

The background is a dark, stylized illustration of a futuristic city or industrial complex. It features curved, metallic-looking structures and a person in the lower-left foreground wearing a dark suit with a glowing red light on their chest. The overall color palette is dominated by dark blues, greys, and blacks, with some highlights in orange and white.

by Lazy Cliché

Superstars of Tomorrow



QIDIAN
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SUPERSTARS OF TOMORROW

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Chapter 201

Our Muzhou Blood

Fang Zhao had already said aloud the answer in Fan Lin's heart. Now, Fan Lin was no longer able to preach about it. However, he reacted quickly and did not show any awkwardness, instead just laughing heartily. "That's right! You think exactly the same as me. I most love watching them germinate. It is really vivacious, especially those arrow sunflowers. Tomorrow morning, you guys will be able to see it. However, before that..." Fan Lin made Fang Zhao and Kevin Lin follow them over to the experimental plots. "Don't you people want to livestream? We can start. Fang Zhao, there is some equipment for hammering the ground over on that side. We have to do some work on the land."

Kevin Lin stamped on the ground. The ground had been hammered before, and it was especially hard. It was difficult for Kevin Lin to imagine planting anything here. He found it hard to believe. "Is there really stuff planted underneath?"

"Of course. Otherwise, why would I have called you guys over? They have been planted for two months already. If it were other crops, the seeds might have rotted in the earth, but arrow sunflowers are different. Just wait and see, the monitored data underground is normal, and they will be able to germinate tomorrow. These two months, the seeds underground have already swelled up to many times their original size."

What was the best way to ensure a plant's growth? They had accumulated 30 years worth of experience growing arrow sunflowers. Till now, at this experimental plot, they had gone through over 20 generations of arrow sunflowers.

As Fan Lin explained to Kevin Lin about this hybrid species, Fang Zhao had already dragged a sledgehammer out from the case beside the experimental plot. It felt heavy in his hands, but just like the pickaxe in the mining tunnel, it had propulsion appliances installed on it. It might be slightly heavy, but once the appliances were enabled and the hammer was being used, it would get much easier.

Kevin Lin coordinated with Fang Zhao and turned on the live broadcast.

Kevin Lin had originally looked a little gloomy, but he put on a warm smile in a flash. "Greetings, everyone. The place I am at is the Academy of Science HQ's Professor Fan Lin's experimental plot on planet Baiji."

He gave a brief introduction of the surrounding terrain but did not mention which outpost it was, nor did he film anything else. All he filmed was the experimental plot's piece of land. Therefore, audiences did not know the location of this experimental plot on planet Baiji.

But online audiences' main focus was not on the outpost. As they watched the scene displayed, they felt puzzled.

"What is going to be broadcast today?"

"Why is it that all I see is a plot of flat land?"

"Don't tell me they are going to broadcast people eating soil?" someone joked.

"What can even grow in such hard ground? Do you think I have never planted flowers?"

"Fan Lin? That name sounds familiar."

"You don't say! Of course he is familiar. Every one of us in Muzhou knows him!"

Upon hearing the name "Fan Lin," audiences in Muzhou could not help but sit up straight and pay attention. Quick-witted people had already guessed that maybe some important new product was going to hit the markets.

In the live broadcast, Fan Lin introduced a new species that had been cultivated in his laboratory: the arrow sunflower.

"...This sort of herb has an annual life cycle. Thirty years ago, my laboratory had already bred it. Half of its genes are from our home planet and the other half from Baiji. In These 30 years, we have been experimenting and improving it."

Fan Lin also spoke about the benefits of this new species. It provided lots of multivitamins and could help in resisting illnesses. This species could be used as food in cooking, medicine, and even military affairs.

Many online audiences were skeptical.

"Is that true?"

"So many benefits?"

"He's bragging, right? Don't they just love to brag about their own stuff and, after that, suck money from consumers?"

"Nonsense. Take a look at who is talking! That is Fan Lin! Perhaps he might not be so reputable in other continents, but everybody in Muzhou knows him!"

In Muzhou, the name "Fan Lin" was a gold-plated signboard. The overwhelming majority of crops used by Muzhou farm owners all came from Fan Lin's laboratory. For example, a couple of years ago, there was a type of fruit that had become popular. When farm owners went to purchase seeds, they always looked at the laboratory that bred the seeds. There were certain names that nobody would doubt regarding safety issues, and Fan Lin's laboratory was one such name.

Someone made a list of various fruits, vegetables, grains, and food products that had been produced by Fan Lin's laboratory. Even without this list, just doing a search online would show how awesome Fan Lin's laboratory was.

However, although Fan Lin did not say much, those that understood could guess that once this product hit the markets, it would probably be a high-end one.

When others in the same industry as Fan Lin received the news, they immediately switched over to channel S5.

"Without saying anything, Fan Lin has actually gone to planet Baiji! Seems like it is indeed hallowed ground. The soil is definitely good, otherwise Fan Lin would not have even given it a glance."

"That means that Fan Lin had already invested in planet Baiji early on."

"30 years ago, planet Baiji's land was dirt cheap. I think a 100-year lease contract cost about 100,000?"

"Maybe 50,000 was enough. Renting the land then was just a steal. Now, if you don't have millions, you can forget about the idea. And even if you do, there are thorough investigations, and planet Baiji's side might not even approve of it."

In the past, getting a piece of land on Baiji to build a laboratory had been very easy. Baiji base would surely have given a lot of leeway as long as it was not overboard, as they had wanted to attract more people.

But now, applying for even a small plot of land was especially hard, and there was still the stingy Shanta there.

"Makes me green with envy!"

"His luck is really good. Straightaway applying for 100 years of usage rights. Now, only 30 years have passed. If we compare to the past, we would definitely be losing out, but if we want to apply for an experimental plot on planet Baiji, we still have to do it fast. If we wait till Baiji slowly becomes even more developed, at that time, even if we wish for it, it will be really hard to get land."

"Is that fella Fan Lin flaunting? With that much land, even if his research on Baiji concludes and he no longer cultivate crops there, when he leaves the place, he can also earn a huge sum."

Fan Lin's live broadcast this time around indeed gave rise to much envy, admiration, and hatred from others within the same industry. It also made many people think about staking a claim on planet Baiji.

To the contrary, Muzhou's other farm owners had started thinking how great it would be if they could grow this crop in Muzhou. Even if it could not be grown in Muzhou, the Muzhou people could take charge of exporting it. When it came to the processing of fruits, vegetables, and fresh produce, Muzhou was the best in the world, and they had many advantages.

As the agricultural continent, for all Muzhou farm owners, this had an even bigger appeal than the discovery of grade A power ore. After all, they relied on the land for agricultural produce to make a living.

Everyone could see that Fan Lin had borrowed channel S5 to make an early announcement of the new product his own laboratory had created.

In comparison, channel S5's resident celebrity Fang Zhao had even less presence than Kevin Lin. At least Kevin Lin was beside Fan Lin, controlling the filming, and he could ask Fan Lin some questions. Fang Zhao just silently stood to the side, hammering away and not interrupting.

Fan Lin walked around the plot and stopped. Stamping on the ground twice, he said, "Fang Zhao, here, this spot requires another two knocks."

Fang Zhao did not say much, just lifting the sledgehammer and hammering twice on the spot Fan Lin had pointed out.

"Here, here, gently! Hey, that's too gentle!"

Fan Lin directed Fang Zhao to hammer at different spots. Noticing his enthusiasm in directing Fang Zhao, Kevin Lin could not help but ask, "Aren't there machines to do this job?"

Although Kevin Lin wished to tell the audience during this broadcast that even if Fang Zhao was not mining in the tunnels, he was hammering the ground in the experimental plots and was not slacking off, he still raised questions that answered the doubts of the audience.

The reason why machines could not be used when mining was that many instruments would not be precise enough and were unusable. Therefore, manpower was needed. But why did the job of hammering the ground at the experimental plot require manpower to complete?

As for this question, Fan Lin did not avoid it. "Why use machines when there is manpower available?"

Kevin Lin: "... Why do you sound so self-confident?!"

Those not in the know would even think that Fan Lin was deliberately making things difficult for Fang Zhao.

"Do you know how much force seeds exert when they germinate?" Fan Lin suddenly asked.

Kevin Lin's mind stopped wandering and replied, "I read something related to this before. It said that when a seed germinates, it has the strength to split rocks."

"That saying is indeed correct. However, although it sounds strong, it is not something that can be done momentarily. It is a slow process. Arrow sunflowers are different, though. The process of their germination is compressed to within a very short period. During that brief moment, it produces an explosive force that is rather astonishing.

Tomorrow at daybreak, you will get to see them germinate."

When he talked about results that he himself had so painstakingly cultivated, Fan Lin's eyes were glowing. At the same time, he was telling online audiences that what he wanted to show everyone would happen tomorrow morning.

Fang Zhao spent half the day busy at work in the experimental plot. Kevin Lin felt tired just watching him. The dull thuds that rang out were real as could be and were not just for show. Although the hammering equipment had propulsion applications on it, Fang Zhao still needed to use his own strength. And from the start of the live broadcast till after the broadcast ended, Fang Zhao's attitude was always the same. He did not just skive off just because the broadcast was turned off.

Although Fan Lin kept instructing Fang Zhao on where to hammer, he knew that as long as the little fellow asked for a break, he would not object to it. He was very satisfied with Fang Zhao's performance, unlike certain little celebrities that had a completely different attitude on-screen and offscreen. Thus, Fan Lin did not say much. He just wanted to see how long Fang Zhao could persevere.

On the contrary, as Fang Zhao continued hammering away at each experimental plot and was about to reaching the eighth plot, not only Kevin Lin, even Fan Lin was feeling tired. However, Fang Zhao still seemed to be rather relaxed. He was only covered in a layer of thin sweat, but he was not panting as he continued hammering away at the eighth plot effortlessly.

Fan Lin looked at Fang Zhao, who was helping him hammer the land, and was pleased. "It feels like this little fella has our Muzhou blood in him."

Muzhou people's farm work was very impressive. On average, their constitutions were also stronger. Even many large farm owners that seemed to live like kings were stronger than people of other continents when it came to standing in their fields.

"There is no need for wishful thinking. I have seen Fang Zhao's file; his previous three generations are all Yanzhou people," Kevin Lin said.

Fan Lin did not care about what Kevin Lin said. He was just lameting and thinking to himself how he could go about talking to Shanta to get Fang Zhao to transfer over here for his military service.

Although he had only wished to borrow Fang Zhao and Kevin Lin's live broadcast to

publicize his own laboratory results, today he had witnessed Fang Zhao's character. If Fang Zhao had changed his attitude and slacked off after the live broadcast, Fan Lin would not have had any other thoughts and would have sent him back to base after the next day's objectives were met. But now, he had changed his mind. He wished to keep Fang Zhao at Outpost 23 and help this old man with his farm work.

Chapter 202

Breaking through the Soil

Although they all had their nutritional dose and some compressed food, the people of Outpost 23 treated Fan Lin, Fang Zhao, and Kevin Lin well. They brought out some of their stockpiled food from their hunts to receive their guests.

The outpost was not as big as the base, and conditions were limited. Each room in the outpost was 10 square meters, and there were two people to a room.

At night, Kevin Lin laid down in his bed, tired out from an entire day. He had covered a lot of ground today. When looking down at the experimental plots from the flying transport, they did not look very big. Only when walking around inside had he known how exhausting it was. Walking up and down and dealing with all sorts of questions from Fan Lin had been tiring indeed.

The outpost's rooms had a sort of cold metallic feel, just like a prison cell. Bases everywhere had similar conditions, but at least the rooms in the base were slightly larger and had more furnishings.

Kevin Lin thought to himself, At least we are returning to base the next day. Enduring a night is not so hard.

"Writing in your diary again, Fang Zhao?" Kevin Lin asked as he noticed Fang Zhao jotting down stuff in that familiar notebook. He had gotten the hang of Fang Zhao's habits. Every day, Fang Zhao wrote down some stuff in that notebook. Fang Zhao had said they were song scores, but as Kevin Lin did not understand them, he just treated it as Fang Zhao writing in his diary.

"Mmhm. You head to sleep first; I still have some stuff to write down." Fang Zhao was writing down the inspiration he had gotten today from the scenery of this planet's mountains and forests en route to the base and the inspiration he had gotten when hammering the ground.

These were just enough for a small portion, not an entire song, but as time passed, maybe on a certain day or at a certain juncture, he might create a completed song.

Before Fang Zhao had enlisted for his military service, he had been called over by Old Xue Jing for a chat. This year, the old artist would embark on another global lecture tour, but as Fang Zhao was undergoing military service, he wouldn't be able to participate this time around.

Xue Jing had advised Fang Zhao not to waste the bits and scraps of inspiration he got during his military service. Although Fang Zhao was only 20-plus, he was considered rather young in the New Era. In composition circles, he was also considered relatively young, but there people in other continents that were even younger and had done their own concerts. Xue Jing hoped that Fang Zhao would not take it easy.

"To gain more recognition in the industry, you still have to go through some traditional methods and raise your artistic value. For example, according to old customs, do a concert. You can disagree with these old customs and feel that they are too rigid, but only those standing at the apex have the right to challenge these customs. For now, it's best to follow these old customs."

Xue Jing had then advised Fang Zhao that it was best if Fang Zhao could organize his own concert within the next 10 years. This sort of concert could not be comparable to all those other commercial concerts, and he would need to provide his own quality works. Thus, Xue Jing hoped that even if Fang Zhao was undergoing his military service, he would not forget his own profession. Inspiration was a strange phenomenon. When one let inspiration slip by, it would be difficult to get another chance to grab it again.

Fang Zhao took Xue Jing's advice to heart. Even if Xue Jing had not said so, Fang Zhao would have kept his old habits and recorded down any inspiration he got in his daily life. The conditions were tough during the Period of Destruction, but now that he had such great opportunities, he needed to grasp every single bit that passed by.

Fang Zhao also wished to organize a concert, but he would need to painstakingly search for so-called art techniques, and he could only follow where his own inspiration took him.

Kevin Lin had no way of knowing what Fang Zhao was thinking, but he was already tired. "All right, you continue writing, I'll sleep first. Wake me up tomorrow. Fan Lin says we have to get up early to watch the seeds germinate. If we miss it, we will have to wait another year and would have come for nothing."

"All right. Head to sleep first." Fang Zhao turned off the lights to the room and then picked up a piece of food, threw it into the water tank, and tapped the glass lightly.

The light produced by the "rabbit" inside the tank was like a flashlight; it lit up the small room.

Fang Zhao had specially gotten this "rabbit" from Fan Lin. This little creature might seem sluggish, but it was actually full of vitality. If he threw a piece of food in, it would glow for a few minutes. The more food thrown in, the longer it glowed. Fan Lin had said the duration it glowed for was dependent on its mood. The more food thrown in when it was in a good mood, the longer it would glow for, but if it was in a bad mood, it would not glow no matter how much food was thrown in.

Fang Zhao took a shirt and wrapped it around one side of the tank to prevent the light from shining on Kevin Lin. Watching the "rabbit" in the tank slowly chomp on its food, he arranged his thoughts and continued writing the uncompleted tune. After that, he ammended the front portion.

By the time Fang Zhao closed his notebook, Kevin Lin was already snoring.

It seemed like the "rabbit" within the water tank was in quite a good mood. Fang Zhao did not know whether it was because he had been fed a lot or because it found its new environment exciting, as it had not extinguished at all.

Fang Zhao gently knocked against the tank wall, and the light slowly faded till it was all black.

Early the next morning, Fang Zhao received Fan Lin's call.

"Get up and head to the experimental plot. Don't laze in bed! Remember to bring the camera and make sure there is sufficient battery!" Fan Lin urged.

Kevin Lin was slightly dazed when he was woken up by Fang Zhao, as if he did not know where he was. After a while, he got up and followed behind Fang Zhao while yawning as they walked toward the experimental plot.

Kevin yawned again as he spoke. "It's still dark. What are we going to do so early in the morning? Squat and wait for it to germinate?"

"You wouldn't get to see anything if we waited till daylight. I'm not kidding." Fan Lin

did not pay much attention to Kevin Lin. He was directing a few scientists that were running around both inside and outside, who were busy measuring something.

All the soldiers at the outpost were also up, even if they were not on duty.

"How is my hairstyle today?"

"You, wipe away your eye wax!"

"Sh*t, I forgot to shave! Should I head back to shave first? Forget it, what would I do if I missed it?"

"I'm so nervous. I just shaved my head a few days ago; I wonder if my family can recognize me."

The people at the outpost had all woken up early just to show their faces in the live broadcast. They had been unable to appear in the previous day's live broadcast. Today, Fan Lin had said they would be given a chance to appear in the background.

However, the outpost's team leader, Yan Biao, had decided not to appear on-screen. Given the restrictions of his rank and official position, to be safe, he could only stand outside the filming area.

Fang Zhao glanced at the few outpost members. Their tough-as-nails manner was full of vigor. Even those that seemed smaller or skinny hid an extremely explosive strength. These were the troops garrisoned on bases on foreign planets. They were different from soldiers at the military districts of every continent who had never experienced battles.

Fan Lin took a look at the underground readings, then looked at the weather before telling Kevin Lin, "We can start the live broadcast... Wait a minute! I nearly forgot about the masks."

Two scientists carried a box over and distributed the masks inside to everyone.

Outpost members standing behind: "... Can we be recognized if we wear a mask?"

"Do we have to put it on?" an outpost member asked.

"You can choose not to wear it, but I'm not responsible if anything happens to you,"

Fan Lin replied.

Everyone in the outpost was at a momentary loss, but they still put on the masks.

At the side, Yan Biao, who could not appear on-screen, had been feeling a little gloomy, but now he felt slightly better.

Fang Zhao put on the mask and breathed in some of the filtered air. His eyes were also separated from the external air by a transparent shield.

"This offers too much protection. We aren't even in the mines, just filtering the air would do. Do we really need to cover our eyes?" Kevin Lin grumbled.

"It burns the eyes," Fan Lin replied. "Furthermore, the mask prevents allergies. Everyone's constitution is different. You might be affected even if others aren't. This is just an added precaution. Given your small physique... Tsk." Fan Lin's tone was only missing the word "loser."

Kevin Lin was unconvinced. "What about me? You aren't much better than me with your old body!" He could not compare with Fang Zhao, sure, but he couldn't compare with Fan Lin, who was approaching old age?

Fan Lin did not say anything and only laughed. After that, he lifted up his shirt, revealing his chiseled eight-pack abs.

Kevin Lin: "...” He went numb.

"I also do farm work." Fan Lin's manner was like educating the younger generation. "Young man, train yourself more. Do not waste the gene's your ancestors passed down to you."

There were all descendants of people from the Founding Era. It was reasonable to say that there were none with especially weak physiques, but even the best genes were unable to withstand generation by generation of wastage. Kevin Lin's type was the result of those that seldom trained physically and were reliant on machinery. Summarized in a sentence, they were just lazy.

Kevin Lin showed that he did not wish to continue talking to Fan Lin. He turned on the live broadcast and communicated with the audience.

Some streaks of daylight had started to appear. Even if lighting was not used, the surroundings of the experimental plot could be seen.

Online audiences were puzzled. "What sort of battle array is this? Why do they need to wear masks to watch seeds germinate?"

"Wasn't it said they would be watching seeds germinate? This looks more like they are preparing for a gas attack."

Kevin Lin explained to audiences the reason they were wearing masks that Fan Lin had told him earlier. Glancing at Fan Lin, he realized that Fan Lin was not coming over to take over, so Kevin Lin cheerfully continued talking to the audiences online.

One minute passed.

Ten minutes passed.

Fifteen minutes...

Kevin Lin could not go on talking.

Online audiences had started to get impatient. Some said they were going to play a game first, others said they would visit the washroom.

Kevin Lin looked to Fan Lin, trying to get an explanation. Hadn't he said that they would be germinating shortly? Fifteen minutes had already passed, but nothing had happened. Are you teasing us? We are wasting live broadcast time!

On the contrary, Fan Lin was not anxious. Keeping his eye on readings displayed on a circular device in his hand, he calmly said, "Almost there."

Fan Lin's tone had just dropped when Fang Zhao raised his eyes to look at the experimental plot and said, "It's here!"

"What's here? What did Fang Zhao hear again..."

Boom Crack—

Cracking sounds suddenly rang out, as if a blunt tool was being used to split open a wall.

Boom Crack! Boom Crack! Boom Crack! Boom Crack!

Loud sounds echoed out from every experimental plot in succession.

