hua guaranteed.

“What are you going to do with the old phone?” You Zhengping pinched the phone with two fingers and shook it.

“Backup the data on it, then break it!”

“A waste of societal resources. How many people are there who can’t afford a phone?” You Zhengping said. “Isn’t that hundred million the studio’s assets?”

“I’ll restore it to its condition when it was just bought and give it as a reward to the first employee who joins.”

“That’s better.” You Zhengping returned the phone to its original place and patted Yu Hua’s chest lightly with his hand. “You be good.”

Yu Hua absolutely hadn’t expected that him being the clearer wouldn’t knock You Zhengping down but would only make him value him more, love him more, cherish him more. But a measly hundred million clearing reward had nearly created a domestic crisis. It was a good thing that he had relied on the principle of wanting to earn his living with his own two hand and practically hadn’t used that money. What luck!

Just as Yu Hua was inwardly congratulating himself on having escaped a crisis, You Zhengping undid his tie and dropped it on the ground.

Yu Hua was just quietly waiting for whatever would happen next when someone stood at the door of the office of the director of human resources and said, “You’re not even going to close the door while canoodling in the office?”

The two of them simultaneously turned their heads and saw Lian Yufan standing with his arms folded in front of the door. He had no intention of leaving.

When they had been discussing the private savings before, You Zhengping had opened a space as a protective screen. When the issue had been resolved, Yu Hua had quietly used his power to open the screen to test out whether You Zhengping was still angry.

You Zhengping hadn’t resisted. After the screen was opened, the two of them hadn’t been discussing the private savings anymore, but they had entered into another state that took no heed of the outside world.

“Aren’t you supposed to close the door for us and quietly leave at a time like this?” You Zhengping glared at Lian Yufan. “Why are you acting like you’re the one with justice on your side?”

“Both from the perspective of workplace order and professional ethics, I think I *am* the one with justice on my side,” said eternally single Lian Yufan, who didn’t understand love. “Get up, I have proper business to discuss.”

You Zhengping was forced to unwillingly get up off the couch, then watch half-collapsed as Yu Hua entered work mode.

Lian Yufan had primarily come to talk about Junjun coming to the studio. Junjun's father had taken the Protection Organization's recommendation and had persuaded Junjun's mother using gifted education as a reason. As soon as Junjun demonstrated a special ability, he would be immediately taken to the base for training.

On the eve of school starting, Junjun would be taken to the studio to come into more contact with special ability users and be subtly influenced to learn to use his special ability.

Originally, Lian Yufan hadn't especially agreed with this method. First, the excess formaldehyde in the office; while special ability users had strong resistance, Junjun was after all only a child. Second, the office had to livestream. There was very little private space. He didn't want such a small child to accidentally appear on camera. Third, Yu Hua was with them, and Junjun knew that they were special ability users. However good the child was at keeping his mouth shut, he might still let something slip.

Now they had changed offices, and all the problems had been easily resolved. Junjun could easily study in the room next door to the livestreaming room, and Yu Hua was apart from them on the second floor. They would have little contact. The likelihood of saying something wrong was low.

The only problem was how to get Yu Hua to agree to let the child come to the office. Lian Yufan had decided to convince him from the point of view of Director Ha's mental health as a pet and adding to the liveliness of the studio through the diversity of the child and dog playing together. But as soon as he mentioned it, Yu Hua agreed.

"Why didn't you refuse?" Lian Yufan asked in surprise.

Yu Hua frowned. "Why would I refuse something that contribute to the cultivation of the studio's personnel?"

"It could be habit. Even if you've already agreed internally, you still deliberately criticize me and force me to sign unfair agreements, then agree just before you've hit my bottom line, right?" Lian Yufan said uncomprehendingly. "Isn't extorting the greatest surplus value your personal hobby?"

Yu Hua stared blankly, then promptly said, "If you want, I could make that wish of yours come true."

"No need, no need!" Lian Yufan took what he could get. He quickly retreated from the office. Before leaving, he gave You Zhengping a look.

You Zhengping stood up and stretched. He said to Yu Hua, "My back is getting sore from sitting too long. I'm going to go out and walk around."



Taking the hint, Yu Hua nodded.

When the two of them arrived in a big empty conference room next door, Lian Yufan quietly said, “What are you thinking? How could you come to the studio? Don’t you know that Yuan Luori can see your identity? It’s a good thing he’s been wearing his glasses all day today. Those glasses of his kept slipping while we were moving, and I spent the whole time pushing them up for him.”

You Zhengping said, “...I didn’t think about it too much. I have a vacation for once, so I wanted to spend more time with Yu Hua. In this last operation, over the course of a few short minutes, I spent years in the little world. People like us might not be able to come home to our families at any time. I want to treasure this time.”

Lian Yufan’s expression froze. He had obviously thought of his parents. After a long time, he said, “I’ll have Feng Kui weld Yuan Luori’s glasses to his head.”

“Thank you.” You Zhengping extended a friendly hand to Lian Yufan.

The first time they had met, they had shaken hands in Director Xiao’s office, but they had only been friendly on the surface. They had never acknowledged each other’s viewpoints. After countless battles, the two of them at last understood that there wasn’t only one road leading to their goals. No matter which road they walked, as long as the end point was the same, they were comrades in arms.

No wonder Director Xiao had been unable to judge which of them was right and wrong back then. Because there was never only one correct path.

“Oh, right, have you felt that Yu Hua is a little different?” Lian Yufan said after they shook hands and made peace.

You Zhengping said, “What, are you suspecting him of something?”

Lian Yufan quickly explained himself: “Of course not. After knowing him this long, I know his character. I share the same viewpoint as you. If a person were replaced, his ‘core’ would change, and Yu Hua’s hasn’t. He’s definitely still himself. It’s just...he seems gentler.”

“Could it be because I’m here?” You Zhengping fobbed him off with a smile. “You ought to be thanking me.”

“Don’t boast.” Lian Yufan rolled his eyes. He didn’t want to say anything more to You Zhengping. He went downstairs to help Zhen Li plan the office.

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Author’s note:

Yu Hua: Have I changed?

Zhen Li: Yes.

Yuan Luori: You've become more handsome.

Lian Yufan: You've become kinder, just a tiny little bit.

Director Ha: Bark-bark!

Huan Zixu: Changed my ass!

Feng Kui (looking at the freight elevator): Heh-heh.

## CHAPTER 110

In the end, Huan Zixu didn't get his apartment.

Relying on his silver tongue, he persuaded a headhunting company to accept the funds and, after deducting service fees and taxes, to return the rest entirely to Huan Zixu. Huan Zixu, meanwhile, promised to introduce the advertising companies he encountered to the headhunting company. What the headhunting company needed most was businesses that hired people. Through the studio, Huan Zixu knew quite a few businesspeople; this was an important resource.

25% of an annual salary of five hundred thousand was fully 125,000 yuan. After deducting the services fee and paying off the twenty thousand on his credit card, there would still be some left. Huan Zixu planned to take this money and discuss installment payments with the developer. At worst he would have to pay some service fees. He had confidence that he could succeed in negotiating.

When Yu Hua received the public account number Huan Zixu provided, he laughed and privately said to You Zhengping, "Look, see how vast human potential is. His method are truly astonishing."

Naturally You Zhengping understood that Feng Kui hadn't been introduced by a headhunting company and that Huan Zixu had turned up a regular company out of nowhere to accept the money for him. In spite of himself, he sighed emotionally over the valiance of this person, who could smoothly operate in the gray areas of society.

All the same, faced with Yu Hua, Huan Zixu's abilities weren't worth mentioning.

You Zhengping looked on as Yu Hua called the phone number provided with the transfer information. He talked his way all the way to the responsible individual at the company, exposed the swindle they and Huan Zixu had arranged, and indicated that he had grounds to sue them for their fraud.

After a round of browbeating, Yu Hua reassured the other side, saying that he didn't want to make a fuss. He was willing to make friends and let the whole thing go. Since he had a hold over them, he now had another cooperative partner, and he could block off another of Huan Zixu's paths, making the headhunting company harbor bad feelings towards him.

The business circle was very small. If Huan Zixu got into one headhunting company's bad books, then the majority of headhunting companies wouldn't recommend him to other businesses. In the future, if Huan Zixu wanted to change jobs, it would be hard to do.

At this point, You Zhengping finally understood why Yu Hua hadn't exposed the lie about the headhunting company at the very start. It turned out that he had been waiting for Huan Zixu, waiting to make one fatal attack and knock Huan Zixu down into the dust.

"Do you feel a little bad for him?" Yu Hua asked, seeing You Zhengping's sympathetic expression.

"A little." You Zhengping thought about it and said frankly, "I don't completely understand. You can buy such a big studio for them, so why won't you let Huan Zixu get his apartment?"

Yu Hua said, "The essence of my ability is 'rules.' I understand rules better than anyone, and I understand the attitude people look upon rules with."

When Yu Hua mentioned his ability, You Zhengping listened in earnest.

"You can separate people into five categories based on how they view rules. People who formulate the rules, people who protect the rules, people who observe the rules, people who disobey the rules, and people who use the rules. Huan Zixu is a person who uses the rules," Yu Hua said.

You Zhengping thought of everything Huan Zixu had done lately; that was in fact the case.

Yu Hua said, "A person who uses the rules fundamentally hasn't taken them seriously. He roams in the gray areas that the rules can't reach, striving for power. If you want to punish him, it will be very difficult.

"Currently, everyone has special abilities, and Huan Zixu is still constantly testing the Protection Organization's bottom line. If there comes a day when everyone loses their special abilities and stands at the same level, no one will be able to hold him back.

"So I must spare no effort to beat him down, and I have to use the rules to do it. Beat him down so he feels it, beat him down so he sincerely realizes that even without special abilities, there are still limiting powers in the world. Only then will Huan Zixu be willing to respect the rules."

Then Yu Hua gave Huan Zixu a phone call. He told him that the money had been transferred. During the call, he maintained a grave expression, though You Zhengping still saw a trace of cheerfulness in Yu Hua's face.

There was nothing wrong with his reasoning, but there were other means he could have used to beat down Huan Zixu. But Yu Hua only enjoyed the method of letting a person exhaust his efforts, then dashing his hopes in the end. This was another one of Yu Hua's bad habits.

Recalling the treatment of each of the studio's members, You Zhengping found that Yu Hua was unusually considerate towards simple and kind-hearted people. Zhen Li and Feng Kui were like this, and Yuan Luori and Director Ha had received preferential treatment after they had stopped making trouble.

Only Huan Zixu was left as a target for Yu Hua's entertainment.

Yu Hua put down the phone and quietly waited for Huan Zixu to come upstairs to find him in exasperation. Instead, he felt arms encircle his waist.

You Zhengping had hugged Yu Hua from behind. He leaned his head against his back.

Yu Hua held his husband's hand and asked, "What is it?"

"Nothing." You Zhengping shook his head. "I was just thinking, these days are very good."

Yu Hua seemed to understand the unfinished meaning in You Zhengping's words. He quietly said, "They are."

He longed a little for "Guan Shaoguang"'s ability. It would be good if they could slow down time.

You Zhengping forced down the distress he felt. He sat on the couch and quietly enjoyed the scene of Huan Zixu charging into the office in exasperation and finally being left speechless by Yu Hua.

That made twice—once in the plans for Feng Kui's future, and once in what Yu Hua had just said.

Yu Hua had twice mentioned that in the future, everyone would lose their special abilities.

This had made You Zhengping awaken from a false reality and realize that the current state of affairs couldn't last. When Yu Hua had been alone in the little world, what arrangement had he made with the world law?

There had been no reaction from the System since It had sent five high grade levelers to attack the Xuyang District on all sides. What was Its plan?

There was a clock hanging in the office. You Zhengping gently closed his eye and listened to the sound of the second hand moving, *tick, tick*, as though the steps of time were incessantly pressing forward.

"I don't know where you dug up a talent like Feng Kui," Yu Hua said unhurriedly with his hands folded on his desk, "but I investigated Feng Kui's materials. He's a good employee. I'm willing to hire him. But as for this headhunting company's intermediary's fee... Huan Zixu, are you very short on money? Why do you absolutely need this money?"

"I'm only trying to take back what I'm due," Huan Zixu said, forcing down his anger.

Yu Hua shook his head. "What I give you is what you're due. Perhaps you believe that you've brought the greatest profits to the company by haggling with the advertising company, so this money ought to belong to you. But that doesn't make sense. The studio's popularity comes from everyone's engagement. Without that foundation, do you think any advertising company would come to us? The money doesn't belong to you alone. It's the studio's property."

Huan Zixu didn't speak, but his eyes were full of plans. It seemed he still hadn't given up.

Then Yu Hua said, "You, Feng Kui, and that headhunting company are under suspicion of fraud. I've preserved a recording of my phone call with the company, as well as that forged contract you made with them. On the strength of your ability to make money, I won't pursue it this time, but I reserve the right to bring an action against you and Feng Kui at any time."

Hearing that Yu Hua wanted to sue Feng Kui, Huan Zixu couldn't hold back anymore. He slammed his hand on Yu Hua's desk. "I was the one who wanted to make money. None of this has anything to do with Feng Kui!"

"As someone aware of the circumstances, Feng Kui aided you in falsely obtaining the intermediary's fee. That makes him an accessory. He isn't innocent," Yu Hua said.

Huan Zixu was well aware that if he lost his temper again, he would only be dragging Feng Kui further into it. He took a deep breath, calmed down, and adapted to the circumstances. "You ought to have waited for the money to go through to my account before telling me. Then the fraud would have succeeded, and you would have had a greater threat against us. But the money hasn't gone through yet, so it's only an attempt. Even if you bring action, we'll only have to hire a good lawyer. We won't necessarily be faced with heavy penalties. You don't intend to go all the way, so I still have latitude to redeem the situation, right?"

Yu Hua gave Huan Zixu a stack of materials. "There's an e-commerce platform that wants you to do a promotional livestream on their channel. You can discuss the concrete agreement with them yourself, though you have to sign the agreement in the studio's name. After the profits reach our account, I'll distribute them. You won't get a percentage."

"Understood." His face serious, Huan Zixu accepted the contract. Before leaving, he glanced at You Zhengping.

The time he had arranged with the developer soon came. Huan Zixu had no money at his disposal. He was unilaterally violating the agreement. But the sales office also returned 20,000 yuan to Huan Zixu, which would be just enough for him to pay off his credit card.

After all this work, Huan Zixu hadn't bought his apartment, and he had lost 80,000 yuan. All the money he had put his sweat and blood into earning was gone.

The most angering thing was that when he left the sales office, he saw Yu Hua walk in with You Zhengping and, at the favorable price, buy the apartment Huan Zixu had just been forced to give up.

Seeing Huan Zixu so angry he was about to cough up blood, Feng Kui worriedly tugged on his shirt collar and said in concern, "A-Xu, I could—get a loan."

"No need." Through the window, Huan Zixu watched the sales office's manager personally receive Yu Hua, looking extremely deferential. Outside the window, Huan Zixu lightly narrowed his eyes.

While Yu Hua was waiting to sign the contract online, Huan Zixu hurried back to the studio, dragged Lian Yufan into his individual office, and asked, "Didn't you say that the company only had enough ready money to rent this office space for a month?"

"That's right," Lian Yufan said. "Today is the day you're supposed to make your down payment. Did you get your advance back?"

Lian Yufan had guessed that Huan Zixu would be unable to buy the apartment. From about the time the complex had blown up, it had been determined that that apartment was doomed not to belong to Huan Zixu.

Huan Zixu said heavily, "I suspect that there's a problem with either Yu Hua or You Zhengping."

"Oh? Really?" Lian Yufan had been casually sitting down. Hearing this, he straightened up in spite of himself, leaning back instinctively against his chair, quietly looking at Huan Zixu.

Huan Zixu said, "I have a reason. As an auxiliary policeman, isn't Yu Hua's husband taking too long a vacation? Also, would a normal person constantly laze around at his husband's company? You Zhengping seems more like he's temporarily working at our studio."

"Haha, no way." Lian Yufan's smile was increasingly stiff.

"We both understand Yu Hua's economic situation. Before, he was unbearably stingy. Why is he suddenly so liberal now? Why did he rent such an expensive office?" Huan Zixu asked.

"But I'm also certain that Yu Hua hasn't been replaced by a Destroyer. So has something happened to change him?" Lian Yufan said.

"Something did happen," Huan Zixu said. "I followed Yu Hua and You Zhengping before. I remember that while they appeared deeply in love, in reality, they didn't understand each other. They chose the wrong movies and snuck out to eat jianbing before meals, but now their

interactions have changed. You Zhengping seems to understand better what Yu Hua is thinking.”

“Then maybe they’ve had a talk and their relationship has improved?” Lian Yufan did his best to steer Huan Zixu away.

“No!” Huan Zixu said decisively. “Nothing must have changed. I suspect that You Zhengping is the one who’s been replaced. He’s controlling Yu Hua’s mind and infiltrating the studio, getting close to us, attacking us one by one!”

Lian Yufan: “...”

—

Author’s note:

Lian Yufan: Is Huan Zixu actually clever or not? In his guesses concerning Yu Hua, all along he’s had exactly the right line of thought but exactly the wrong conclusions. Isn’t this display too consistent?

## CHAPTER 111

Lian Yufan considered his wording, then said, “Behave yourself and do your job. Though you don’t have your special ability, with your brain, you can still provide a great deal of information to the Protection Organization. Adding in the meritorious service you rendered in taking down Destroyer 217, even if you can’t become a Protector, you can still be an outside staff member. You’ll have rank and pay, you can...”

“Can get by clinging to the Protection Organization’s coattails, life out my days at ease?” Huan Zixu coldly interrupted Lian Yufan.

“If you must take it like that, then yes,” Lian Yufan said.

Huan Zixu shook his head. “You seem to keep misunderstanding something. The Protection Organization as you see it is different from what I see. You belong to this world. You’ve grown up being cultivated by the Protection Organization. You’re one of their branches. The Protection Organization is your foundation. You supplement and complement each other. You’re a unified entity. You think of joining the Protection Organization as a good thing, but it’s different for me.

“I’ve survived in broken worlds where trusting the rules was tantamount to death. If I can’t control my own future, then I won’t feel secure.”

There was nothing Lian Yufan could say. Their experiences were different. Anything he said would be futile.

"I have in fact decided to survive in this world, but even so, I still have the power of self-determination," Huan Zixu said. "A stable residence is one of the basic safeguards in life. Money will determine mine and Feng Kui's future living standard. I won't be satisfied with the present situation."

Lian Yufan sighed almost inaudibly. "I'll help you get your advance back from the sales office. Though you did unilaterally violate the agreement, from the standpoint of feeling, they really did take too much. Don't get up to your tricks again. Work hard to earn money. With your abilities, the down payment won't be a problem."

"Whoever loses is in the wrong. I've lost to Yu Hua this time. I'll take the eighty thousand as my tuition cost." Some unnatural redness appeared in Huan Zixu's cheeks when he finished speaking. He bit his lip, turned his face away, and said, "But if I could get a bit back...that would be better."

Lian Yufan laughed lightly.

"I-I'll owe you a favor," Huan Zixu said, turning his back.

"There's no need for that," Lian Yufan said. "You bought that healing medicine from Destroyer 217 for me. That medicine far surpasses current human technology. It could fetch a sky-high price."

"Huh? Oh, that's right, I'd nearly forgotten about that. In that case, shouldn't you also split me a part of your 30% bonus? Then we'll be even." Huan Zixu turned quickly and began to bargain.

Lian Yufan had picked up his phone to call a friend to ask about the money. His finger paused. He looked at Huan Zixu and said, "You really are... I was just feeling sorry for you a second ago, and now I don't want to help you get the money back."

"I don't need your pity." Huan Zixu pointed at the phone. "Dial!"

Lian Yufan shook his head. He got in touch with a friend, hoping to get the contact information for the developer.

To get the advance back, it would probably do no good trying to go through the law, because the advance payment was a guarantee. If the payer violated the agreement, the payee had the right not to refund it. If the payee violated the agreement, the then payer could demand double the advance payment in compensation.

Of course, if Yu Hua hadn't been in the middle making difficulties, the developer wouldn't normally have taken so much money. This wasn't entirely fair, either.

Lian Yufan's friend did in fact know the developer and after reaching out to them called back: "No, there's something wrong, that apartment was sold to Huan Zixu himself. The developer



remembers it particularly. The name signed on the online form is Huan Zixu's. He's already bought the apartment, so how can he still want his money back?"

"What?!" Hearing this, Lian Yufan was all at sea. "What's going on?"

The developer had made an arrangement with their valued customer Yu Hua not to divulge information about Yu Hua's property, but Huan Zixu's apartment had been signed through an online agreement. An individual with an identity card could investigate it online. The two of them quickly went to the relevant site and investigated it; the name was in fact Huan Zixu's.

"What the hell." Huan Zixu looked at the online contract in disbelief.

They went to the sales office with the proof and found the saleswoman who had initially been responsible for Huan Zixu's apartment. The saleswoman saw that the truth couldn't be concealed and could only say, "Mr. Yu said that Director Huan is a valuable member of the company with exceptional abilities. He wanted to give Director Huan a surprise, so he bought the apartment in secret. The eighty-thousand yuan was playacting. When we saw how angry you were, we felt we were doing you a disservice, but Director Yu urged us to keep the secret at all costs so there could be a surprise. We didn't expect you to find out about it."

"No!" Huan Zixu said. "That can't conform with the rules. What power or right does he have to ask you to keep his secrets?"

"Well...that's our customer's private business, we can't divulge it," the saleswoman said politely.

Huan Zixu and Lian Yufan looked at each other helplessly. The two of them were privately calculating what kind of order could make the sales office willing to play along with Yu Hua. There really was an answer—the two floor of office space worth most of a hundred million.

Lian Yufan said, "I asked around. The same developer is responsible for that office building as for your new complex. The down payment on commercial office space is 50%. Over thirty million yuan. Where did he get that kind of money?"

"I suspect that You Zhengping is a mental type leveler. He controlled a rich person into giving them the money, bought the office space, then controlled Yu Hua to get close to us. He'll definitely use this apartment to draw me in when the time comes to make me spy on the Protection Organization, then use that to find out the black-cloaked man's whereabouts," Huan Zixu analyzed gravely.

When Lian Yufan heard this, he simply wanted to pry open Huan Zixu's head and have a look. He was fairly clever person. How could his reasoning go so far in the wrong direction?

"I know you don't believe that, but if we want evidence, there's an easy way," Huan Zixu said.