A split appeared in the ground that had been hammered flat.

White arrow shapes emerged from the cracks. It was as if time was running at extra speed. It was as if the sprouts were self-aware, forming two leaves in the blink of an eye and inching their way toward the rays of lights from the horizon.

The originally bald ground, in a few breaths, had transformed and was now covered by a layer of young and tender sprouts.

Fang Zhao watched the entire scene of the the plants splitting the earth and sprouting without blinking. It was as if he had watched musical notes being illuminated one after another. It had gone from dull to dazzling, spinning and connecting to form an electric arc and reaching into every nook and cranny of his body.

Many times, one might endure a dull and ordinary beginning, but all one needed was a little patience, to wait for the moment where it impetuously explodes and blossoms. Such was the power of life.

Chapter 203

Transfer Over

The sky gradually became brighter. The field of view had already become very clear.

Online audiences watching the large green area of young sprouts displayed on the screen could not help but feel like they had witnessed an unbelievable miracle.

"Were there really no special effects used?"

"I just looked at the time. It really has only been five minutes. Otherwise, I would have thought that a few days had passed."

"The f*ck! I just went to the washroom, how did it become like this!"

"Me too. I went to order some takeout, and when I returned to the broadcast, everything had changed!"

"Brothers who have missed it can watch the video replay."

"How is that the same? The purpose of watching the live broadcast is to see those images at the first possible time. Replaying the video can no longer be considered a live broadcast; one will always feel a sense of lagging behind."

But even if they were regretting, they could only watch the replay. There was no way time could be turned back. A missed opportunity could never be gotten back.

In front of the experimental plot.

Kevin Lin was at a momentary loss for words. He curiously looked at the little sprouts that had broken through the soil in a flash, trying to see if there was anything special about them. He really did not understand it, and so he did not speak much.

Kevin Lin turned to Fan Lin. "Professor Fan, could you present a little?"

Fan Lin looked at the readings on the circular device and removed his mask. "We don't

have to wear the masks now."

The group of over 10 soldiers in the background hurriedly took off their masks and put on serious faces that they thought were the most cool. Their faces were calm, but their hearts were screaming with joy. Finally, we can appear on-screen!

"One of the reasons I gave them the name 'arrow sunflower' is because the process of germination is compressed into a very short period of time, like an arrow being shot out. You all saw it for yourselves. The process happens very quickly. Blink and you will notice a sprout has appeared. However, during its germination process, a few gases are released. Some have a scent, while others are odorless. But some of these gases can irritate the human body. If we do not put on masks, in serious cases, it can lead to shock..."

As Fan Lin was speaking, a short distance away from the experimental plot, an outpost member came out from inside the outpost and scanned the area before running over to Yan Biao.

The outpost soldier who had been about to give a report was given a scare when he noticed Yan Biao wiping away tears. "Captain... Captain, are you okay?"

Who was Yan Biao? He was Outpost 23's team leader and captain and had experienced much fighting, but this iron-blooded man actually had tears streaming down his face. What exactly had he gone through? Was he moved or was he heartbroken?

Yan Biao drew back the corner of his mouth. "My eyes are burning. It stings."

He also had not expected to be affected while standing so far away. A while ago, his eyes had suddenly felt a stinging pain, then his tears had started flowing uncontrollably. It was as if someone had thrown a tear-gas grenade over.

Now, he was feeling much better. Yan Biao rubbed his eyes and asked the outpost soldier, "What is it?"

"Message from the base telling every outpost to maintain the recent high alert and not goof off. Report to superiors should there be any unusual situations."

"Didn't they mention this yesterday?"

"It's being emphasized again today."

Yan Biao knit his brows. "Got it." It seemed like the discovery of planet Baiji's grade A ore had attracted a lot of attention.

That outpost soldier did not leave immediately after delivering his report, instead stretching his neck to look over at the experimental plot.

"Is that the little celebrity that came to our base for his military service? He looks rather average, not as good looking as me." He had not gotten to see Fang Zhao yesterday, but after seeing Fang Zhao now, he felt a little disappointed.

"There are many people who are good looking, but that fellow is popular. I hear he is very good at games," Yan Biao replied.

"I'm very good at gaming too! When I was younger, I took part in primary level e-sports competitions, and I received awards!" that outpost soldier jested.

"I heard he can detect the position of ore just through listening. Oh, just now, when the seeds were germinating, he also heard that too. I feel that his ears are even more effective than the device Fan Lin has in his hands."

Yan Biao recalled the moment when Fang Zhao had called out just before the arrow sunflowers had sprouted and felt that it was really mystical. To think a person's hearing ability could achieve that sort of level! When he had been young, he had watched a variety program that had talked about people with supernatural powers, but they had been denounced afterward, as the news had exposed some dirty tricks. Only then had he known they had all been swindlers. Thus, when he had heard about Fang Zhao's situation, he had still maintained a skeptical attitude until just now.

"That awesome?" the outpost soldier asked.

"I only believe what I see." Yan Biao noticed that outpost soldier's gaze kept stopping at the experimental plot area and knew what the soldier was thinking. "You want to appear in the background?"

"Hehe, I did have that idea. It's almost been two years since I last went home." The outpost soldier scratched his head, embarrassed. If he had not had that idea, he could have relayed the base order's through the comms device. Personally running out was to see whether he would have a chance to show his face. He was just a little soldier without any presence. Unlike Yan Biao, it was all right for him to appear on-screen.

Yan Biao chided that soldier and gave him a little kick. "Still playing mind games with me. I just knew you had that sort of idea. Go on, then. Whether you can steal a spot in front of the camera is all up to your own ability."

"Heh! Got it!" The outpost soldier stealthily ran over to that side.

Yan Biao glanced at Fang Zhao over at the experimental plot and couldn't help but click his tongue. "Tsk." He really did not know how that fellow Fang Zhao had become famous. Fang Zhao did not look particularly eye-catching and did not seem to have much original presence. At this time, it was entirely Fan Lin and Kevin Lin standing in front of the camera and conversing. That little fellow totally did not know how to steal the spotlight and was actually holding on to his paperback notebook and squatting over at the side while scribbling something. Could that be an unconventional way of acting cool?

Yan Biao shook his head. He had no idea what went through the minds of these sorts of celebrities.

Yan Biao gave a muted sigh. "However, we really do have to thank him."

Planet Baiji's position in the development sequence had started to move forward. In the future, there would definitely be more troops. Yan Biao had been guarding Outpost 23 for so long, it was probably time for him to get promoted too.

When he thought about this, Yan Biao could not help but laugh. He knew that he would be able to get promoted soon. He was really grateful to Fang Zhao. If not for Fang Zhao discovering Baiji ore so quickly, their facilities would not have been upgraded and manpower at the base would not have been increased so quickly. His rank now was captain, and if everything went smoothly, within the year, he could surely rise to the rank of major. Even if he was discharged from the military in the future, his discharge fee would not be little.

Over at the experimental plot, Kevin Lin and Fan Lin were taking turns asking and answering questions. The two coordinated very well. After continuously going through a few questions, Kevin Lin remembered Fang Zhao. Looking over, he saw Fang Zhao holding onto that familiar notebook.

"Seems like Fang Zhao realized something and is busy composing again." This was considered an explanation by Kevin Lin, telling the online audiences that Fang Zhao

was not skiving off but rather was finding the time to compose new tunes.

If Kevin Lin had not mentioned it, many people would have forgotten about Fang Zhao's composition background.

However, some online audiences had some doubts: Why did he say 'again'? Is inspiration that easy to get?

Some people lamented Fang Zhao's spirit in persevering with composing during his military service, but there were also some who said Fang Zhao was showing off.

Whatever others said, Fang Zhao could not see or hear it. Even if he could hear it, he did not care at all. He was just jotting down all the inspiration that had flashed through his mind as he witnessed the scene of arrow sunflowers germinating. After he was done, he closed the notebook and kept it before once again working the land. He listened to Fan Lin's instructions and moderately sprayed the ground with water.

"Oh right, Fang Zhao, I wish to transfer you over from the base. In the future, you can stay at Outpost 23 and undergo your military service here. What do you think?" Fan Lin asked.

At this time, Kevin Lin had already shut off the live broadcast. Hearing Fan Lin's words, he nearly jumped.

"Transfer over here?!" Kevin Lin was unwilling. The conditions at the outpost were much worse than the base.

Fan Lin unhurriedly explained his analysis. "Do you guys still wish to return to the mines and film? It is better over here. You can film the flowers and grass. What can you film over at the base? You guys can't enter the mines right now, and even if you get allocated there, the base will not allow you to do a live broadcast in the mines."

Could grade A power ore and grade A- ones be the same? There would be even higher confidentiality when it came to extracting and mining. For example, the quantity excavated every day, the quality, and so on. At this moment, this information could not be public knowledge, so even if they went over, they would not be able to get information from that side. Not only them, even those newly dispatched military reporters had no way of knowing.

Kevin Lin understood Fan Lin's opinion. Transferring over would make it easier to

operate compared to the base, but the living conditions were slightly worse.

Fan Lin looked over. "If Fang Zhao agrees, I can speak with Shanta and change your military service allocation over from mining to here."

"I guess I will just have to trouble you for that," Fang Zhao replied.

"Hahaha, no trouble, no trouble at all! Don't worry, you will find working here more meaningful than mining. Planting flowers and growing grass, and you can also follow the outpost team on their hunts and try some wild flavors. How great is that? It's much tastier than that compressed food." Fan Lin laughed heartily. In his heart, he pondered. Later, when he got back, he would discuss this matter with Shanta. After all, Fang Zhao was a member of Project Starlight and was different than other conscripts. The procedures would certainly be more inconvenient, and he needed to give prior notice.

Kevin Lin saw Fang Zhao agreeing. Furthermore, what Fan Lin had said had aroused him. Although the accommodations at the base were slightly better, there were more restrictions. The outpost was different. There would be more freedom, and the things that could be filmed were more abundant. Looking at the benefits, this place was indeed better than the base.

But since they would be moving over, he needed to return back to the base to pack his belongings.

During the noon break, after they returned to the room, Kevin Lin gave a call to the base, wishing to request a flying transport come over and fetch them. The team and flying transport that had brought them over had already returned to base.

Unfortunately, the request was not successful.

"They are temporarily unable to dispatch any unnecessary flying transports over. We have to wait who knows how long! So many flying transports and they can't dispatch one to come and fetch us? Surely Fan Lin had a hand in that!" Kevin Lin angrily exclaimed. "People with the Fan family name are all too sinister!"

Fang Zhao spoke as he threw food into the water tank. "Perhaps there are real missions on their side. I heard from the outpost captain that they are on high alert everywhere. The flying transports might be dispatched on missions. Actually, since Baiji ore was discovered, it has been very hard to request flying transports. That time when Prof. Fan got one was because he had collaborated with the base for a long time

and has special privileges."

"That is why I just said Fan Lin is sinister! He had the idea of bringing us over here to advertise for him all along!"

Chapter 204

Showing Off Gunplay?

Kevin Lin still couldn't secure a flying transport from the main base the next two days. He didn't want to beg Fan Lin for help either. In any event, he did enjoy much more freedom at the outpost, and he was fed adequate food and drink. It felt nice to be pampered by the soldiers at the outpost. Even though Kevin Lin still b*tched in front of Fang Zhao, he had grown more and more attached to the outpost. The reason he kept applying for a flying transport was that he wanted to collect his things from base.

Fang Zhao's assignment had been officially switched to the outpost. His daily workload was recorded on his personnel file and the person responsible for evaluating him was Fan Lin.

Digging up soil, dispensing fertilizer, setting up protective fencing, and so on—these tasks were handled by Fang Zhao and two other lab technicians. Fan Lin sometimes worked in the fields too even though there were already three or four people working the plot. Breaking down their productivity, Fang Zhao accounted for 75 percent of the total work output.

As for his downtime, Fang Zhao was always scribbling away in his notebook. It was a scene folks at the outpost had gotten used to.

"That kid is hardcore. He doesn't play around when he works," one of the sentries told Yan Biao.

The soldiers were indeed biased against celebrities and the like. They had always thought that all celebrities only knew how to put on a show, that everything was fake, but their impression had changed drastically over the last two days.

"Kevin Lin behaves more like a celebrity."

Even though they didn't go online, all the sentries knew that Kevin Lin got more screen time in the live broadcasts than Fang Zhao did.

In reality, Kevin Lin was quite conflicted.

In plain terms, Project Starlight was a poverty-alleviation program that leveraged the popularity of celebrities. But now that Baiji was no longer poor, it had no use for Fang Zhao's name recognition. In that sense, Fang Zhao was dispensable, because Baiji no longer lacked a killer resource. It had no shortage of investors and business partners. Now it was the Baiji base's turn to be picky. Every drib and drab that was announced about the latest research on the new energy ore was enough to draw massive mainstream media attention and investor interest.

Kevin Lin had gotten word from his editor-in-chief that his assignment had changed. All he needed to do now was report on novelties, anything that could grab viewer attention. As to whether or not Fang Zhao made an appearance in the live broadcast and for how long, that no longer mattered.

The bottom line was that Fang Zhao was still performing his military service, so he enjoyed far less latitude than the other four celebrities. Balancing the pros and cons, First Frontline wanted Kevin Lin to find other more interesting things to broadcast instead of focusing on Fang Zhao's routine. What was so interesting about performing military service? It was the same boring job every day.

But Kevin Lin was too embarrassed to tell Fang Zhao the truth. After all, S5's current viewership, whether they were intrigued by the power ore or something else, was all thanks to Fang Zhao. So in spite of his new marching orders, Kevin Lin always mentioned Fang Zhao in his broadcasts.

If it were anyone else, any mention of their name by Kevin Lin would have prompted them to show up in the broadcast, but Kevin Lin realized that Fang Zhao genuinely didn't care about exposure, or to put it in different terms, Fang Zhao held himself to be a different kind of celebrity.

Not to mention that, at the end of the day, Fang Zhao was there to perform his military service. His evaluation depended entirely on Fan Lin. These researcher types were so stubborn sometimes that it drove Kevin Lin mad. You couldn't count on them to stage a show. Fang Zhao had to carry out his daily duties in earnest.

So Kevin Lin had been brainstorming how to freshen up the next broadcast. Viewers were probably already bored from three straight days of footage from the experimental plot.

Kevin Lin glanced at Fang Zhao, who was toiling away in the experimental plot, before

turning around and walked to the edge of the field. "Captain Yan, when are you guys going hunting again?"

Alarm bells went off in Yan Biao's head immediately. He still flashed a friendly smile, but he responded, "We are only allowed to hunt a certain number of times every month. I don't wanna break any rules. You want to do a live hunting broadcast?"

Back when the sentry post had had no visitors, when living conditions had been tough, Yan Biao would sneak his team out for a few additional hunting trips on the side so they would have better food. Every sentry post had done the same thing. They hadn't been an exception.

But they would never let these reporters or scientists in on these secret expeditions. He was afraid they would make a big deal out of it. In that case, their superiors could no longer turn a blind eye.

But Kevin Lin was no fool. There was no way he was buying Yan Biao's explanation, but he didn't want to call him out on the lie either. Instead, he negotiated. "I asked Prof. Fan Lin. He said there isn't much work left to do at the experimental plot this afternoon. The weather is decent. It's not too hot and it's not raining. Why don't we go for a stroll? Even if we don't hunt, I can shoot something else. You guys have been stationed here for some time and know the area quite well. Is there any interesting stuff I can shoot?"

"There's plenty, but it's rather dangerous out there. If you guys head out alone, you're bound to run into trouble. If you really want to go, I'll personally escort you with a team to guarantee your safety." Yan Biao sounded so chivalrous, but what was really going on was that he was itching to hunt and wanted to get some airtime as well. He wanted to give other members of his team some exposure too.

"Then apologies in advance for imposing on Captain Yan."

After sorting out the details with Yan Biao, Kevin Lin went over to give Fang Zhao a heads up. Fang Zhao also wanted to check out the woods beyond the sentry post. It was his first time living on a foreign planet. He wanted to take in its unique features as much as possible.

Yan Biao approached the two with a traditional hunting rifle. "Do you guys hunt?"

"I do!" Kevin Lin wanted to try hunting here. Restrictions were too tight on their home

planet. You could never find a place like this. If you wanted to hunt freely, you had to do it on an undeveloped foreign planet like this.

"Fang Zhao, wanna give it a try, then?" Kevin Lin asked.

Fang Zhao nodded. "Sure."

The group headed out in the afternoon.

Yan Biao brought a team of about a dozen people to guard Kevin Lin and Fang Zhao.

After leaving the outpost, they were removed from the safety of the protective fence. A raw, dangerous vibe emanated from their surroundings. The natural fragrance of the forest was mixed with a warm, bloody smell.

"There are a bunch of big carnivores feasting over there. Let's take a detour," Yan Biao whispered.

As if to echo Lin Biao's warning, a huge roar erupted about 200 meters away. Kevin Lin felt as if every hair on his body was standing up. He had spent too much time in the city. It took his first foray into a virgin forest to realize that he had grossly underestimated the level of danger. He was too stiff to move, as if the slightest shiver would result in his immediate demise.

"It's OK." Yan Biao pointed to the shadows hovering in the sky. "They're just scaring off the carrion-feeding birds. They won't attack us. Keep going."

Kevin Lin's teeth were chattering. "K-k-keep going? Haven't we ventured too far?"

"Not at all. Normally we don't hunt so close to the outpost." Yan Biao was speaking with a normal tone, but he was secretly snickering. Ha—you're terrified, aren't you? I knew these folks are too chickenshit. Yan Biao continued, "We've got guns. There's nothing to fear even if the beasts attack us."

The guns the sentry team had been allocated were different from the hunting rifles issued by the main base. The guns the sentries carried with them were more lethal—just in case.

Taking into account the fact that this was Kevin Lin's and Fang Zhao's first trip into the forest, Yan Biao didn't go too deep into the woods. After finding a suitable spot, he

turned around and told Kevin Lin, "This is a safe area. There won't be any major threats, so you can start your live broadcast."

"Am I going to get a signal this far from the outpost?" Kevin Lin grumbled.

Yan Biao looked at Kevin Lin like he was an idiot.

The whole point of the outpost was to build a global defense network, which counted a global communications grid as a major component. Apart from areas where signal strength was affected by a peculiar landscape or soil quality, coverage was universal within the network. Kevin Lin was a veteran journalist, but his question made him sound like an amateur.

Not to mention that Yan Biao and team rarely ventured into areas where there was no coverage. Otherwise, even if they died, no one would know to fetch their corpses. They were brave, but they weren't death-seekers.

Kevin Lin calmed down. He realized the mistake he had just made and coughed in embarrassment. He was still stiff from his nerves, so he passed his rifle to Fang Zhao. "Why don't you go ahead first?"

Fang Zhao accepted the rifle. "Sure." The old-school hunting rifle from the New Era was very similar to the hunting rifles Fang Zhao was familiar with. It was not foreign at all.

"Can we go live?" Kevin Lin asked.

"Sure."

"Do you need to warm up?" Kevin Lin was worried.

"No, I'm good."

It wasn't that Fang Zhao was overconfident, it was just that he had noticed that Yan Biao was antsy and eager to start barking instructions. If they warmed up and he finished his spiel, then there would be nothing left to say on air.

Of course, Fang Zhao was also confident in his abilities. Even if he missed his first few shots, he'd get the hang of it after a few tries. He wasn't worried about losing face.

"Then here I go." Kevin Lin switched his camera to "live" mode and gave a brief rundown of their location.

Yan Biao also gave a briefing and offered tips on how to use the traditional hunting rifle—how to aim, how to seize the moment, and so on.

I can't show my face, but I can sure as hell make sure my voice is heard! This time, Yan Biao got his fix.

His family should be able to recognize his voice, no? He hadn't been home in years, so he wasn't sure. In any case, this was his way of getting on air at least once.

The online viewers were also intrigued.

"Wow, so this is one of those storied virgin forests on foreign planets?"

"I hear they're crawling with wild animals."

"Jealous."

"Who's the hunting instructor? How come he isn't showing his face?"

"The camera panned past him a few times but missed his face. Still, I'm certain it's one of the sentries from the outpost."

"Duh. Who else would it be? A lab technician?"

"Is Fang Zhao going to hunt on live broadcast?"

"Will he be able to hit anything?"

Fang Zhao's meteoric rise to the top of the "Battle of the Century" rankings and the black street scuffle had people wondering whether he had gang connections. There were all sorts of wild stories. Now, folks could finally see Fang Zhao use a hunting rifle for real.

This time, the live broadcast drew gamers who typically weren't interested in the show.

Gaming was just gaming, after all. As good as you were in-game and as much time as

you put in on the practice range, it was no substitute for the real thing.

Hunting was the real thing.

So many online viewers were eagerly anticipating this moment. Many so-called professional marksmen were glued to Fang Zhao's every move and every gesture so they could analyze them like a precision instrument.

Holding a rifle was one thing, but shooting it was another. Was he an accurate shooter? How would he compare to his avatar?

The 50th floor of Silver Wing Tower. The virtual projects department.

"Wow, boss is going to fire a real gun on live TV!"

Zu Wen quickly spread the word within the department.

"This is for real. I'm so nervous."

"What's so nerve-racking about hunting? Over in Muzhou, they have private hunting grounds. Word is quite a few professional marksmen go hunting over there."

"No, it's not that. You don't know the entertainment industry. Some of these folks are brutal critics. Boss did so well in 'Battle of the Century.' If he falls short just a bit in reality, they're going to butcher him. Not to mention that Boss has been in the headlines for discovering the Baiji power ore. What do you think they will do if they see an opening?"

Of course, they would show no mercy.

"But Fang Zhao doesn't look like someone who would take on something he isn't sure about," Jinro said.

"That's true. If he weren't confident, he wouldn't have agreed to the live broadcast so quickly."

Considering the matter from a different perspective, perhaps this was an opportunity for Fang Zhao to show off his gunplay?

The thought made Zu Wen and company more relaxed. They started looking forward

to the broadcast as well.

"I've never seen boss use a real gun in real life."

"Me neither."

"Zuo Yu, have you?"

"It's illegal for people without gun permits to shoot in public except for firing ranges," Zuo Yu responded. He had never seen Fang Zhao shoot a real gun, but even if he had, confessing to it would be the equivalent of announcing that his boss had broken the law.

Meanwhile, in the live broadcast, Fang Zhao raised his old-school rifle and started aiming at a chubby bird that was resting on a tree branch under Yan Biao's guidance.

"Wait. Be patient. Calm down." Yan Biao was worried Fang Zhao couldn't maintain his composure, so kept whispering reminders. But when he turned his head, he noticed that Fang Zhao was surprisingly calm. He didn't look like a young man of his age raising a rifle for the first time.

Wouldn't a normal person be excited and a bit nervous and uncertain at the same time?

But Yan Biao cast aside his doubts when he felt the timing was right. "Go for it!" he urged in a whisper.

The online viewers wouldn't risk so much as a blink lest they miss the scene.

Right at that moment, the screen went dark and the following line appeared: "Signal lost. Reconnecting."

The online viewers: "..."

Chapter 205

Attack

Channel S5's comments section had exploded.

There was so much anticipation. Many people had stopped what they were doing and were waiting for Fang Zhao to pull the trigger. Online bystanders, gaming fans, reviewers, entertainment media outlets, and many other sorts of people with different purposes were all waiting. In the end, at the most crucial moment everyone was waiting for, they got a "Signal lost, attempting to reconnect"?!

During the black screen, vulgarities and abuse exploded from many people.

Others that had slower reactions were dazed for a while when facing the black screen. Following that, just like everyone else, they went to the comments sections and forums to vent their dissatisfaction.

"F*ck! Your father thought he had not paid his network fees and the signal was cut, but when I switched to other channels, everything was normal. Only channel S5 is black!!"

"Same over here. Only channel S5 has no signal, all others are normal."

"Seems like S5's live broadcast signal was cut. The problem does not lie with our internet."

"Wasn't it reported yesterday that Baiji's communications network has been upgraded? How could something like this still happen?"

In channel S5's comments section, comments that had a large proportion of unrefined language had been censored to "***." For voice comments, someone could select any of them and be able to hear a stream of censored "beeps."

As channel S5 belonged to Project Starlight's First Frontline segment, at the moment, they were under heavy fire. Customer service was totally unable to cope. Call after call of complaints came in succession.

"We request channel S5's live broadcast signal be reinstated! Right now! Immediately!"

"Don't come pretending to be poor to your father. Don't say that you don't have the funds to upgrade communications facilities! Was Baiji ore mined for nothing?! Was the ore eaten by you guys?!"

"Let me tell you this. You guys are all corrupt! Embezzlers! You better put back every single cent to be used for upgrading the communications facilities right now!"

A customer service staff wiped off the sweat on his forehead as he listened to a customer's complaints. In his heart, he was thinking, You can sue us, but it's no use; we aren't the ones in charge of constructing planet Baiji's facilities.

The segment's official platform had many messages full of grievances, catching them unprepared.

The face of the chief editor in charge of the five channels was red with anger. He asked the technician, "Have you discovered the reason?!"

"It is indeed the other side's live broadcast signal that has been cut, and we can't reconnect. We aren't able to contact Kevin Lin. Should we try contacting planet Baiji's base first?"

"Then do that!" The chief editor was furious. "How does Kevin Lin do his work! Can't he find a place with a stronger signal for his live broadcast?!"

If they were live broadcasting in the forest, so be it. Why had he had to pick a place with such an unstable signal? Furthermore, the signal just had to break at that sort of moment. Lots of people online had criticized them for using this method to purposely tease the audiences with the motive of attracting more viewers.

What a load of hogwash!

However, very quickly, the segment's chief editor heard even worse news.

"Boss, Baiji base cannot be contacted!"

"...How can that be! Didn't they just upgrade the communications network's receivers and transmitters?"

At that moment, in the forest close to planet Baiji's Outpost 23.

After Yan Biao had indicated that Fang Zhao could pull the trigger, he waited for a few seconds, but Fang Zhao did not do anything. Just as he was about to say something, he saw Fang Zhao putting the gun down and looking up at the sky.

"What happened?" Yan Biao remembered that Fang Zhao's hearing was better than that of normal people. "What do you hear?"

"It doesn't feel good. Something is going to happen," Fang Zhao replied.

Yan Biao was skeptical. "You heard it?"

Fang Zhao looked straight at Yan Biao, "Intuition." There was no hint of a joke in his eyes.

Yan Biao stopped smiling and decided to contact someone in the outpost, but he realized that there was no connection.

"No signal."

"No signal?" Kevin Lin was also astonished. "Eh? There isn't any live broadcast signal either. Is the problem with the base or with the outpost?"

Yan Biao did not reply. He switched his comms device's mode to the outpost's internal network. This time, it connected.

"Outpost, are there any anomalies?"

"Nope, everything is normal," replied the outpost soldier in charge of alerts at the moment. "However, we are unable to get in touch with the base."

"Are we able to contact the other outpost?" Yan Biao asked.

"Unable to do that either. Only Outpost 23's internal network is working."

"Then it's probably an issue with the base mainframe." Yan Biao pondered for a bit, then instructed the people in the outpost. "Be alert. Look out for any suspicious things in the surroundings. Set the defense system to the highest level, and keep it running. I will be back within 30 minutes."

After ending the communication, Yan Biao told Kevin Lin and Fang Zhao, "Let's head back to the outpost first."

Kevin Lin was eager to head back immediately. "Okay, okay! Let's return!" He did not feel safe in the forest. Although he was not too sure what had happened, he could feel the tense atmosphere of their surroundings and read the expressions of the others. Whether they were being overly sensitive or not, returning to the outpost to hide would always be safer.

When leaving the outpost, they had not been rushing for time, so they had walked slower, but now that there were special circumstances, Yan Biao wished to hurry back. The outpost soldiers were no issue, and Fang Zhao was not a problem, but Kevin Lin was not in good shape.

Yan Biao glanced at Kevin Lin, who was panting heavily after just a short while, and got the fittest soldier in his team, Riode, to carry Kevin Lin on his shoulder and run.

Leaving, they had taken over an hour. Their return journey only took 20 minutes.

After entering the outpost, Yan Biao immediately rushed to the monitor room and checked whether there were any other unusual situations.

Fang Zhao supported Kevin Lin into their room. Kevin Lin's complexion looked poor; getting carried by someone running was not exactly pleasant.

Once he sat down, Kevin Lin started to think. "Fang Zhao, what do you think happened? A malfunction with the transmitters and receivers at the base? Or is it an attack?" With his profession, he tended to think about the worst that could happen.

"Definitely nothing good," Fang Zhao replied.

Kevin Lin looked toward Fang Zhao, astonished. "To actually hear you say such words is really rare. Why are you so sure? Did you really hear something?"

"Intuition." Fang Zhao did not want to say any more. He had no way of knowing the situation over at the base, so he sat on his bed and pondered silently. His eyebrows furrowed tighter. The uneasy feeling was getting stronger.

Fang Zhao caught a gleam of light from the corner of his eyes.

It had not been fed, yet the normally sluggish "rabbit" in the water tank had actually started glowing at this moment. Its movements inside the water had also become more intense.

Fang Zhao turn on the comms device, switched to the outpost's internal mode, and contacted Yan Biao.

Yan Biao's voice sounded tense. "What's wrong?" As if he had already sensed something and was not as carefree as he normally was.

"Something is coming, probably from the air. It's not safe here," Fang Zhao said.

Yan Biao did not make a sound, probably deciding whether to listen to Fang Zhao's recommendation.

He did not let Fang Zhao wait long. After five seconds, Yan Biao said, "I will have someone bring you to the underground shelter. You will be safe from air raids there."

Very quickly, a few outpost soldiers brought Fang Zhao and Kevin Lin to the underground shelter. In a short while, Fan Lin and those scientists were also led down.

One of the outpost soldiers pointed to a floor plan on the wall. The floor plan showed all the details of the entire shelter. "If the shelter isn't going to hold, head out through that side's emergency exit."

As the oldest here, Fan Lin displayed an image of calm. He had to be calm. "Understood. You all have to stay safe too."

After the outpost team left, the underground shelter quieted down and the atmosphere became somewhat stifling.

To ease everyone's nervous mood, Fan Lin laughed and asked Fang Zhao, "Why did you bring it down as well?"

When Fang Zhao came down, he had brought along the water tank. At the moment, the little chap in the water tank was glowing.

"It seems to be in an... excited mood?"

"No, it could be that it is afraid. It probably sensed danger." When Fan Lin said this

sentence, the mood in the underground shelter became even more stifling.

"This place is too old. I wonder how strong it is," Kevin Lin worriedly said as he eyed the surroundings.

The outpost's defense system and communication facilities had been upgraded, but its underground facilities had not. It looked really old, simple, and crude.

Fang Zhao suddenly exclaimed, "Everyone, be careful!"

BOOM.

The entire underground shelter shook.

"What is going on—"

BOOM.

Kevin Lin had not finished speaking when another loud boom rang out, and the underground shelter started swaying. Those that had not been standing firmly were nearly thrown to the ground.

Fragments of the ceiling came loose and fell, and a few items placed on the table also tumbled down.

Fan Lin reassured the others. "The outpost has been attacked. However those two explosions were not direct hits. The outpost probably intercepted it in the air. Don't be so pessimistic, everyone, the outpost's defence system has been upgraded—"

Fan Lin had only spoken halfway when an intense explosion sounded. It was as if the entire outpost had been shoved into a box and violently shaken. The few scientists that had been standing or sitting were all thrown to the ground. If not for Fang Zhao supporting him, Fan Lin would also have fallen.

Kevin Lin fell flat on the ground, and blood starting flowing from his nose. If Fang Zhao had not pulled him back a step, he would have been smashed on the head by falling bits of the ceiling.

The lights in the shelter flickered for two seconds and then extinguished. Light from the water tank's "rabbit" lit up the room.

Fang Zhao scanned the place. "How is everyone?"

"Someone's hurt, but it shouldn't be life-threatening," a scientist replied.

Fang Zhao eyed the floor plan on the wall and headed to the corner where a toppled cabinet was. He pried open the cabinet and took out the first aid kit inside. "Medical supplies are limited. Let's treat those that are injured first. The ones with more serious injuries take priority."

"Fang Zhao, what category... does mine belong to?" a bloodied-faced Kevin Lin asked.

Fang Zhao glanced over. "Minor injury, wait for now."

"Oh."

After Kevin Lin's nervous mood passed, his occupational habit kicked in and he turned on his camera. Although it could not connect to the network for live broadcasts, it was still able to film.

Kevin Lin switched to film mode and first filmed one round of the surroundings. Following that, he directed it to face himself. Raising a hand to wipe away the blood from his nose, he said, "Greetings everyone, it is your old friend Kevin Lin. My work ID number is LKW7986, from Huangzhou. Now, I am currently hiding in the underground shelter of planet Baiji's Outpost 23. The outpost is under attack. We have no idea what the situation is like above us..."

After facing the camera and saying a bit, Kevin Lin set the video he had just recorded to auto-transmit. The moment network was restored, it would automatically be transmitted to the news team.

"Fang Zhao, do you want to record one?" Kevin Lin asked.

"Record what?"

"Last words."

Fang Zhao: "..."

Chapter 206

Raging Fury

Fang Zhao silently watched Kevin Lin for two seconds, then brushed away the camera Kevin Lin had pushed over. "No need."

Following that, Fang Zhao continued using the bottle of medicine and helped apply it to the wounds of the injured.

The situation they had encountered today had happened practically every day during the Period of Destruction—suddenly suffering an attack and feeling that their lives were threatened.

Back then, it had simply been a normal occurrence, and nobody had known what would happen to them in the next moment. But now, for people used to a peaceful life in the New Era, this sort of attack was just like judgment day, and they had to bear an enormous mental pressure.

Actually, according to Period of Destruction customs, Fang Zhao had written a will shortly after he had been reborn, and it was saved to his personal terminal, but he had made amendments every once in a while as his assets had changed. If he suddenly met with an unexpected accident and lost his life, once he was determined as deceased, the will saved in his personal terminal would automatically be made public.

However, given the situation at hand, it was not actually so bad. According to Fang Zhao's own judgment, it was not like there was totally no chance of living. At least now they were taking refuge in the underground shelter. Listening to the sound of activity, it did not seem like there were a lot of attackers.

But for Kevin Lin, it was totally different. This was the first time he had personally experienced this sort of situation. Although he had encountered some dangerous situations before, the stress he felt this time round was incomparable. During the explosion, he had even thought that he would really kick the bucket this time.

However, as a reporter, Kevin Lin knew how to weigh the pros and cons. After considering, he became determined. Although he did not know whether they could

safely survive through this crisis, this was also an opportunity. Since they were stuck in this predicament, he had to grasp this chance tightly. He needed to record the true events of this situation, just like those outstanding older generations of First Frontline that had reported on the real events at battlefields. However, unlike them, he was not "utterly fearless." His mental state was somewhere around the level of "extremely scared but without any choice."

If he did not survive, perhaps all that he filmed could let him become a famous person in reporting circles. His portrait would also be revered, and his recorded videos could become real excerpts for educational videos.

And if he could safely survive this crisis, he would... prosper!

Although it was not formally stipulated, in the circles, there were those that reported on entertainment programs and those that reported on war situations; the latter was generally regarded better! Even political news reporters could not compete against the gold mine that was battlefield reporting! But many professional war journalists never revealed their faces. No normal reporter would be willing to experience a real warzone, where it was easy to lose one's life. But when they encountered one, no reporter was willing to let such a chance slip by.

Taking deep breaths, Kevin Lin tried his best to allay the fear in his heart. With a wobbly hand, he once again controlled the camera and continued to record. "I can still hear many loud and soft sounds. There is shooting going on above. We suffered a total of three bombardments. The previous two were shielded by the defense system, but the third one was unable to be completely blocked off, and we suffered some injuries..."

Kevin Lin had originally wanted to film Fang Zhao first, but when he scanned the room, he realized that Fang Zhao was the only one who could be considered "completely unharmed." Not wishing to make himself seem weak, Kevin Lin controlled the camera and turned and filmed Fan Lin and the other scientists. With some skill, he only filmed the back of Fang Zhao.

Although this was the first time he had filmed under these sorts of circumstances, as a reporter with many years of work experience, Kevin Lin was really skilled at controlling the images captured by the camera. The images captured could embellish the atmosphere and show the disorder within the shelter as well as the dreadful state of the wounded. He was not overly concerned with detail and form, just using the

images to show the situation. His words were only supplementary. Simple words that would make the scene captured by the camera easier to understand.

"I am guessing that there is a high possibility the aggressors are terrorists, and they have probably been planning this scheme for some time..."

When his brain started working, Kevin Lin's thought processes were much clearer, unlike the start when he had been totally shell shocked.

Kevin Lin analyzed this matter, from the signal being cut off, to them losing all contact with the base, all the way to this current situation.

Fang Zhao listened to Kevin Lin's analysis of the aggressor's identity as he helped tend to the wounded.

Having been reborn for so long, Fang Zhao had not experienced any wars. Life in New Era cities were very tranquil. Even the incident with Su Hou in Muzhou could still have been considered rather peaceful. After all, the entire world had been unified, and every continent had cooperated with each other. But in unseen places, there were still disputes. There were internal struggles within the alliance hierarchy, but outside, it was not so harmonious. It just did not affect the lives of normal people.

Fang Zhao did not feel that it was strange. During the Period of Destruction, everyone had united to face the enemy, but after the Founding Era, benefits had been distributed unevenly. When rapacious people were not controlled properly, there would be lots of internal strife. Yanzhou was the best example.

All those years ago, when great general Wu Yan of the Founding Era had passed away, the Wu family's internal wars had caused Yanzhou to undergo a wide-scale change of leadership. For a long period after that, the Wu family had had a rather awkward position. Even though they had since flourished, they were unable to go back to being the absolute political authority.

As for these extreme terrorists, Fang Zhao had heard a few people mention them before. Before he had enlisted, when Great-Grandfather and Great-Grandmother Fang had talked about their experiences, they had also mentioned these people who were at odds with the alliance.

Great-Grandfather Fang's assessment had been this: "Those people are lunatics. Regardless of what they say, it's all excuses. Everything they do is just to satisfy their

own desires."

There were many groups that the alliance of governments was unable to control. Actually, there were such groups in every period, regardless of whether it was in the New Era or the Old era, but not every group endangered society. Only those that caused a high degree of harm were classified as terrorists.

At this moment, planet Baiji base.

Shanta was in a furious state. He had just raged angrily at his subordinates in the command post. Now, he had calmed down a little, but he had a fiery look in his eyes that made a few military reporters swallow the questions they wished to ask about the situation at hand.

Shanta did not even care about those few reporters. He slammed the door to the command post, preventing others from seeing or hearing anything inside.

Forty minutes ago, the base's communications network had been crippled, which had caught Shanta unprepared.

"How many times have I emphasized the need to be cautious and alert when upgrading the communications network—they just can't f*cking remember! So what if they are engineers from the Academy of Science HQ? They are careless and complacent; everyone holds them in such high regard that they forget their own worth!" Shanta's suppressed rage returned once more.

Another high-ranking base officer said, "Nevertheless, they are still capable. This time, though, they did not do a proper job, and they allowed people to find a loophole. This time, it is clear that somebody had this well planned out for a long time, possibly even before the discovery of Baiji ore. They even have an understanding of our military deployments. This wasn't an impromptu decision."

When Shanta thought about what had happened in these 40 minutes, he could not contain his anger. "Those engineers deserve to be scolded! If they had been more prudent, would this sort of situation have occurred? Even if the communications network were crippled, it wouldn't result in such a big problem, and they would be able to restore it. But now? Forty minutes! You don't need me to tell you what can happen in 40 minutes!"

The room quieted down in an instant. Everyone in the room was an experienced hand.

The base had no way of knowing or controlling what was happening elsewhere on planet Baiji. In these 40 minutes, nobody knew how many losses they would incur.

Now, they could only communicate within the base's range via the internal comms network.

Shanta slammed the table. "Who do you think it is this time?"

The people within the room all had the same answer. "Who else but 'T'?" The "T" organization was the abbreviation given to the extremist group known as "Tomorrow's Empire."

A new communication came in and Shanta hurriedly answered.

"The teams dispatched to nearby outposts for scouting have returned. Nothing is out of the ordinary."

"Men from the mining area reporting, the mines were attacked, but the situation has been controlled. Seven terrorists shot dead and 31 conscripts injured. At the moment, there are no casualties."

This information let those in the command post breathe a little more easily.

Shanta had personally seen to the defensive deployments of the mining area. Shanta had also constantly reminded the team guarding the mines not to let anything suspicious slip by. Now it seemed like that had been effective.

These few pieces of good news were hard to come by, but Shanta still felt uneasy. Picking up his comms device, he contacted the engineers who were restoring the communications network. "Is it done?"