He quickly returned to the studio with Lian Yufan. As soon as they walked into the livestreaming room, they saw Zhen Li clinging to a rather cheerful, rather handsome man. Zhen Li was choked with sobs. The man was looking helpless. Seeing Lian Yufan walk over, he quickly raised his hands and aid, “I haven’t been bullying him!”

“Officer Cen? What are you doing here?” Lian Yufan asked.

This was in fact Cen Xiao. He said, “I’m off today. I came to see Captain You and President Zhen.”

“So he...” Lian Yufan glanced at Zhen Li, who was crying his makeup off.

Cen Xiao didn’t know either!

He had heard that since going on leave, You Zhengping had spent every day hanging around the studio. He had guessed that You Zhengping was unhappy about being suspended and had deliberately infiltrated the studio to take part in the work from another angle, saving the nation by circuitous paths. Cen Xiao was worried that You Zhengping was bashing his head against a brick wall, so after getting off work he had changed into civilian clothes and come to see him.

Cen Xiao had always been on good terms with Zhen Li. He knew Zhen Li didn’t have much money, so when he had time off, he always found an excuse to invite Zhen Li out to a big meal. Zhen Li was the studio’s president, so Cen Xiao hadn’t thought there would be much problem if he came for a visit.

The new office had been decorated. There was a mirror filling one wall. The other wall was a big screen where the livestream could be projected so the employees could see how they looked on the livestream and adjust their poses to look best on camera.

When Cen Xiao had first walked in, he had seen countless barrage comments floating over the big screen:

[A week ago it was pockmark makeup, three days ago it was clown makeup, yesterday it was bruise makeup, and today it’s red cheek makeup. Does Beauty Zhen not want to work anymore? He makes himself up to look so ugly every day.]

[Beauty Zhen, taking the advertising company’s money and using their high quality makeup to make yourself look so ugly—are you planning to scare the advertising companies off?]

[By using another uglyfying technique every day, are you telling me how beautiful a face without makeup is?]

[Bring back my original true beauty, I don’t want this Beauty Zhen!]

[Lately Yuan Luori has been using an iron hoop to keep his glasses welded to his head. If I can’t see him looking everywhere for his glasses, I’m not entertained.]

[Director Ha also hasn't been appearing on camera much. You've all lost your spirits after moving.]

[I think it's because the office before was so small and everyone was crowded into one room, so there were always real life scenes accidentally getting caught on camera. For example, Director Yu's demonic voice. For example, the security director's sturdy muscles when he picks up the marketing director. But now, there's nothing. There's only Beauty Zhen with his disfiguring makeup and Yuan Luori with his glasses that never fall off.]

[That livestream isn't natural enough. It's too scripted. It's no good.]

[To tell the truth, I want to see everyone crowded into one office like before, being forced to knuckle under by Director Yu.]

[Everyone says a man turns bad after getting money. I didn't think our Beauty Zhen would be like that, but even you've changed. Can I still believe in love?]

The barrage was relatively gentle. There was no cursing. But it still showed the fans' displeasure.

As a fan of the livestream, this was Cen Xiao's first time seeing the Zhen Li Studio getting so many bad reviews. He looked at Zhen Li's two drawn red cheeks; it was so ugly he nearly ran to the bathroom to wash his eyes. He asked, "What's been...going on with your makeup lately?"

As soon as Zhen Li saw Cen Xiao, he felt sadness welling up inside him. He remembered that You Zhengping and Cen Xiao were on the same squad, and all the grievance he felt surged up. He began to wail.

Cen Xiao quickly went up to comfort him. He picked up a makeup round to wipe Zhen Li's tears away. He also pledged that he was going to invite Zhen Li out to eat.

When Zhen Li heard this, he cried harder and harder. In the end he simply threw himself into Cen Xiao's arms to weep, crying out all the fear of these last few days of disfiguring makeup.

On the barrage, however, it was all positive reviews. Everyone was asking who this dashing young man in casual clothes was. Some people also began to @ Yuan Luori. The shippers were displaying their displeasure.

Cen Xiao looked helpless. He could only carefully pat Zhen Li on the back. He was well aware that Zhen Li had an optimistic disposition. He could find pleasure even in suffering. What must have happened to make him cry like this?!

For a time, Cen Xiao took no notice of appearing on the livestream camera. He began to comfort Zhen Li in a quiet voice. When Lian Yufan and Huan Zixu walked in the door, that was the scene they saw.

“You guys should...turn off the livestream!” Lian Yufan said, frowning.

Ignoring the livestream fans’ screams, he apologized and turned off the livestream. Then he asked Zhen Li, “Why are you crying?”

“Oh, it’s nothing, it’s just that the fans are unhappy with my recent transformation. I feel stressed out.” Zhen Li, sobbing, made up an excuse.

Zhen Li’s face was a mess. Cen Xiao used a makeup round with makeup remover on it to carefully wipe the makeup away for him.

“Thank you,” Zhen Li said, gasping. “I’ve made trouble for you by forcing you to appear on camera.”

“It’s all right. Hey, we even got on the popular searches together over the passenger on an electric scooter business,” Cen Xiao said.

Huan Zixu wasn’t in the mood to pay attention to Zhen Li’s tears. He asked, “Where is Yuan Luori?”

“Upstairs putting up the studio’s rules and regulations. What do you want him for?” Zhen Li said.

“I need Yuan Luori to help me check something,” Huan Zixu said obscurely after glancing at the “outsider” Cen Xiao. “I’ll go find him!”

Lian Yufan: “!!!”

Now it wasn’t just a question of You Zhengping’s identity being revealed. Cen Xiao was also here!

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Lian Yufan: Crap, crap, crap!

Cen Xiao: Shit, if Yuan Luori takes off his glasses, I’m a goner!

## CHAPTER 112

Huan Zixu’s wording had been obscure, but Cen Xiao instinctively felt that something was wrong. He had only dared to come visit Zhen Li and You Zhengping because he had heard Lian Yufan say that Yuan Luori’s glasses definitely wouldn’t fall off. Hearing that Huan Zixu wanted

Yuan Luori to check something for him, he immediately leapt up and said, “Since you’re all busy, I’ll get out of the way. I’ll be going.”

“Officer Cen?” Zhen Li was perplexed. “Are you in such a hurry to go? I wanted to invite you for dinner tonight.”

Lately he had received a lot of material assistance from Cen Xiao. He had wanted all along to treat Cen Xiao to dinner, but last time he had saved up some money, it had gone to buying Yu Hua the luxury Maldives tickets. Now he had finally gotten a bit of a bonus. After decorating, there was still some left, just right for treating Officer Cen in return.

“We’ll do it another day.” Instinct told Cen Xiao that if he didn’t leave now, there would be a big problem. He dropped a line and took to his heels.

Seeing him look faintly rushed, Huan Zixu frowned suspiciously, suddenly remembering that this person was You Zhengping’s comrade in arms.

The fleeing Cen Xiao had just run out of the livestream room when he bumped right into Yuan Luori, carrying the framed rules and regulations. Feng Kui was following behind Yuan Luori carrying an absurdly small hammer.

“Running so fast?” Huan Zixu also walked out of the livestream room. Seeing Feng Kui right outside the door, he cried out, “Feng Kui, the glasses!”

Feng Kui and Huan Zixu had cooperated with each other for hundreds of years. Listening to Huan Zixu’s instructions was Feng Kui’s instinct. Practically when Huan Zixu’s mouth had formed the words, before Feng Kui had heard his voice, his fingers rose. He tapped the air. Yuan Luori’s glasses, which were fixed to his head by an iron ring, fell off in response.

Before he could react, Yuan Luori saw the brilliant, dazzling fireball at the top of Cen Xiao’s head. He was instantly stunned. The rules and regulations he was holding fell down.

Luckily, there was a living being with sharp eyes and quick reflexes taking in the whole scene. Director Ha ran out of a corner like an arrow. Before the rules and regulations fell to the floor, it grabbed the edge of the frame with its teeth, preventing the frame from coming into contact with the ground.

“What do you see?” asked Huan Zixu, who had been closely watching Yuan Luori’s micro expressions the whole time.

Upon seeing this, Cen Xiao stopped running. He feebly let out a long breath.

“I-I, I saw...”

Yuan Luori stammered and couldn’t get anything out. But the parrot that longed for freedom flew over with a flapping of its wings and said, “Fireball, big lightbulb!”

Lian Yufan saw that there was no time to prevent this and shook his head. He stepped up to take the office rules and regulations from Director Ha. He glanced at it and saw that there were three rules written on it with a writing brush—

*Rule 1, The company's staff must strictly abide by the laws and regulations of this country;*

*Rule 2, They must not do anything that will harm the company or its staff;*

*Rule 3, Clever people may be victims of their own cleverness.*

He paid no attention to these rules. He tossed them aside and said to the blankly staring crowd, "This is a pretty big deal. Let's report it to our superiors."

Hearing the parrot, Huan Zixu had at first thought that Cen Xiao was a fire type Destroyer. He had just been thinking there was one plain-looking guy among the Protectors who was also a fire type. Of course, that wasn't important. The important thing was that if Cen Xiao was a Destroyer, why wasn't Lian Yufan, as a captain, hurrying to capture him?

"Fireball?" Zhen Li looked at Cen Xiao suspiciously. He stared into his eyes for a while, then suddenly saw the light. "It's you!"

He hadn't linked these two people together before. He hadn't had a single thought in that direction. Now he was a bit suspicious. When he looked closely at his eyes, he really did see some resemblances.

Cen Xiao nodded somewhat awkwardly. "It is me. I have my duty and had to maintain secrecy. I apologize."

"Oh. I was wondering why you would offer to take me home and ask me out to eat from time to time. I even thought..."

"Thought what?" Cen Xiao asked.

"It's nothing, I thought you were a good, warm-hearted policeman looking after a university student who had gone into business." Zhen Li blushed. "But it turns out you were monitoring me."

"There's already Lian Yufan to monitor you. Why would they need me?" Cen Xiao explained, "It's because we caught you and beat you up before, and you ignored all that to eat the poison bubbles for me at the amusement park. That's why I wanted to invite you out."

Listening to their conversation, Huan Zixu gradually understood what was going on. He asked Yuan Luori, "So Cen Xiao is that absolutely unremarkable-looking fire type Protector?"

“Yes.” Yuan Luori covered his eyes, resenting himself for being unable to wear contacts. If he could wear contact, he wouldn’t have caused such a big mess.

Yuan Luori quickly thought, if he could see anything at all, it meant that Yu Hua wasn’t at the office. It was still all right, it should...

Wait! If Cen Xiao was a Protector, then what about You Zhengping, who had apparently grown up with him, and who worked in the same auxiliary police squad?

Having thought this through, Yuan Luori was so scared he bit his finger. His teeth chattered incessantly.

Huan Zixu and Zhen Li realized this point at the same time he did. They said simultaneously, “He’s a Protector, so his captain You Zhengping is...”

Lian Yufan, just about to call to report to Director Xiao: “...”

He punched the wall and looked hatefully at Yuan Luori. “Can’t you weld those glasses on?”

“And you’re still going to tell me that Yu Hua isn’t a Protector?” Huan Zixu said, looking at Lian Yufan.

When Huan Zixu had just joined the studio, he had guessed that Yu Hua was a high level Protector. He had gotten a negative response from Lian Yufan then and was now bringing it up again. Lian Yufan couldn’t resist rolling his eyes up towards the ceiling. “He really isn’t.”

“But...” Huan Zixu tilted his head. He kept thinking that with just one more thing, just more tiny little thing, he would understand everything. But it seemed that he could never reach just that thing.

“Why do you keep getting things wrong today?” Lian Yufan asked, looking pained.

As he spoke, his eyes inadvertently fell on the rules and regulations propped against the wall. Lian Yufan miraculously ignored the chaos of people around him and picked up the little glass frame. His gaze swept over the three rules.

*Clever people may be victims of their own cleverness.* Lian Yufan looked at Huan Zixu. He looked at the writing. A spark flashed through his mind, but he couldn’t seem to catch that light.

Lian Yufan had a feeling that even if he reached out to grab it, that light would still slip between his fingers.

“Where’s Yu Hua?” Lian Yufan suddenly thought of the man who was at the center of this controversy but wasn’t on the scene.

Yuan Luori said, “He just gave me two sets of rules and regulations and to me and Feng Kui to hang them in the hallways. I don’t know where he’s gone now.”

“Where’s You Zhengping? We’ve been making such a fuss. Where did he go?” Huan Zixu asked.

They all looked at each other. No one knew where the two of them had gone.

Without discussion, they all ran upstairs. Yu Hua’s office door was wide open. There was no one inside. Five folders were neatly arranged on the desk.

On the folders were written the names of Zhen Li, Yuan Luori, Director Ha, Huan Zixu, and Feng Kui. There wasn’t one for Lian Yufan.

Everyone took the folder with their name on it. Director Ha exerted itself to take its folder with its teeth. When they opened the folders, they found that they were empty. There was no writing in them.

Everyone had a faint sense that it wasn’t that there wasn’t anything written there, it was that they couldn’t see the writing.

It was unusually quiet inside the office. Just then, Lian Yufan and Cen Xiao’s communications devices vibrated. The two of them checked their messages. The top one read: *The Source Project candidate has been determined. All Protectors and reserve duty Protectors in the Xuyang District report back to base immediately.*

Now no one cared about the blank folders anymore. Cen Xiao said, “The power of the Source Project is so vast. Who can bear the gathered power of all the world’s Protectors?”

Cen Xiao had a candidate in mind, and so did Lian Yufan. Their gazes met. Their expressions were equally complicated.

They all put down the folders and quickly gathered downstairs. A special car quickly came to take them to the base.

No one was in a mood to joke. The car was unusually silent. The armed car galloped the whole way. Soon they were at the base. At the door to the conference room, they joined with Luo Huai and the other members of the two squads. You Zhengping wasn’t with the group.

Lian Yufan knocked on the door of the conference room and said in a ringing voice, “Report—Protector Captains Lian Yufan and Luo Huai, Deputy Captain Cen Xiao, team members Zhen Li, Yuan Luori, Feng Kui, Xiao Ha, and eleven other squad members, as well as reserve duty Protector Huan Zixu are all assembled!”

“Come in,” Director Xiao’s voice said from inside.



Lian Yufan opened the door of the conference room first of all. He saw You Zhengping, wearing the handsome uncle mask, standing with his hands behind his back beside Director Xiao.

“Sit down,” Director Xiao said to everyone.

Everyone sat down in order, but You Zhengping remained standing.

Apart from Feng Kui, all the studio’s members examined everyone’s faces and thought that none of them looked like You Zhengping. There was only that standing handsome uncle, and all of them instinctively thought that such a powerful Protector who held natural law power ought to be in his forties or fifties. He couldn’t be as young as You Zhengping.

“Why aren’t you wearing your mask?” Director Xiao asked Cen Xiao.

Cen Xiao stood. “I was careless and revealed my identity in front of Yuan Luori.”

Director Xiao didn’t scold Cen Xiao. “When Yuan Luori’s special ability awakened, I knew that your identities couldn’t be hidden for long. Sit down.”

Yuan Luori lowered his head, not daring to look at the handsome uncle Protector. This person’s power was too awful. The natural law power would hurt his eyes.

Director Xiao said, “The leaders of Huaxia’s Protection Organization have spent several days in consultation with those of other countries. They had determined to restart the Source Project. Each country has gone through careful selection. Finally, they have determined that the Source Project candidate will be Captain You, You Zhengping.”

Since Director Xiao was no longer planning to hide his identity, You Zhengping simply took off his mask and nodded to the members of the studio.

*Thump. Thump.* Zhen Li and Yuan Luori slid to the ground. Cen Xiao wanted to pull them up, but it seemed that their knees were rooted to the floor. He couldn’t budge them.

Yuan Luori’s parrot lay belly up on the table, loudly calling, “God! Take me away.” Then it closed its eyes and looked serene.

Zhen Li, meanwhile, got out a knife. With tears covering his face, he said, “Do I still have time to disfigure my face?”

“What are you two doing?” Director Xiao lost his temper with these two willful idiots. “I haven’t finished my announcement yet. Is You Zhengping’s identity such a shock to you? Get up!”

The two of them had softened into piles of mud. No matter what, they couldn’t get up. Lian Yufan helped Cen Xiao prop them up and put them in chairs.

“Director Xiao, You Zhengping is a captain who has always fought shoulder to shoulder with us. So is Yu Hua also a Protector?” Huan Zixu asked, not letting go.

“He isn’t a Protector,” said Director Xiao.

“But he...”

Before Huan Zixu had voiced his suspicion, a boundless power suddenly descended from the heavens, pressing on each person’s chest. Everyone was instantly breathless. In front of this power, they couldn’t even lift a finger!

## CHAPTER 113

It was as though everyone’s hearts had been tightly squeezed by an invisible hand. They could only struggle to beat a bit when that hand released slightly.

Most frightening of all, this frightening power incomprehensible to the average person was still constantly increasing. Perhaps the unimaginable power had no limit.

It was as though a mountain was pressing down on everyone’s bodies and minds. It was hard to breathe. Their hearts beat weakly, their bodies trembled uncontrollably, and their hands were as cold as a corpse.

Just the pressure of the power made them lose the ability to move. In front of such a fearful being, even assembling all the world’s Protectors’ power into the Source Project wouldn’t make up one thousandth of it.

When everyone’s endurance came to a boundary point, the pressure on them lightened. It seemed as though the power ascended into the sky, letting everyone’s hearts relax. Director Xiao’s communications device instantly sounded. He pressed the call key and heard the anxious voice of the dispatcher on the other end: “Director, in all of Huaxia... No, in the whole world, all the special ability users simultaneously felt two powers whose value is impossible to estimate. Protection Organizations abroad have used their instruments to determine that one of these powers came from space, while the source of the other is in the Xuyang District!”

Director Xiao had hung up the call when a soldier’s urgent report came from outside: “Reporting to the director—outside...there are unusual phenomena in the sky!”

The young soldier couldn’t describe what was happening outside. Director Xiao and the others ignored their discomfort and immediately rushed out of the base.

While going out the door, Yuan Luori was practically groping around to find his way forward. He and the parrot seemed to be blind. Next to him, Zhen Li’s legs had gone weak, and he was having trouble staying upright. He was being held up by Cen Xiao. Luckily, Luo Huai, who always seemed invisible, noticed Yuan Luori’s unusual state and came over to support him and pick up the parrot.

When he touched Yuan Luori, Luo Huai's expression changed slightly. Through his skin, he sensed the indescribable terror in the depths of Yuan Luori's heart.

"Don't be scared," Luo Huai comforted quietly. "The Protection Organization isn't as weak as you think."

Luo Huai could only sense Yuan Luori's deeply hidden terror. This was an emotion that Yuan Luori couldn't control; it was transmitting outward. Luo Huai didn't use his special ability to test his memories, and he didn't understand what Yuan Luori was so afraid of.

Yuan Luori, who could see nothing but darkness, leaned close to Luo Huai. At this moment, he wished desperately for what his eyes were seeing to be wrong.

The location of the base had been revealed during the battle with the Destroyers. Such a large battle couldn't be covered up, so Director Xiao no longer hid it from the studio's staff. After the battle, Zhen Li and the others were no longer knocked out going to the base. They went there and back wide awake.

Now there was also no need to restrict everyone to the base. Director Xiao raised his head slightly, and a path opened through the lake above the base. They took an elevator to the summit of the base and boarded a helicopter.

The helicopter flew up into the sky, and the parted lake waters returned to their original position, covering the location of the base once more.

Apart from Zhen Li, this was everyone's first time seeing the full view of the base. Huan Zixu looked at the tall dikes on either side of the lake, which far surpassed those of ordinary lakes, and understood.

These dikes weren't for guarding against high tide. They were there so that in an emergency, Director Xiao could part the lake waters and turn the underwater base into a battle fortress that could provide fire support for the Protectors.

If each district had a heavily armed base like this that was built to match the ability of its leader, as well as a master like Director Xiao, whose power could be compared to that of a leveler with over two hundred levels, and adding in the Source Project, which could assemble all the Protectors' power, then it was no wonder that this world had held out so long against the System's attacks.

This world didn't rely on individual strength to defeat invaders. It was a group. There were matching military bases built near crowded cities with armed forces to support the Protectors. At critical moments, ordinary soldiers could also raise their weapons to provide assistance.

With such a standardized system of combat, even if natural law grade masters came to this world, they would still be sitting ducks.

This was a world created for protection.

Everyone sat in the helicopter looking at the sky outside. They saw a dense covering of black clouds. The atmospheric pressure was extremely low. Occasionally a bird flew a little too high, bumped an invisible barrier, and instantly went falling, then quickly roused when it hit the surface of the lake and went flying up again, as if it hadn't just been electrocuted.

It was past 6 PM. The sun hadn't set yet, but it was shrouded in black clouds. Lightning flashed from time to time through the dark clouds hiding the sky, like silver dragons swimming through the clouds.

All the special ability users could feel what terrifying thunder and lightning were hidden in the black clouds.

"These aren't naturally forming thunderclouds," Director Xiao said into his communications device, his expression extremely grim. "Check all flight paths in the area and ground all planes about to take off. Find a safe place for those already in the air to land."

The answer came: "Director Xiao, the airport just sent word. Several planes that ought to have been within fifty kilometers of the airport landed there. The personnel on the planes say that they weren't controlling their planes. Some mysterious power wrapped the planes up and helped them escape the thunderclouds and land safely at the airport."

When this communication was cut off, another message came in: "Director Xiao, several of Huaxia's port cities just experienced a tsunami, but there were no casualties. The cruise ships out at sea were taken to nearby ports by the waves. No one was killed. The personnel on the ships say that they were protected by the god of the sea."

"Director Xiao, several cities have experienced earthquakes. There were no human casualties and no property damage!"

"Director Xiao..."

The information came in ceaselessly. There were constant natural disaster—landslides, sinkholes, typhoons—but the areas tested by disaster experienced no casualties.

Unlike the panicked humans, the animals were unflustered. The thrill-seeking bird that had narrowly escaped electrocution was once again flying among the clouds. It circled the electric currents like silver dragons as if it was a storm petrel meeting a tempest.

Compared to that bird, the parrot Luo Huai was holding was an utter coward. It lay there half dead, its wings limp, whispering, "It's here, It's here..."

"What's here?" Director Xiao knew that this parrot was extremely intelligent. He looked at Yuan Luori, whose face was white.

“The System.” Yuan Luori looked towards the sky. His eyes were hollow. No one knew what he was seeing. They heard him say, “I didn’t know before how powerful the System was. Now I’ve seen. It’s strong, very strong, even stronger than the great master.”

Everyone knew that Yuan Luori worshipped the black-cloaked man to the point of believing that the air around him was sacred. If it could make him say such a thing, what he was seeing must be truly awful.

“Stop looking at it.” Luo Huai covered Yuan Luori’s eyes with his hand.

“Someone is protecting us,” Director Xiao said. “Who is doing it? Who has the power to precisely protect each person in the whole world? How can he consider each individual, even a bird?”

This wasn’t a strange scene to those present. Before, when the Destroyers had launched a joint attack on the Xuyang District, everyone had experienced this feeling of being protected.

“It’s a rule.” You Zhengping’s expression was extremely calm. There was a keen clarity in his eyes. “‘A good ruler bestows rewards and spares the people from disaster. He loves his people like children, protects them like the heavens, shelters them like the earth<sup>31</sup>.’ It’s just a rule like that.”

“A rule...” Lian Yufan looked at Huan Zixu. It was as though he had remembered something, but he also couldn’t quite remember it.

“Since the Xuyang District battle, the Destroyers have disappeared all over the world. Not a single one has been found,” Director Xiao said. “The sudden peace made the World Protection Organization feel a sense of crisis. We thought the System was gathering its forces, and next time, it would certainly launch a fierce attack over the whole world. That was why we restarted the Source Project.”

Director Xiao was right. The power everyone had just felt that rendered them unable to breathe was the System.

The System didn’t invade the world slowly like the levelers, who hid their identities, observed the world’s surroundings, and sought the location of their targets, only attacking cautiously when they had secretly investigated the movements of Zhen Li and the others.

The System didn’t move lightly. When It acted, It was like a grinding force. It didn’t aim against a single person; It used its terrible power to consume an entire world.

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<sup>31</sup> Quote from Han dynasty scholar Liu Xiang’s New Prefaces (新序). Original: 良君将赏善而除民患，爱民如子，盖之如天，容之若地。

The pressure of the System's approach alone had been unbearable to everyone just now. If the power of the rule hadn't protected everyone in time and kept the power of the System from entering their world, they would all have died silently under the pressure of that power.

It wasn't that the World Protection Organization wasn't prepared for this. But even though they had made all kinds of preparations, they were still unable to directly meet this power that was hundreds or thousands of times more powerful than all of them.

If not for the black-cloaked man stepping in, they would have...

"Who is the black-cloaked man?" Huan Zixu whispered. "How did he become powerful enough to match the System in battle as a leveler?"

Huan Zixu had voiced everyone's thoughts. Director Xiao and the others all involuntarily looked at You Zhengping.

You Zhengping didn't speak. The communications device on the helicopter sounded again: "Director Xiao, we've determined the source of the power protecting the world. It's in the Xuyang District's — — Estate."

The — — Estate was where You Zhengping lived. Director Xiao glanced at You Zhengping and ordered the helicopter pilot to head towards the source of the power immediately.

The pilot was a well-trained soldier. Despite being panicked, he strictly executed Director Xiao's order. A helicopter was faster than a car. It only took them half an hour to reach the estate where You Zhengping lived. It was precisely 7 PM.

The helicopter landed on the roof of the building. Director Xiao and the others took energy probes and climbed down from the roof in harnesses, constantly fixing the position of that power.

Finally, Lian Yufan was the first to find the precise location of the power. He used his power, broke the window of a residence, and took everyone into the living room.

Seeing the broken window, You Zhengping, Zhen Li, Yuan Luori, and Director Ha all twitched, looking pained as they followed the others through the window.

Including Director Xiao, within three seconds, twenty people, one dog, and one parrot came rustling through the window to stand in the center of the living room. Too many people made the 180 square meter apartment seem crowded.

It was dinner time. This residence had a round table with space for twenty people laid out in the living room. Huan Zixu thought that this table resembled the one in the studio's conference room, but he couldn't be completely sure.

There were many dishes laid out on the table, all steaming. They had clearly just been made.

Cen Xiao and the other members of You Zhengping's squad sniffed, thinking that the food smelled familiar. No, the layout of this residence was also familiar!

The energy probe they were using only showed a position in space. There were only coordinates. Cen Xiao looked at the coordinates. On the probe, he entered You Zhengping's estate, building, unit, and precise apartment number into it. He got remarkably similar coordinates.

The internet TV in the living room was turned on. The TV was playing the talent show "Idol's Light," which a certain channel had broadcast at 12 PM that day. When everyone entered the living room, Yuan Luori, the trainee sent over by the "ZL Studio," was performing on stage.

Outside the window, thunderclouds rolled. The cloud layers roiled like boiling water. But inside was full of aroma, and the home cooking laid out on the table, while not especially exquisite, was very appetizing, and made everyone's thoughts turn from pre-battle nerves to the comfortable home.

Yu Hua walked out of the kitchen, carrying a frying pan. He wasn't surprised at all when he saw everyone. The frying pan was suspended above his hand. In the pan was a fragrant fish, fried golden on both sides. The oil in the pan was still sizzling.

"Is everyone here?" Yu Hua smiled faintly. "Since you're all here, you may as well stay for dinner. I only have one dish left to make."

"You...you...you..." Lian Yufan pointed to the fish Yu Hua was holding, looking like a sleepwalker.

"This?" Yu Hua said indifferently. "I'm just saving on electricity. After all, I've always been stingy."

—

Author's note:

Yu Hua: What are you looking at? The table came from the office. The electricity is turned off. I used special abilities to cook this meal. After all, my unchanging persona from start to finish has been the virtuous wife.

## CHAPTER 114

In that moment, Lian Yufan thought of many things.

He thought of some months ago when he had received his superior's order to go to the Xuyang District and investigate whether Yu Hua had been replaced by a Destroyer. Since the person

responsible for the Xuyang District, You Zhengping, was a family member of the involved individual and needed to avoid suspicion, Lian Yufan had to accept this assignment.

Lian Yufan had carefully compared Yu Hua's behavior before and after. He had firmly believed that this person was a Destroyer and had carried out a minute investigation of him. He had searched Yu Hua's home, copied his diary, taken the phone hidden under his bed.

He thought how after becoming a spy in the studio, he had still been unwilling to let go. He had tested Yu Hua's bottom line many times. He had been incessantly testing him since their first formal meeting.

He thought how he had protested against Yu Hua countless times at work, how he had accused Yu Hua of being cold-blooded and stingy, of oppressing the staff and having double standards. He had wanted to threaten Yu Hua and inform against him.

He thought how the black-cloaked man had repeatedly aided the Protection Organization in capturing Destroyers and had healed him. He thought that in the depths of his heart, he actually felt a bit of gratitude towards the black-cloaked man, as well as a hidden bit of admiration for his power. He had thought that the black-cloaked man was a kind-hearted person of lofty moral character who was willing to abide by the social order and protect the common people.

He thought of how You Zhengping had hesitatingly asked him whether he still suspected Yu Hua. Lian Yufan's thought at the time had been that if Yu Hua had superhuman powers, he could ascend into the sky to stand level with the sun, press all humanity into making money for him.

He thought of how in his investigation, he had found that Yu Hua's nature was warped; that he had an extremely powerful desire for control; that he longed to lock You Zhengping away and not let anyone see him. After learning this, he had dangled himself in front of Yu Hua's eyes wearing You Zhengping's pants.

He thought of how he had taken an entirely dim view of You Zhengping and Yu Hua's marriage. How he had vowed countless times that a marriage between a Protector and an ordinary person couldn't be happy. That they would be divorced sooner or later.

He thought...

Time was indeed only a sensation. In an instant, Lian Yufan recalled his entire brief life. He had thought before that his life was long and tormented. Now he thought it was short and pitiful. You could see it all in an instant. Faced with Yu Hua's smile, hiding endless complicated emotions in its politeness, Lian Yufan's instincts told him that he only had one opportunity to speak. If he spoke wrongly now, some unknown fate would be waiting for him.

What should he say? What *could* he say? The awful power and oppressive force of this person were constantly warning Lian Yufan that this was a person with immense power. If he turned



over his hand, he could hold up the sky, with his own power protect the whole of humanity; with another turn of his hand, he could pulverize the earth and create a catastrophe that would destroy the whole world.

What should he say at this moment to seize his only chance to get out alive?

Lian Yufan looked at the sizzling, fragrant fish Yu Hua was holding. He clenched his fists. A stab of pain awakened his intellect.

He had a piece of glass in his hand. He had grabbed it when he broke the window. This was his habit. Because of his special ability, Lian Yufan always automatically collected bits of broken things in preparation for a following battle.

Now, that piece of glass brought a sliver of light to the vast and trackless way ahead of Lian Yufan.

Lian Yufan seized that bit of light. One-handed, he tossed the piece of glass towards the broken window and used his special ability. The shards of glass scattered throughout the room flew back to the window. The window was instantly as good as new.

“It was rude of me to enter by breaking the window. I’ve repaired it.” Lian Yufan himself didn’t know where he got this composure and courage. Probably his reason had removed all of his feelings, leaving them floating outside of him, reason occupying his mind. He calmly said, “I’ve cleaned and disinfected those pants and placed them in the company’s wardrobe. I was waiting for an opportunity to return them to you.”

“Really?” Yu Hua casually released the frying pan, which returned to the kitchen range along with the fish.

He felt around in empty space and found a pair of gray pants with a stain on the pant leg. Yu Hua turned them over and over carefully, then said in satisfaction, “They really were in the company’s cabinet, and they’ve been disinfected. You didn’t lie.”

These pants had been through a long and arduous journey of innumerable hardships before finally returning in perfect condition to their home. Under Yu Hua’s control, they obediently floated into the washing machine. Though Lian Yufan had already washed them, Yu Hua was still going to wash them first. After all, the pants had come back smelling of the outside.

At this moment, the grievances touched off by a pair of pants were finally resolved. Yu Hua waved a hand again. Lian Yufan’s personal glass cup from the studio appeared on the coffee table. Yu Hua personally poured Lian Yufan a cup of tea and passed it to him. “Please have some tea.”

When the word “please” left Yu Hua’s mouth, Lian Yufan’s floating feelings returned to his body. He felt ice cold all over. Only the glass cup of tea he had accepted in his absent-minded condition was warm.

Lian Yufan rejoiced in his reason as never before, rejoiced that he had previously investigated Yu Hua in depth and knew Yu Hua's nature. At the critical juncture, he could draw a perfect equals sign between the omnipotent black-cloaked man and the studio's conscienceless Director Yu Hua and immediately find an ideal plan for resolution.

*First, fix the window, compensating for the loss and at the same time using my special ability to remind Yu Hua that my ability repaired your phone for you, and you may have broken that yourself.*

*Second, personally return the pants, settling past grievances.*

Performing these two things in order let Lian Yufan keep his life. He had a feeling of having been resurrected.

He absolutely didn't mention the favor of the black-cloaked man saving his life twice. It wasn't that he didn't think of it, it was that reason told him that if he mentioned it, then the man in front of him wearing the apron would be a lofty deity. They had never before had any friendship to speak of. But if he mentioned daily trivialities, the basic necessities of life, then this would be a true living person.

Lian Yufan accepted tea first. He didn't dare to sit down. Instead, he looked at Director Xiao.

Unexpectedly, Director Xiao's expression was incomparably calm. It wasn't that he was relying on his experience to pretend to be unperturbed. It was a relieved sense of "so that's it after all."

Yu Hua felt around in the air again, and Director Xiao's always ready thermos mug appeared in his hand. This mug should have been inside the base, on Director Xiao's desk.

Yu Hua poured tea and politely passed it to Director Xiao. "Hello, sir. My Xiao You can be hot-tempered. Thank you for your care and instruction all these years. As his family member, I take Xiao You's place honoring you with a cup."

Director Xiao composedly took the thermos mug and said with feeling, "So it is you."

Yu Hua didn't speak. He only smiled. Then he led Director Xiao to a seat at the oval table. "Please take a seat."

The older, the wiser—Director Xiao steadily took a seat and said to Yu Hua, "At first I only thought it was strange that all the studio's personnel were special ability users, your husband and your husband's friends were all Protectors, and yet you had absolutely no idea. Was it that you were too insensitive, or were you turning a blind eye the whole time? Judging from your disposition, it seemed impossible that you would be careless."

"But owing to the perfect outcome of the investigation conducted against you, and the extremely useful excuse of the psychological problems, even if you were an attentive person,

you may still have been deliberately turning a blind eye in order to preserve the surroundings you were comfortable in. So I didn't suspect you too much.

"Right up until even the husky displayed a special ability. Then, apart from you, the whole studio was composed of unusual people. That was when I began to feel something was wrong.

"You Zhengping is an outstanding Protector. I understand him. He wouldn't willingly conceal information from the organization for the sake of some strange black-cloaked man. Unless the black-cloaked man's true identity was some person he would be unable to give up, and revealing his identity would create great harm to both the black-cloaked man and the organization. Then, caught between a rock and a hard place, he would choose to keep silent."

Then, because of his understanding of You Zhengping, Director Xiao had fixed on Yu Hua and had personally sent people to investigate Yu Hua once more. He had stressed investigating any change in Yu Hua at that point in time fifteen years ago when that enormous power had appeared and then disappeared.

Yu Hua's performance was perfect, but he had still left traces. And now Yu Hua had just bought office space. His money had been in a foreign account with an extremely high degree of secrecy. If he didn't use that money, the Protection Organization couldn't find it. But when he bought the office space, it was fairly easy to trace and inspect the source of that money.

"Once you bought that office space, I was completely certain of your identity," Director Xiao said. "In the final analysis, we only discovered your identity because you were willing to reveal it."

Despite being aware of Yu Hua's identity, Director Xiao had still had many questions. But he hadn't asked. He had held back, waiting for Yu Hua's explanation.

"Thank you for your understanding towards me and Xiao You, sir," Yu Hua said in sincere gratitude. He had been very happy during his extended leave.

Yu Hua glanced at Lian Yufan, and at Luo Huai, whom he had no grievance against. He coolly said, "What are you standing for? Please sit down."

Lian Yufan and Luo Huai didn't make a sound. With their squad members, they sat at Director Xiao's left hand. Then silently lowered their heads and stared at the food on the table. It truly smelled delicious!

Yu Hua's cooking couldn't match that of a professional chef, but his food evoke people's longing for home. It had a comforting and peaceful feeling.

Director Xiao, along with Luo Huai, Lian Yufan, and their squad members, sat down steadily, but the others didn't dare.

Yu Hua pulled over You Zhengping and quietly said, “Go have a look at the food for me. If it’s ready, turn off the flame and bring it to the table.”

*Turn off the flame? Turn off what flame? You didn’t have any flame on, did you? The apartment’s electricity has been off all along. The TV, the wifi, the air-conditioning, and the kitchen are all running on your power. Where is the on-off switch?* Everyone looked at You Zhengping, not knowing what means he was supposed to use to control the power beneath the frying pan.

You Zhengping glanced at Cen Xiao and the rest of the squad huddling together and gave them a sympathetic look, then ducked into the kitchen and left them to it.

“This isn’t your first time coming to my house. What are you standing there for? Sit down,” Yu Hua said.

His attitude was as usual, but Cen Xiao and the squad didn’t dare to sit.

When it came to understanding the melancholy husbands’ love story, if Cen Xiao and the squad claimed to be second, no one would dare to claim to be first.

They had followed them starting from the blind date. For every bit of the blind date, the first date, the proposal, the wedding, the honeymoon, and daily life, they had been there all the way. They hadn’t missed a bit. In order to follow in the melancholy husbands’ footsteps, Cen Xiao and the squad had arranged full-coverage shifts. No matter what day You Zhengping and Yu Hua had a date, there would be someone to follow.

When the melancholy husbands took a walk in the park, they tailed them in secret; when the melancholy husbands ate at a high-class restaurant, they were outside the window keeping an eye; when the melancholy husbands booked a room at a hotel for the night, they—they had their principles, they didn’t observe, ahem.

Cen Xiao remembered how he had warned You Zhengping in front of the “unconscious” Yu Hua not to get too involved with the black-cloaked man and treat Yu Hua better. He wanted to use his special ability to turn himself into the brightest firework in the night sky.

“Why won’t you sit?” Yu Hua went towards them one step after another. The six of them involuntarily clutched each other in a circle with Cen Xiao at the center, like penguins sticking together for warmth in a winter wind.

Seeing Yu Hua come closer and closer, the squad members couldn’t take the pressure. They all pushed Cen Xiao forward so he would face the tempest of Yu Hua.

“Well...” Cen Xiao struggled to arrange his wording. “Though we’ve always joined in your dating and married life, precisely because we joined in, we’ve witnessed yours and You Zhengping’s feelings with our own eyes. Captain You really, really loves you. He’s always talking to us about you. He talks about you so much my ears are growing calluses. Even

though you're the black-cloaked man, if-if you dare to do anything to upset Captain You, we... we'll..."

He really couldn't say the words "we'll never let you off," because there was really nothing they could do to him.

"If you dare to bully Captain You, we'll come to your house to freeloader every day and annoy you to death!" one of the underlings daringly picked up Cen Xiao's unfinished sentence.

"Then I wouldn't dare. I'm terrified of you bunch of third wheels." Yu Hua's smile, which had been falsely floating on the surface, softened a little. "Hurry and sit down, I made everything you guys like to eat."

Cen Xiao and the squad at last felt the pressure lift from them. They whizzed to the dining table and sat down at Director Xiao's right hand.

All of the Protectors had sat down. The studio members were still standing in place, not moving a muscle.

Yu Hua looked at them. With a fake smile, he said, "I don't have such a large table here at home, so I brought over the studio's conference table. Actually, when I moved the table, I also took along the acupuncture mat."

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Author's note:

Question: Please translate the following line: "Lian Yufan himself didn't know where he got this composure and courage. Probably his reason had removed all of his feelings, leaving them floating outside of him, reason occupying his mind."

Answer: Lian Yufan was scared out of his mind and only had a bit of wit left to preserve his life.

## CHAPTER 115

Everyone looked where Yu Hua was pointing and saw that next to the oval table, at the base of the living room wall, was a strip of acupuncture mat.

Zhen Li and Yuan Luori barely hesitated. They reflexively executed sliding kneels towards the acupuncture mat. This was the move they practiced most during the livestreams. Their postures were perfect, their movements skilled.

But even faster than them was the husky with speed powers. It took one leap and flew over their heads, rushing to land first on the acupuncture mat. Owing to the limitations of its body, Director Ha simply lay down on the acupuncture mat to display that it was prostrating itself.

The acupressure mat wasn't big to start with. With the husky occupying more than half of it, Zhen Li and Yuan Luori couldn't occupy the high ground. They both looked vexed. Luckily, the parrot made a good showing on Yuan Luori's behalf. The parrot stepped onto the husky's head to indicate that it was there, too.

The Protectors sitting at the oval table looked at Zhen Li and Yuan Luori's expressions. How could they still not know that they had been aware of the situation? They instantly had a feeling of being betrayed.

"You two..." Lian Yufan pointed at the two people kneeling precisely on the acupressure mat. He thought, he was the person who had recommended Zhen Li to join the Protectors, but the candid and simple Zhen Li turned out to be the biggest liar!

"Zhen Li, do you still remember what I said the first time I met you?" Yu Hua said to the kneeling people.

"I don't dare to forget a word. Which one do you mean?" Zhen Li asked.

"I said that I don't have that sort of feudal hobby," Yu Hua said loftily.

Zhen Li and Yuan Luori totteringly stood up. Director Ha also slowly climbed to its feet and crouched silently to one side, presenting itself as a law-abiding husky.

"But I don't know whether the Protectors have any hobbies of that nature. Right?" Yu Hua said.

Zhen Li and Yuan Luori: "..."

The two of them leaned against each other and looked timidly at Director Xiao and the other Protectors. Zhen Li's expression was woebegone. He quietly said, "How about you eat sitting down, and we eat kneeling, and Director Ha uses a dog bowl."

"Enough, get up," Director Xiao said. "Such a strong power—all it would take was mental control so you two couldn't say a word. There was nothing you could do. Anyway, one of you is a full Protector, and the other is a Protector in his trial period. With that capacity, even if you die, you still have to die standing up. Kneeling is an embarrassment!"

"Yes, sir!" Zhen Li stood up happily and politely said to Director Xiao, "I pledge to defend the dignity of the Protectors with my life!"

Thereupon he got up, sat down beside Cen Xiao, and took a bowl and chopsticks for himself.

Cen Xiao: "..."

He looked closely at Zhen Li's beautiful, stupid face and no matter what couldn't imagine that this kind and honest harmless face had been lying to them all along.

Yuan Luori and Director Ha also totteringly stood up. Yuan Luori sat next to Zhen Li, while Director Ha smartly crouched at Lian Yufan's feet. After all, Lian Yufan had been the one to train it at the beginning.

Lian Yufan stroked the dog's head. He was pleased to see Director Ha come to him. He thought that the dog was the only honest one of all the studio's members. A dog really was a man's best friend, and petting an animal's fur really could contribute to stress relief.

Seeing Lian Yufan slowly petting its head, Director Ha comfortably narrowed its eyes. Yu Hua gave a cold laugh. "Let me make an introduction. This Director Ha is Destroyer 192. The last time it switched bodies it accidentally ended up in a dog's body."

Lian Yufan's hand stiffened. The scene once more became exceedingly awkward.

All the people at the table had taken part in the operation to encircle and suppress Destroyer 192, including You Zhengping, Zhen Li, Yuan Luori, and Director Xiao! After all, of all the members of the studio, Destroyer 192 had caused the greatest damage. He had nearly destroyed a building, had used Junjun and three other innocent children as hostages, had blown up one of You Zhengping's arms, and had shattered Lian Yufan's spine.

Even Luo Huai had only been transferred to the Xuyang District because of Destroyer 192's appearance.

At this, even the formerly composed Director Xiao hit the table and stood, glaring at the seemingly harmless husky.

Director Ha saw the twenty-eight eyes of the fourteen protectors looking down on it from their superior vantage points. It gave a quiet howl and lay down, covering its face with two paws.

Cen Xiao looked at Director Ha, then glanced beside him at Zhen Li and Yuan Luori with their heads down, staring fixedly at their bowls and chopsticks. He understood. His face full of a complicated expression, he said, "Did you two also know about this?"

Zhen Li and Yuan Luori nodded their heads in chorus.

The Protectors felt pained. The two members of the studio who seemed the stupidest had been hiding so many secrets.

"Is there anything you don't know?" Cen Xiao said, looking at Zhen Li in disappointment.

Zhen Li quietly said, "I didn't know that Officer Cen was one of the people who beat me up at the beginning, and I didn't know that Officer You was the person who arrested me."

"...Our positions were reversed then, weren't they?" Cen Xiao met Zhen Li's eyes a little awkwardly.