Just three words, yet each word carried a fearsome intent.

The tone of the engineer replying was somewhat timid as he stiffly replied, "Not yet."

"Twenty minutes. If it is not restored in 20 minutes, the whole lot of you can scam back to wherever you came crawling out from!" Without waiting for a reply from the engineers, Shanta ended the communication. He would wait for an hour at most. Forty minutes had already passed, and after they waited for another 20 minutes, if the communication network were not restored, he would execute another plan.

The engineers that faced the wrath of Shanta were red in the face, but they had no choice but to bear with it. They had painstakingly managed to grab a spot to come over and upgrade planet Baiji's communications network, yet problems had arisen shortly after they had arrived. Indeed, it had been their negligence that had resulted in the chance to be attacked. If the communications were not restored within 20 minutes and they were chased back by Shanta, they would have no face to continue staying with the Academy of Sciences HQ. Most importantly, being forced to return would be considered a black mark in their profession, and there might be no more chances for promotion in the future.

Luckily, under heavy pressure, they were finally able to restore the network in the 19th minute. Although it was still unstable, at least they had salvaged some face. In another 15 minutes at most, it would definitely be completely stable.

At practically the same moment the communications network was restored, Shanta received information from every outpost. Other outposts were fine, but outposts 8, 23, 61, 85, and 97 had suffered attacks.

The communications network had not been completely restored and the signal was still unstable. Shanta wanted to contact these five outposts, but the connection kept breaking. At least he was able to get a rough report of the situations at those outposts.

Fortunately, every outpost's defensive systems had been upgraded after the discovery of Baiji ore, or they would surely have lost all contact with those five outposts, or perhaps those outposts would have been obliterated off the face of planet Baiji.

This also let Shanta confirm the fact that this attack had been planned for quite some time. It seemed that planet Baiji had been targeted even before the discovery of Baiji ore, and now these people had initiated an attack because they were worried that Baiji's forces stationed on the planet in the future would be even greater and so it would not be as favorable to attack when their defenses were tighter. Not wishing to miss the chance to attack, they had hurriedly gone ahead with this surprise attack.

Suddenly remembering something, Shanta violently turned his head and asked the others in the command post. "Which outpost did Fan Lin transfer Fang Zhao to?"

Shanta's assistant brought up Fang Zhao's military service files. At the column for his military position "active duty" were the words "Outpost 23."

Silence befell the room and the atmosphere became grave.

Fan Lin, a veteran professor at the Academy of Science HQ who had brought along large projects and was a famous person from Muzhou.

The eight scientists under Fan Lin were all his research elites. If anything had really happened to them, Fan Lin's laboratory would have been destroyed all at once.

And there was still Fang Zhao and Kevin Lin, who were part of Project Starlight and garnered a lot of viewership. The matter could not be covered up if something had happened to them, not to mention that they had been doing a live broadcast before the signal had been lost.

Fang Zhao, Baiji ore's discoverer, could be considered the person who had changed the fortunes of planet Baiji. Shanta was also grateful to him, especially his ears. If something had really happened to Fang Zhao this time, it would be really unfortunate.

"Fang Zhao's vocation transfer was never publicized. Even when they were broadcasting, no information was revealed that Fang Zhao was at Outpost 23," someone said.

"Fan Lin's decision to come over here was made before the discovery of Baiji ore, so they would not have been the target."

A colonel spoke up. "These T people only wanted to create a diversion and attack. The base defenses are too strong. They would be asking for trouble if they attacked the base. Rather than sounding us out and attracting our attention, they were simply better off picking outposts to attack. As for why Outpost 23 was selected, all I can say is that Fan Lin and Fang Zhao are unlucky."

Shanta also did not waste any more time and immediately dispatched men to provide backup for the five outposts that were under attack.

Online, people a long way from the fighting could not know the present situation on planet Baiji. All they had now were complaints.

"People from Frontline First, stop playing dead!"

"Where is the live broadcast? Why hasn't it been fixed yet!?"

"Complaint, we want to make a complaint!!"

At the start, many other media firms had taken this opportunity to attack First Frontline, especially companies that had similar natures as First Frontline. Previously, they had only been able to covet the overflowing popularity First Frontline got from Project Starlight, but then they'd had an opportunity to call them out.

Other than these people, there were others that had seized the opportunity to defame Fang Zhao. After all, Fang Zhao had risen too quickly and had hindered the paths of quite a few people.

As for those entertainment magazines, at the moment, they were beyond excited. These magazines loved to take advantage of the situation and dish out dirt. Anyway, if they joined in with the abuse, they would not get caught and could still use this opportunity to attract site traffic. Perhaps if the tempo was raised, there would be people who would give them money to shut up. How could they face themselves if this chance to line their own pockets was missed?

Therefore, in the short half an hour where the live broadcast was offline, the internet was filled with curses and abuse, but as time went by and the broadcast wasn't restored, First Frontline continued to play dead and did not give an official reply. Also, quick-witted people realized that the original criticism from popular and mainstream media outlets was slowly dying down. The ones still making a fuss were those fools still blinded by benefits.

A certain Huangzhou news company's social platform operations department received instructions from the top to delete the article denouncing First Frontline that they had posted on social platforms.

An operations staff was puzzled. "Why is it being deleted? Many people are sharing it. All this counts as traffic, and traffic means money!"

Another person made a guess. "Could it be someone threw money for it to be deleted?"

"Whatever the reason, since the top asked us to delete it, then we just have to do so."

Yanzhou, Silver Wing tower.

After Duan Qianji received a call from her husband Hong Lou, she instructed the public relations department to temporarily not issue any statements.

As before, there were still lots of people who were spurred on to abuse Fang Zhao online. Whether they were purely picking a quarrel or they were really filled with grievances, after scolding, they still arrogantly copied what others said. "Silver Wing, come out and clean the floor 1 !" After all, doing this was not against the law.

Silver Wing 50th floor, virtual projects department.

Zu Wen and a few other technical staff were using dummy accounts online to refute others.

Pang Pusong was suspicious. "It's almost been an hour already, and the company's public relations department doesn't seem to be responding."

"First Frontline has yet to give an explanation as well."

"Not just them. Did you all realize that all the news medias that attacked First Frontline have deleted their remarks?" Jinro mentioned.

"It's true. Not only were the posts deleted, they are all maintaining silence. Even those Yanzhou-based ones that are always at odds with us have shut up! Does that mean that the company and First Frontline have done something about it?" Zu Wen asked.

"No." Jinro's voice became deeper. "I have a feeling that something may have happened."

Silver Wing did not have the patience to make all its rivals maintain silence all at once. Unless a certain situation had occurred that could make so many large media firms in both Yanzhou and abroad keep their silence and not dare to post anything.

Zu Wen was prepared to investigate when he heard the sound of a push notification. Opening it, his eyeballs nearly popped out of his sockets.

"F*ck me! Terrorist attack?!"

Jinro opened the link. It was Huangzhou's military news channel that was broadcasting the news right now.

"...Planet Baiji has suffered a terrorist attack. The communications network is currently crippled and there are no means of contact..."

This news was like a large-scale frost magic spell being cast on the war of words online, as everyone stopped in their tracks.

A foreign planet's base suffering a terrorist attack was not considered news. This sort of situation occurred once or twice every year, especially for remote planets with inadequate equipment. The poorer the conditions of a place, the easier it was to be targeted.

But also because these incidents were so far removed, it would remain a talking point for a short time before passing. It was a matter that did not concern oneself, and only those people about to enlist for military service paid attention to them. Following that, they would try their best to be assigned to places as far away as possible. As for people who did not follow political news, they simply did not know about terrorist attacks.

But this time around, planet Baiji was highly trending, and there were too many people paying attention to it. Even though it was separated by the internet, everyone felt as if this had incident had happened right in front of their eyes, so much so that many people were shocked senseless by the news.

"Terr-Terrorist attack?"

"Looking at the time, it was when the live broadcast was interrupted!"

"Are they really not acting?"

Five minutes later.

A piece of information appeared online. On it was a picture, a screenshot of planet Baiji's publicity video, but on it was an extra large "T."

In no time, every large media outlet reported on this matter and explained the meaning of that picture: terrorist group "Tomorrow's Empire," aka the "T" organization, had claimed responsibility for the attack on planet Baiji.

Yanbei city retirement facility. Great-Grandfather Fang was watering the plants when he saw the news. His hands trembled and the watering can fell to the ground.

Great-Grandmother Fang hurriedly picked up her communications device and contacted former comrades, hoping to get news on the latest developments on planet Baiji.

The two elders' faces were extremely pale. They were full of regret right now. They should not have agreed with Fang Zhao's decision to undergo military service on planet Baiji. Although Great-Grandfather Fang always said that the younger generations should head to more arduous places for military service, there were times when he would close an eye, meaning that he actually doted on his descendants. When Fang Zhao had made his decision then, the two elders had been delighted, but at the same time, they had worried that Fang Zhao would meet with some problematic situations.

The discovery of Baiji ore had let Great-Grandfather Fang feel very proud in the retirement facility for a period. Never had he expected that after being proud for a few days, this sort of incident would occur.

"Little Zhao is the discoverer of Baiji ore and is also a celebrity. They probably assigned many people to protect him. He should be fine. Mmhm, definitely fine," Great-Grandfather Fang muttered. He did not know whether he was reassuring his wife or convincing himself. After that, he rushed to pick up the communications device and continued to contact people to help him get information.

Over at planet Baiji, Kevin Lin received a notification of a successful transmission and a wave of ecstasy swept across him.

Successful transmission signified that the communications network had been restored and meant that the base surely knew what was happening here and would dispatch people over to provide assistance. Even if the base was too occupied with the situation, at least over here he could send his report back and make a call to people he was close to!

However, when he saw the transmitting status, he felt as if he had been doused with ice-cold water.

He had recorded so many videos, but only the first one had been successfully transmitted, and he did not know how long it had taken for it to be transmitted successfully. The second video was stuck at 19%, and progress was slow. Live broadcasting was even more out of the question. They could not contact the base either for some unknown reason.

"Is the signal underground too weak?" Kevin Lin asked. "Professor Fan, have you managed to get in touch?"

Fan Lin shook his head. He felt that he had let down Fang Zhao and Kevin Lin. After all, he had pulled some tricks to transfer Fang Zhao over. Who could have known that this sort of situation would happen.

Fan Lin sighed. "Fang Zhao, this time it's my fault. I should not have transferred you two over."

He paused for a moment, but Fang Zhao did not reply. Fan Lin looked over and saw that Fang Zhao, who had been tending to the wounded, had stood up at that moment and was looking at the door of the underground shelter.

The shelter suddenly became slightly brighter.

The "rabbit" inside the water tank was now glowing even more brightly than before. Its original soft-looking fur had straightened out and swelled up, and each strand had its own bright spot. It looked very beautiful, but Fan Lin had a sort of dangerous feeling—whenever touched it at this moment would be very unlucky.

Many animals could sense danger much better than humans. The people in the underground right now were not idiots, and because of this, they all tensed up.

"What is ou-ou-outside?" Kevin Lin's previous excitement had totally vanished, and when it quieted down, he listened carefully to all the sounds of activity outside and could hear an indistinct and strange howl that made the hairs on his body stand up.

Fang Zhao did not reply, instead walking over to the doorway and pressing a button on the wall beside it. A screen appeared displaying the scene outside this underground shelter. Because it hadn't been used in a long time or maintained, the equipment was rather old, and the image twitched from time to time.

There were no lights outside. The surveillance camera was in night vision mode so the colors were not very distinct, but it could still be considered rather clear as it transmitted the situation behind the door.

A slender four-limbed beast walked past the underground shelter's door. It had hook-like claws and was covered with lumpy fur. As for the portions that were exposed skin, ripped muscles were bulging. Its face appeared malevolent, and some form of liquid dripped from its canines, perhaps its saliva or blood.

One look at this abomination and it one would know that this was not a native wild

animal of Baiji.

Bang!

The sound of something breaking rang out suddenly in the quiet underground shelter, shocking everyone.

Everyone looked at the source of the sound, but they only saw that the metal piece Fang Zhao held in his hand, which had been removed from one of the wounded, had been forcibly snapped.

Fang Zhao's back was facing them. His normally gentle and calm eyes had an ominous glint at the moment, like a sharpened knife.

It appeared that Fang Zhao was standing there calmly, but at the moment, a raging fire had started burning inside him.

Those beasts from the Period of Destruction were no longer considered a big threat to the people of the New Era, so much so that some rich folks had voiced out about wanting to keep a Period of Destruction beast as a pet, though it was against the law. Experiments regarding Period of Destruction beasts had stringent regulations and needed to be declared and go through many rounds of investigation and auditing. If anyone were caught breaking these laws, the punishment was death.

There were some who did these illegal experiments for the sake of money, such as hoarding specimens and bones of beasts from the Period of Destruction, and there some who had other motives, such as using these beasts as biological weapons.

There surely wouldn't be just one inside the outpost. The aggressors had intentionally let these beasts out to attack the people of the outpost.

People in the new era might only just be disgusted with this sort of actions by the terrorist, but what Fang Zhao felt was fury!

Struggling through almost 100 years of war and chaos and having suffered so many sacrifices, was it to watch you let these things loose?

Revolt?!

A bunch of absolutely disgraceful things!

Chapter 207

How Can It Be Him

The temperature of the entire underground shelter seemed to drop suddenly, and some uncontrollably shivered. As if there was a faint hint of a murderous aura here.

Kevin Lin thought to himself that perhaps it was his body subconsciously creating a shocked and afraid reaction after watching the images on the screen. But then again, that didn't seem right. Following that, Kevin Lin turned his gaze toward Fang Zhao.

Kevin Lin looked at the metal piece in Fang Zhao's hand. Although the things in the underground shelter were quite old, it was still unknown what this metal piece was made of—probably some cheaply priced material used when the place had first been built. Although it could not compete with newer materials, it really wasn't something that could be easily snapped. However, when considering Fang Zhao's manner while doing farm work, it was not that surprising.

"Fang Zhao? What's wrong with you?" Kevin Lin asked.

Fang Zhao retracted his gaze from the screen and threw away the few pieces of metal in his hand. He replied, "I'll be heading out for a bit."

The way Fang Zhao spoke was different from before. When he spoke, Kevin Lin nearly jumped.

"No way!" Kevin Lin vehemently rejected. "Are you trying to court death by going out?! Didn't you see those things outside? Even if you had a few lives, it wouldn't be enough!"

Originally, Fang Zhao had not had any intention of going out. Even if he had wished to head out to help those outpost soldiers, there were also people here that needed protecting. Although the underground shelter had protected them from a few rounds of bombardment, what if something happened? The people here did not have much fighting strength.

Therefore, Fang Zhao's original intention had been to stay here with Kevin Lin, Fan Lin, and the small team of scientists. If anything happened, he would be able to help.

But now, having seen those things roaming outside, Fang Zhao could not suppress the raging fire burning in his heart.

Fang Zhao was certain he could handle these things, but he still had to take into consideration the others. He knew that now was not the best time to leave, that he needed to wait for the things to move further away before heading out.

Probably because it had caught the scent of humans, the thing outside the door raised its head and sniffed, then turn and came closer to the door. Kevin didn't dare speak despite there being many things he wanted to say, as he was afraid the thing outside would hear him. He did not know how effective the soundproofing here was, so to play it safe, he could only shut up.

CRASH! CRASH!

The banging on the doors made the people inside even more nervous. Kevin Lin was sweating profusely as he kept his eyes peeled on the door. He felt as if the nerves in his entire body were trembling in sync with the sound of the beast crashing against the door. All he could now do was pray that the door was sturdy enough to withstand the battering and had not been damaged during the aerial bombardment.

The scientists were equally nervous, their bodies tensed up like stone. Luckily for them, the underground shelter had been constructed meticulously. The beast outside smashed against the door a few more times and then let out a loud, unresigned howl. Following that, it sniffed the air and, probably picking up other scents, followed the passageway and left.

The shelter was filled with the sounds of deep breathing. They knew that they would be fine for the time being.

Only now did Kevin Lin realize his legs had gone soft. He checked the camera—good, the scene had been recorded.

Kevin Lin, who at the moment was looking at the camera and lamenting, heard Fang Zhao say once again, "I am heading out to take a look."

"Are you crazy?!" Kevin Lin could not understand why Fang Zhao still wanted to go out after witnessing such a nerve-wracking scene.

Fan Lin also tried to persuade Fang Zhao. "Fang Zhao, don't be impulsive. I know you

wish to help out, but it would be best to leave those things outside to the outpost team; they are professionals."

"That's right, leave it to the outpost team. Furthermore, restoration of the communication network seems to be in progress. The base has found out about the situation here. We just have to stay here and wait for the base to send people over. Besides, what can you do if you go outside? You don't even have... a... gun..." Midway through his words, Kevin Lin saw Fang Zhao produce a gun from some unknown place. "Where did you get that gun from?!" Originally Kevin Lin had been leaning against the wall, but at the moment, he had leapt forward, his eyeballs bulging, unable to believe the shocking scene in front of him.

Kevin Lin bombarded Fang Zhao with questions. "Whose... whose whose gun is this? How did you bring it in? Or did you find it in the underground shelter?"

Fang Zhao did not explain. "I will head out for a bit, and"—Fang Zhao pointed at the camera—"remember to cut out the portion you just filmed."

There were indeed no longer any suspicious figures in the passageway outside. Fang Zhao listened attentively, then picked up a pole from the table before opening the door and speedily heading out after instructing Kevin Lin to hurry up and close the door and lock it. From the incident where the beast had smashed itself against the door, it could be seen that this place was still secure, so he could head out without worrying.

Kevin Lin was both angry and worried, but Fang Zhao simply had not listened to him. Fang Zhao had already gone out, and all he could do now was shut the door and observe the surveillance footage on the screen.

The passageway was murky; the majority of lights had been destroyed by the earlier bombardments. Sight was limited here, but hearing was even more acute in this darkness.

Fang Zhao listened attentively for the sound of activity and then took quick steps and ran forward in the passageway.

——

At the end of the passageway, the area that had originally been sealed off had collapsed.

A person wearing the uniform of the outpost team was half-buried under the rubble.

Walker felt that today was probably his last day alive. One of his arms was basically crippled, and both his legs were buried. When he tried to move, acute pain flashed through his body. He totally could not exert any strength. Just now, his team members had wanted to come over and help, but he had rejected them. Currently, they simply had no time to waste on him.

Only one of his arms could still move, albeit weakly. Shooting a gun required a great deal of effort, let alone aiming accurately for heads. Walker sighed softly and looked at the round black object in his hand. This was his last grenade. Even if he died, he would at least take one along with him.

He could hear the frenzied breathing in-between piercing howls coming from the passageway. This was the excitement of bloodlust.

Walker moved his fingers and flipped the switch, releasing the safety on the grenade. His finger positioned itself over the button in the middle as he looked toward the passageway. From the bright area into the darkness, he could not see anything and could only use his hearing to determine the distance to the target.

A piercing pain coursed through his arm every time it moved.

What if his throw was not accurate and it did not blow the beast to bits?

Then just wait for it to get a little closer.

Just a little closer...

After all, he was going to die anyway.

Walker counted in his heart.

He could already see the blurry outline of the monstrous beast rushing over. The shape of the beast gradually became clearer, and he could see its malevolent face and its sharp fangs.

However...

Walker pricked his ears. Why did it sound like someone was behind the beast?

Was it friend or foe?

As he thought about this, Walker heard a bang.

The monstrous beast that had been running at high speed fell to the ground and slid forward a short distance. Walker could see the bullet hole in its head. He tilted the head to see the bullet hole in the wall. That high-speed bullet had gone straight through that monstrous beast's skull.

A strange sound of gunfire and an unfamiliar bullet hole—it was not a gun model that the outpost or the base used. Who the heck was it?

Walker, who was still clutching the grenade, had intended to rain curses before going out with a bang and dying as a martyr, but now he was dumbstruck. He widened his eyes to try and see who it was, but the other party was not in a rush to come over.

Dong—

Dong—

The sound of a metal rod knocking against the wall reverberated within the long passageway

Grrrrrr—

The sound of low growling came from above.

Walker carefully raised his head. Above, at the age of the area that had sunk in, there was another one of those beasts standing there. However, that beast had been attracted to the knocking sound and wasn't looking at him.

Dong, Dong, Dong—

The knocking sounds became more urgent, and the beast let out a series of low growls. After that, it leapt down from the top.

Walker had started to think of as many ways to escape the predicament before his eyes, but he had only begun using his head when he heard a bang.