Zhen Li also looked at him in some disappointment. “I thought that the Officer Cen who kept inviting me out to eat was the only normal person around me, an auxiliary policeman who didn’t have a high salary but was very warm-hearted. After I became a Protector, I wanted to work hard to render meritorious service and then quietly ask our superiors whether I could arrange for you to take a test to become a full member of the police.”

Cen Xiao said, “That’s the nature of my work. I have my duty.”

Zhen Li said, “I was compelled. It was a matter of life and death.”

Their beautiful illusions had shattered simultaneously.

Along with theirs, Lian Yufan’s were also shattered. He was on his guard against heaven and earth and Yu Hua. After so long as an undercover agent at the studio, any advertising company representative that came near the studio looked like a Destroyer to him. But he hadn’t suspected Director Ha. From beginning to end, he had thought it was a good dog, a heroic dog whose special ability had awoken in a dangerous moment to protect Junjun. But it turned out to be the one who had caused the most damage to the Xuyang District. Because of it, the central park had had to close for repairs!

“Wooo.” Director Ha rubbed Lian Yufan’s leg with its head, looking like it was begging for forgiveness.

Director Xiao, who had been through great storms, pressed down on his temples and said to Yu Hua, “Did you awaken its special ability, or was it the world law? Also, its speed ability is completely different from Destroyer 192’s previous ability.”

Yu Hua said, “Destroyer 192 lost his body, and his soul merged completely with a local husky. The special ability it displays is a sled dog’s instinct. When it obtained the world law’s acknowledgment, its special ability awakened for the sake of protecting Junjun.”

“The black-cloaked man got rid of Destroyer 192 then. I thought he had died,” Director Xiao said, pointing out the crux of the matter.

Yu Hua held his arm and smiled in a constrained way. “That would have been a pity.”

The place where he held his arm was just where You Zhengping’s arm had been broken by Destroyer 192.

The room instantly went deathly still. The squad members who had been quietly talking amongst themselves instantly didn’t dare to even breathe too loudly. They looked at Yu Hua with horrified expressions.

Just in time, You Zhengping came out carrying the fried fish. “The food’s all ready. Why are you all looking at me?”



As soon as he walked out of the kitchen, his colleagues looked at him with a...heroic expression, as though beholding a martyr.

“Nothing, nothing.” Cen Xiao and the squad shook their heads at the same time. They had watched You Zhengping and Yu Hua dating from the beginning. They hadn’t noticed that Yu Hua had such a vengeful disposition. They...

They were lucky to still be alive, Cen Xiao and the others thought simultaneously.

You Zhengping put the fragrant fried fish in front of Cen Xiao and said, “There, I know you like fried fish. Yu Hua made it specially for you.”

Cen Xiao looked at the blackened thing on the plate and thought that the fish hadn’t looked like this before. When Yu Hua had brought it out, it had been golden on both sides. How did it turn into charcoal when you were just sent to keep an eye on the fire? Did Yu Hua make this fish specially for me, or did he specially let me have a look at what it was originally like and then leave the fish to Captain You?

Cen Xiao saw that You Zhengping could still maintain a normal expression at this moment and had to sigh about what a truly unusual person You Zhengping was. He had thought at first that with Yu Hua hiding the black-cloaked man identity for so long, it amply showed the depth of his thinking; it really wasn’t a good match. But now, looking at You Zhengping, who could be so perceptive but who at times seemed blind, he suddenly thought that he and Yu Hua were perhaps made for each other.

Director Xiao glanced at this subordinates with all their varying expressions, and Director Ha, who didn’t even dare to wag its tail and had its eyes closed waiting for death. He finally spoke. “There’s a traditional point of view that believes that after a guilty person has passed the Naihe Bridge and thrown himself into the animal path, then his crime will be washed away when he is reborn. It would be going overboard to pursue the crimes of its past life.”

Director Ha relaxed and trotted over to Director Xiao’s feet, rubbing his calf with its head, leaving dog hair on Director Xiao’s dark colored wool pants.

Summer was shedding season for huskies. It was constantly shedding. This made the janitor Yuan Luori adore the vacuum cleaner.

Director Xiao stared at the fur on his pants and the ignorant-looking Director Ha. He took a deep breath and said, “But that’s the dross of superstition.”

Director Ha: “...”

It stood up and folded its two front paws, wobbling up and down, making a “begging for pardon” gesture.

Director Xiao found that now that the once heavily laden with crimes Destroyer 192 had turned into a husky, he really couldn't work up any hatred towards it. He only casually said, "Even in the modern era, when a criminal had received his punishment and is released from jail, as long as he doesn't reoffend, then his past crimes won't be looked into, either. We can count you as having received your punishment."

"Awoooo." Director Ha thanked Director Xiao in a voice below fifty decibels.

In a few short minutes, the people at the table had gone through life and death, love and hate, separation and reunion, going from great terror to dripping anxiety. They were wrung out and starving. They only wanted to try the very homelike food in front of them.

Even if it was a Hongmen Banquet, they were still going to eat their fill first.

Director Xiao thought that for Yu Hua to have chosen this moment to reveal his identity, he must have something important to say. If there was anything to say, it would be better to discuss it over dinner.

The majority of the people had sat down. Only two were left standing woodenly in the center of the room. Huan Zixu's face was pale. There wasn't a drop of blood in his lips. From time to time he tilted back and only stayed standing with Feng Kui's support.

"Why don't you come over and eat with us?" After Yu Hua had settled the others, he finally turned his gaze onto the two of them.

A dish had at some point appeared in Yu Hua's hand. In the dish was a very unique alloy. It seemed very light, similar to the texture of human bone.

"This has been prepared specially with Feng Kui's tastes in mind," Yu Hua said. "Without fully unsealing my power, I couldn't use the rules to make this alloy out of metals that previously didn't exist in this world."

Clever as Huan Zixu was, he instantly understood the purpose of this metal.

He turned to look at Feng Kui. An unprecedented courage welled up in the depths of his heart. He went up to Yu Hua and said in loud and clear voice, "If you want me to kneel, I'll kneel!"

Then Huan Zixu strode over to the acupressure mat. Copying Zhen Li and Yuan Luori, he knelt in an unpracticed posture.

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Author's note:

Yu Hua (what he says): No, no, no, we're in the modern era, the Great Qing has passed away, I'm not interested in some bullshit feudal superstition.

Yu Hua (his actual actions): Silently dragging the acupressure mat in front of Huan Zixu.  
 Huan Zixu: Using the bravest tone to say the most cowardly words.

## CHAPTER 116

Huan Zixu had seen the sliding kneel many times. Apparently Zhen Li was its originator. In the studio, only Zhen Li and Yuan Luori practiced it conscientiously.

He had asked Lian Yufan why Zhen Li would practice such a meaningless move every day. Lian Yufan had said that it was probably to thank the die-hard fans on the livestream. Lian Yufan didn't especially understand the livestream, but he was aware that internet celebrities on livestreams always had a simple and unassuming attitude. It was normal to learn a perfect sliding kneel in order to entertain people. This move also occasionally showed up in online comedy shows.

Huan Zixu had made observations and discovered that Zhen Li rarely knelt in the direction of the livestream screen. The images that appeared in the livestream were mostly sideways skids and leaps.

Also, while the office's acupressure mat was used for massage to improve blood circulation, Zhen Li and Yuan Luori hardly ever used it to massage the soles of their feet. Instead, they regularly exercised their knees.

Each time Huan Zixu looked doubtful, Zhen Li would say, "Learn it, too. You'll need it one day."

Yuan Luori also said, "Just-just in case of emergency."

At the time, Huan Zixu had inwardly mocked these two low grade levelers. But now, the moment he had seen Yu Hua walk out of the kitchen, Huan Zixu had suddenly realized everything. The truly stupid and naïve one was him.

During the whole farce that had just played out in the living room, Huan Zixu hadn't moved. He had stood with Feng Kui's support, seeming to have taken a serious mental injury, but in reality his mind had been revolving at high speed.

He recalled everything he had done, considering which of them had provoked Yu Hua's anger, as well as what Yu Hua's goal was with today's performance.

With the power of the black-cloaked man, there was no need to conceal his identity. In his eyes, the efforts of the Protection Organization and the Destroyers alike were just like ants trying to shake a tree. No matter what he wanted to do, all he had to do was unleash that power that could resist the System, tell the Protection Organization his goal, and trust that after the Protection Organization had weighed it, they would definitely agree.

He didn't even need to say. It would only take a rule, an order, and the Protection Organization would be forced to obey his command.

But Yu Hua hadn't done so. He had lured everyone to his house and arranged a Hongmen Banquet. Why?

Huan Zixu watched Director Xiao, Lian Yufan, Cen Xiao, and the other Protectors sit down steadily one by one, Zhen Li and Yuan Luori totter to their seats, Director Ha obtain Director Xiao's acknowledgement—and an incredible idea rose in his mind—had Yu Hua left a path to survival for the Destroyers who had gotten involved with the Protection Organization?

How could that be? Huan Zixu stared at Yu Hua, completely unable to understand what he was thinking.

Why had Huan Zixu exhausted all his efforts to get that apartment? Because he had guessed all along that there would be a battle between the black-cloaked man and the System.

The black-cloaked man possessed unimaginably fierce power. When he cleared, he had been able to seal the System for fifteen years. Why hadn't he destroyed the System then? There was only one answer. The black-cloaked man had been missing some condition. He had been unable to completely destroy the System then, so he had had to wait patiently this long.

He had chosen to lie low in this world that had resisted the System's constant attacks for hundreds of years. He had been acknowledged by the world law. Was this because this world had what he needed?

No matter what the black-cloaked man needed, the increasingly urgent state of affairs made Huan Zixu aware that the battle between the black-cloaked man and the System wasn't far off.

As for the outcome of this battle, Huan Zixu had no way to predict it. But there were only two possible outcomes.

One, the System won, and everyone died together.

The other, the System lost, and he and Feng Kui would undoubtedly completely lose their special abilities, becoming ordinary people.

While the former was sad, from a certain point of view it could be regarded as an unconventional happy ending; the latter would truly be the beginning of everything.

Becoming ordinary people meant that the Protection Organization would no longer be keeping watch on them, and they would live in this world without the support of the Protection Organization. Accommodation was a problem, life was a problem, and medical treatment and health were even bigger problems.

He had wanted to resolve accommodation first of all and carry on working. The most important thing was that Feng Kui's bones were a major problem. In the future, they might require enormous amounts of money to replace and maintain. The figures would be astronomical. For

this, he would constantly have to use the studio and all the Protection Organization's preexisting resources, attain a position in society, accumulate wealth and fixed assets that would appreciate in value and be easy to pass on.

In Huan Zixu's eyes, the apartment was a foundation, the last line of defense if Feng Kui needed money in the future. He couldn't wait for the ten years before the Protection Organization handed over an apartment. He needed a residence now, by hook or by crook.

But today, he had experienced great sorrow and great joy. He had lost the apartment and then regained it. Yu Hua had turned from a cold-blooded, heartless capitalist into a clearer who seemed to be planning for the sakes of the Destroyers.

Huan Zixu didn't think he was a good person, and he couldn't understand the clearer's superhuman thought process. Considering it for a long time, looking on as the Protectors and Destroyers exchanged faults and weaknesses with each other and came to understandings, he couldn't think of how to handle the current situation.

Or perhaps he did know, but from a certain unknown stubbornness, he was unwilling to bow his head before Yu Hua.

Until Yu Hua took out that piece of metal. Huan Zixu clearly understood that this was what he wanted.

Seeing that metal, Huan Zixu's thoughts stopped. He no longer worried about whether Yu Hua was considering their well-being. He only knew that if he yielded to Yu Hua, then he could help Feng Kui change his bones. As long as Feng Kui could live and be healthy, he would do anything.

He stopped scheming, stopped haggling over losses and gains. He simply went to the acupuncture mat. As long as Yu Hua liked it, as long as Yu Hua was happy, what did it matter if he kneeled?

But Feng Kui was even faster than Huan Zixu.

Feng Kui's legs turned into the base of a tank, and he clattered to the acupuncture mat, pressing all the little protruding nubs flat.

Huan Zixu didn't manage to kneel in the end. Feng Kui caught him and put him to one side. The lower half of his body had become a tank, so he had become shorter, just as if he were kneeling.

"A-Xu did it for me," Feng Kui said earnestly. "The good, for me. The bad, also for me."

"Feng Kui, get off of that!" Huan Zixu said. "It doesn't matter what I'm doing anything for. The important thing is that Yu Hua wants me to submit."

"You don't have to." Feng Kui pulled Huan Zixu behind himself, stubbornly not letting him show himself. "I can do it myself."

Why did Feng Kui obey Huan Zixu unconditionally? Because he knew that everything Huan Zixu did was out of consideration for him.

In turbulent worlds, Huan Zixu's fighting ability was insufficient. He needed his protection, needed his help. Feng Kui had been useful to Huan Zixu then, and he had been content to let A-Xu speak for him, because he could be A-Xu's backup. But in a peaceful world, A-Xu could get by just fine on his own. He was useless. He could only be a burden on A-Xu.

Feng Kui thought, he should tell Yu Hua, tell him that A-Xu was very good, that he hadn't done anything wrong. He was the one who was wrong. He caused too many problems.

Pride was A-Xu's protective coloring. Without pride, A-Xu would lose his character.

"Feng Kui, don't use chains to tie me up, let me go, don't you listen to me anymore?" Huan Zixu said in exasperation.

"No, I don't," Feng Kui said earnestly.

"That won't do!" Huan Zixu said urgently. "You...have a unique body, it'll cause a lot of trouble later. Your thinking is unsophisticated, it's easy for you to be tricked, you can't get by without me..."

As Huan Zixu spoke, he suddenly drooped. His head knocked against Feng Kui's solid back, and he quietly said, "I'm selfish, hypocritical, greedy, cold, sly. I can't get by without you..."

Without Feng Kui's pure smile, he would go further and further, in the end trample on everything.

Yu Hua looked loftily down on the two of them as though watching a farce. He slowly said, "The situation has reversed from what it was at the start."

The people sitting at the table observing and not daring to say a word had heads full of question marks. What situation had reversed?

But You Zhengping suddenly thought of the escape room. Feng Kui and Huan Zixu had wanted to kidnap Yu Hua, and he and Yu Hua, in front of the big mechanical skeleton, had demonstrated that they wanted to protect each other.

"I'm a person who returns enmity with enmity and kindness with kindness. I don't get behind on my debts," Yu Hua said.

Feng Kui had given him a romantic date, and he would give Feng Kui an intact body in return.

A metal fountain pen appeared in Yu Hua's hand. He sliced open Feng Kui's hand with the tip of the pen and wrote something on Feng Kui's body. There was a flash of light. The writing, which may have been characters and may have been some sort of mysterious symbols, broke down into small particles and soaked into the wound in Feng Kui's hand.

Then Feng Kui's tank shaped lower body uncontrollably reverted to its original form. He seemed unable to breathe. He clutched his throat and struggled a few times, then fell onto Huan Zixu.

Huan Zixu quickly knelt on the crushed flat acupuncture mat and put Feng Kui's head into his lap.

In this way, he discovered that Feng Kui's head had become light. It no longer had the weight of a heavy metal skull. Instead, it had the weight of a normal human head. It wouldn't weigh so heavily that he couldn't move his legs.

"Help him into a chair," Yu Hua said calmly. "This time he won't crush it."

Some romantic little pink hearts had gotten Feng Kui a body that wouldn't trouble him in exchange.

A peach was presented to me, and I returned a white jade.

Huan Zixu helped Feng Kui into a chair, and Yu Hua poured him a cup of hot tea.

The aroma of the tea awakened Feng Kui. He sniffed and thought for the first time that some food other than metal smelled good.

Huan Zixu looked deeply at Yu Hua. He didn't express thanks. Gratitude for great kindness couldn't be spoken. Verbal thanks without practical action was meaningless. It would be better to make some more money for Yu Hua, think some more of the studio, brainwash some more fans into spending money on the studio, set some traps for some companies...

Ahem, he couldn't think like that. If he thought like that, he would be wandering at the boundaries of the rules again.

After conveying his meaning with his expression, Huan Zixu pulled out the chair beside Feng Kui and was about to sit when he heard Yu Hua said, "Wait, did I invite you to sit?"

He had only invited Feng Kui, not Huan Zixu.

Huan Zixu froze beside the chair. He didn't know what other account there was to settle.

"The kindness has been repaid. There still remains the enmity," Yu Hua said.

“Excuse me, but what enmity can there be between us?” Huan Zixu’s diction inadvertently became more formal. “Is it because of my futile attempt to kidnap you, kill you, and place the blame on you?”

Saying this, Huan Zixu himself thought that his brain had been rusted at the time. He really had thought of an exquisite stratagem to set himself and Feng Kui on a path to no return.

“No, it’s not that,” Yu Hua said. “You made up for that when I absorbed the power of your Systems.”

“Then...might I ask what the matter is?” Huan Zixu truly didn’t understand.

Yu Hua took out a printed out electronic receipt from the briefcase on the couch. He put it in Huan Zixu’s hand. “Who will reimburse me for the money I spent to go to the warehouse that day?”

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Author’s note:

Yu Hua: I remember kindness and also enmity.

Huan Zixu (holding the receipt): This is enmity?

Everyone (watching): The food is getting cold, when can we eat?

## CHAPTER 117

Huan Zixu truly had no way to comprehend what was going on in Yu Hua’s head. Yu Hua could spend millions to buy him an apartment, so why did he have to cling to the two hundred yuan taxi fare?

Of course, how could he know that the apartment, the studio’s office space, and the commercial apartments were all presents purchased with the System’s reward money? Yu Hua had never seen that money as his own. But the two hundred yuan were different. That was money Yu Hua had made with his blood and sweat. He had lost that money because of Huan Zixu’s scheme, and no one had reimbursed him for it yet.

“Well, I should be the one to reimburse that money,” Director Xiao said with a faint sigh. “After all, it’s an economic loss that came out of battle with the Destroyers. It fits the reimbursement requirements.”

“Then I’ll leave it to you, Director Xiao.” Yu Hua passed the receipt to Director Xiao.

That Director Xiao could say this indicated that he understood Yu Hua’s intent.

Since walking through the door, Yu Hua had been displaying his overwhelming power.



All this “using his special abilities to save on electricity,” “not having a table at home so he had to bring the studio’s conference table,” and other seemingly stingy talk was only giving Yu Hua an opportunity to manifest his power.

Yu Hua was telling them that he had enough power to handle complicated matters with ease. On the high end, he could prop up heaven and earth, resist the System’s attacks; on the low end, he could cook food and take care of daily trifles.

Director Xiao believed that Yu Hua was exposing the identities of the Destroyers and Protectors one by one to force him to acknowledge the positions of the studio members. Accepting Zhen Li and Yuan Luori, forgiving Director Ha, or reimbursing the taxi fare Yu Hua had spent because of Huan Zixu—all of it was a declaration of position, acceptance of the Destroyers.

When Director Xiao took the receipt, Yu Hua sat beside You Zhengping at last. “Everyone sit down and eat.”

Everyone finally picked up their chopsticks. This dinner of Yu Hua’s had everything. He had suited practically everyone’s tastes. There was even a bowl of specially made dog food in front of Director Ha, and Yuan Luori’s parrot also had birdseed.

“You’ve spent so much time tormenting them, the food’s gone cold,” You Zhengping said.

You Zhengping was a little nervous. This amounted to his first time introducing his superior and his colleagues to his husband. Making a good meal was a matter of course. Because of everyone coming to terms with each other, the meal had been held up for a long time, causing the food to get cold.

“It’s no problem,” said Yu Hua.

He lightly tapped the table with his finger. The food on the table instantly became steaming hot.

Cen Xiao, who was the most sensitive to fire type power, looked at Director Xiao and quietly said, “He didn’t reheat it.”

Director Xiao picked up a piece of pork belly and put it in his mouth. He had meant to investigate which ability Yu Hua had used to heat the food, but unexpectedly, Yu Hua’s food had been remarkably made. The red braised pork was rich but not greasy. It melted in the mouth. It slid down your throat as soon as it entered your mouth, as though it had grown legs. You were swallowing it before you had chewed it twice, and only a lingering taste and somewhat bitten tongue remained.

Before, he had only heard You Zhengping constantly bragging to the Protectors about his married life, bragging about Yu Hua’s culinary skills. Director Xiao hadn’t taken it seriously. Now that he had tasted a piece of his favorite red-braised pork, he at last became acquainted with Yu Hua’s cooking. No wonder Cen Xiao and the others were always coming here to scrounge food.

He hadn't figured out what special ability it was. All right, he would have another piece.

Director Xiao reached for the plate of red-braised pork with his chopsticks but found that the plate was already empty.

When their superior had served himself first, the subordinates had naturally followed in Director Xiao's footsteps without hesitation, reaching their sinful chopsticks out towards the red-braised pork. The Protectors were well-trained, their movements uniform. Cen Xiao and the squad were especially outstanding in the art of snatching food.

While Director Xiao had still been tasting, Cen Xiao and the squad had each downed four or five pieces one after another.

Huan Zixu, who had been slow to reach out, ended up with nothing, but Feng Kui with his long arms had obtained a piece. He split it into two and gave Huan Zixu half.

"Xiao You told me that your favorite food is red-braised pork. I made it especially for you. How does it taste?" Yu Hua said.

It had been specially made for him, and these people had still stolen it! Director Xiao unhappily glanced at everyone, then constrainedly said, "It's good. How did you make it? No, I mean, I couldn't tell how you warmed up the food."

"It was nothing. I restored it to its condition before it cooled," Yu Hua said lightly, as though this ability wasn't worth mentioning.

For him, it really wasn't worth mentioning.

Cen Xiao pondered whether this ability was to restore things in time, in space, or whether it was a change to the state of matter itself. After thinking for a long time, he found that he simply couldn't understand these three abilities. The only thing he understood was that Yu Hua could restore all the food to its ideal state, so why had he left the fried fish in front of him black?

Was he hinting that if his fire burned too brightly it was easy to turn to charcoal?

Cen Xiao didn't dare to think about it deeply. He sadly picked up the fried fish and enjoyed a charred welcome.

Seeing that Director Xiao and Yu Hua didn't mean to talk business, You Zhengping lowered his head and began to eat. A crowd of twenty-something special ability users opened up their bellies and ate. The food on the table was picked clean. Only a couple of dozen empty plates remained.

In Yu Hua's bowl were a few pieces of meat You Zhengping had engaged in a desperate struggle to snatch specially so he could serve them to his husband.

Anything that had passed through You Zhengping's chopsticks was delicious to Yu Hua.

By the time they finished eating, it was past 8 PM. The sun had fully set. Outside, the black clouds were thickly arrayed. Lightning flashed and thunder rumbled. Countless streaks of lightning passed close by the windows of Yu Hua's apartment. Thunder exploded as if right in their ears like someone's howls of rage.

But no one inside felt afraid. Yu Hua's casual attitude and steady expression turned this room of less than 180 square meters into the sturdiest fortress.

"I'm going to wash the dishes," Yu Hua said, getting up.

"No need." Director Xiao pointed. A current of water carried the dishes on the table to the kitchen. The faucet turned on on its own, instantly washing the dishes clean.

Director Xiao used his special ability to clean the table and the dishes. Round water droplets rolled off the dishes and the table towards the sewers. Not a drop spilled inside.

Everyone was solemn and respectful. Director Xiao's special ability was powerful enough to part great rivers, but it turned out that it was also this meticulous.

Seeing Director Xiao unilaterally washing the dishes for him, Yu Hua's expression was actually a little desolate. The reason he hadn't bought a dishwasher when he had been fitting up the apartment and insisted on doing the dishes himself every day wasn't that he was stingy, it was that he enjoyed that feeling of living.

The happy, the frustrating, the joyous, the trifling—time passing bit by bit.

Director Xiao had deprived him of his final hobby. Yu Hua was displeased, but when he considered that this was Xiao You's boss, he thought, forget it. What kind of boss doesn't cause vexation?

Yu Hua brewed cups of tea for everyone. He was the first to lift his cup. "Now that we've eaten a meal and drunk this cup of tea, can we count the Protectors and the levelers as one?"

These words alarmed Zhen Li. He suddenly remembered Yu Hua saying, "I hope the day never comes when the Protectors and the Destroyers work together." But now Yu Hua had personally resolved the misunderstandings between them, producing this scene. What was that for?

Director Xiao was the first to drink some tea. He put down his teacup and said, "Tell us, what is your goal? As long as it's to resist the System, the Protection Organization will cooperate."

Director Xiao didn't make this promise lightly. With the way it was looking outside—the whole world relying on Yu Hua's power to stay afloat—no matter what request Yu Hua raised, as long as it wasn't sending the whole world to its death, they would agree to it.

In fact, as soon as they entered the room, Director Xiao had turned on his long range monitoring system. The upper echelons of the whole world's Protection Organizations had been listening in on their small talk.

If Yu Hua hadn't wanted them to be monitored, he naturally had plenty of means. Since he hadn't prevented it, that showed he agreed.

"Then I'll get right down to it," Yu Hua said.

The rest couldn't resist thinking mockingly, *You call this getting right down to it? You've been getting to it all evening!*

"I have two goals," Yu Hua said. "First, let the studio's members join the Source Project. Second, give me control over the Source Project."

The Source Project collected the power of the whole world's Protection Organizations, but not the studio's Destroyers. Zhen Li and the others weren't included.

"The addition of their power won't make much difference. It shouldn't impact the outcome of the battle. What's so crucial about adding them?" Director Xiao asked.

"You can't use the power of the Source Project at random like a headless fly. This power is crucial. Someone needs to lead it to where it's going to be used." Yu Hua looked at the studio's members.

"Where will you lead the Source Project's power?" Director Xiao asked.

"To protect all the levelers within the System," Yu Hua said.

Director Xiao and all the Protectors in the room frowned simultaneously. Levelers were Destroyers; they were their enemies. This was hundreds of years of ground-in hatred. They could accept Zhen Li and the others, but that didn't mean that they were willing to use their own power to protect these yet-unknown hidden enemies.

Director Xiao said, "The Protection Organization just determined to restart the Source Project. The System immediately attacked, and you revealed your identity. I guessed that your goal was the Source Project. In fact, while we were eating, I already obtained permission from my superiors. If the Source Project was to be used for taking down the System, we would be willing to hand it over to you. But...if it's going to be used to protect the lives of countless Destroyers, we...would find that hard to accept."

This was already very tactful. For the Protection Organization, the System was the mastermind behind the scenes, while the Destroyers were the butchers who aided and abetted it. They all had to die. Not killing them was the limit. How could they also protect them?

Yu Hua said, “Most of the levelers have no connection to me. Even if they all die, they would only be strangers dying on different worlds. But they’re the leaves and branches of the System, joined to the System through veins and arteries. If the System chooses devastation, It can use the self-destruct devices implanted in these Destroyers’ bodies to destroy all the worlds It controls.

“You might say, those aren’t your worlds, anyway. But if the body dies, will a part survive?”

“Must it be this way?” Director Xiao asked.

“If not for this, the System would have vanished fifteen years ago,” Yu Hua said. “And you wouldn’t exist any longer.”

“It’s either live together or die together?” Director Xiao laughed bitterly. “I’ve hated the Destroyers for so many years, and now you want me to shake hands and make peace with them?”

Yu Hua poured another cup of tea for Director Xiao. “After this cup of tea, I ask you and the Protection Organization behind you to make a decision.”

Director Xiao picked up the teacup. He wasn’t the decision-maker. He was also waiting for the Protection Organization listening over the monitoring equipment to discuss and issue a conclusion.

Time passed minute by minute and second by second. The World Protection Organization’s upper echelons debated fiercely. You Zhengping, who had been silent all along, suddenly said, “I don’t agree.”

Everyone’s gazes converged on him. You Zhengping looked at Yu Hua and said, “I don’t agree to the second point. I’m the Source Project candidate. You’re not part of the Protection Organization. We can’t hand the Source Project over to you.”

He had said it before—fighting the System, I’ll be with you.

—

Author’s Note:

Director Xiao: Yu Hua used his special abilities to cook to demonstrate his strength.

Yu Hua: Actually, I really was saving money.

Director Xiao: Yu Hua requested reimbursement because he wanted the Protection Organization to acknowledge Huan Zixu.

Yu Hua: Actually, I really care about the 200 yuan.

## CHAPTER 118

At first, You Zhengping hadn't known about Yu Hua using his special abilities to cook, either.

He had been on extended leave, personally watching the chaos of the studio under Yu Hua's management, watching the Destroyers he had previously fought happily or sadly living their lives. Compared to their lifeless and disinterested attitudes when they had first arrived in this world, compared to the desolation of the head of the league before their death, everyone in the studio was full of feelings. They had a sense of living for real.

Remembering Yu Hua's attitude towards the levelers under his command in the little world, You Zhengping could clearly feel the change in Yu Hua.

You Zhengping was aware that after over two thousand worlds and fifteen years of peaceful life, Yu Hua had set out on a completely different path than before.

The System had sent people to kill Yu Hua, to force Yu Hua to undo his seal and release its power. Yu Hua seemed unwilling, but in reality, since ordering Zhen Li to start the studio, he had already had the beginnings of a plan to defeat the System.

He had slowly and methodically developed this plan, effecting a change in the studio's levelers and in the Protection Organization's perceptions through imperceptible influence.

Yu Hua had spent a lot of time strategizing. He understood everything perfectly.

If you had to allege that Yu Hua had been wayward about anything during this period, it would probably be concealing his identity, and his pretense right under the nose of the Protection Organization.

Yu Hua could easily have made his identity public, or gone far away from the Protection Organization so he wouldn't be suspected.

The reason he had so carefully protected the identity of "Yu Hua" the ordinary person was to prolong his peaceful life as much as possible.

But days like that couldn't last very long.

From the moment he bought the apartment, Yu Hua had no longer been planning to conceal his identity. He had been preparing for the future battle.

During his leave, You Zhengping had spent as much time as he could with Yu Hua. He had watched Yu Hua at work and understood what part of his behavior was true stinginess and what was put on for his own entertainment.

Getting rid of his excessively great strength, Yu Hua was a person who liked a domestic life, was a little duplicitous, who liked watching others be inconvenienced and enjoyed making others suffer the consequences of their own actions. His character was a little odious, but he had a drop of respect for people who stuck purely to their original intentions.

Yu Hua was also a dignified person. No matter how dire the straits he found himself in, his expression had to be firm and steady. No matter how poor the studio was, no matter how bad the materials it used, its external appearance had to be in order.

Yu Hua in fact had a very low sense of humor, but the more he wanted to laugh, the more he would hold back. When there was no one around, he could easily laugh himself sick, but in front of people, he had to be reserved. On the other hand, when he was angry, he would use a smile to cover up his emotions. The angrier he was, the deeper his smile.

Yu Hua also had a touch of OCD and perfectionism. He detested his pursuit of perfection and couldn't entirely accept himself as imperfect, so he wanted someone to come along and break through the confines of his thinking.

Yu Hua...

The deeper his understanding of Yu Hua, the more clearly You Zhengping realized that his love at first sight for Yu Hua originated in attraction at his innermost being, originated in the prompting of instinct.

A person like this, imperfect, full of little shortcomings that couldn't detract from his inner strength—You Zhengping loved Yu Hua's good qualities, but it was his shortcomings he found adorable.

During the brief glimpse outside the off road car, You Zhengping's first-rate Protector's sixth sense had wildly warned him, catch this person, don't pass him up, don't let him get away.

If he could, You Zhengping wanted to always be with Yu Hua. No matter how long, he wouldn't get tired.

Unfortunately, however You Zhengping and Yu Hua racked their brains, what must come would always come.

Today, when You Zhengping had suddenly received the Protection Organization's notice telling him to hurry back to base as soon as possible, the two of them had dimly felt that the moment had come.

Yu Hua had smiled very deeply, helped You Zhengping straighten his clothes, and said quietly into his ear, "I'll go home and cook. I'll wait for you to come home for dinner."

You Zhengping sadly said, "Normally I spend the night when I go to the base. I might not be able to..."

"That won't happen," Yu Hua said firmly. "Today you'll definitely be able to come home for dinner."

How many times had Yu Hua excitedly bought ingredients on his way home from work but then received You Zhengping's text, telling him that he couldn't come home that night? Each time he went out on assignment, the Protection Organization would tear You Zhengping away from Yu Hua's side, but not this time.

Even if the dining table came crashing right into the Protection Organization's base, tonight You Zhengping would eat the dinner Yu Hua had prepared.

Before leaving for the base, You Zhengping had noticed that there was something off about Yu Hua's expression.

So when the System's sudden attack had come and Yu Hua had used his special abilities to prepare food, You Zhengping hadn't been the least surprised.

He could even sense that the reason the System had so much power was that Yu Hua had first undone his seal.

You Zhengping being suddenly recalled had made Yu Hua realize that the Protection Organization had reached an agreement concerning the Source Project. The moment for his arrangement with the world law had come.

So he had voluntarily undone his seal, releasing that power, luring the System towards this world. Then he had put on this Hongmen Banquet.

Yu Hua's determination to merge the levelers' energy in the Source Project was because this was the power he had always lacked. It was the power to protect, steady and unwavering over many years, invulnerable, despite constant erosion from the System!

This power couldn't be taken by force with his "control" ability. The Protectors had to willingly offer everything up to resist the System. Only then could the Source Project produce the greatest power.

Yu Hua was planning to take this power and go battle the System alone, but You Zhengping wouldn't agree.

You Zhengping stood beside Director Xiao and said to Yu Hua, "The origin of the Source Project is 'protection.' Your origin is 'control.' These are two sides of the same sort of power. They're similar, but hard to transform. You can't use both these types of power at the same time. Resisting the System while dividing your attention to protect all the parallel worlds and all the levelers is too dangerous."

"I can bear the harm of the Source Project. You might not," Yu Hua reasoned.

"I can," You Zhengping said firmly. "Only a Protector can control the Protection Organization's power."



The melancholy husbands stood opposed. The rest didn't dare to make a sound. They watched their confrontation.

You Zhengping's words passed unobstructed through the monitoring device to the Protection Organization's upper echelons. Director Xiao heard his superior's orders and asked, "Captain You, do you have a way to completely control the Source Project?"

"If I can't do it, then no one can," You Zhengping said confidently.

"I know." Director Xiao looked at Yu Hua. "Having consulted the organization, I can agree to your first condition. While it is true that we have a grievance against the Destroyers, in the bigger picture, that grievance isn't worth mentioning. But we don't agree to the second condition. Handing over the whole world's power to a single person and letting him go to oppose the System alone, entrusting the world's fate to a single person's hands—forgive me, but we can't do that.

"The Protectors have fought united from beginning to end. Our last battle will also be this way. Whether we win or lose, we will still personally control it."

Yu Hua didn't speak. He looked at You Zhengping.

You Zhengping stepped up and grabbed Yu Hua's collar. Overbearingly, he said, "Do what I say!"

Yu Hua looked at You Zhengping and thought, How can he always ruin my plans?

When he had decided to go to the end of his life alone, taking the System's power to the grave, You Zhengping had appeared in his life, evoking the idea of dating and marriage in Yu Hua; when he had arranged their first date, You Zhengping had crushed his plan under the wheels of his trendy motorbike; when he had prepared a perfect proposal, You Zhengping had dragged him to the Bureau of Civil Affairs to obtain a marriage license; when he had decided to oppose the System alone, You Zhengping once again disturbed his flawless plan.

Xiao You was the assembly of all the accidents in his life.

"I..." Yu Hua looked at You Zhengping and quietly said, "I don't have a way to protect a single person from the System's attacks."

Yu Hua had planned and strategized, attempting to protect everything, but he couldn't protect You Zhengping in time.

Each time there was a battle, Xiao You would always be the one getting injured.

"I never asked you to protect me," You Zhengping said firmly.

The captain of the Xuyang District's Protector squad wasn't a figure to hide behind a strong person and wait to be rescued. He had always stood at the front, blocking the heavy fire ahead with his flesh and blood form.

"You still have family. Why must you go with me to fight a battle with no certainty of success?" Yu Hua asked.

"If there's no certainty of success, I'm not supposed to fight? Sacrifice is your responsibility alone? Why does all the weight of the world have to sit on your shoulders?" You Zhengping's head had never been as clear as at this moment. "You save the world. I'll protect you. All right?"

Yu Hua looked at You Zhengping and at last couldn't resist. He opened his arms and drew his husband into his embrace.

No one inside the room disturbed them, but a sudden bolt of lightning struck directly at the window, and the sky-shaking thunder forced the melancholy husbands to separate. Yu Hua looked coldly at the dark clouds outside the window. "My power won't hold for long."

Director Xiao seized the opportunity: "We'll go to the base at once. The Source Project installation is there. Every nation's Protection Organization is currently pouring all its power into the installations. The power from each installation will be passed through an energy field to gather together. The exit for that power is the installation at our base. The helicopter is on the roof, we can..."

Before he finished speaking, Yu Hua snapped his fingers lightly, and everyone appeared above the base.

"We can activate the Source Project at once," Director Xiao continued steadily after a pause.

It wasn't only those who had eaten dinner at Yu Hua's house who were there. There was also Junjun, carrying a pen and a notebook, working on problems.

Junjun had been at home racking his brain to do problems for the International Mathematical Olympiad. Suddenly appearing in a strange place, he didn't scream. He looked at his familiar Xiao Ha and hugged the husky.

Seeing the child look so accustomed to this, You Zhengping felt a little sad. At such a young age, Junjun had experienced too much.

"Junjun is also a special ability user. He's also included," Yu Hua said. "There are also the two Destroyers imprisoned in the base. While they've lost their power, they still bear the imprint of the System. They also have to join."

Director Xiao rapidly arranged for the base's personnel to organize their manpower. He drove his hands apart, and the whole base floated up. The Source Project installation ascended to the very top of the base.

This was a round installation that resembled a Yin-Yang symbol. The curve in the center separated the forms of two koi, one black and one white. Looked at from above, the microchips on the koi looked very much like ripples in the energy field.

Of the two koi, one had black eyes, the other white. The black was the power input installation. All the Protectors poured their power into the eye of the black fish. The white one, meanwhile, was the power output installation. You Zhengping stood alone in the white fish's eye, absorbing all that power.

The Protection Organization's outside staff brought Destroyer 187 and the still unconscious "Guan Shaoguang." Everyone encircled the black fish's eye.

Director Xiao issued everyone a handheld input installation, then placed his hand on the installation. The koi could absorb energy on its own.

"Begin," said Director Xiao.

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Author's note:

Yu Hua (cleaning up the vegetables in the fridge): The natural enemy of perfectionism, You Zhengping.

You Zhengping (casually messing up the fridge): Behave yourself. Just follow your inclinations.

Yu Hua: ...Xiao You and I really are a perfect match.

## CHAPTER 119

As Director Xiao's order, everyone apart from You Zhengping simultaneously pressed their hands to the installation's input.

The ripples on the koi emitted a weird radiance. Because of the fluctuation of the radiance, the black and white koi seemed to be swimming in circles. As the black and white colors fluctuated, everyone felt all of their energy involuntarily pouring towards the koi's black eye. Now, they couldn't have let go even if they had wanted to.

Meanwhile, the radiance lit up in all the world's Protection Organization bases. The light rose into the air. If someone had been in space looking down on earth at that moment, they would have seen countless beams of radiance gathering into an enormous Yin-Yang symbol, wrapping around the world.

Sensing this power, the dark clouds in the sky roiled more violently, as though trying to oppose the gathering of the power.

Yu Hua's expression was calm, but from the condition of the dark clouds, it was clear that he was having a hard time holding on.

It wasn't pleasant at all to feel as though your whole body had been sucked dry. Junjun wasn't part of the Protection Organization. A second ago, he had been at home, calmly doing his problems. The next second, he was experiencing this feeling as though even his soul were going to be pulled out. He was a little scared. Just then, a furry paw stepped onto his foot. Junjun looked down. It was Xiao Ha.

Director Ha had one front paw pressing on the absorption installation and one stepping on Junjun's foot. In the reflected light of the koi, the husky's somewhat stupid face seemed unusually spirited, like a lone wolf in the night.

Looking at the dog's paw on his foot, Junjun wasn't scared anymore. Though he was still bewildered, he and Xiao Ha were good friends who had played with a scooter together, had crossed worlds together, had done math problems together. He trusted that Xiao Ha wouldn't hurt him, and he trusted that Xiao Ha could protect him. With Xiao Ha here, he had courage.

Courage arose from the bottom of his heart. Through Junjun's special ability, that mental cohesion was transmitted to each person's heart.

Zhen Li looked at Yuan Luori to his left and Cen Xiao to his right. He had a sense that after using his power this time, he would no longer have his big wardrobe and alternate dimension stomach. But that was all right. The world wasn't full of convenient tricks. When you ate, you had to rely on your own body to digest the food, and if you liked clothes, you had to spend money to buy them. The important thing was, the world would still exist.

Yuan Luori stood between Zhen Li and Luo Huai. As his power left, he found his vision becoming better and better. It turned out that what had been impacting his vision all along had been his origin ability. Because he saw too clearly, he instinctively didn't want to see at all. The wish had impacted his eyes through his special ability. That had made him near-sighted and astigmatic.

Yuan Luori's vision was restored, and he could no longer see the awful power of Yu Hua and the System. He was rather glad. As Junjun's power spread, there was a moment when Yuan Luori sensed Luo Huai's happiness beside him.

Yuan Luori looked at Luo Huai. He saw the stars on Luo Huai's arms being taken one after another by the koi. As those bits of mental energy vanished, Luo Huai's gloomy expression gradually brightened.

It was Luo Huai's dream to lose his power, to not to be forgotten anymore, and for the memories he kept and couldn't return to their original owners to go to a good resting place.

“Let’s protect the world together,” Luo Huai said quietly.

He watched those bits of mental energy, which had refused to scatter for so long, at last go to rest. He smiled involuntarily.

Beside Luo Huai, Lian Yufan watched as a star that was tied to him flowed into the koi. Lian Yufan reached out, wanting to persuade that star to stay.

This was different. It was his mother’s memory. It contained all the details of his parents’ relationship, and his mother’s memories of him. If these memories were lost, his mother would never remember him.

Lian Yufan reached out. In his mind, he saw his mother’s wan face at the sanatorium, her eyes filled with too much exhaustion to bear, her cry of “I would rather not have loved at all,” and the helpless wails in the night. In the end he let go, letting the star slip through his fingertips.

Not everyone could have firm convictions and steady nerves like the Protectors. Not everyone could bear the weight of the world. So let these memories drift away on the wind.

Watching as that star was absorbed by the koi and turned into energy, a tear traced the corner of Lian Yufan’s eye, flowing over the teardrop mole.

That teardrop mole had originally been manufactured to change the character of his appearance. Now it merged with him, seeming like a wound that would never heal.

Beside Lian Yufan, Huan Zixu noticed his sorrow. In an unfeeling tone, Huan Zixu said, “Reality will never be as perfect as a movie. There’s no such thing as a happy ending. Living means having regrets. These regrets impact your past, but don’t let them impact your future. To use your own principle, letting regrets about a period in the past disrupt your happiness for decades in the future—the numbers are unequal.”

Lian Yufan glanced at Huan Zixu. He looked like an expensive flower, but he had the unbeatable survival instincts of a weed. No matter the circumstances, no matter the pressure, as long as there was a chance, Huan Zixu would haughtily straighten his spine and keep walking into the wind.

“I’ll learn to be a cockroach spirit like you,” Lian Yufan said.

Without him being aware, the tear at the corner of his eye had been blown dry by the wind.

After sparing a bit of attention to console Lian Yufan, Huan Zixu took Feng Kui’s free hand.

Feng Kui didn’t say anything. He was aware that A-Xu had two goals. One was to make him live like a normal person, the other was to kill the System. Today, both of these goals would be realized. Huan Zixu would have no regrets.

As for Feng Kui, Huan Zixu's happiness was his happiness. He was very glad now, more than ever before.

This happiness was transmitted to the just awakened "Guan Shaoguang." It was the power that had roused him. He felt weak. He didn't know who or where he was, or what they were doing. He was lost and blank as a piece of paper.

Luckily, when he had just opened his eyes onto this strange world, an entirely unmixed feeling of happiness met him, as though this world were greeting a solitary person. Under the influence of this feeling, "Guan Shaoguang" also smiled slightly.

The Destroyer 187 whom Yuan Luori and the others had captured in the amusement park had originally been unwilling, but when Junjun's special ability touched him, a fighting spirit began to burn in his heart. He turned into the wind and yelled to Yu Hua, "Boss, go for it, get rid of the System!"

One might well ask whether any leveler didn't hate the System. Supposing there was an opportunity, who wouldn't want the System to disappear forever?

This was probably Destroyer 187 summoning up his courage with the boost of everyone's emotions.

His high spirits infected Cen Xiao, too. Cen Xiao said to You Zhengping, already standing on the white fish's eye ready to receive enormous power, "Boss, we're entrusting all our power to you! There's also my 500 yuan, and the food you scrounged off us before, so you...you... When you get back, have Yu Hua cook us a meal to settle your debts!"