Blood splattered on Walker's face, carrying with it an unfamiliar pungent smell that

made one nauseous.

However, Walker simply paid no heed to that. He was staring blankly at the beast that had just landed and had not yet steadied itself before its brains had been blown out. He stiffly rotated his neck to look down the passageway.

The knocking on the wall had stopped after the shot had rung out. The sound of footsteps neared. Walker glanced over as the other person came closer, and an unexpected figure appeared in his field of vision.

"Fang... Fang Zhao!?" Walker looked as though his neck was trapped in a headlock. Worried that his eyes were playing tricks on him, he shut them tightly before violently opening them.

No mistake!

It was Fang Zhao!

How could it be Fang Zhao?

At this moment, all sorts of guesses, both positive and negative, flooded Walker's mind.

In the few days since Fan Lin had brought Fang Zhao over, the soldiers in the outpost had all met this person who had changed the fortunes of planet Baiji. Walker had also discussed Fang Zhao with his comrades in private. He knew that this person was a gaming and composing celebrity. However, in the few days Fang Zhao had been here, many people had gained favorable impressions of Fang Zhao. He did not put on airs, and he treated others warmly. Sometimes he would even help out the outpost team and give them more opportunities to appear on the live broadcast.

This was just an upright and grounded youth! Remove his celebrity tag and Fang Zhao would not be any different. The reporter named Kevin Lin, on the other hand, was even more of a diva than Fang Zhao. This was what they had thought of Fang Zhao.

However, now, Walker felt as if this was his first time getting to know Fang Zhao.

He only met Fang Zhao's gaze for a brief moment, yet Walker could feel a chill going down his spine.

There was not a speck of blood on Fang Zhao now, yet Walker felt as if there was a dense smell of blood permeating the surroundings.

"Walker." Fang Zhao had only been at the outpost for a short time, yet he remembered the names of the outpost team members.

"It's... It's me." Walker was filled with doubt. For example, where had Fang Zhao gotten the gun in his hand from? Why was his shooting so accurate? Why had he appeared here? These and many other questions filled Walker's head, yet he did not know where to start.

Fang Zhao walked over and, with one glance, was able to roughly determine Walker's current state. Pushing aside Walker's fingers, Fang Zhao took the grenade from Walker's hands and flicked the safety back on for the grenade, which could have blown at any moment.

Fang Zhao helped extract Walker from underneath the rubble and brought him back to the underground shelter.

Having gone out for a round and brought back a wounded person, the people in the shelter saw Fang Zhao in a strange light, as if it was the first time they were seeing this person.

The items in the shelter were limited, so they could only give Walker some simple treatment. For further treatment, he could only wait till the situation was resolved and he was sent to the base.

After inquiring a little about the situation above, Fang Zhao took Walker's gun and handed it over to Kevin Lin. "I'm heading up for a look."

Chapter 208

I Disagree

As soon as Kevin Lin heard Fang Zhao's decision, he objected. "No way! Didn't you just get back? You were lucky enough to come back alive; let's just stay put. I'm sure the soldiers from the main base will be here soon."

"I agree, Fang Zhao. Let's just stay here. Don't go out," Fan Lin seconded.

Walker looked at Fang Zhao and said, "If you head up to ground level, you might be mistaken for the enemy."

On the battlefield, even if you were a friendly, you might be shot by mistake. If Fang Zhao headed out in his current state, he could easily be mistaken for a terrorist and killed in combat.

Naturally Fang Zhao was aware of these risks, but he still decided to leave.

Fang Zhao left the bunker again. All Kevin Lin could do was glare at him. Kevin Lin then turned to Fan Lin's lab technicians and asked, "Which one of you is the better marksman?"

The lab technicians all shook their heads.

"Then I better carry this. I have done shooting practice before, after all." Kevin Lin had never seen combat, but at least he had practiced on a firing range.

After glancing at a resting Walker, Kevin Lin couldn't help putting on his reporter's hat again. He started interviewing the wounded soldier.

At an unknown location on the first floor of the sentry post.

The sirens kept sounding following a series of explosions.

A silhouette emerged. It was a terrorist who had been part of the attack on the outpost.

The terrorist was in a good mood and was wearing a cocky and crazed smile. Unlike his two incompetent comrades who had been killed by snipers as soon as they had entered the sentry post, he had managed to infiltrate the complex and locate the storage room where the food, medicine, and other supplies were stored. Judging from their expiration dates, the inventory had just arrived. They were still in very good condition. Daily necessities like that were extremely hard to come by on a foreign planet. He had just blown up a few of the interconnected storage rooms. He felt like a bona fide hero, admiring his handiwork.

He still wasn't satisfied. Noticing locations that were left unscathed, he set another fire.

The security system started malfunctioning after the attack. It could only sound the alarm but not extinguish the fire. The repeated bursts of fire alarm sirens were unnerving, but to this terrorist, they sounded like celebratory bells extolling his achievement.

It was such a shame they couldn't go blow up the main base.

If the Baiji ore hadn't been discovered, if the military presence on the planet hadn't been reinforced, and if its defenses hadn't been beefed up, they probably would have blown the Baiji base to pieces. That would have made for huge news.

But once he thought of the fact that the outpost they had bombed was where that minor celebrity was broadcasting live from, the terrorist was ecstatic again.

They had only realized that Fang Zhao was around when they had arrived and scouted the experimental plot. The attack on Baiji had been in the works for some time. They were aware of everything that was happening on Baiji. They watched the live broadcasts every day. Naturally, they recognized Fang Zhao's face.

If he could track down that minor celebrity and broadcast his beheading live, then he would be the top story of the day. This was big news. Everyone would know who he was.

After gloating, he would commit suicide.

Sounds like a plan. Then... it's decided.

He licked his dry lips and tasted blood. The more he thought about his plan, the more

excited he became. He was going to track down the minor celebrity stashed away by the sentries.

Where in the world had the sentries hidden the celebrity?

As he was pondering the matter, the flash of an arm showed up in his pupils and grew bigger rapidly. Before he knew it, his whole body plunged backward and landed on a wall. The subtle sound of his bones cracking could be heard, as if they had been crushed.

"Ahhh!"

The lone wail was quickly drowned out by the ongoing sirens.

His two arms flopped to the ground and his gun dropped to the ground. His comms unit was removed and stomped to pieces. Someone grabbed his collar and dragged him forward away from the storage units, a bit like he was a garbage bag.

"You're from Tomorrow's Empire?" a cold voice asked.

The terrorist lifted his head toward the voice for the first time since his whole body had been picked up. The first thing he saw was the dark barrel of a gun.

The temperature was hot because of the bombing and the fire he had started. He felt a warm breeze mixed with the smell of burnt toast. If someone stuck around long enough, they would be covered in sweat, but staring at the dark barrel and the cold glimmer of the gun, all he did was shiver.

The terrorist took a gulp. He had noticed his captor wasn't wearing the sentry uniform. He didn't know off-hand who his captor was, but now he took in the face behind the gun and froze. "Fang Zhao? You're Fang Zhao?"

Ecstasy replaced fear. He even ignored the metallic sensation of the gun barrel pressed against his face.

He had just been about to track down that minor celebrity. Lo and behold, the celebrity had showed up in front of him. It was divine intervention.

But he never would have guessed the minor celebrity had a few moves of his own. Several thoughts flashed through his head. A light bulb lit up when he recalled Fang

Zhao's question. He had a brilliant idea.

"That's right. I'm a member of Tomorrow's Empire. I would do anything for the Empire."

"The Empire?" Fang Zhao asked.

"That's right. We want to build an empire of our own. A brand new world. Why do the descendants of the martyrs that founded the New Era have a monopoly on the best resources while we are discriminated against?" the man said in a righteous tone.

"You're a descendant of the founding fathers?" Fang Zhao pressed.

The man was about to answer in the affirmative, but he paused. "No, I'm not a descendant of the founding fathers. I'm a descendant of a Period of Destruction martyr."

The founding martyrs and the Period of Destruction martyrs were two distinct groups. The former referred to those who had made major contributions to mankind during the founding of the New Era, while the latter referred to heroes who had sacrificed themselves during the Period of Destruction. Any mention of Period of Destruction martyrs inspires a sense of awe and mixed emotions.

Fang Zhao frowned. "A descendant of a Period of Destruction martyr?"

The man was delighted by Fang Zhao's shift in tone. "That's correct," he blurted out.

In reality, he had no idea if any of his ancestors were martyrs. Regardless of the facts, it was his word against Fang Zhao's. This was his lifeline, or perhaps at some point he had brainwashed himself into believing that he was indeed the descendant of a martyr wholeheartedly, that everything he had done had been in the name of correcting injustices committed against his ancestors, that his work would bring him the utmost glory. It had all been for Tomorrow's Empire. Freedom fighters like him shared the spirit of the founding fathers who had battled for a new future.

Yes, that's right. All that killing had been for a better tomorrow. Bring on another Period of Destruction war!

"Let's set aside the issue of the martyrs' descendants who were forced to go down my path first. Do you remember the martyr Fang Zhao? You know, your namesake, the

really famous one, the great man ranked only second to Wu Yan in the core area of the Yanzhou Cemetery for Martyrs? You're from Yanzhou. You must know about him, no? It's a shame that he died in the 99th year of the Period of Destruction and Wu Yan stole the limelight. Look at how much prestige the Wu family enjoys these days? What about Fang Zhao's descendants? They've long been shoved into the gutter."

Fang Zhao watched as the man blabbered on passionately and self-righteously, seemingly emboldened by the noble cause of exposing the indignities suffered by a giant of history. Little did he know that the man standing before him was the real Fang Zhao. Fang Zhao had seen pitiful performances like this during the Period of Destruction a countless number of times. He could tell his prisoner was lying.

His claim of being a descendant of a martyr was bullshit. All this talk of correcting injustices committed against martyrs was simply a pretty excuse to advance his own interests and satisfy his greed.

Taking a step back, even if this person was telling the truth, even if this extremist organization counted the descendants of martyrs among its members, just look at what they had done. Fang Zhao thought to himself: if his fallen comrades who hadn't lived to see the New Era knew their descendants had stooped this low, they'd be furious enough to crawl out from their plots in the martyrs' cemeteries. They wouldn't be able to rest in peace.

The terrorist kept observing Fang Zhao's facial expressions as he talked. He swelled with delight when he noticed a subtle change in Fang Zhao's gaze. If he could convert Fang Zhao, that would be a major accomplishment.

If he couldn't...

The man bent his limp fingers, his fingernails piercing the center of his palms. He couldn't raise his arms anymore, but he could move his fingers.

"Think about the luxurious lifestyle that the Wu family enjoys now, then think about poor martyr Fang Zhao, resting alone underground, unable to protect the livelihoods of his descendants. If he were still alive, he'd be upset too. He'd definitely approve of our..."

Bang!

A bullet penetrated the man's head between his eyebrows, ejecting into the wall

behind him.

Fang Zhao glanced at the slumped body and mumbled, "I disagree."

Fang Zhao didn't like extremist organizations like Tomorrow's Empire. The death of the parents of the original owner of his body had the fingerprints of an extremist organization all over it. Accidents like that were not unheard of, but many of them were covered up to prevent mass panic. The government had been heavy-handed in its recent antiterrorism campaign, dealing the extremists some major blows. Otherwise they wouldn't have been so desperate as to target Baiji. Not too long ago, Baiji had been an impoverished planet, which had made it a vulnerable target. If they had truly had the guts, why hadn't they targeted the planets at the top of the development order?

If they were genuinely so ambitious, if they actually harbored such lofty aspirations, why had been they so fixated on blowing up Baiji, endangering innocent civilians in the process? If they wanted to build their own empire, why not colonize a planet that hadn't been discovered by the global alliance and truly break new ground?

To expend all this energy to come up with evil plots instead of channeling it toward righteous causes, calling for the overthrow of the existing order, even recreating the beasts from the Period of Destruction—such bastards! They deserved to be crushed.

On the verge of his death back in the day, Fang Zhao had had his grievances all right. He had witnessed the emergence of all sorts of "royalty" on the different continents and read an online commentary that he was the one with the worst luck among the Period of Destruction leadership. He'd be lying if he said none of it had gotten to him.

But as he had admired the beautiful blue home planet from space, he had felt that all his sacrifices had been worth it. He had put all those injustices behind him.

Then Fang Zhao had wondered if, one day, some b*stard posing as his descendant would pop up and stir up trouble.

If the occasion actually arrived, he would deliver a bullet to the imposter's head, Fang Zhao had thought to himself.

Chapter 209

Blind

There was still continuous gunfire all over the outpost.

Yan Biao's face was pale and covered with beads of sweat. He took a look at his blood-soaked pants and winced at the pain. The protruding veins on his face twitched with every movement he made, but his two eyes were still scanning the surroundings like radar for any sign of activity.

Yan Biao used his comms device to ask those who had stayed behind in the command post, "Command post, how did the base reply?" His chest was heaving violently, and his words had some urgency to them.

"Base says that reinforcements are on the way. Captain, you should get some treatment first. With your current condition..."

A few other voices came through the comms device.

"Captain, you are hurt?!"

"Captain, don't delay treatment. Base reinforcements are en route, we just have to hold them off a little longer."

The comms channel they were using was in multi-user mode.

"Hold your own positions! Do not get distracted! I know my own condition best!" Yan Biao wiped away the droplets of sweat that had almost reached his eye. His sharp gaze was focused on the ruins in front, trying to detect where the two terrorists had concealed themselves.

These two were just too crafty. Yan Biao did not dare to get careless. Although his perception was not as strong as a cemetery guard's, he could rely on his own experiences and intuition to deduce a few things. The two hiding themselves were surely the leading members in this attack. Even if they were not leading the operation, they were still crucial personnel and could not be allowed to get any closer to the

outpost!

But those two had really sharp senses, and every time, they managed to slip away just as the snipers were about to fire. Because of this, Yan Biao was even more determined to shoot these two terrorists dead.

If he were to be brought to a safe place for treatment, surely manpower would be needed to transport him over, and there would be others required to cover him. That would make it more difficult to kill these two. If he were to receive medical treatment, he had to get rid of these two terrorist first! He could not rest easy till they were dead!

At this moment, through his earpiece, he heard a message from the command post.

"Captain, the surveillance system shows some beasts headed your way!"

Yan Biao's heart dropped. He suspected that the two hidden terrorists ahead had used some sort of method to attract over more of these beasts to increase their fire power. This way, it would be more difficult to kill off the two terrorists.

"How many?" Yan Biao asked.

"Coming from your right. There are seven... six... five... four..."

Hearing the voice on the comms channel, Yan Biao's face stiffened. The veins on his face were protruding even more than before. Yan Biao bellowed, "Are you f*cking counting down!?" This wasn't the time!

"I'm... I'm not, captain. I'm really giving a serious report. There were really seven on your right headed over, but the numbers are dropping, there are still two... one... no more. The right side is clear."

Yan Biao violently exhaled.

How long had it been since this exchange of words? Seven beasts, completely wiped out!

When had their outpost team had such a godly marksman?

"Who did it?" Yan Biao asked.

"No idea."

"You didn't see it? Are none of the surveillance cameras working?"

"They are working, but all I saw in the footage was the beasts falling one after another. I couldn't tell who shot them. However, it doesn't seem like it's someone from our outpost team. The sound of the gunfire was different—not the gun model we use at the outpost. The sounds it made seemed like they were from an even older model."

Hearing this, Yan Biao was even more skeptical.

Could the person be in cahoots with the attackers? But if he were from that side, why had he shot those beasts?

Had reinforcements arrived?

That seemed unlikely.

If people from the base were here, it wouldn't only be one.

Who the h*ll was it?

"Get to the bottom of this!" Yan Biao ordered.

Even without Yan Biao's instructions, people in the command post were searching seriously. The sharp sensors of the detection system could capture the activity of any living beasts. The people in the command post stiffened up as they watched the bright spots displayed by the surveillance system change. Hurriedly, they exclaimed, "Riode! The person is headed over to you! It's unclear whether he is friend or foe!"

The line "unclear whether he is friend or foe" astonished Riode. Generally, they would always assume worst-case scenario. But now, "whether friend or foe" meant that in the current circumstances, the other party's actions were beneficial to him.

At the moment, Riode was leading men to clear out terrorists and those beasts that had entered the outpost. Hearing this message, he replied, "Which side... Never mind, I already hear gunfire."

The passageway's surveillance camera was damaged, and those in the command post had no way of watching the situation, but through the detection system, they were

able to see the bright spots of life forms on the map. Blue dots were humans, and red ones were beasts.

Riode's team consisted of five people—five blue dots. In the middle of this long passageway, there were six red dots, and they were moving quickly in Riode's direction. There was another blue dot at the other end of the passageway who was moving at an even higher speed and was catching up to those red dots. And during this process, the red dots were decreasing.

As an eyewitness to this scene, Riode's thoughts overwhelmed him.

Flapping sounds as the six beasts ran at high speeds were accompanied by low growls and howls that flooded the passageway. However, every time a shot rang out, a beast fell.

Riode did not let his men fire. They were only to be on alert as they watched the person heading over eliminate the beasts.

Whenever they encountered these beasts, they would open fire from a distance. They would absolutely avoid engaging them in close combat, as they did not understand these beasts and could only be passive. Aim at the head? That was easier said than done. When it came to reality, the difficulty was much higher. In the last hour, they had experienced it for themselves.

But now, apparently every beast was being killed in one shot. Not considering marksmanship, Riode swore he had never ever seen such a crazy person before.

That's right, from what Riode saw, this was a crazy person!

Not only was it one shot one kill, after the person had caught up to the beasts with his extremely quick speed, he did not slow down at all, instead fearlessly continuing to rush forward.

Riode scrunched his eyebrows together. Close-quarters combat?

When the steel rod struck the beast's taut, rock-like muscles, it created a thumping sound. The thumping sound had not yet dissipated when the second strike accurately struck the beast in its neck like a violent gale. A torrential barrage of attacks created an accompaniment of bones cracking and flesh being slapped.

Riode's furrowed expression turned to one of astonishment.

Beast after beast fell to the ground and did not budge.

Bang!

Gunfire.

The last beast collapsed to the ground heavily. The inertia from its rushing caused it to slide some distance after it fell, leaving a trail of brown blood from the bullet hole in its head.

The whirlwind-like attack had only lasted a few blinks. Before Riode had even regained his train of thought, the entire thing was over. Those aggressive howls a few moments ago had been silenced for the rest of eternity.

Riode was still standing in his original spot. The muscles around his eyes were twitching. Even more so when he saw the other party's face; his eyeballs nearly fell out of their sockets.

Those in the command post saw the six blue dots on the screen and anxiously asked, "Riode, what's the situation over there? Who is the other party? Is he friend or foe?"

Others who were in the same comms channel pricked their ears up.

Riode heard the questions through his ear piece and opened his mouth. With great difficulty, he spat out two words: "Fang Zhao."

When everyone in the comms channel heard this name, they spoke almost simultaneously.

"Who!?"

"What!?"

Riode swallowed his saliva. When he saw Fang Zhao look over, he was a little startled and nervous for no reason. A layer of sweat had actually formed on his back.

At this moment, Fang Zhao's entire body seemed to be oozing a viciousness that was entirely different from how he normally was!

Riode recalled the scene he had just witnessed. The kind that went all out to beat the enemy to death without even giving them the tiniest bit of time to take a breath. In the past, how had he reckoned that Fang Zhao was a gentle and harmless person?

I must have been f*cking blind!

"Why are you even here?" Riode asked.

Fang Zhao flung the blood off his steel rod. "I came out to take a look. What's the situation like right now?"

"It's already under control. People from the base should be arriving shortly." Riode briefly spoke a little about the current situation. There was nothing confidential, and he did not need to hide any information.

"From where you came from, besides these beasts, did you encounter any terrorists? Previously, two holes were blasted in the outpost and some infiltrators entered, sabotaging a portion of our surveillance system. The command center had no way of finding them."

"I encountered one when I came over from the storehouse." Riode had also mentioned Yan Biao's situation, and Fang Zhao decided to go over and see if he could help out. "Does Yan's squad require help? I'll go over."

The conversation between the two was also transmitted to others through Riode's ear piece and receiver.

When Yan Biao heard the conversation, he was still unconvinced. Two minutes later, he had a complicated expression as he saw Fang Zhao appearing in front of him. This old soldier had made an oversight, let alone the others.

Glancing at the gun in Fang Zhao's hands, it was indeed an old model that had already halted production. This was a gun model that garrisoned troops had used a few decades ago. The question was: where had this little fellow gotten a hold of it, and how had he even brought it here? Even bringing a gun for military service?

"You need medical treatment ASAP," Fang Zhao said as he took a look at Yan Biao's wound.

"We don't have to worry about it right now. Fang Zhao, the command post said that

many of the beasts inside the outpost were killed by you?"

"19. Until now, I have killed a total of 19," Fang Zhao replied.

Yan Biao's face twitched when he heard this figure. According to rough estimates, during this round of attacks, the terrorists had released eight cages here. Each cage had held approximately 15, thus totaling 100-plus such beasts. If what Fang Zhao had said was true, then he alone had gotten rid of a sixth of them!

If anyone had told Yan Biao this before, he definitely would not have believed it.

There was the sound of concentrated gunfire in the surroundings, and a number of beasts approached. This was the reason they were defending this area and were unable to move forward to the ruins ahead.

These beasts did not know pain. As long as they were not dead, they would engage in slaughter till the very end.

"You have good marksmanship? Do you see that area in front? Within those ruins are two terrorists, We cannot let them get any closer to the outpost. You can cooperate with Bie Liao. Do you know Bie Liao? He is our sniper. Those two terrorists are really crafty, so it is very difficult..."

Bang!

The gunshot rang out beside his ear. The sound of gunfire from the old gun model was too loud, and Yan Biao was deafened for a moment. He stared blankly for two seconds before recovering. It was also because he was weak from his injury; otherwise, his reaction would not have been like this.

The dazed Yan Biao heard sniper Bie Liao's voice crackling through his ear piece.

"Captain, one of the terrorists has been hit. Judging from the bullet wound and the spurt of blood, he should already be dead."

Yan Biao looked slightly more at ease. "Good job!"

"It wasn't me," the sniper mumbled. He had been just about to fire when he had seen the target's head tilt back and blood spurt out.

The terrorist that had been shot dead probably had not known whether he had been hit by a stray bullet or targeted and eliminated, as the bullet had not been shot from the sniper's position. The terrorist might have been guarded against the outpost team's sniper, but he was not guarded against shots from other positions.

"It wasn't you?" Yan Biao was suspicious. Inclining his head toward Fang Zhao, he opened his mouth to ask.

Bang!

Another shot rang out beside his ear.

Sniper Bie Liao's voice came through the ear piece. "Captain, the other terrorist has also been shot dead."

"Was it you this time?" Yan Biao asked.

"It wasn't me this round either," Bie Liao said grudgingly. He was the outpost's best sniper, and he normally called himself the ace marksman, but this time around, he had really suffered a blow. He had totally been unable to lock the two crafty terrorists in place, and after, he had not gotten a single one after guarding for so long. In the end, they had been killed by somebody else.

"But in any case, those two have finally been settled." Bie Liao sighed. "The remaining beasts are not a threat. Captain, you should hurry and get treated, or you will die from blood loss."

"Tell everyone at your side that nobody is allowed to go any closer. They might have bombs on their bodies."

"I know."

Ending the comms, Yan Biao looked at Fang Zhao, who had already put away his gun. "Were those two shot by you?"

"Mmhm."

The calm tone Fang Zhao used was as though he had just slaughtered some chickens.

Chapter 210

No Interest

Yan Biao could not clearly see the situation ahead of him, but since Bie Liao had seen it through his sniper scope and confirmed that the two terrorists had already been killed, Yan Biao could rest easy and receive treatment. However, if what Fang Zhao had said was true, examining the wounds on the bodies would verify his words. The gun used by Fang Zhao was different from the ones used by the outpost team. The gunshot wounds would be different, so it would be easy to distinguish.

Yan Biao was a little puzzled when he saw Fang Zhao keeping his gun away. "Aren't you going to continue? There are a few more beasts over there."

"The others can handle it. Besides, I'm out of ammo," Fang Zhao replied. The situation was already under control. There weren't many threats remaining, and he had no need to snatch military glory away from the outpost team.

Yan Biao did not question how Fang Zhao had managed to smuggle the gun into planet Baiji. Instead he asked, "These types of old gun models have very little ammo. How many bullets are there? You ran out of ammo so quickly."

"There were only 20 bullets when I brought it over." Fang Zhao did not hide this bit. Yan Biao and the others did not think highly of these sorts of decades-old guns. If a gun from the Old Era were placed in front of them, they would surely treat it as an antique.

Bie Liao had just arrived and had a shocked look on his face. "You dared to head to the battlefield with only 20 bullets? Was it enough?"

Yan Biao too was used to high-capacity magazines and also found it utterly unimaginable. "What can you do with so little ammo?" But when he remembered how Fang Zhao had shot the terrorists and the reports of how Fang Zhao had killed those beasts with one shot, he swallowed his words.

"That's why I brought a steel rod." Fang Zhao brandished his already-deformed steel rod, which was now full of brown bloodstains. Not every beast had been shot dead;

some had been bludgeoned to death.

Yan Biao silently watch Fang Zhao for a few seconds, then handed his own gun over to Fang Zhao. "You use it first. I no longer have the strength to use it."

Fang Zhao did not accept it. He looked up at the sky in a certain direction. "Should be reinforcements from the base arriving."

Yan Biao felt delighted inside and looked over... but he did not see anything.

But when he remembered Fang Zhao's "Diting ears," he largely believed it. He still pushed the gun toward Fang Zhao. "Even if personnel from the base have arrived, you hold onto it just in case."

Indeed, after a short while, a black speck appeared in the distance. Yan Biao switched the modes on his comms device and received a new signal accessing the outpost's communications network. It was the personnel dispatched from the base.

After reporting the situation over here, Yan Biao checked his comms device again. There were two missed comms from Kevin Lin.

Yan Biao had set up a few communication channels in the network. Channel 1 was for personnel with a squadron leader position or above, including the command post. Channel 2 was for team leaders and above. Channel 3 was solely for communications with the command post and to understand the current situation. Channel 4 was for personnel not part of the outpost team, like Kevin Lin and the rest.

Previously, he had been in the outpost internal comms channel and been set to combat command mode, so those in other channels could not interfere.

Yan Biao switched over and immediately heard Kevin Lin's anxious voice asking. "Fang Zhao went up! Have you seen him?"

"He's here beside me. He's all right. Base personnel have also arrived, but we still need time to make sure the danger has passed. You people stay where you are first and don't come out. When it's safe, I will send men to fetch you."

Yan Biao's words were undoubtedly good news to those in the underground shelter. They signified that the situation was roughly under control.

Yan Biao did not say much else. Two soldiers came over and prepared to carry him off for medical treatment. He no longer needed to maintain his position. As he relaxed, he felt his vision blurring as he faded in and out of consciousness.

Of the two terrorists, one of them was indeed armed with explosives. Furthermore, the explosives were embedded within his body and were difficult to remove. After the personnel dispatched by the base determined the identity of the two terrorists, they moved the bomb-laden corpse far away for detonation.

The explosion in the distance shook the earth, vindicating Yan Biao's judgement. If those terrorists had infiltrated the outpost's interior, the consequences would have been even more dire...

Now that there were reinforcements, Bie Liao held his gun and sat at the side. He was really tired, yet he could not control his curiosity. He asked Fang Zhao. "Were those two terrorists really shot by you?"

Bie Liao had seen the gunshot wounds on the two terrorist's bodies. Both had been killed with a single shot, and the wounds had not been made by the gun model issued by the base. On the contrary, the gunshot wounds seemed similar to those found on the bodies of the beasts Fang Zhao had shot dead. Because of this, Bie Liao found it unimaginable.

If it was an old experienced soldier around 70 or 80, Bie Liao would only have had admiration for him, but Fang Zhao? How old was Fang Zhao?

Those two terrorists were experienced hands with sharp perceptions. Bie Liao had kept an eye on them for so long, yet he had been unable to succeed. Every time he had caught sight of their shadow, the other side seemed to have sensed it and had evaded so Bie Liao could not get a lock on them.

Not just himself, Bie Liao reckoned that if it had been any of the few ace marksmen from the base, they would not have been able to do it either.

Timing, speed, decision-making, mental state, external factors, and other factors affected the final outcome. Bie Liao was not finding excuses—it was indeed very difficult.

However, today, the scene that had unfolded in front of Bie Liao's eyes was like a lesson for him.

Even if Bie Liao was unwilling to admit it, he had to accept this fact. In less than a minute, Fang Zhao had used a gun that was no longer in production and two bullets to shoot dead the targets that Bie Liao had been unable to hit for 20 minutes.

This skill was really extraordinary!

Furthermore, from what Riode and the others had said, given Fang Zhao's skill, marksmanship, and temperament, if he joined the military, anywhere he went, he would be the absolute trump card!

"If I had your ability, maybe even just half, I would have become a senior officer long ago. I wouldn't still be stuck as a lieutenant like now!" Bie Liao lamented to Fang Zhao. This little fellow, why did he not think things through? Why did he decide to be a celebrity!? Bie Liao was especially curious about one thing. "How long have you been practicing with a gun?"

Fang Zhao thought for a bit before replying, "Very long."

"Definitely not as long as me." From what Bie Liao saw, he was older than Fang Zhao by a few decades. He'd had access to firearms from a young age. Bie Liao had certainly held guns longer than Fang Zhao, but his skill could not be compared. This Bie Liao acknowledged.

Bie Liao had an envious look in his eyes. "Your talent is really good." This sort of thing known as talent was not something anyone could have. Some people could just use a shorter time to achieve more dazzling results.

When Fang Zhao heard this, he gave a faint smile.

Talent?

These technical abilities and skills were gained from experiencing living hell for close to 100 years and from the accumulation of many wounds and injuries. Technical abilities did not drop from the sky. How much had his body and mind gone through to achieve the level of skill he had today?

In his previous life, the reason Fang Zhao had not survived was largely due to his accumulated injuries and illnesses coupled together with the immense pressure on him from the war. As the leader of a large warzone, he had been unable to avoid many affairs. Before his death, his body had already reached its limits, and even if the battle

where he had died had not occurred, he might not have made it to the Founding Era.

Fang Zhao's rebirth had let him feel pleasantly surprised, but ultimately, his soul was still the same one that had gone through close to a hundred years of the apocalypse.

During that period where they'd had to make sure every bullet counted and where danger had lurked around every corner, where they'd had to stay alert both day and night and a person's life could have been lost at any moment, he had lived for close to 100 years.

This was something Bie Liao would never be able to imagine.

When Fang Zhao faced those beasts, his soul and body combined to create an instinctive reaction.

But Fang Zhao could not say any of this.

Noticing Fang Zhao not speaking, Bie Liao did not mind. He continued, "The magazine for that gun of yours is way too little. But speaking of that, for Old Era guns, their bullets were big, and the magazine capacity was really little. I heard that some of the gun magazines could only load 10 shells? I have no idea how those people from the Period of Destruction could get by. If it was me, I would have fallen into despair."

Fang Zhao nodded. "Yeah, they probably wished they could have broken a single bullet into many more."

"Oh right, I forgot that you were a godlike player in 'Battle of the Century.' I heard that 'Battle of the Century' is set during the Period of Destruction, and things during that period were recreated. I will try it if I get the chance."

"Godlike player" and so on were the words entertainment media used to describe Fang Zhao. When Bie Liao had first seen it, he had felt that it was rather exaggerated, but looking at things now, even if it was exaggerated, it was not beyond reason.

Bie Liao decided that, when he got the chance, he would go online and search for Fang Zhao's dazzling game videos.

"I heard that some units have already been allocated the latest gun model, the sort that shoots beams. That sort of gun doesn't require bullets at all, and the firepower is even greater. There is even a vertigo mode and a heat mode." A look of yearning

crossed Bie Liao's face. "It sounds so cool. I wonder when would our side will get to use it."

"Equipment will get better and better in future," Fang Zhao said.

"That's for sure. If we were the planet Baiji of old, all we would be able to do is dream. But now, it's different! We can look forward to it! If we'd had equipment of that sort of grade, we would have beaten these attackers to a pulp!"

At this point, Bie Liao once again thanked Fang Zhao. "It was all thanks to you discovering Baiji ore that our systems and equipment were upgraded. Otherwise, during this attack, maybe half of us wouldn't have survived. But what can we do? Resources are limited, and there are positions in the development sequence. You see, we, planet Baiji, were poor and had lousy equipment and so were placed at the back. It's little wonder we got targeted by terrorists." Bie Liao lameted for a little bit before asking Fang Zhao, "Oh, do you have any interest in developing in the military?"

"Nope," Fang Zhao replied. "I'm in the art industry."

He just wanted to enjoy this new life that was hard to come by.

The attacks all over planet Baiji were already under control. Reinforcements from the base had reached all the other outposts in succession. The communications network had not yet been fully restored. Although the network was still unable to support a live broadcast, information transmission was no longer obstructed.

However, people online were unaware.

The matter of planet Baiji being attacked by a terrorist organization had become something that everyone was following closely.

The military would not publicly reveal all information, so for those that wanted to know the latest developments at planet Baiji, they needed to find relevant parties. If not, all they could do was worry.

The large majority of netizens were like this. They were worried, and all they could do was vent in all the large forums until channel S5 released a video.

It had been sent to the company by Kevin Lin on planet Baiji. In the video, Kevin Lin was in a dusky room, his face bloodied. He cut a sorry figure. Ever since the live

broadcasts had started, this was the first time he had appeared this way in front of the audience, but nobody mocked him.

"Greetings, everyone, it is your old friend Kevin Lin. My work ID number is LKW7986..."

Kevin Lin's voice was heavy and trembling slightly, as if he was saying his last words.

In no time, every continent's various internet or television channels synchronized to this broadcast.

Channel S5's viewership hit an unprecedented height.

Chapter 211

Virtual vs. Reality

"Did you hear that planet Baiji has come under attack?"

"You mean the planet that was the center of attention a while back after discovering the new power ore?"

"Yes, yes, yes! I heard it's a terrorist attack."

"So be it. It's no big deal."

For many folks, Baiji was a faraway planet, and what happened there didn't affect their daily lives. In addition, this was not the first terrorist attack in the history of mankind. They didn't pay much attention. As for the handful of folks who followed political and military news, even they went about life as usual when they learned about the attack from their friends. At most it was a fallback conversation topic during social gatherings, and they would make a perfunctory donation to the military on Memorial Day. That was it.

But this time, things were different.

"You've heard of Fang Zhao, right? The dude who was the top-ranked player in 'Battle of the Century'? He is performing his military service on Baiji at the exact sentry post that was attacked. I heard that he was broadcasting live at the time and his signal was cut off. He might have been hit. They still don't know whether he's alive or dead."

"What?"

For many gamers, both professionals and amateurs alike, Fang Zhao's departure from gaming was a sad development. The void at the top was a frequent subject of discussion in online gaming forums. Now the global rankings for "Battle of the Century" were a full-on slugfest day in day out, with the former No. 1 and No. 2 both out of action. Fang Zhao had to serve in the military, and Marshall had decided to focus on his professional shooting career instead. Now that the two strongest players were out of the picture, everyone else naturally went all out trying to advance their

rankings.

Given the prevailing dynamics, gamers would bring up Fang Zhao from time to time and reminisce about his stranglehold on the No. 1 spot in the first six months after the game had launched.

When Fang Zhao had announced he was quitting gaming to serve in the military, some had cheered and others had mourned the news. Likewise, news that the location where Fang Zhao was serving had been attacked by terrorists sparked mixed reactions. Some folks wished for Fang Zhao's death so that their competition would be eliminated for good, while others prayed for Fang Zhao's survival. A third group just followed the latest developments for the heck of it.

Regardless of their motivations, none of the gamers were in the mood to play anymore.

Fiery Bird noticed that the number of gamers online playing "Battle of the Century" was much lower than usual, and the figure was continuing to dwindle over time, especially after channel S5 played the footage it had received from Baiji. Everyone had gone offline to watch the video.

The Project Starlight team of First Frontline and the rest of the editorial team were hard at work. All their phone lines were busy. Meanwhile, Kevin Lin slowly transmitted a few text, sound, and video files back to headquarters.

After watching the first video Kevin Lin sent, they knew this was a prime opportunity for their publication.

Indeed, for any profit-making organization, their business interests came first. Naturally, they were concerned about the situation on Baiji and whether there were any survivors, but they cared more about how the incident could benefit the publication.

"The second video has been edited. We've received 98 percent of the third video."

"Boss! Another internet TV channel from Muzhou wants to buy our footage."

"The third video has been downloaded in full. I'll start editing."

The editors at HQ considered some of the footage that Kevin Lin sent redundant, so they took it out and made other edits before airing the final cut on S5.

"Kevin Lin's gonna become a star," one of Kevin Lin's colleagues said as he observed S5's viewership numbers skyrocketing.

"He's already a star," another colleague said while pointing at his computer screen and wearing an astonished expression.

On his screen was Kevin Lin's social media account. His last status update had been posted before he had taken off for Baiji: "About to take off!"

The post included a photo that also showed Fang Zhao and other fellow passengers.

The number of comments on the post had already exceeded 1 million. Concerned viewers noticed Kevin Lin's account displayed in the S5 videos.

Kevin Lin had interviewed celebrities and politicians in the past, but no matter how much he had self-promoted and embellished, he had never gotten anywhere. Now, a disaster had turned into a blessing in disguise. His follower numbers had reached a level that made many fellow journalists jealous. Even if it was a temporary bump, people were still jealous.

The military chose not to disclose the latest updates it had received. All they said was that the situation on Baiji was under control and that the military base was secure. That was all. So if viewers wanted to find out more details, they had to tune in to S5 or regional internet TV channels that took the S5 feed.

The first video S5 aired explained what had happened. Not just Kevin Lin, but Fang Zhao, Fan Lin, and the other researchers also appeared in the video. The second video showed the appearance of a monster.

The beast was no stranger to gamers who were playing "Battle of the Century," even if it belonged to a species they weren't familiar with. The monster's savage face bore a striking resemblance to the beasts in the game.

The banging on the door not only unnerved the people in the bunker, it also spooked the viewers watching the video. This wasn't a movie. It was cinema vérité, real footage from the planet of Baiji. They didn't know what they would see next, which gave their nerves a roller-coaster ride.

Good thing the door was firm enough. The beast was also distracted by other noise, so the online viewers could finally breathe a sigh of relief.

The third video was also edited, but not by First Frontline's editors. Kevin Lin had cut a portion of the film before he had sent it. He had edited out the footage of Fang Zhao pulling out his gun. Conscripts were not allowed to carry arms without permission. The footage would reflect poorly on Fang Zhao. Kevin Lin knew Fang Zhao had pulled out his gun as a last resort. As a brother from the trenches, Kevin Lin was a loyal comrade. Even if Fang Zhao hadn't said anything, Kevin Lin never would have aired the footage.

So the third video started with a close-up of Kevin Lin's bloody and dusty face. He sat in a corner, sighing repeatedly and rubbing his face before going on camera. His eyes were bloodshot, weary with concern and fear.

"Fang Zhao..." Perhaps it was dehydration and the pressure, but Kevin Lin's voice was a bit hoarse. He paused shortly after starting his sentence.

The online viewers became even more anxious.

Yeah, where is Fang Zhao?

The viewers could see the lab technicians behind Kevin Lin, but there was no sign of Fang Zhao. They thought he was simply off-camera, but Kevin Lin's tone of voice seemed to suggest otherwise.

Countless viewers stopped what they were doing in anticipation of the rest of Kevin Lin's sentence.

Kevin Lin cleared his throat before continuing. "Fang Zhao headed out. He said he wanted to take a look."

The viewers froze. Some bitched that Kevin Lin was a tease. What the hell are you doing gasping for breath before he finished his sentence? The pause made us think that Fang Zhao had sacrificed himself in combat.

Wait.

Something doesn't sound right.

He headed out?

Fang Zhao left the underground bunker?

What for? To kill a few monsters? Does he think this is a f*cking game?

Also watching the footage was Great-Grandfather Fang, who was so startled he got out of his chair. "Nonsense! What can a young conscript who's never seen real combat do? Does he have a death wish?"

Great-Grandfather and Great-Grandmother were angry and anxious. None of their old comrades had any concrete word on Fang Zhao's status. All they could offer were updates on the base. But all the two elders cared about was the latest status of Outpost 23. The only source of news about Fang Zhao was S5's video footage. All they could do was wait.