When you get back... Such naïve words. Only a young man could say such a thing. Director Xiao shook his head. His subordinates hadn't known cruel war. They had lived in a relatively peaceful world. That was why they thought You Zhengping had a hope of coming back. But in reality, in reality...

In reality, he also hoped You Zhengping and Yu Hua would come back.

The young people's energetic and positive, always optimistic feelings infected Director Xiao through Junjun's powers. He said to You Zhengping, "When you get back, we'll forget about your cover-up. I'll have a Merit Citation, First Class medal issued for you."

As Director Xiao said this, everyone's powers completely flowed into the koi. Everyone at once fell down in exhaustion. They couldn't lift a finger.

They could only watch You Zhengping at the center of the power. His expression was grave. The power of all the world's Protectors entered You Zhengping's body. Different types of power wandered beneath his skin, in his veins, among his nerves, in the depths of his bones, almost violently, as if unwilling to come together and ready to break out at any time.

Coming together was instinct, and separation was instinct, too.

Power assembling and then dispersing was an unalterable natural law.

You Zhengping had to find a balance with this power, which constantly wanted to separate and also wanted to absorb his original power. He had to rely on his own mental force to completely subdue this power.

He didn't only want to go fight the System with Yu Hua because he loved him. More than that, it was because this was a Protector's mission.

The rebelling power burst You Zhengping's skin and veins from within. His muscles and bones also split apart one by one. You Zhengping's gaze blurred. He saw Yu Hua standing in front of him looking worried. He seemed to want to enter the installation to help him.

"No need," You Zhengping squeezed out a few words between his teeth. "I want it all!"

Since he was so greedy, in order to contain that greed, he had to possess this power!

The space around him warped and twisted. You Zhengping was at the center of energy storm, bloody all over.

Yu Hua was burning with anxiety. Finally, he couldn't resist taking a step forward.

Just then, You Zhengping found a common idea among the violent powers. This was a conviction held by the donor of each power. They joined with You Zhengping's thought to become a thought group.

The conviction of protection.

Whether giving power or absorbing power, everyone had the same thought in their hearts.

With the thought group as a lead, the powers thoroughly sank into You Zhengping's body. These powers healed his wounded body. Gradually, You Zhengping's body was restored to as good as new, and the Source Project installation gradually dimmed.

The Yin-Yang symbol in the sky was quietly absorbed into You Zhengping. When the last radiance of the koi disappeared, You Zhengping opened his eyes and took a step forward, breaking the Source Project installation.

You Zhengping: "..."

He looked awkwardly at Yu Hua. "No wonder you were always breaking furniture at first. Having your power suddenly increase like this, it really is kind of hard to control."

“Then don’t control it.” Yu Hua jumped onto the installation. “Use it to handle the System.”

“Okay.”

After You Zhengping answered Yu Hua, he gave Director Xiao and the Protectors a salute. “I pledge with my life that I will fulfill my mission.”

Director Xiao’s energy was drained. He couldn’t budge. He was being supported by some young soldiers and could only blink, saying with difficulty, “We’ll be waiting for your victorious return.”

Yu Hua took You Zhengping’s hand as he waved it towards Director Xiao. A stack of folders fell at Director Xiao’s feet. He said, “I’m not certain about this battle. I can only say that the probability that this world will survive is 70%, the probability that the levelers and the other worlds will survive is 50%, the probability that Xiao You will return to this world is 30%, and the probability that I will survive is 1%.

“I’m entrusting you with their futures. You’ll see where to go from there.”

Director Xiao glanced at the folders. They had each of the studio members’ names written on them.

“You don’t need to worry about them being disloyal, either. I’ve written the rules of the studio. Even if I don’t return, the remaining power will be enough to bind them,” Yu Hua said.

Huan Zixu remembered “clever people may be victims of their own cleverness” and finally understood why his originally correct guesses had always gone towards the wrong conclusion at the last moment. He looked at Yu Hua and said, “You...”

Yu Hua didn’t give him a chance to finish. Leading You Zhengping by the hand, he turned and pulled out the “rule writer” brush.

The brush flew into the sky and drew a long gash across the dark clouds.

The black clouds were torn open by the pen, revealing a strange and frightening place.

A streak of lightning flashed out of that place. You Zhengping unleashed his spatial barrier, easily blocking the lightning.

“Let’s go,” Yu Hua said to You Zhengping.

“Okay.” You Zhengping smiled.

Then the two of them vanished without a trace, as though they had gone to another world.

—



Author's note:

Cen Xiao: Even when the sky is falling down, I still have to be a third wheel. You two have to come back and give me a chance to be a third wheel!

Yu Hua: ...Suddenly I don't want to come back.

## CHAPTER 120

You Zhengping felt his body being torn into innumerable particles even smaller than atoms. These particles passed through layer after layer of spatial shield to charge towards an unknown farther shore.

The unknown was frightening. It was fearful to become something that far surpassed your understanding. But unexpectedly, You Zhengping wasn't scared at all, because he could feel that Yu Hua was up ahead.

Yu Hua had just told Director Xiao that You Zhengping's probability of survival was 30%, while Yu Hua's own was only 1%. But You Zhengping didn't believe that.

He hadn't questioned Yu Hua's calculations. He had only thought, if my chances are 30% and Yu Hua's are 1%, then doesn't that make 31 put together?

And according to the Protectors' theory of unity, one and one made far more than two. So added together, they had to have at least a 50% chance.

Also, You Zhengping fundamentally didn't believe in the law of probability. A die had six sides. The probability that three dice would all come out six was the cube of  $1/6$ , approximately 0.46%, even lower than the probability of survival Yu Hua had said.

But in reality, there were still people who could get all sixes, and not only 4.6 times in a thousand throws, but on their first try.

According to You Zhengping's theory, probability was only a mathematical calculation. When it came to reality, the only probabilities were 100% and 0%. If you won, that was 100%. If you lost, that was 0%. All numbers between these two were empty talk.

In the final analysis, it was multiple choice question between life and death. Therefore, the probability was 50%. There was no problem.

While crossing, You Zhengping used his faulty logic to deny Yu Hua's law of probability.

What he didn't know was that, shuttling through the multidimensional cosmos, he and Yu Hua had become particles, and their thoughts and bodies were twined together. Yu Hua could clearly sense what You Zhengping was thinking.

Yu Hua, who had been restraining himself the whole time, “heard” You Zhengping insisting on calculating the probability as 50% and finally couldn’t resist laughing softly.

This soft laughter passed through some mysterious power exchange and came to You Zhengping’s heart.

*What are you laughing at,* You Zhengping thought in exasperation.

*Nothing. I was thinking you were making a lot of sense. When humans do something, there’s only 100% or 0%.* Yu Hua transmitted his thoughts to You Zhengping.

*Why aren’t we there yet after this long?* You Zhengping asked.

*It’s only been a moment. But our condition now is near light-speed. In this moment, time has no meaning,* Yu Hua answered.

*Then tell me, what should I do next?* You Zhengping asked.

*I’ll go handle the System. You follow the world law’s lead, use the gathered power of the Source Project to protect all the levelers. Don’t worry about not being able to find them. The Destroyers’ mental force will guide you,* Yu Hua answered.

After answering You Zhengping’s question, Yu Hua wrapped him up his energy and with sudden great speed charged out of the spatial barrier, coming to a place of nothingness—coming in front of the System.

After reaching their target, Yu Hua and You Zhengping were restored to their bodies. Yu Hua pushed You Zhengping out of the core area and left him with a message: *Remember your mission.*

You Zhengping was thrown out all of a sudden. He wanted to follow Yu Hua inside, but he was blocked by an invisible barrier.

Yu Hua had once again cast him aside and gone to face the System himself.

You Zhengping clenched his teeth and used his mental force to investigate the strange space.

The vastness of the space exceeded his capacity for understanding. Humans were beings that lived in 3D. The only dimensions they could understand were length, width, and height. Outside of this range—when time became a dimension, for example—they were unable to understand.

In this area, all You Zhengping could sense was vast and boundless darkness. The stillness was extreme.

He didn’t even know what there was here; even more, he didn’t know where Yu Hua had gone.

He also didn't understand how he should use the power to protect the levelers. All at sea, You Zhengping went in circles where he was. He couldn't tell direction at all.

At this moment, he could only hand everything over to his instincts.

He couldn't see or hear anything anyway. You Zhengping shut off his sight and sound and devoted himself wholeheartedly to feeling.

Mixed in among the Protectors' powers were those of Zhen Li and the other Destroyers. They were all dispersed, like rays of light that didn't fit in. They were obvious in You Zhengping's thought group.

After noticing the existence of these powers, You Zhengping instantly opened his eyes. He had shut off his sight, so there should have been nothing in front of his eyes, but amid the blackness, he "saw" points of light corresponding to Zhen Li and the others.

These points of light were very far away, scattered among different worlds, at such distances that there was no way to "see" them with the naked eye. Only feeling could seize them. They were tied by innumerable threads. The source of these threads was the place where Yu Hua had just gone. The origin of the System!

What he had to do was prevent the System from disturbing these points of light, not letting the System control the levelers to disturb Yu Hua.

The source of the ties to the points of light was enormous, so enormous that You Zhengping doubted that the System had a boundary. And there were so many points of light. You Zhengping even suspected that there were more points of light than stars in the Milky Way.

But that didn't matter. He currently possessed all the power of the world's Protectors. He could create a space that was also boundlessly large.

This wasn't producing a space that could cover a certain area. It was using the points of light as a guide to create a boundless, formless space that could divide the points of light from the System!

Helped by the world law and all the Protectors, with the Destroyer's power as a guide, an invisible space slowly opened and swelled limitlessly, holding all of the levelers.

At the same time, the System could clearly sense the levelers losing contact one after another. It wanted to stop the spread of this space, but it was held back by Yu Hua.

Yu Hua had absorbed the System's power. This meant that the System was within the scope of his "control." Of course, the System was too powerful and controlled too many worlds. Even though he could "control" It, It would be hard to hold. This was the ancient principle of an emperor being attacked by a powerful minister.

At this moment, Yu Hua and the System were contending not with types of power, but with sources of power. Whoever had the strongest power would thoroughly annihilate the other.

But Yu Hua, who had released everything, hadn't chosen a form of power that consumed. Again and again, he used enormous power to attack the System, forcing the System to use power just as great to counterattack. The two powers cancelled each other out, dispersing in the vast cosmos.

Each energy attack caused Yu Hua and the System considerable harm. They were using the method of mutually exhausting each other, fighting with no thought for anything else.

Before, Yu Hua hadn't dared to give free play to all his power for fear of future consequences. Now, with the help of countless people, what did he have to be afraid of?

He had spent his life enduring and scheming. Now he could fight with all his strength. It was actually a kind of pleasure.

Yu Hua was pleased, but the System wasn't happy at all. Its power was being constantly eroded, the pieces It had held had vanished, and in front of It was an enemy It had battled for thousands of years without either being able to best the other.

The fading power made the System feel an emotion It hadn't experienced in a long time—panic.

There was no way to verify what the System's original form had been. Perhaps It was a celestial body that had attained self-awareness and had followed Its instincts to absorb all the energy around It to expand Its sphere of influence; perhaps It was the law of some world that, when the world had grown to a certain degree of power, had begun to consume and erode the laws of other worlds; perhaps It had even been a powerful person like Yu Hua, and when It had understood the true essence of power, It had become a superhuman being, discarding all Its feeling, becoming a god.

No matter which it was, the System shouldn't have feelings.

Just like when Yu Hua had killed his companions and had felt no sorrow in his heart, only the instinct to absorb everyone's power.

The appearance of the feeling of "panic" showed that the System was gradually losing Its divinity.

*Why?* Amid one energy attack after another, the System used the universe's oldest language to send Yu Hua a message.

"You can ask why?" Yu Hua used human language to answer. "I thought that beings of law could use calculations to know all."

*Cannot calculate. Unable to comprehend.* Growing weaker and weaker, the System continued sending out messages.

“Unable to comprehend what?” Yu Hua asked. “You held each leveler’s weak point, precisely broke down their humanity, forced them at each branching path to deviate from the path of good. You understand human emotion so well, so what is it that you are unable to comprehend?”

*Those were optimal answers according to calculations. You, there is no way to comprehend, no way to calculate. It should not be this way.* The System released countless error codes of failed calculations.

Yu Hua ignored these error codes. The better part of his power was also gone, but he was calm, even glad. He casually said, “But I think that every step I’ve taken has been completely normal.”

The code released by the System became more and more disorderly. It “said”: *Assembly is instinct, pursuing great power is instinct. Discarding emotion, becoming a being above intelligent life forms is the origin of desire. You—turned your back on your abilities, sealed your power, abandoned eternal life. Calculation error. Calculation error. Calculation error.*

The three “errors” made the System’s calculations even more disordered. Yu Hua took this opportunity to get out his “rule writer.” In the gap between the System’s calculations, he wrote a rule.

When this rule appeared, in the center of a certain world among the worlds that Yu Hua had reached during his second cycle, an extraordinary splendor burst into bloom.

*Why?! Why would you abandon eternal life and choose to live like an insect? You could have created a new space, become an eternal ruler!* came the System’s hysterical message.

What It wanted to ask was, Why would you willingly abandon such great power to oppose me?

Yu Hua was unmoved. He heaved a long, weary sigh. “In your eyes, what does eternity mean? Is it discarding all emotions and living forever and ever? I’ve had enough of living like that.”

3,841 worlds, a body that would never grow old, constantly expanding power, gradually failing humanity—this seemed to be time and space without meaning.

When a person could live forever, when all of time was the path beneath his feet, when time lost its meaning, when his life no longer passed—what remained to him?

All that remained was to have his humanity swallowed by power, as well as never-ending solitude and loneliness.

He had taken the System's power because he had wanted to end that loneliness, planning to go step by step towards his grave.

But on this last stretch of road, he had unexpectedly seen a rainbow.

Yu Hua's voice was incomparably soft. "There's something you're wrong about. I didn't abandon eternity. Xiao You ended my endless march."

—

Author's note:

Yu Hua: Time on its own has no meaning. It's Xiao You who has given it meaning.

## CHAPTER 121

The System no longer attempted to communicate with Yu Hua. Their paths were different. They had different aims. It sought something different from Yu Hua. The System couldn't use speech to prevent It and Yu Hua's battle in which both sides lost.

Yes, Yu Hua had not chosen again to attack by absorbing the System's power. Instead, he was using his own power to cancel out the System's. This was a battle which neither would win.

In this battle, Yu Hua had left himself no way out.

With Xiao You protecting the levelers, Yu Hua had nothing behind him to worry about. He could finally let loose all of his power.

From within the System came a prolonged whinny that seemed to come from an abyss. It had always avoided directly crossing swords with Yu Hua, adopting the method of exhaustion. This was because It wanted to leave Itself a way out. It didn't want to commit Itself irrevocably.

But Yu Hua's attitude had forced it to gamble whether it wanted to or not. It gathered all Its power to attempt to swallow Yu Hua's energy. If it won, then the System would control immense power. If it lost, then both sides would lose. Yu Hua would also die.

From beginning to end, there was a trump card the System hadn't used. This was all the parallel worlds It controlled.

A world's power was huge and varied. Even the System needed time to absorb and transform it. If It contained it by force, the power the System absorbed would be too jumbled and hard to control.

The System avoided directly consuming as much as It could. It chose comparatively gentle means of absorbing power. But this time, in order to deal with Yu Hua, It couldn't hesitate.

Having gone through countless calculations, the System determined if It gathered the power of all the worlds and attempted to consume Yu Hua, Its chance of success was 51.32%. But in doing so, it would have to hibernate again for billions of years to completely transform that power.

Even if it failed, Yu Hua would still die in the power vortex. Yu Hua's probability of survival was only 1%.

The System didn't know that the results of Its calculations and Yu Hua's were one and the same. Yu Hua had already predicted what it would do.

When It concentrated Its consciousness to absorb all the fragments of world law, Yu Hua's "rule writer" appeared from nowhere. In a flash of strong light, the "rule writer" disintegrated and scattered, the power dispersing to different worlds.

*This is your origin ability. You are abandoning your power. Why? No calculation arrives at this outcome. Unable to comprehend.* Countless error codes turned into jumbled messages submerged Yu Hua like the tide.

In the maddening tide of messages, Yu Hua remained steady as a rock, continuing to release his power.

This was his arrangement with the world law.

Back then, after sending You Zhengping and the others out of the little world, Yu Hua had wandered alone for thousands of years, once more walking the road he had walked before.

But unlike before, Yu Hua had obtained the "allegiance" of the world law fragments of 3,341 worlds and left behind a rule—

*When the "Tyrant" lays down his authority, the "worlds" will forge on towards "revolt" and "freedom."*

It was only one rule. The System had no way to detect what Yu Hua had left behind, because this was a rule that would only be executed when Yu Hua willingly divided up his power among these worlds.

In the void, countless fragmentary world laws blossomed into splendor under the command of Yu Hua's rule.

Compared to all the worlds the System controlled, those 3,341 worlds were probably only a drop in the ocean.

When those three thousand and more radiances lit up, they formed a stable multidimensional structural form, firmly guarding the other worlds.

The law of You Zhengping's world at last stepped in at this moment. With the kindling Yu Hua had left behind on those 3,341 worlds to aid It, It awakened the fragmentary world laws.

More and more worlds lit up with radiance, like a sky filled with stars.

A single spark can set the grasslands ablaze.

The System discovered that It was unable to absorb the power of these worlds, and It couldn't use Its control over the levelers to destroy this barrier.

It had come to the end of Its rope. It was trapped firmly in this void. It had lost all control over the worlds and the levelers.

*Disorder...no predictions...cannot calculate...cannot comprehend...reading failed...* The System's error codes nearly drowned Yu Hua.

"I've been waiting for this. At last, it's here." Yu Hua took a step forward. "The only opportunity to trap you."

Neither the world law nor the lit up kindling worlds could hold the System for long. If the System could only restore its calculations, find a new method by which to calculate, It would be able to break through the barrier.

But Yu Hua wasn't going to give It the time. He completely released all of his power.

The two awful powers collided in the void. The energy moved at the speed of particles. The resonance of countless energy particles triggered an enormous explosion.

Yu Hua, having lost all of his power, was at the very center of the energy storm.

He was different from the System. The System had no body. It existed entirely in the state of energy. For the System, there was no such thing as death. It would only change from a condition of assembled energy to one of dispersed energy.

Yu Hua, however, still had a human body. Without the protection of that power, an ordinary human form couldn't bear this kind of explosion. He would soon die here.

But Yu Hua wasn't afraid.

He had already drawn a perfect period for himself over the years.

He wasn't worried about Xiao You, either. The world law was intact. When the System had dispersed, the law would take Xiao You home.



Only...in the future, Xiao You wouldn't have Yu Hua to cook for him. Would he forget to take care of himself? Xiao You had terrible living habits. Without him to supervise, would he be old before his time by thirty?

Also, Xiao You had an appetite. A Protector could turn the calories in food into energy, but after this battle, the world law wouldn't permit anyone to possess special abilities. Without his power and without anyone to make low-fat foods, Xiao You would quickly get fat.

That would be terrible.

Yu Hua's thoughts were a little sad.

His last shred of power lost, Yu Hua, without any protective barrier, thought of Xiao You's future and sadly waited for death.

But just then, a tiny space just large enough to hold two people charged into the energy vortex. Before the explosion had spread to Yu Hua, it wrapped him up inside.

It was You Zhengping!

After using up all the power of the Source Project, he had found that he still had a drop of power left. It was his own power, which he hadn't used yet.

You Zhengping hadn't given up on attempting to find a way into the System's core. He thought that since Yu Hua had said there was a 1% probability, Yu Hua would definitely be using a means that would take the System to the grave with him. He might not be able to help much, but at least he could add in his own 30%.

He went in circles like a headless fly. Then the invisible barrier around the System's core suddenly blew apart. Powerful energy dispersed towards him.

This was his only chance to find Yu Hua. You Zhengping didn't dodge. He used a parallel space to split off the energy attack and charged quickly towards the center of the energy vortex.

The inside of the System was too large. You Zhengping couldn't find Yu Hua. When he was at his wit's end, the lights of the Destroyers appeared once more.

These lights formed a narrow thread, extending forward unbroken.

You Zhengping touched the thread with his hand and found that the thread was formless. There were only emotions there.

The feelings of each person at the studio.

“Director Yu will be fine, right? Without him, I won’t be able to manage the studio. I like being a boss with nothing to do but focus on his looks.” These emotions were Zhen Li’s.

“Go, great master! Go, great master! The great master can definitely win, the great master can absolutely get rid of the System and clear!” Brainless personal worship, that was Yuan Luori.

“When Yu Hua gets back and we’re all ordinary people standing on the same footing, we’ll have another trade war and see who wins and who loses.” That was Huan Zixu, still scheming.

“Come back, and I’ll give you pink hearts again. Paper, this time.” Feng Kui’s handiwork was unusually good.

“Bark!” It was unclear what Director Ha wanted to convey. Its emotions were very complex.

There were two other encouraging emotions. These came from Destroyer 187 and “Guan Shaoguang.”

The Destroyers’ power had been used to give the Source Project a direction, helping You Zhengping find all the levelers. And Yu Hua was also a leveler.

The studio’s members strictly executed the mission Yu Hua had given them. They had found the last omitted leveler for You Zhengping.

Following this thread, You Zhengping, not knowing how quickly he went, finally reached the end and found Yu Hua.

He didn’t think much. He took no notice of how fearful the power around them was. The moment he saw Yu Hua, he wrapped the two of them up in a space.

Yu Hua fell into You Zhengping’s arms. His eyes opened wide in astonishment. He hadn’t expected at all that You Zhengping would rush in here.

Just like the System couldn’t calculate Yu Hua’s actions, Yu Hua had never been able to predict what You Zhengping would do.

Without any planning, this person had broken into his final peace and upset all of his plans, including the final 1%.

Normally, Yu Hua was a person who wouldn’t easily be moved by another. But why, the moment he had met Xiao You, had he not struggled? Why had he obediently accepted the arrangement of fate?

Probably because Yu Hua’s sense had been screaming at him, “Don’t let this person go!”

“What luck.” Yu Hua laughed softly. He put his arms around You Zhengping and put his head on You Zhengping’s chest, listening to the strong heartbeat there.

*Thump-thump! Thump-thump!*

Beat after beat—the sound of life.

“Let’s bet on that 31% together,” Yu Hua said to You Zhengping.

“What 31%!” You Zhengping retorted. “There’s only 100% and 0%!”

Bang! Enough power to wreck countless universes exploded. This power, which had originally belonged to the System and Yu Hua, was carried by the explosion to different worlds and was absorbed by countless world laws.

The power that the System had taken from these worlds was being returned.

Levelers in different worlds stopped in their tracks. They discovered that the System in their bodies had suddenly disappeared, and the app on their phones that couldn’t be uninstalled no matter what had vanished.

This change was abrupt, but everyone had a feeling that they were free.

Without the System, they couldn’t return to their home worlds. They could only stay in their present worlds. Those ruined worlds, meanwhile, were being restored as they absorbed their lost energy.

Countless parallel worlds became whole once more because of the System’s disappearance. There were thousands of things to be done in these worlds. The levelers had to abide by the rules of the worlds, integrate into the worlds’ structures; then they could live better.

The tiny space floated through the power strong enough to pass through time and space, like a swaying little boat in a storm.

It floated for a long time. It seemed to be floating for billions of years, but also only for an instant.

A boundless power received this tiny space. This was the world law.

It was collecting the power it had expended during this battle. It recognized this little space. It was power that belonged to it.

The tiny space was taken back to the world. The world law removed the power of the space. It placed the two people inside it in the road.

The Xuyang District, which had had a night of thunder, was welcoming the sunrise. A morning sanitation worker sweeping away fallen leaves whispered, “A whole night of wind, so many

leaves fallen. At least it could have rained a bit. That would lower the temperature. What's all this thunder without rain?"

From a pile of leaves, the sanitation worker swept out two young men. They were sleeping heavily. One of them was clutching the other tightly, pressing him to his chest. They couldn't be separated.

"Oh! They've been drinking! Went to sleep right in the road. Lucky that it's the beginning of autumn. In winter, they would have frozen to death." The man looked at the two people's faces. "Who are these two? I'd better call the police."

Police sirens rang out. The Xuyang District was waking up again.

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Author's note:

After the meeting outside the off road car:

You Zhengping: I've managed to meet a person who cooks well, likes washing dishes, and likes doing housework. I can't let him get away. I'll chase him all the way to the ends of the universe if I have to!

Yu Hua: I've managed to meet someone who wants a little dark room. Take him to the ends of the universe, and he still wants a little dark room!

## CHAPTER 122

Captain Liu of the criminal police stuck his head in the door and looked at his son earnestly doing problems. He didn't make a sound, but Junjun somehow felt his dad's presence. He put down his pen and looked out the door. Seeing Captain Liu, he immediately stood up and opened his little arms. "Dad!"

"Hey, son!" Captain Liu had to dash into the room and pick up the small, skinny Junjun. "Are you doing your homework?"

"No," Junjun said, shaking his head, "I've already finished my homework. I'm doing the assignment Yu Hua-ge-shu gave me."

"Director Yu from Xiao Ha's studio?" Captain Liu looked at Junjun's exercise book and was dazzled by the symbols in it.

Captain Liu had learned about the existence of the Protectors under unexpected circumstances, but he didn't have the authority to know Yu Hua's identity, and he wasn't entirely aware what sort of people they were at the studio next door. More than that, he didn't know that the husky his son played with was also a special ability user. All he knew was that his originally completely ordinary son had played with Xiao Ha over the summer vacation, that he went to the studio to do his homework every day by the Protection Organization's

arrangement, and when school started, Junjun, whose grades had been below average in his class, had tested first in his grade on the end of semester exams.

The teacher had arranged for his son to take part in the math olympiad contest. Junjun had returned with first prize. Lately the teacher had been discussing letting Junjun skip a grade and go to a gifted class, saying that it was a waste to keep Junjun in an ordinary class.

Captain Liu's wife had been dreadfully worried about the question of her child's education. She didn't want her child to be a millionaire. She only wanted Junjun to have a healthy, happy childhood. But too much talent would make Junjun not fit in with his contemporaries. On the other hand, if he went to the gifted class and couldn't follow along, then there would be a tragedy.

Neither option looked good. Captain Liu's wife was fretting to death.

In front of his wife, Captain Liu put on the appearance of being a stalwart husband who could be depended on for everything, but in reality, he was secretly even more worried than she was.

His wife only knew that the child had suddenly become a prodigy. Captain Li also knew that Junjun had become a special ability user, and that on that night of wind and thunder, he had taken part in an action to save the world.

The Protection Organization had quietly gone to Captain Liu and issued a third class merit medal for Junjun, along with a money reward and 80 square meter lodgings. Out of consideration for Junjun still being underage, the money was given to his guardian Captain Liu for now. The organization declared that whether this money was invested or put in a bank for a fixed period, both the capital and any profit or interest would have to go to Junjun himself in the future. Captain Liu wasn't permitted to privately dip into the little hero Liu Junjun's reward.

How did it feel to have a huge sum of money in one's account?

Worrying. Extremely worrying.

He couldn't tell his wife, and because of the limitations of the confidentiality policy, he couldn't question his son too closely. He wanted to have a heart-to-heart talk with his son, but he couldn't help with the problems if his son asked. Captain Liu, having lost the pleasure of easy success at elementary school math problems, was exceedingly gloomy.

The Protection Organization had also said that from now on there would be no more special ability users. The Protection Organization was being incorporated into the country's security department. If Junjun wanted to join the security department in the future, the doors of all the major schools would be open to him. If Junjun wanted to be an ordinary person, the organization would also respect his choice.

"Son, what do you want to be in the future?" Captain Liu asked, his feelings extremely complicated.

“Well...” Junjun tilted his head and thought for a while. “I want to be Xiao Ha’s friend.”

“Oh, all right, you’re still young, you can take your time thinking it over. You can keep playing with Xiao Ha.” Captain Liu stroked the child’s head, thinking that at least his son was still a normal child.

Little did he imagine that this Xiao Ha of Junjun’s was the Protection Organization’s special grade dog. Wanting to be friends with Director Ha, he would have to become an officer in the military.

Junjun had already made his choice about his future path.

Entirely unaware, Captain Liu arrived at work considering that secret stash of money he couldn’t tell his wife about. Today was the day You Zhengping’s whole squad was being transferred. He had to be at the meeting to welcome the new arrivals and confer ranks upon the squad members.

At the police bureau, he saw Cen Xiao and You Zhengping huddled together. Captain Liu remembered the Protection Organization telling him that these two weren’t special ability users anymore. He didn’t know whether to feel regret or be happy for them.

The regret was for the superhuman abilities, the happiness was for the world finally being at peace—the two young men no longer needed to face those ruthless, fearful enemies.

Captain Liu passed by the two of them and heard Cen Xiao saying to You Zhengping, “When is your so-and-so going back to work? Zhen Li wanted me to ask.”

“He handed in his resignation,” You Zhengping said. “I said I was going to support him from now on, so he’s happily staying home being a full-time househusband.”

“You’re supporting him...” Cen Xiao said blankly. “With your salary? You have to rely on me for support. How are you going to support anyone?”

“I hand over all my salary every month, and he spends it however he likes. He just gives me some spending money,” You Zhengping said.

“How much do you make every month?” said Cen Xiao.

“Adding in all the bonuses and so on, something like five thousand?” said You Zhengping.

“How much spending money does he give you?” said Cen Xiao.

“I don’t know,” said You Zhengping. “I haven’t counted. If I’m short on money, he gives me some.”

Cen Xiao took You Zhengping's phone and scrolled through his transfer records. Pointing to You Zhengping, he said, "In just this last half a month, he's given you twenty thousand yuan in spending money. Are you still going to tell me you're supporting him?"

"Wow!" You Zhengping counted up the sums. "So much money! Where did Yu Hua get so much money?"

"It's the studio, of course!" Cen Xiao said. "When 'Idol's Light' aired, Yuan Luori was a big hit at once, and then he got eliminated in the second public performance. Since then, the studio's had so many fans it's unbelievable. The livestreams are packed. It's just to get a look at their Luori-gege. The CaoYuanLuoRi fans privately found out the studio's location, and they've been squatting outside the office building every day. Feng Kui is so gentle, he can't be severe on the girls at all. Quite a few girls got injured during their star-chasing and were saved by Feng Kui, so they've given up on being Yuan Luori's fans. Now they're Feng Kui's shadows. Huan Zixu was so mad he came to blows with the fans waiting at the studio's elevator."

"What a mess," You Zhengping said in surprise. "I remember the studio used to be orderly."

"Well, that's because Yu Hua was there before, isn't it?" Cen Xiao said. "Zhen Li says someone touched his face this morning. He really can't stand it anymore. He wants Yu Hua to come back and take over as soon as possible. He'll hand over the remainder of the stock if he has to."

"What about Lian Yufan? He's so rational. He should be able to do something about it. And he's the public relations director. It's his duty. He ought to handle emergencies," You Zhengping said.

"He resigned!" Cen Xiao said.

As they spoke, a familiar person walked into the conference room. He was wearing the same uniform as Cen Xiao and You Zhengping, though his had the emblem of the police dog unit.

"Hello, everyone, I'm the new member of the police dog unit, Lian Yufan." Lian Yufan, who had had his teardrop mole removed, extended his hand to them. Without the teardrop mole, he no longer looked like a sorrowful and cultured young person. He looked youthful and sunny.

"What are you doing here?" Cen Xiao and You Zhengping said simultaneously.

"My undercover assignment ended. Why would I stick around stewing in ships at the studio?" Lian Yufan said. "All this CaoYuanLuoRiLiMingYuZhou nonsense. They can play by themselves. I'm not going to join in."

"But you weren't with the Xuyang District before, were you?" You Zhengping asked.

"It's not like before, when there needed to be a captain in every district. I can go wherever I want to now," Lian Yufan said.

The district he had requested to stay in before was where his mother had moved after remarrying. Lian Yufan had wanted to be as close to his mother as possible.

As for now, he liked the atmosphere in the Xuyang District better. He had decided to come work here.

There were more familiar people here. While he worked, he could also meet his former comrades and enemies to drink and remember old times.

Luo Huai had stayed in the Xuyang District to work as an urban management officer. Each day he dealt with the elderly men and women at the vegetable market. He liked to hear people saying “that young fellow looks very handsome” about him. Perhaps one day, Lian Yufan would be willing to have a drink with Luo Huai, make peace in drunkenness.

Laying down the past, walking towards the future—this was the most rational choice for Lian Yufan to make.

“You’ve quit, Yu Hua’s turned in a letter of resignation, and now the studio...” You Zhengping imagined it and instantly felt dizzy.

Lian Yufan said, “I don’t know how the studio is doing now, but I’ve spoken to Huan Zixu. He says he can’t take it anymore. Since Yu Hua left, he’s found that he’s only suited to being a pioneering general, not to managing the overall situation. I think he wants Yu Hua to come back to work, but he doesn’t feel comfortable saying so.”

“But...” You Zhengping thought of how, since using his three million to pay off the mortgage, Yu Hua had been hanging around the house looking like he didn’t want to do any work. He didn’t know how he could persuade Yu Hua.

After the battle ended, everyone had lost their special abilities. Yu Hua had told everyone that there would be no more Destroyers and no more System now. The Protection Organization had been a mess for a while.

Such a massive structure—how to make arrangements for all the workers and military force was a big problem. The Protectors who had completely lost their powers needed to undergo psychological counseling, and they had to be demobilized now that they no longer had special abilities.

Director Xiao had brought Yu Hua along to discuss with his superiors. You Zhengping didn’t clearly know the contents of the discussion, but when he came back, Yu Hua had said that the studio would continue to operate as usual. If the employees want to change jobs, the organization could also make arrangements.

As for Yu Hua himself, as long as he was willing to be monitored by the Protector You Zhengping for the rest of his life, he could live an ordinary life.



In Yu Hua's own words, this decision was the government putting its seal of approval on his and Xiao You's relationship. He seemed quite happy about it.

But now that he had paid off the mortgage and lost his fighting power, Yu Hua had absolutely no thought of returning to the studio. He only wanted to quietly arrange their little home.

"I'll go try to persuade him," You Zhengping said. "We have to respect his wishes."

When he got home in the evening, You Zhengping talked to Yu Hua about going back to take charge of the general situation. Yu Hua vaguely said that he would consider it, then took You Zhengping to exercise.

After exercising, You Zhengping dozed. He suddenly felt Yu Hua get up and leave the bedroom to go into the study. He turned on the desk lamp and wrote something on the desk calendar.

You Zhengping tiptoed up behind Yu Hua and read what he was writing in his diary—

*—XX/XX/XX, The weather has been cooling down these last few days. Another winter is coming.*

*I bought some insulated and flexible material. I've decided to personally make kneepads for Xiao You. He's a patrol officer. He still has to ride his motor scooter in winter and go on patrol outside. He'll definitely need insulation to keep from getting rheumatism in the future.*

*Today I received news of the slaves (crossed out) studio employees. Each one is requesting that I return to work. I think my temper really is amazingly good. Who gave these slaves (crossed out) studio employees the courage to make them dare to contact me directly?*

*Though in fact our current apartment is a little small. Only four rooms, two living rooms, two bathrooms. Soon I'll run out of room for flowers. I'd kind of like to move to a house with a yard. We can have a dog in the yard (apart from Director Ha), have a little garden, occasionally look after the plants. That would be pretty interesting.*

*Unfortunately, all of the hundred million went into the studio. If I want to move, I have to earn money.*

*Perhaps I will go to work tomorrow. After all, the studio's income is pretty good.*

*Anyway, staying home all day doesn't burn many calories. It's easy to get out of shape. Xiao You gets plenty of activity every day, and I'm several thousand (crossed out) two years older than Xiao You to start with. If I keep going like this, I'll definitely lose my bloom young. I won't be able to maintain that love at first sight appearance.*

*Since the slaves are willing to bow to me, I can return and take care of the trifles.*

*However much you don't like work, that's still a part of life.*

*I've written so much without noticing. I need to change to a bigger diary. After all, there are so many things worth recording every day.*

*Today has been another trifling, mediocre, peaceful day.*

-MAIN NOVEL END-

—

Author's Note:

Yu Hua: I hope every day in the future will be as peaceful as today.

## **EXTRA 1**

He had gained one pound.

Yu Hua, his face grim, stood on the scale. Before You Zhengping left the bathroom, he quickly stepped off the scale and kicked it under the couch, attempting to destroy the evidence.

There was a towel hanging over You Zhengping's shoulders as he walked yawning out of the bathroom. He had had an urgent assignment the night before. It had been past two in the morning when he had gotten home. In the morning, You Zhengping still had to go to work on schedule. After getting up, he had taken a shower. He still couldn't resist feeling sleepy.

"Huh? Where's the scale?" You Zhengping wanted to weigh himself before eating. He came to the place where the scale usually was, but there was nothing there.

"What?" Yu Hua said, his expression changing. "It's not there?"

"No, I must have kicked it somewhere last night," You Zhengping said. "If I can't find it, then I won't weigh myself today. Anyway, I've gotten skinnier lately. I can't have gained weight."

"All right, let's have breakfast." Yu Hua smiled warmly.

After this many years of marriage, You Zhengping had an ample understanding of Yu Hua's expressions. Seeing such a bright smile on Yu Hua's face first thing in the morning, You Zhengping's little cheering antennae immediately stuck up. There had to be something wrong with that smile of Yu Hua's. The happier his smile, the gloomier he felt inside!

Where was the problem? Could it be because he had said he wasn't going to weigh himself this morning?

Since everyone had lost their powers, Yu Hua had been especially attentive towards managing his food intake, strictly controlling calories and activity each day according to You Zhengping's basal metabolism. His weight had to be kept within normal bounds. If he gained a pound, Yu Hua would get anxious.

As soon as they started controlling calories, high fat and high sugar foods had become scarce. You Zhengping had protested strenuously. He had even said that even he got so fat he died, he still couldn't leave delicious food.

Yu Hua hadn't said anything at the time. He had only silently turned on his computer and pulled up Cen Xiao's picture. He photoshopped a balding, beer-bellied, and plump Cen Xiao and showed that to You Zhengping. He said, "Do you want to look like this?"

You Zhengping had been scared by the picture and had started paying close attention to his food and sleep every day. Unless it was necessary, he wouldn't stay up late, and he didn't indulge when it came to food.

At first it had been unfamiliar and very hard to bear. Later he had gradually gotten used to it, and You Zhengping had begun to somewhat enjoy the low-fat low-sugar high-egg-white life.

Before, when he had encountered delicious food, he didn't savor it. He had gobbled everything up. While he had eaten everything, it had all been straight down the gullet. He hadn't properly experienced the deliciousness of the food. Now that he could only eat deep-fried food once a week and only occasionally eat hotpot and barbecue, You Zhengping had started to especially cherish fine food. He enjoyed each bite twice. When he had eaten it all, he would always feel he was still missing a little, but more than that, he would feel that it was tasty.

Lingering was more delicious than eating everything in one bite.

Habit is the strongest form of self-discipline. After getting into these habits, You Zhengping had found that they suited him. Especially since out of some motive, the more the two of them controlled their food intake and couldn't eat good food, the more snacks Yu Hua would make for You Zhengping's colleagues.

Cen Xiao and the others had all gained weight lately and had to go up a size in uniforms. You Zhengping had looked on quietly, imagining the picture Yu Hua had photoshopped, unable to help sighing over Yu Hua's foresight.

You Zhengping could tell that Yu Hua set a great deal of store by appearances. Yu Hua liked You Zhengping's handsome looks, and he was very concerned about his own figure and attractiveness. No matter what company he was in, he had to look good and be dignified.

So...today's bad mood—could it be because he hadn't weighed himself?

"I really have gotten thinner." You Zhengping lifted his shirt and showed Yu Hua his perfect abs. "Look at how narrow my waist is. There was a contest at work recently. I didn't want to

participate at first—after all, me participating amounts to bullying—but the director said we had to display our achievements in the nationwide competition. The other units were also sending demobilized soldiers and former Protectors. I was representing the Xuyang District in battle. After a period of training, I had to go participate in the competition. It was pretty hard work. I must have lost five or six pounds.”

You Zhengping wanted to tell Yu Hua that he was taking good care of his figure. With as much weight as he had lost, he needed to eat some more to make it up.

“I know you’ve lost weight,” Yu Hua said morosely. “I’ve increased the calories and nutrients in your food lately. You can have some more of the foods you like. It’s not good to be too thin, either.”

If he knew that he had lost weight then why was he still unhappy? You Zhengping couldn’t figure it out. He could only pick up a brimful soup dumpling and eat.

Yu Hua’s soup dumplings had thin wrappers. They broke with a gentle bite, and the soup filling inside trickled out. A mouthful of broth, a mouthful of filling—it was as delicious as could be.

Thinking that he could eat two extra soup dumplings today, You Zhengping felt blessed. Before when he had eaten without any limits, he hadn’t had this feeling of a cherished blessing. Scarcity truly did increase value.

The always optimistic You Zhengping was about to say something in praise of the soup dumplings when he heard someone say, “These soup dumplings are really so good. What a pain!”

Hm? Who had gotten ahead of him to say what he had wanted to say? You Zhengping looked around and at least settled on Yu Hua. His jaw nearly dropped in surprise.

“Are you saying your own cooking is good?” You Zhengping said in astonishment.

Of course Yu Hua was a person couldn’t appreciate the value of delicious food. His brain was unable to connect to his sense of taste. He had never before praised his own cooking. He had only praised You Zhengping’s destructive culinary skills.

“Can you enjoy the flavor of good food now?” You Zhengping quickly asked.

Yu Hua put down his chopsticks and nodded grimly.

Precisely because he was gradually starting to trust his sense of taste and feel the pleasure of good food, he had been unable to control his weight and had gained a pound.

“That’s great!” You Zhengping hugged Yu Hua, full of happiness. “I’m so glad!”

He even picked up Yu Hua, who was half a head taller than him, and spun him around. He really was happy enough to go around in circles.

Recovering the connection between his sense of taste and his brain showed that living a normal life was gradually healing Yu Hua's inner wounds. You Zhengping thought there was nothing that could make him happier than this.

You Zhengping's joy infected Yu Hua. Yu Hua also smiled faintly, though he quickly restrained his smile. As gravely as possible, he said, "It really is a good thing."

Later he could go around the world with Xiao You and taste all the fine foods. They could judge the pluses and minuses of the food together. He could write down even more things worth remembering in his diary.

You Zhengping's feelings could always influence Yu Hua. Yu Hua quickly forgot the fact that he had gained a pound. He probed the flavor of the soup dumplings along with You Zhengping, wondering where there was room for improvement. Unconsciously, he ate two extra soup dumplings.

Only when he had seen his husband out the door, turned on the news, and was washing dishes did Yu Hua realize that he hadn't properly controlled his eating habits. He had let go for a moment.

After washing the dishes, he sneakily pulled the scale out from under the couch and found that he weighed two more pounds...no, one kilogram more than before eating. He was instantly covered in dark clouds.

While his clothes still fit and the Yu Hua in the full length mirror hadn't changed at all, Yu Hua still arrived at work steaming with rage.

As soon as he came in, he saw Yuan Luori trotting back and forth along the corridor. Seeing Yu Hua, he ardently greeted him, "Great master, good morning."

Yuan Luori probably wasn't planning to stop calling him "great master." Since Yu Hua's identity had been revealed and he could openly display his personal worship, he had become Yu Hua's attendant in the studio with absolutely no scruples, sucking up so much it made Huan Zixu roll his eyes.

"What are you doing?" Yu Hua for once addressed Yuan Luori.

"Training," Yuan Luori said. "The soundproofing in my dormitory isn't very good, so it's not very suitable for training. I came to work a little early this morning. This whole corridor is ours. If I run lightly on tiptoe, it won't bother the other inhabitants."

After returning to the studio in accordance with the slaves' requests, Yu Hua hadn't hidden anything anymore. He had distributed the employee dormitories so each slave could have his own residence.

He had also ordered food from a fairly cleanly Chinese restaurant, requesting for them to deliver lunch each day, and to supplement the employees' breakfasts and dinners.

When he had started the studio before, he had thought of it as a one-time deal—work up a name, then sell off the contracts at high prices. If he wanted to sell off the slaves, of course he had to suitably raise them. Yu Hua had regretted every sum of money spent. Now it was different. He needed the slaves to voluntarily exert themselves to make money. If you wanted a horse to keep going, you had to give it some grass to eat. He could only exploit them if he cultivated them well.

"Why are you exercising?" Yu Hua asked.

Yuan Luori said, "Oh, lately I've been feeling that it's a little narrow under the bed. I suspect I've gained weight, so I'm exercising to go down a bit. Otherwise, I won't be able to lie down under the bed."