They actually tried contacting First Frontline directly for their full footage, but they couldn't get through. First Frontline wasn't based in Yanzhou, after all. While Great-Grandfather Fang had connections in Yanzhou, his influence didn't extend to Huangzhou. They didn't have a direct line to First Frontline on short notice, and the publication's customer service hotline was overwhelmed with calls. Grand-Grandfather Fang wanted to take a number but gave up after he saw that the queue was in the tens of thousands. Lord knew how long that would take.

Thankfully, they didn't have to wait long. Fang Zhao appeared in the next video. Not only did he return to the bunker safely, he brought with him a wounded comrade.

Many folks breathed a sigh of relief, but before they could relax, Fang Zhao headed out again.

Great-Grandfather Fang gasped for breath. "Why, why, why is he going out again?"

During the period Fang Zhao was gone, the video showed Kevin Lin and a few others who were only lightly injured treat the wounds of the rescued soldier. They did the basics. His wounds were too severe and there was only so much they could handle.

But the wounded soldier, Walker, didn't stay silent. He didn't know if he was going to make it, so Kevin Lin filmed him giving a blow-by-blow of Fang Zhao's rescue attempt.

A gamer watching the video beamed. "That is to say that Zhao-god killed two monsters?"

"Fang Zhao was such a badass in the game. He couldn't fare too poorly in reality, right?"

There were dissenters. "Did you forget about the earlier news reports? The virtual world is different from the real world."

Some people were only cocksure online, whereas in reality they were pussies. Entertainment news items casting gamers in an unfavorable light had surfaced in the past. For example, an entertainment magazine broke the story of a superstar fighting-game player who was hospitalized after getting the crap beaten out of him by a small-time black street thug. There was also the shooting gamer who tried to play hero in real life only to be killed instead.

Regardless of the controversy, everyone wanted to know how Fang Zhao fared. Did he come across any monsters or terrorists during his second outing? Was he injured? Was he still alive?

When Kevin Lin finally got through to Yan Biao and learned that Fang Zhao was safe and that backup had arrived, the online viewers couldn't help but cheer as well.

But S5's live broadcast broke off abruptly again at that moment of rejoice. Just as viewers started bitching and threatened to file complaints, they saw the following line appear on their screen: "Live signal connecting."

The previous footage had all been delayed. What they had witnessed had happened earlier. Now that there was a live signal, who cared about taped footage?

The viewers stopped whining and stared at their screens.

Their screens flashed "successful connection" and then Kevin Lin's bloody face appeared, but this time, his grim, unsettled look was gone. Now he was emotional, ecstatic.

"Someone is here to pick us up, finally!"

The camera swung toward the entrance to the bunker. A small team of soldiers filed in. They carried out the heavily wounded while Kevin Lin and the others followed on foot.

Kevin Lin kept filming, capturing on camera the charred interior of the outpost and the bodies of several monsters. Some of the footage was too graphic, so Kevin Lin reminded viewers: "Our channel is only suitable for viewers 15 and older. Please switch channels if you're under 15. Parents, please check if any children in your

household under 15 are sneaking online."

"I'm gonna track down Fang Zhao now. I wonder if he's injured," Kevin Lin said as he followed the soldiers.

He was flooded by daylight when he left the sentry post. He took a deep breath and scanned his surroundings when he saw the flying transports dispatched from the main base and the other reinforcements, then approached a soldier who looked familiar.

"Excuse me, have you seen Fang Zhao? Where is he?"

"Fang Zhao? He's over there. Someone took him to get a change of clothes," the soldier responded.

"New clothes? What for?"

Kevin Lin was about to press the soldier for details when he saw Fang Zhao disembark from a freight transport.

Fang Zhao had changed into a uniform similar to the outfit worn by the sentries and held a gun. Kevin Lin had seen Yan Biao with the same gun.

"Fang Zhao, what's this all about?" Kevin Lin asked.

"I'm heading back into the woods for cleanup. A few monsters escaped into the forest."

Before Kevin Lin could respond, he heard Bie Liao shout, "Hey, Fang Zhao! Time to go!"

Fang Zhao cut the conversation short, signaled to Kevin Lin that he was heading out, and dashed toward Bie Liao and his team.

Fresh from a hard-fought battle, the sentries still gave out a subtle killer's vibe. They met onlookers with icy stares. There were only about a dozen of them, but they projected a formidable presence.

Kevin Lin found himself stopping to admire the soldiers unconsciously. These soldiers are the real deal.

Fang Zhao didn't stand out in Bie Liao's team at all. Instead, he blended in perfectly, as

if he had always been one of them.

The camera kept following Fang Zhao. Viewers could see him in uniform, boarding a flying transport with the other soldiers. The flying transport took off toward the forest. Kevin Lin stayed focused on the aircraft until it was reduced to a blip.

Shortly after that scene appeared on S5, the world-famous gaming publication Rising Dragon put out a news item about the elusive Fang Zhao.

The headline was "Virtual vs. Reality." The accompanying graphic was a combination of two pictures. To the left was Fang Zhao's avatar in "Battle of the Century," AliveAfter500Years. To the right was a screen capture of Fang Zhao standing with a few other soldiers during the live broadcast. Fang Zhao was wearing combat fatigues and carrying a firearm in both pictures, but these were two different contexts. The outfits and gun models were also different, but the subject was the same.

The backdrop on the left was the Period of Destruction some 500 years ago. The backdrop on the right was present day. One was a made-up world, the other real.

The contrast of the two contexts gave readers a big kick. It also sparked inexplicable feelings of worship among many gamers.

The brilliant juxtaposition was soon reposted by many other gaming publications.

Quite a few professional gaming clubs bemoaned the fact that Fang Zhao was in the headlines yet again. Didn't this guy retire? How come he's an overnight sensation in gaming circles again?

Chapter 212

Meritorious Deeds?

This incident gave rise to a round of passionate discussions in gaming circles.

The photo of Fang Zhao's "Virtual vs. Reality" was bookmarked by a lot of people.

"I suddenly feel like I can stand taller. In the future, if anyone tells me that playing games can only allow you to go savage in the virtual world, I will take this photo and wave it in front of their faces!" some gamers said excitedly.

Of course, there were voices of disapproval.

"Don't praise it to the high heavens. We don't even know the full truth. It might not even be as you are imagining it."

"Maybe it's just the outpost team helping him show off."

"All of these fans of Fang Zhao are blind and praise him so much. Be careful reality doesn't smack you in the face."

After this sentence was posted, a heated discussion started.

"Bullsh*t, wasn't the terrorist attack real? The military even announced it, as did many authoritative television channels. These are not lies. Fang Zhao already did well. Do you think anyone can stand out under these sorts of circumstances?"

"After all, Fang Zhao is just a gamer. Making such a rash decision to come out, it's a miracle that he managed to stay alive."

"That is why surviving is already really not too bad. If he'd had a little less luck, he could have taken a stray bullet and lost his life. It's best to stop while you are ahead. Since the situation is already under control, it's best to wait at one side. Why follow them into the woods? Don't get yourself killed in the end."

"Cough, certain people's own abilities are unable to match up to their ambitions, so

they can only hope for others to fail as well. How sour!"

"I feel that he is not showing off. Also, the soldier that was saved by Fang Zhao when he previously went out mentioned that, if not for Fang Zhao's timely arrival, he would have long been dead. Seems like Fang Zhao has done some meritorious deeds this time and will surely receive a medal."

"It will probably be an outstanding service medal or a memorial badge."

"I also have a memorial badge. Isn't it something that every conscript gets?"

"There are also different grades for badges! Your kind is probably the normal one. Nobody would even want it if you put it up for sale!"

"There might be some under-the-table manipulations for this," someone said.

"There might be, but how much can they falsify? Fang Zhao is a celebrity with lots of presence, and so many people are watching him. How can they fake it!"

"That's right, planet Baiji does not have the final say on a lot of things. Baiji is only in charge of evaluations and reporting. There are many things that require their superiors to audit. Given Fang Zhao's high presence in the media, the top brass will surely audit it very strictly."

The forums discussed topics ranging from how many shots Fang Zhao had fired to how he had managed to survive. They talk about whether he had accomplished any meritorious deeds and what sort of military medals Fang Zhao would be awarded.

Now, many gamers idolized Fang Zhao. In the past, they had only idolized his gaming skills, but now, they idolized him as a person.

Currently, Fang Zhao had no idea of the discussions about him online. He had followed Bie Liao and the others as they had ridden the flying transport to do a cleanup of the woods.

Some of the beasts had slipped into the woods. These dangerous beasts could not be ignored and had to be cleared.

Riode tried to restrain himself, but he could not help it and said to Fang Zhao, "Brother, just asking. Later, if we discover any beasts, could you not make your move first?"

When they had entered the woods, the moment a beast had been spotted, Fang Zhao had immediately fired three consecutive shots before anyone else had even been able to place the beast in their sights. He had been firm and decisive, without even a tiny hint of hesitation. This had completely been Fang Zhao's subconscious reaction.

Three shots, and all had buried themselves within the beast's skull. Although it was not so godly that the three bullets wounds had been in the same spot, it had been enough to amaze Bie Liao and the others.

The beast had been running and the transport flying. For all three shots to have accurately hit the head was really no easy feat.

If it had been any other old soldier from the base or outposts that had achieved this sort of result, everyone would have been full of praise and not have been so astonished. However, the person that had shot was Fang Zhao, a conscript. Furthermore, he had just gotten this gun from Yan Biao. No matter what, there should have been a period of getting used to it. To think that he would actually have achieved this sort of result his first time using this gun, was his gun sense that strong?

But when recalling how Fang Zhao had shot dead the two terrorists, Bie Liao was no longer that surprised. Riode could not help but speak out when he remembered how Fang Zhao had settled that beast.

Actually, Riode had not wanted to bring Fang Zhao on this operation, as Fang Zhao would fight with them for meritorious deeds, but Fang Zhao's hearing was good, and he was just a contingency. If any equipment failed, they could rely on Fang Zhao.

But now, Riode and the others were feeling some regret. If the whole process of "cleaning up" was like this, would they even get the chance to act? They had decided that, after cleaning up, they would report to the superiors and take credit, but if everything stolen by Fang Zhao, what credit could they even get?"

Fang Zhao understood where Riode and the others were coming from, so he nodded. "All right."

He also had not intended to snatch glory from them. What had happened previously had been a subconscious reaction.

After that, when any beasts were found in the woods, Fang Zhao would only stand aside and watch.

Given Fang Zhao's result of shooting dead a target with three shots, Riode and the others took over 10 shots before downing one and were too embarrassed to find an excuse.

Luckily, this was Fang Zhao's first time using this sort of gun. If he were given the time to practice with it, would one shot have been enough?

"Fang Zhao, how did you get so accurate? Is this really your first time using this sort of gun model?" Bie Liao asked curiously.

"Not really. I came across it before when I played 'Ultimate King of Guns'."

"'Ultimate King of Guns'?" Everyone in the flying transport looked toward Fang Zhao, puzzled.

"A shooting game that was really popular last year," Fang Zhao explained.

The interior of the flying transport fell into a weird silence.

...

They searched in the wooded area outside the outpost for a day, followed by another two days of joint searching with people from other outposts. Only when they did not find any more escaped beasts did they return back to the outpost. Even if they did not discover any beasts, during routine patrols, they would still be able to notice any that slipped their grasp.

The outpost had suffered severe damage. Half of the stockpiled resources in the storehouse had been destroyed, but for the outpost and the troops stationed on Baiji, these were no longer that important.

Baiji's rise was imminent. In the future there would be no shortage of resources.

After returning to the outpost, Fang Zhao, together with Kevin Lin, Fan Lin, and the others, were sent to the base. Troops with serious injuries were transported to the base for treatment as well.

Arriving at the base, Fang Zhao went to pay a visit to Yan Biao. Yan Biao had just completed an operation on his legs, and a portion of his lower legs had been amputated.

Fang Zhao asked around. Yan Biao had gotten injured while saving two brash outpost soldiers. Even the medical procedures of the New Era had been unable to save Yan Biao's legs. His legs had been seriously injured, and there had been complications. Because Yan Biao had endured for so long during the attack, when he had been transported from the outpost to base, he had been fading in and out of consciousness.

During this terrorist attack, the five outposts had lost a total of 29 people. Of the 29, three were from Outpost 23. Although this was the least compared to the other four outposts, comrades from the same outpost had still lost their lives. Those close to them had already hidden themselves away to cry.

If the security systems and equipment had not been upgraded, the number of sacrifices would have been greater for this premeditated bombing and suicide attack.

It was not the first time that this sort of thing had happened, and sacrifices were inevitable.

Baiji base conducted a memorial service for the 29 soldiers who had lost their lives in this attack. Yan Biao, who had just undergone an operation and was in bad shape, also participated.

Returning to his room, Yan Biao had mixed feelings. With a heavy heart, he felt sorry for the comrades that had lost their lives and bemoaned his own injury. Yan Biao knew that he could no longer continue serving here and would need to be discharged early.

Yan biao had only returned to his room for a short while when Bie Liao, Riode, and the others came to visit.

Watching Yan Biao lying there, Bie Liao and the others did not know what to say.

Yan Biao spoke first. "I heard that you guys appeared on the live broadcast?"

When this was mentioned, Bie Liao and the others' gloomy moods were somewhat lifted.

"Don't bring it up. We just had a talk with the political instructor." Bie Liao looked remorseful, but looking closer, his eyes had a trace of happiness.

Not just Bie Liao, Riode and the others had the same sort of reaction.

Yan Biao frowned. "I heard that you guys didn't put on helmets and your faces were revealed? A full-body shot in high definition, too. Did you all forget your own ranks and the rules?"

Bie Liao defended himself. "We didn't voluntarily reveal our faces. That reporter was too excited and forgot to either keep away or censor it."

"Yeah, that's right. It wasn't our fault. We are all victims," Riode hurriedly added.

Yan Biao absolutely did not believe them. "What nonsense! If you guys really had the intention, wouldn't you guys have avoided it? Especially you, Bie Liao. You called out to Fang Zhao on purpose, and rather loudly too. Don't tell me you didn't notice Kevin Lin holding the camera? And when you realized it, you didn't evade?"

After all, these soldiers all served under him. Having worked together for all these years, how could Yan Biao not know what they were thinking. He could tell what sort of tricks they were trying to pull with one look.

"You guys are thinking about the immigration policy," Yan Biao said slowly.

Planet Baiji was going to construct a large military district. Although no concrete news had been leaked, given their political sense of smell, which had been trained for many years, they could guess it.

Following in the footsteps of the few planets at the front of the development sequence, when constructing a large military district, housing, schools, hospitals, and other basic facilities would surely be constructed. When family members moved in, these soldiers would not pine for their home planet that much. This was the place where they would achieve their aspirations and ambitions.

Garrisoned soldiers like them were considered the first batch of immigrants. However, family members moving over would surely begin from the high-ranked officers, at least around Yan Biao's rank. Bie Liao and the other's ranks were not high enough yet.

They had been in the military for a long time already and had engaged terrorists numerous times. This time, they had been exposed due to "negligence" and "unexpectedness." To protect their families, the base would surely prioritize looking after them.

If Yan Biao could see these little intentions of theirs, would Shanta and the other high-

ranking officials not be able to realize this?

Actually, everyone was clear on this, and what words were said and actions done were nothing more than formalities.

Bie Liao and the others did not quibble and just laughed. They knew they could not have hidden it and decided not to. When they thought about their families moving over after the military district was constructed, they could not help but be excited, and their eyes glowed.

Watching their expressions full of anticipation, Yan Biao felt a little envious and helpless, but he had no regrets. All he could do was sigh and feel sorry for himself.

He would not get to see the day where planet Baiji's military district was ready. After this round of treatment, he would have to be discharged from the forces.

His comrades would have bright prospects, while Yan Biao would still need to talk about the future. Getting discharged under these sorts of circumstances, Yan Biao would surely be taken care of and would be allocated a job. He might not necessarily like the job, but at least his situation would not be miserable and he would at least have a large pension.

After Bie Liao and the others calmed down from the excitement, the mood became a little awkward. Wiping the smiles off their faces, they told Yan Biao, "Captain, you will always be our captain. When planet Baiji opens up, you can come over and visit us."

These were just words, but Yan Biao knew that planet Baiji would not be opened up to the public and currently did not have any tourist districts planned. After leaving, it would be very difficult to return. Furthermore, the costs of traveling to and from Baiji were not cheap. Leaving the place, even after many years, it was still uncertain if he would ever have the means to return.

When Bie Liao and the others left, Yan Biao stared at the ceiling. He had just gone through an operation, and his body was weak. He actually felt quite weary, like he could fall asleep if he closed his eyes. He seemed like he was trying to find fault with himself and was exerting all his strength to keep his eyes open as his mind thought about a lot of things, in both the past and the future.

Actually, he still felt a little regret. He had thrown away his glorious prospects to save others. Although it sounded like he had lost a lot, if he got the chance, he would gladly

do it all over again.

"That's life!" Yan Biao sighed softly toward the ceiling.

After sighing, Yan Biao decided to rest. At this moment, someone else came to visit him.

"Fang Zhao?" Yan Biao was surprised.

"I'm just visiting." Fang Zhao sat himself down on the stool beside the bed. "What are your future plans?"

"I'm going to be discharged for sure. With my condition, there is no way for me to continue with the forces. In a few days, the base is going to send us special wounded back to Earth to continue with follow-up treatments arranged for us. After that, I will get prosthetics and a job will be arranged for me." Yan Biao had a sanguine outlook. "Therefore, you don't have to pity me, really." He did not need others' sympathy. It was not as if he had no way of living on, and compared to his comrades who had lost their lives, he was considered lucky.

"I'm still lacking a bodyguard," Fang Zhao said. Duan Qianji and Zu Wen had both said that having one bodyguard beside him was too little. Zuo Yu was also having to juggle being a driver and assistant as well. Once Fang Zhao's military service was over, there would be many more things to do. When the time came, Zuo Yu would not be able to cope.

Yan Biao was silent for a few seconds. "Actually, I'm really pathetic. Honest!"

Chapter 213

New Bodyguard

Yan Biao was no fool. After reacting to Fang Zhao's comment with a momentary freeze, he quickly broke down the pros and cons in his head and concluded that this was an excellent job.

It wasn't that he had never considered his prospects after quitting the military. His initial plan if he retired before 50 had been to become an Indiana Jones-style explorer or something exciting like that. Who knows, he might even discover some treasure and become an overnight billionaire, but considering the severity of his injuries, this was not a realistic goal anymore.

He had considered working as a bodyguard before. Bodyguards for celebrities were paid well. Yan Biao had gotten the lowdown from former comrades who had already retired from the military, but doing bodyguard work for celebrities wasn't a walk in the park either, especially if your employer had a foul temper. They were a major hassle, and celebrities who behaved differently in public and in private were major headaches.

Yan Biao wasn't even 40 yet. By New Era standards, he was just beginning his golden years. He was also restless. The government would naturally find more relaxing work for him. The pay wouldn't be great, but it wouldn't be too low either. He would be able to cover his basic expenses, and the benefits would be great. Still, Yan Biao wasn't content to become a retiree so soon.

From what he had observed so far, Fang Zhao seemed like a reliable fellow. He wouldn't fare too poorly under Fang Zhao's wing.

Having been through the outpost attack, Yan Biao knew Fang Zhao was a competent fighter himself, but at the end of the day, celebrities were constrained in what they could do, especially in public. That was where their bodyguards came in.

Yan Biao switched gears quickly and started tooting his own horn. "As far as bodyguard work is concerned, you can't go wrong with me. In terms of solo fighting skills and professional ethics, I'm definitely one of the elite if not one of the very best.

I know when to turn a blind eye and when to shut up. Where else are you going to find such a great bodyguard? Don't judge me by my condition now. Not to brag, but when I recover and get fitted for better prosthetics, taking on five guys alone will be a piece of cake."

After finishing his spiel, Yan Biao stared at Fang Zhao, who was sitting next to him silently. He couldn't read his potential employer's expression and started wondering, Was that a bit over-the-top?

"When can you start?" Fang Zhao asked.

Yan Biao knew he was in play. He continued, "In most cases like mine, after returning to the home planet, I'll need to receive treatment at the military hospital. I'll get fitted for prosthetics and undergo rehab. A conservative time frame would be half a year, but I haven't been on the home planet for a long time. I won't need to spend that much time with family, but I do need time to catch up on the latest developments on the home planet. I'll need a transition period. But Boss, I'm thinking by the time you complete your military service, I'll be in tip-top shape and ready to go."

The term "Boss" had come out naturally. Yan Biao was quick on his feet. He didn't feel embarrassed at all.