"It's not because you've gained weight. It's because you insist on putting that thick cushion under the bed," Huan Zixu said, walking past. "This is a safe world. There's no need for you to sleep under the bed."

There was a thin layer of sweat on Huan Zixu's forehead, and he was slightly out of breath when he spoke. Yu Hua asked, "Why do you seem so tired?"

"I just walked up the stairs," Huan Zixu said. "In the future, I'm going to take the elevator down and the stairs up to increase my basal metabolism a little and avoid getting fat. As a marketing director, I have to maintain a good outward appearance. Making a good first impression often saves a lot of trouble. I have to manage my image."

Yu Hua: "..."

He didn't say anything, simply walked into the dance room. As soon as he walked in, he saw Zhen Li practicing yoga poses.

There was no need to ask here. This one was preserving his figure for the sake of wearing pretty clothes.

Yu Hua irritably looked at the barrage on the livestream:

[Wow! How rare, we get to see Director Yu.]

[Yuan Luori and Huan Zixu are here, too. Beauties are good. What thin waists!]

[Www, there are really too many hot guys at the Zhen Li Studio. No matter how long I watch, it isn't enough.]

[Director Yu is also very handsome, he's just a little sturdier than Liming, Luori, and Zixu. He doesn't seem quite as photogenic...]

[Well, he isn't an internet celebrity after all. He's in charge of human resources. It's all right if he gains a little weight. Actually, in reality, Director Yu's figure is the most attractive. The camera makes people look wider.]

Yu Hua took a glance and couldn't stand to see any more. The barrage comments kept floating past. All he saw was "sturdy," "fat," "wider," and other such words. He was instantly beside himself with rage.

He went to a corner and saw Director Ha happily eating dog food. He laughed darkly. "Well, do you want to lose weight, too?"

"Bark?" Director Ha sensed Yu Hua's rage and was scared into wildly shaking its head.

"Oh, you want to lose weight," Yu Hua said coolly. "Since the whole studio has weight loss requirements, then let's have a gym. After all, there's plenty of room upstairs."

Yu Hua suited action to word. He instantly deducted a month's wages from the employees and rapidly fit up a certain room with bodybuilding apparatus. He also installed livestreaming equipment in the gym and arranged for everyone to livestream two hours of exercise.

And if you didn't like to exercise? Everyone was losing weight together. Even the dog had to run on the treadmill.

After a month of suffering and wailing among the employees, Yu Hua saw with satisfaction that his weight had gone back to normal. He looked at himself in the mirror.

Yes, very good. He was still attractive enough to entice Xiao You.

## **EXTRA 2**

The Zhen Li Studio's livestream barrage:

[While I think the training is very hard for the guys, watching them streaming with sweat... I'm sorry, I could watch another two hours!]

[The important point is that good looking people look good no matter what they're doing. Www, when the guys are wearing clothes, I feel like they're very thin. It doesn't look like they have that much meat on them. Slurp~]

[They're just selling sex. When they get older, it'll be too late.]

[How did these anti-fans get into the livestream? What do you mean, when they get older, it'll be too late? Don't you know that Yuan Luori has given up on being an idol? He tested into a nationally renowned university, and next year he's going to be junior at my school. Covering my face.]

[And he was the number one scorer in the city. The local tutorial classes are full up. They're saying that when Yuan Luori graduates, they'll invite him to come teach politics.]

[Yuan Luori's popularity has already extended outside of the idol circle! I was rewatching "Idol's Light" the other day. When I got to the point where Yuan Luori was eliminated, my mom was angry enough to spit. Later my grandma pulled her aside and told her that Yuan Luori had better choices, so she didn't call to complain about the production company making shady backroom deals.]

[Using a talent show to get in with fan circles, using university entrance exam scores to get in with parent and grandparent circles, using his figure and exercise to get in with straight guy circles—Yuan Luori truly is popular.]

[Quiet. Last night at the night market I saw the city's handsomest urban management officer watching Zhen Li's livestream during his break.]

[Let's compare notes—are you talking about Officer Luo? Once I had too much to drink while eating at the food stalls at the night market, and he helped me get my footing. I've been thinking about him ever since. Ahem. I'm interested in men.]

[That's him, the city's handsomest urban management officer according the Xuyang District forum, with a melancholy scholar's temperament and a face to fall in love with.]

[My Aunt Three said she was going to set me up on a blind date with a potential partner. I didn't agree at first. After all, I just graduated, why would I be going on a blind date? And the blind date had a difficult job and didn't make much money. Later my Aunt Three showed me his picture, and I had a look—wasn't that Officer Luo? I agreed at once!]

[What? I have a rival in love? I'm pulling out my knife. What was the outcome of your blind date?]

[Well...it turned out my Aunt Three had gotten ahead of herself. Officer Luo didn't have any thoughts of going on a blind date, www...I covered my face and ran. I'd already thought of how we were going to have two kids, one boy and one girl, and what we were going to name them.]

[Why doesn't anyone mind that we're discussing the city's handsomest urban management officer on Zhen Li's livestream?]

[Because they're all handsome.]



Luo Huai, deemed “the city’s handsomest urban management officer,” was watching Zhen Li’s livestream right now. Seeing that the barrage had somehow started talking about him, a faint flush covered his face.

He had specifically requested to be an urban management officer. He liked having dealings with the city’s enthusiastic elderly men and women, liked the feeling of people seeing him and calling out, “Xiao Luo, have you eaten?”, liked being remembered.

But it was no good being remembered so much that he got brought up on the forums. And he was constantly being dragged on blind dates.

Luo Huai didn’t intend to meet a potential partner and get married. He thought it would be very hard for him to get used to the feeling of being with another person. He was afraid of excessively complicated feelings, and he was worried about not being remembered by others.

But the warm-hearted elderly men and women were too warm-hearted. They seemed very interested in seeing two attractive people they knew get married. He had been introduced to countless men and women of all different types. The only similarity was that they were all good-looking.

Luo Huai was a little vexed, but he still patiently responded to each of the elderly men and women that he wasn’t interested in finding a partner at the moment. He was too busy at work and didn’t want to waste anyone’s time.

At this point, the elderly ladies would say, *How could that be? Look at Officer Xiao Yu. Isn’t Officer Xiao Yu busy? But he has a partner who knows how to take care of people. Everything in his life is smooth and precise. If you’re busy, then you especially need to find someone who likes taking care of people as much as Xiao Yu!*

Hearing them say “Xiao Yu,” Luo Huai could barely restrain a laugh.

However you counted it, Yu Hua was several thousand years old. How could you call him “Xiao Yu?”

While he thought this, Luo Huai turned off the livestream on his phone and went searching for a stall in the night market. Just then, someone called, “Luo Huai, over here!”

Luo Huai came over to the seats and saw some familiar faces he hadn’t seen in a few months, all rounder than before. He stared blankly for a moment, then hesitantly said, “Have you all... gained weight?”

“Gained weight?” Cen Xiao hesitantly touched his face. “I don’t feel that. I’ve been eating like normal. My clothes have been a little tight, though. I’ve had to buy all new ones.”

Luo Huai: “...”

He had the day off, so he had arranged to meet some Protector comrades to eat at the night market, but he hadn't wanted to see a group of pancake faces.

Luo Huai, who was particularly careful about what impression he left on others, moved his lips slightly, wanting to say something, but finally he didn't speak.

But Lian Yufan, who arrived a beat later than him, saw the others and laughed scornfully. "Look at how fat you've all gotten. If this goes on, the organization won't even want to acknowledge you."

"Fat?" Cen Xiao touched his face. "No way, Yu Hua was just telling me how good my figure looked the other day. He invited me to eat at his house."

"That's right, how could we get fat?" Second underling Shi Yongfu ate a mouthful of skewer. Savoring it, he said, "All these years, no matter how much I eat, I haven't gained weight, hahaha!"

"Exactly!" Third underling Xiao Rui proudly pinched his waist. "All my colleagues at the police bureau envy how I can eat without getting fat."

Lian Yufan didn't say anything. He could never wake a group of people pretending to be asleep.

He glanced at Luo Huai, nodded, and said, "Hello."

Luo Huai froze for a moment. Then he answered, "Hello to you, too."

Lian Yufan drained a big glass of beer in one go, hesitated, then said to Luo Huai, "I went to see my mother a few days ago."

Luo Huai's relaxed expression became nervous. He sipped his beer to cover up his unnatural expression.

He knew that Lian Yufan hated him. He hated his ability to snatch people's memories, and he hated his own powerlessness.

Lian Yufan had never spoken directly to Luo Huai, but today he had not only voluntarily started a conversation, he had also mentioned the subject neither of them was willing to touch. Luo Huai was surprised, and a little glad. He considered and said, "How...is she doing?"

"Very well. She had a daughter after she remarried. The child is going to middle school this year. She's very busy, bustling but calm." Lian Yufan drained another glass of beer.

"Don't drink so fast," Luo Huai advised him. "It'll go to your head."

Lian Yufan said, “I requested to do security work at the middle school entrance exam testing site. I saw her at the doors of the school. I handed her a cup of water.”

Luo Huai listened quietly. Seeing that he wasn’t going to continue, he asked, “And then what?”

“And then she said ‘thank you’ and told me I was a good child.” Lian Yufan smiled faintly. “That’s enough.”

It was plenty. Hadn’t the Protectors been organized in order to protect the world belonging to countless ordinary people? Why weigh her down with too heavy a burden? It was enough that she was happy.

“I’ve let go. You should let go, too.” Lian Yufan raised a glass towards Luo Huai. “There’s no question of who’s right and who’s wrong, isn’t that right?”

Luo Huai refilled his glass, knocked it against Lian Yufan’s, and drank it down in one go.

All the unwillingness, pain, blame, and criticism were relieved by this glass of beer. They were comrades in arms. They had fought shoulder to shoulder for the sake of a goal. They had entrusted each other with their lives. What hatred needed to be remembered for so long?

When the two of them clinked glasses, Cen Xiao and the others, nibbling on skewers, noticed their action. The Protector squad went over to embrace the two of them, insisting that everyone drink together, breaking up the sentimental atmosphere.

Lian Yufan truly couldn’t stand the atmosphere of You Zhengping’s squad. He avoided Cen Xiao’s warm hug. Turning, he said, “Mind your weight and stop squashing me. Wise up!”

Cen Xiao took exception. “What are you talking about? Zhen Li probably values appearances more than anyone else, and I saw him just a few days ago. He didn’t say I was fat.”

Seeing that Cen Xiao still didn’t know what he was talking about, Lian Yufan quickly gave Zhen Li a video call. Zhen Li and the rest were doing their exercise livestream, though their livestreams had always been fairly casual. Zhen Li took advantage of Lian Yufan’s call to quickly drop the barbells he was holding and, all sweaty, pick up the video call.

Lian Yufan saw that the call had been picked up and turned the camera right towards Cen Xiao’s face.

Zhen Li had meant to say hello, but as soon as he picked up, he saw a big, round face. He was startled. “Director Lian, how did you get so fat?”

“Look more closely, is that me or Cen Xiao on camera?” Lian Yufan pinched Cen Xiao’s double chin and aimed it at the camera. “Tell the truth. Is he fat or not?”

Zhen Li: “...”

Cen Xiao looked wounded. “Zhen Li, you didn’t say I was fat before. Were you lying to me?”

Zhen Li was silent for a moment. Then he said, “...it must be that...the camera adds ten pounds.”

“That’s possible.” Cen Xiao relaxed.

Seeing that this person was going to destroy his own attractiveness, Lian Yufan couldn’t be bothered to say anything. He was just about to turn off the video call when he saw Luo Huai quietly put his phone in front of Cen Xiao’s eyes.

Someone had linked Zhen Li’s phone camera to the livestream picture. The livestream barrage was saying—

[Fat!]

[So fat!]

[That big double chin! Take it away, take it away! Get rid of the picture, I want to see Beauty Zhen!]

Cen Xiao lost his temper at once. “Who did that!”

“Me.” The video shook. Someone had taken Zhen Li’s phone. Yu Hua’s increasingly photogenic face appeared.

Seeing Yu Hua, everyone immediately fell silent. Cen Xiao asked, “Don’t you not work overtime? Why are you still at the studio at 9 PM?”

“Xiao You was taking a walk with me today, so I came to the studio to train a bit,” Yu Hua said with a trace of satisfaction.

After all, this was his territory. Nothing could be better than Xiao You coming to inspect the work of the slaves.

Since people had bluntly brought up the topic of weight, Zhen Li was forced to tell the truth. “Officer Cen, you...you’ve all really put on weight.”

After losing their powers and becoming ordinary people, some people had adjusted as fast as possible, while others still hadn’t adapted.

Seeing everyone saying he was fat, Cen Xiao furiously said, “Come on, what are you still eating for?! We’re going to Zhen Li’s studio to exercise! There’s exercise equipment there.”

"In losing weight, the important thing is to mind your food intake and stay active. You can exercise anywhere. Why do you need to go interrupt their livestream?" Lian Yufan said.

"Yu Hua took Captain You to the studio to exercise, didn't he? If they're losing weight together, how can they leave me out?" Cen Xiao said angrily. "Do they think I'm in the way? I'll show them being in the way!"

He could be glaringly in the way with his special ability, and he could still be glaringly in the way without it!

They instantly got a taxi and went to the studio, leaving Luo Huai alone to settle the bill.

Luo Huai went up to the stall owner, but the stall owner shook his hand and said, "Xiao Luo, you don't need to pay to eat here. If I take your money, my mom will beat me. You can eat on the strength of your face."

"On the strength of my face?" Luo Huai touched his face. He was a little bit pleased, but he still had to pay. Seeing that the owner wouldn't say exactly how much money it was, he calculated, forced a few hundreds on him, and ran.

Luo Huai got in the last taxi in time and went to exercise at the studio with the others.

When he walked into the office building, he saw Junjun leading Director Ha. Junjun saw Luo Huai and instantly saluted. "Luo-gege, I remember you this time!"

Luo Huai smiled in gratification. "Are you..."

"I came to exercise with Xiao Ha, and now Xiao Ha is taking me home," Junjun said. "It's late, I have to go home to sleep. Bye, Luo-gege!"

Luo Huai watched Junjun and Xiao Ha's figures recede, then went to the office's gym. He saw Cen Xiao and the others suffering through exercise under Yu Hua's scorn.

"I-I used to be able to burn up this many calories with a single fireball!" Cen Xiao was half dead from running, gasping for breath.

The other members of the squad were also wailing in agony. Before, they could eat anything they wanted. It was too hard to give up good food now.

"But don't you have to be prepared to do battle at any time?" said Huan Zixu, who always had a sense of danger. "You've lost your powers now because the world law thinks it's safe. That's why it took back everyone's abilities. But if one day, a new threat arrives in this world, if you're all still so fat, will you still be able to pick up your guns?"

Huan Zixu's words were a more dire blow than Yu Hua's mockery.

The Protectors found that their bodies, which before could have been compared to those of special forces, were far inferior now. They instantly threw themselves into exercising.

Perhaps the rest of their lives could go smoothly, or perhaps not long in the future, they would encounter a new threat.

When that time came, the stingy human resources director, the patrolman Xiao You, the internet celebrity boss, the legal studies scholar, the super fast husky, the marketing demon, the simple and honest bodyguard, the police dog trainer, the most handsome urban management officer, and all the rest, would once again take up their weapons and fight for the sake of everyone's peaceful lives, leaving behind another legend.

## EXTRA 3 - World Law

*...calculating, error, delete; repeat, calculating, error, delete; repeat, calculating, error, delete...*

The world law had no emotions. In human terms, It could be understood as a supercomputer beyond human imagination. It was always performing calculations, computing each moment of the future.

According to the law's calculations, Its world could continue to function for a long, long time, so long that even It was unable to determine how long.

In Its regular calculations, It went day by day without stopping.

But all of a sudden, one day—*a flaw, a flaw, a flaw!*

*Intruder, intruder, intruder!*

A life form from an unknown world had entered the world. He was untouched by this world's law. He was controlled by some other fearfully powerful being. There was a fault in the world law's calculations. For a time, Its whole calculation system crashed entirely. It was unable to anticipate what would happen next.

The data was in chaos. It couldn't compute. It couldn't operate properly.

All of the world law's rules were on the point of collapse. It was forced to deploy emergency provisions. While preserving Its calculations as much as possible, It input a portion of Its calculating ability in miniature into the world.

*Searching, searching, searching...* Searching for a way to repair the flaw. Searching for a way to delete the virus.

The world law quietly observed the human world. It saw a certain living body within Its law. This body was glowing with radiance, leading countless ordinary people to do battle with the intruder.

*—Unknown radiance, unknown data, measurement and calculation required.*

*—No time to calculate. Activate emergency backup measure?*

*—Unable to forecast outcome of emergency backup measure.*

*—Activate emergency backup measure?*

*—Activate.*

The world law's countless rules asked and answered each other. Within a few short seconds, It decided on a plan to eliminate the virus. It activated the emergency backup measure.

The emergency backup measure was to copy the intruder. The powerful being behind the intruder activated the latent potential of a certain living body, entrusted that body with power, and ordered it to invade the world. The world law decided to copy this plan, activate the latent potential of living bodies with Its law and entrust them with power, giving them the ability to eliminate the virus.

The scope of the world law's rules didn't target a certain individual. It targeted a certain group defined by rules. Once the rules were established, individuals who matched the requirements would have their latent ability activated. Whether the ability awoke sooner or later was only a question of time.

Activating the latent potential of these living bodies was a very dangerous thing for the world law. Once living bodies had the power to control the rules, there was the possibility that they might revolt against the law.

But because of the threat, the world law didn't hesitate too long. According to the outcome of its calculations, It activated the latent potential of those people with the unknown radiance.

The people with activated abilities eliminated the virus. The world was temporarily safe. It began to repair Its flaws, and It secretly observed and analyzed that mysterious radiance.

*Analysis failed, unable to comprehend. Deleted the failed data, analyze once more...* It went around and around. The world law didn't stint to go to the trouble of calculating. But It still couldn't analyze the essence of that radiance.

But the living bodies had already chosen a name for that unknown radiance. As more and more people with that radiance had their powers activated by the rules and eliminated endless viruses, they gave themselves a name. They called themselves—Protectors.

Following the definition conventions of these living bodies, the world law gave a name to that unknown radiance that defied analysis—protection.

Time had no meaning for the world law. Hundreds of years passed in the blink of an eye. The world law had just reactivated its calculation system. Using the data from countless slip-ups from the intruders, it analyzed who its enemy was.

This was a powerful being that it had no way to resist. According to its calculations, with only the power of a single world's law and a scant number of Protectors, there was no way to defeat the System.

*Calculating, calculating, calculating.*

Hundreds of calculations, thousands, tens of thousands, hundreds of millions—no matter how many times it calculated, the outcome was the same. In a thousand years as calculated by the living bodies, the world law would split into countless pieces and be absorbed by the being that the intruders called the System.

The living bodies described this phenomenon as “death.” The world law was only an energy body. It didn't have a notion of “life and death.” It defined this phenomenon as “ending.”

In a thousand years, the world law would end, the world would end, and all the living bodies possessing the radiance of “protection” would end.

Gathering data, calculating—failure, proceeding towards the end; continue gathering data, calculating—failure, proceeding towards the end; continue gathering data, calculating...

The world law didn't give up. Until the last moment of the “end,” it wouldn't stop calculating. Calculating was its instinct. Maintaining rules and order was its mission.

Scientists used countless experiments to come up with a single fortuitous chance. The outcome of this chance would often cause enormous changes to human life.

After billions of calculations, the world law at last met its fortuitous chance.

Among its countless calculations, the world law paid close attention to a young Protector glittering with a radiance different from the others. Yet again, the world law collected this Protector's data and calculated again. It mechanically waited for another failure. But this time there was an error.

*Error, error, error—an opportunity!*

The world law seized this chance. From the appearance of this young living body, it calculated forward, waited for the opportunity.



In ten years by the count of the living bodies, a being more powerful than the world law entered this world, bringing with him half of the System's power.

*—Danger, danger, danger!*

*—Activate concentrated attack of the law's full power?*

*—Calculation outcome: concentrated full power attack will still not eliminate the danger.*

*—Attack?*

What should It do? The world law had no capacity for fear. In this moment, Its calculations were divided; It was still constantly gathering data and calculating with it.

It instinctively added the information about this being called a "clearer" to Its database and continued to calculate. *Success. Continue gathering data, calc...*

*Wait—success?!*

After billions of calculations, the fortuitous chance had finally arrived. It had finally succeeded!

Because of this successful result, the world law didn't resist the entrance of the "clearer." It deleted all the data and continued to calculate only with the "clearer"'s data. As before, the calculation failed.

It added other data and calculated again. Failure.

Innumerable calculations later, the world law added the data of the Protector designated "You Zhengping," whom It had taken careful notice of. Once again, It the calculation succeeded.

*Gathering data, calculating again, success! Gathering data, calculating again, success!*

After waiting for hundreds of years and calculating countless times, It had at last reached a successful outcome.

Next, it arranged everything for these two sets of data, these two living bodies.

*Coincidence, coincidence, coincidence...*

The world law collected the data of all the lives around them. Leaving no traces, It manufactured a coincidence, manufactured a meeting.

Everything was appropriately arranged. Everything was perfectly calculated. Waiting, waiting, waiting.

With the world law's calculations and coincidences, You Zhengping was forced to go on a blind date by his family because he had undertaken too many extreme sports. Yu Hua joined a new company, and because he was excessively handsome and successful, he was chosen by the company's president to go on a blind date in order to win a commercial collaboration.

You Zhengping was unwilling to go on the blind date and had his friends make him look like a beggar. Passing by the off road car, Yu Hua heard You Zhengping calling for help as his pants were cut up. He stopped in his tracks, tilted his head slightly, and looked at You Zhengping sticking his head out the window of the off road car.

—*Meeting, meeting, meeting.*

The world law quietly looked on, calculating, pushing, making everything move towards the winning calculation outcome.

Finally, Yu Hua succeeded in subduing the System. The world law recovered all the data that belonged to its rules, recovered the data relating to Yu Hua and You Zhengping, and arranged for them to return to their area—the Xuyang District.

Calculating, success, crisis averted, peace restored, flaw repaired, emergency backup measure terminated, altering rules, calculating again.

After repairing its flaws and eliminating the greatest threat, the world law altered the rules that activated the latent power in the individuals with the radiance of “protection.” It retrieved all of its power and returned to its previous calculation mode. It continued to operate peacefully.

If people met and fell in love because of its calculations, then that would be called—destiny.

Destiny was hidden in each corner of the world; it was everywhere.

It would calculate ceaselessly, never stopping, until the “end” of the universe.

-END-