Fang Zhao nodded. Yan Biao's response was pretty much what he had expected. He had thought the matter through before making the offer. Someone who had served as a checkpoint leader was a rigorous thinker. Even though Yan Biao was a bit too smooth, he had his moral standards.

"Get some rest first. I'll send over your contract later. It will list all the job requirements." Fang Zhao didn't want to say too much. He got up and prepared to leave. Yan Biao wasn't in the best shape, after all; his energy level was low after surgery and he needed rest.

"Wait. Boss, has the base command reached out to you?" Yan Biao asked.

"Not yet." Fang Zhao could tell that Yan Biao had something to say. He retracted his step so Yan Biao could finish his thought.

"Then they should be reaching out to you soon." Considering Fang Zhao was likely to become his future boss, Yan Biao seized the moment to make a good impression. "The identities of the two terrorists who were killed have been confirmed. They are ranked

very high on the most wanted list, very dangerous folks. You killed those two terrorists. Add to that the beasts you killed before that, Boss, and you should expect a promotion. You might even get a third-class merit logged on your records. Don't downplay a third-class merit, Boss. They're not easy to come by."

Fang Zhao didn't seem especially excited. He waited for what came next.

"But..." Yan Biao gave Fang Zhao a glance. "Odds are they're going to investigate your gun. If the base command reaches out to you, that's what they're going to ask you about."

This was a reminder to Fang Zhao. Whether Fang Zhao would be promoted, whether he would be awarded a merit—it all rode on the gun. If he didn't handle the matter properly, nothing would come to fruition.

"Got it." Fang Zhao didn't seem worried, nor did he press Yan Biao for more detail. Instead, he asked, "What about you? Should I mention you?"

"Me?" Yan Biao gave out a relaxed laugh. The sense of doom in his gaze seemed to dissipate as well. "In cases like mine, I'll probably end up getting bumped one rank and become a retired major. I'll get a bigger pension."

Yan Biao had performed well as well. Out of the five sentry posts that had been attacked, Outpost No. 23 had been the best protected. It had also sustained the fewest casualties. Of course, Fang Zhao was a big part of the equation, but under Yan Biao's command, his men had fended off two attackers. The storage rooms that had been bombed weren't that important. So be it if they were blown up. The command post and the engine room were the key locations, and these two sites had been defended well. Fan Lin and company had also survived the attack. This in itself was a job well done as far as the base leadership was concerned, not to mention that Yan Biao had suffered serious injuries while rescuing a comrade. A one-rank promotion was a given.

Having said what needed to be said, Fang Zhao left Yan Biao's hospital room. Even though he was quite tired, Yan Biao was on a bit of a high. He turned and tossed in bed, trying to think of which former comrades had gone into bodyguard work. He could ask them for advice.

Not long after Fang Zhao left, a clinical psychologist showed up.

The psychologists looked up experienced soldiers like Yan Biao from time to time.

Retiring soldiers were also subject to exit interviews. Their job was to assess if the soldier's psychological state was appropriate for their new civilian post and whether they showed any sociopathic tendencies.

After reading Yan Biao's work and patient history, the psychologist had been brainstorming for ways to console Yan Biao, but the conversation took a completely different turn than what he had expected.

Yan Biao had his regrets, but he was clearly not depressed. Yan Biao's mental state was probably the best out of all the wounded soldiers.

The psychologist was a bit baffled when he left Yan Biao's hospital room, even doubting his own professional judgment, so he asked a colleague to drop in on Yan Biao as well. The prognosis was the same.

"He seems... quite upbeat," the colleague marveled as he jotted down notes from the interview.

Yan Biao hadn't disclosed his conversation with Fang Zhao. He hadn't signed a contract yet, after all, and he hadn't officially retired from the military, so he had decided not to tell anyone about his next move. Still, he was in a totally different mindset now, especially when he got the contract Fang Zhao sent him. His smile then was as wide as a Cheshire cat's.

The contract listed various requirements. Yan Biao studied them carefully in typical fashion and couldn't find anything he took issue with. The pay was especially generous. His pay level during probation was already higher than what he had expected his permanent salary to be. Still, Yan Biao didn't think being a bodyguard was straightforward, that it was easy money, but at least it was better than early retirement. All he hoped for now was a quick recovery so he could start his new job in the best shape possible. Fang Zhao's other bodyguard was former special forces, after all. As a retired major once stationed on a foreign planet, he had to measure up as well.

That's right—in a year, Baiji might become a full-fledged military installation. As a retired major from the Baiji military district, he couldn't afford to lose face.

Just as Yan Biao was looking forward to the next stage in his life, Fang Zhao was summoned to a conference room on base.

As soon as he entered, Fang Zhao saw five members of the base senior command,

including Shanta.

The farewell ceremony for the fallen soldiers had concluded. Security protocols for the base and the various outposts had been upgraded. Everything was returning to normal. It was time to tally merits. But some of the candidates for merits who were still on active duty had to be interviewed.

Fang Zhao was the first one.

Under normal circumstances, meetings between the base's senior command and rank-and-file soldiers took on a serious tone. The top brass would posture as well, but somehow, they couldn't play their parts in front of Fang Zhao.

After all, Baiji's advancement in the global development order was all due to Fang Zhao.

When Fang Zhao entered the room, everyone couldn't help but burst into smiles, regardless of the expressions they had intended. It was a lost cause. Every time they saw Fang Zhao, they were reminded of the Baiji power ore, after all. Thoughts of the Baiji ore led to rosy predictions for the planet's future.

Fang Zhao performed a standard New Era-style military salute in accordance with his service manual.

"Sit down first, Fang Zhao. Relax. We just want to have a chat," Shanta said.

Once Shanta set the tone, the others gave up all pretenses and stopped suppressing their smiles.

Fang Zhao sat down in the chair reserved for him. He wasn't nervous, but he didn't ignore decorum either.

Shanta was secretly impressed. The way Fang Zhao carried himself—it definitely grew on him. Still, procedure had to be followed.

Shanta's gaze shifted to the box on the conference table. "Let's talk about your gun." The box contained the firearm that Fang Zhao had voluntarily surrendered after the terrorist attack. A quick run of the model and the serial number had already revealed its owner.

"The gun is my great-grandfather's. It's for personal protection. Prior to the attack, it had only been fired on a shooting range. It has never been used publicly on the home planet."

Fang Zhao said he had taken the gun from his great-grandfather, but he didn't volunteer that it was a gift from Great-Grandfather Fang. The interview was recorded and would be considered along with written material Fang Zhao submitted.

Shanta and company knew very well that even their own kids and grandkids played with their guns before they were licensed to carry. They turned a blind eye as long as nothing serious went down. If they went by the book, the barracks of every military district on every continent would be filled with offenders.

Once they ascertained the identity of the gun's owner, the senior command had a sense of how to proceed. They wouldn't press Fang Zhao for details. The severity of the offense was up to them. It all depended on the attitude of these senior commanders. If they treaded lightly, then it wasn't a big deal. Not to mention that Fang Zhao had offered a full explanation. Every bullet the gun had ever fired had been accounted for. The logs of the firing range where it had been used could be easily traced. The other bullets had been retrieved from the bodies of the beasts and terrorists that Fang Zhao had shot. The evidence backed up Fang Zhao's story.

But a minor refraction was still a refraction. It was impossible to cover up. However, the senior commanders could play it down when applying for a merit on his behalf.

Shanta released Fang Zhao after a brief conversation of about 10 minutes. He then took out the paperwork he had prepared ahead of time and ticked the box next to the item "third-class merit."

Chapter 214

Promotion

Someone beside Shanta spoke out. "Third-class merits... They won't be approved even if we recommend it to the top."

"If it was someone else, it would probably be approved and the audit would not be too stringent. In the past, as long as we decided and recommend it, it would be approved, but Fang Zhao has too many people watching him," another person in the conference room said. "If it was a soldier stationed at the base, there would definitely be no issue. Being stationed at the outpost falls a little short. Of course, the most important thing is Fang Zhao's military service duration. He only just started, so it may be an obstacle."

"Third-class merits would probably be approved, but promotion? The possibility of this being approved is not high."

"Didn't he discover Baiji ore as well? That's a really huge service."

"That cannot be considered a meritorious deed."

Shanta, who had been silently listening to everyone discussing, knocked on the table and said, "I feel that if we recommend it, the possibility of it being approved is very high."

The others all kept quiet and waited for Shanta's analysis.

Shanta drummed his fingers on the table and said three words: "Exemplary model soldier."

Exemplary model soldier!

The others all understood when they heard this.

Indeed, the attitudes of the top were changing. In the past, they had never thought highly of the entertainment circle, but hadn't they rolled out Project Starlight this year for the purpose of letting idols and celebrities garner more attention?

Furthermore, the benefits arising from Project Starlight were very obvious. This time, there was a chance for an exemplary model soldier, from what Shanta saw, so the chances of approval were extremely high.

"Indeed, they need to find a benchmark. An example is something that words cannot compare with. In the past, so many publicity films were created, and everyone can see the result they achieved. Why else would the top-brass have launched Project Starlight?"

"If you think this way, it makes sense."

"This little fellow Fang Zhao has such good luck! This promotion is an exceptional case."

"But back to the topic, ever since the military service reform where they decreased the duration from two years to one, the only one who would have gotten promoted so quickly is Fang Zhao."

...

Fang Zhao did not know he was being discussed after having left the conference room, nor did he particularly care about meritorious deeds. Killing those beasts and shooting those terrorists had not been for the purpose of garnering meritorious deeds—it had just been instinct that had been carved into him during the Period of Destruction.

Returning to his dormitory, Fang Zhao once again picked up his little notebook and started composing. Matters had temporarily come to an end and he could feel at ease and arrange his thoughts and inspirations.

However, Fang Zhao could not compose for long. In the afternoon, Shanta came looking for him for a chat. Not on official affairs, but a private talk.

Shanta had looked for Fang Zhao to speak about two matters. The first was to inform Fang Zhao that the third-class meritorious deeds had been reported to the top and a promotion application had been submitted. The other matter was to inquire if Fang Zhao was familiar with anybody in Yanzhou's military district.

After this surprise attack, more troops would surely be sent to reinforce planet Baiji. This time, Shanta could not put it off. Every continent's military district would

dispatch some people over. Since reinforcements were inevitable, Shanta definitely wanted to find parties he could collaborate with. There were no especially satisfying collaborating parties over in Yanzhou. As long as the other parties could satisfy certain conditions, anyone was fine, so Shanta use this pretext to ask Fang Zhao for a favor. As long as he did not have any adverse reactions to the person put forward by Fang Zhao, Shanta would just approve of it.

"I only know Major General Hong Lou over in Yanzhou's military district. We have collaborated in the past..." Fang Zhao told Shanta about Hong Lou, about how Hong Lou had given him some welfare during military training and had purchased one of Fang Zhao's movements for the military district's publicity film's BGM. Fang Zhao felt that Hong Lou was competent and was rather upright. Moreover there was Hong Lou's relationship with Duan Qianji. For an officer-ranked military personnel, Fang Zhao could only think of him.

"Hong Lou?" Shanta racked his brains for information about this person. He did not know much regarding Hong Lou, but there was no animosity, so he would check it out later. "Oh, right, other planets have asked for you a number of times already. They want to ask you to go over to their mining districts and take a look around. If you don't have any other plans, how about taking some time to go and visit," Shanta said.

When other planets of a similar grade to the planet Baiji of the past saw Baiji's development rate, they were also envious. Even if they had impetus from Project Starlight, how could it be compared to grade A power ore and their position on the development sequence?

Now, many places wanted Fang Zhao, but during his military service, if his base's highest-ranking officer did not agree, nobody could even dream about it. Borrowing was fine, but transferring over was absolutely out of the question. Shanta still felt that he should leave Fang Zhao here as insurance.

"Actually, they have already used the latest models of detection equipment to probe but did not discover anything. However, they aren't willing to give up and want to borrow your 'Diting ears'." When Shanta spoke about this, he seemed very pleased with himself for choosing to defend Baiji and not some other planet.

Fang Zhao nodded. "Sure." Going over was not necessarily a bad thing. He would surely be unable to avoid this. Even if he did not go now, in the future, those people would think up all sorts of methods to make him go over. Fang Zhao did not think his own

ears were better than the newest models of detection equipment, but it would save a lot of trouble if he could make them admit defeat.

Shanta's actions were quick. After finishing his chat with Fang Zhao, he went to check on the Yanzhou military district's Hong Lou and got a few trusted aides to analyze this person. He felt that it was feasible, so he contacted the Yanzhou military district.

Hong Lou felt as if a weight had been taken off his mind when he found out that the Yanzhou military district would dispatch him to planet Baiji. Although his wife had told him that Fang Zhao would surely lend a hand, nobody had known if Shanta would actually believe that.

Now it seemed that that little fellow Fang Zhao was rather reliable!

Over at the Yanzhou military district, besides Hong Lou, there were many other people of the same rank and who were just as capable and had similar backings and connections. Planet Baiji's reply became the deciding factor.

When he received the notification from the top, Hong Lou excitedly called Duan Qianji. "Wifey, you were right, That little fella did good!"

Duan Qianji went blank for a bit but quickly responded when Hong Lou told her what had happened with a laugh. "Have the personnel been confirmed?"

"It's fixed, it's fixed! Let me make preparations and bring troops to planet Baiji!" Hong Lou's voice was filled with excitement that could not be suppressed.

After people from all twelve continents were sent over, there would be news of planet Baiji establishing a military district. The home planet's structure was already fixed, and these people with ambitions did not have much room for growth if they stayed here. However, heading out would grant them a wide area for development.

"Don't forget to assign a few more people to protect Fang Zhao," Duan Qianji reminded.

"Say no more! I will surely do so! I will definitely assign the elite!" Hong Lou guaranteed.

Every continent's military district was beginning to stir, but this did not affect Fang Zhao too much. He would only serve on Baiji for a year, as he would leave after that. However, he felt happy for planet Baiji. Shanta had shown him a set of development

blueprints for Baiji. Once it was established, the housing district would be enlarged and there would be many more choices. Even if situations occurred, they would not be trapped on the planet and stuck in a desperate fight for survival. The living hell of the Period of Destruction would never happen again, and this made Fang Zhao feel gratified.

A week later, Fang Zhao, who was participating in the reconstruction of Outpost 23, was summoned to Shanta's office.

"There are too many things to handle, and special times call for special measures, so everything is being simplified. We won't be holding a commendation ceremony, so this is yours." Shanta handed over a case with the alliance's emblem on it.

Recently, Shanta had been busy dealing with parties from all the twelve continent's military districts. Fang Zhao could see that Shanta attached great importance to this and had specially taken the time to hand it over to him personally.

Fang Zhao opened the case. Lying inside was a golden third-class merits medal as well as an epaulet with the rank of second lieutenant. There was also a gun of the same model that Yan Biao and the others used.

"From now on, you have the lawful authority to possess a gun, but your previous one cannot remain in the base." Shanta personally helped Fang Zhao put on the epaulet. "Strive hard. Perhaps your rank might rise by the time you are discharged."

Shanta's words did not carry the tone of a leader but rather one of a senior. This way, their relationship seemed closer. Originally, Shanta had decided to urge Fang Zhao on with a few meaningful and heartfelt words. He raised his hand and wanted to pat Fang Zhao on the shoulder to show some encouragement, but when his eyes met Fang Zhao's calm eyes, he could not bring himself to go on. His raised hands paused in the air before returning to his side. Finally, he choked out a sentence. "Young man, have more vigor. Don't be too gloomy."

"Understood." Fang Zhao saluted and left Shanta's office.

Shanta watched the door as it closed and thought about that weird feeling he'd had. Why had it seemed like there had been a little something missing. What exactly was it?

Could it be that he had been so busy with official duties that it had affected his body's

condition?

But Shanta did not have long to ponder, as he received a call.

"I heard that another inspection team is heading over?" the person at the other end asked with a laugh.

Shanta groaned coldly. "Inspection team? I didn't agree to it and yet they still can force their way?"

In the past, they had inspected others, but now they were the ones being inspected.

With too many matters to handle, Shanta did not think any further about that uncomfortable feeling a while back.

Elsewhere, Fang Zhao returned to his dormitory in the base after leaving Shanta's office and opened a different case.

The other case was similar to the one he had received. Inside was the gun he had received from Great-Grandfather Fang. Shanta had returned it to him.

Fang Zhao wrapped up the case for the military medal and the gun case, wrote down an address, and attached Shanta's clearance before handing it over to the specialized people in charge of the base's postage system.

Any packages to and from the base required stringent checks. Without clearance, firearms could not be sent out.

The address written on it was Yanzhou's Yanbei City Retirement Facility. That gun could no longer be used here, so he was mailing it back to Great-Grandfather Fang. The merit medal was mailed as well. The two old folks would really love this.

When Fang Zhao returned to Outpost 23, Kevin Lin was in the middle of a live broadcast.

Fan Lin and the others were repairing the experimental plots. During this surprise attack, many of the arrow sunflowers that had sprouted had died, but there were still some that had survived by luck. Recently, Fan Lin had led people to try and save the experimental sprouts that had not yet "stopped breathing."

Without Fang Zhao around, Kevin Lin had to personally work the fields. Given his constitution, he was panting and gasping for air after a little while. Spotting Fang Zhao returning was like catching sight of his savior. "Fang Zhao you have returned... Ha!"

Kevin Lin had good eyes and had noticed the rank on Fang Zhao shoulders. When Fang Zhao came closer and Kevin Lin could see it clearly, he did not say more and simply adjusted the camera to face Fang Zhao so even more people could clearly see the epaulet.

Many online audiences did not understand military ranks, but among them, there were still some who recognized it. After that, the comments section exploded.

"What the f*ck! Are my eyes playing tricks on me!"

"The rank on Fang Zhao's shoulder, someone tell me I'm not seeing things!"

"I just double checked, and it is indeed a second lieutenant rank, without a doubt!"

"Second lieutenant is quite low, but it is considered an officer rank, right?"

"The question is how long has he been in service. Has it even been a month? And he has risen through the ranks!?"

"There is this sort of thing... for military service?"

Chapter 215

Power of an Idol

Many people never thought about promotion during military service, as it only lasted one year. If this was the period right after the New Era had been founded and military service was still two years, this sort of thing would be more common. However, most promotions nowadays happened in the second year of military service, and normal people required second- or third-class merits to rise up the ranks quickly. People like Fang Zhao, who had not graduated from military school and yet received third-class merits a short while after enlisting, were extremely few. That was why Shanta and the others had said that this was an exceptional case, because he was an exemplary model soldier and set a benchmark.

This sort of opportunity had not been seen for many years and had to be grasped. Of course, the reactions online were indeed very huge.

"Forget about his rank for a second. I'm not sure if you noticed the gun Fang Zhao was holding; it was different from the one he held in the morning. The serial number is different. I didn't get to see the serial clearly, but the first letter is different."

"Speaking of that, according to regulations, if he got promoted directly, he would be able to wield a gun, yeah, a gun of his own. After he is discharged, he can also apply for lawful gun ownership."

"Lawful gun ownership!?" This attracted many people's attention.

"That means to say that even after Fang Zhao completes his military service, he will be able to carry a gun everywhere he goes?"

"Wicked!"

"Now I feel like heading over there for my military service. I used to attend special martial arts classes and have basic training in that area. Perhaps I can garner a few meritorious deeds so I can lawfully own a gun after I complete my service!"

People who had some genuine ability started to dream about this. Fang Zhao had

managed to achieve some meritorious deeds, so they likely would not be worse off than him.

"I'm already in year two of university. I had already prepared to enlist in October and made plans, but now I have changed my mind!"

"Me too, I'm changing mine as well. Luckily, enrollment hasn't started. When the time comes, I want to apply for planet Baiji! And become comrades with Fang Zhao!"

"Stop thinking from your asses. Young people are just too impulsive! Do you know how tough military service is? If you have the means, it's better to find a more relaxing place to serve," those who had served in difficult places advised.

"Can this be called being impulsive? No! This is called a sense of responsibility! It's called being honorable! I want to do my part for the construction of planet Baiji and contribute to the great cause of the immigration plan! I'm not afraid of terrorist attacks and I want to go. I might not have ice-cold blood running through my veins, but my heart is fiery and I live and breathe for the mission!"

"The person above, you are too f*cking dramatic! Actors aren't even as engrossed as you!"

"Actually, how could there be so many terrorist attacks? As long as there is some contribution and excellent behavior, after one year of military service, you could probably gain some substantial benefits. Planet Baiji is about to enter a construction phase and is short of people; this is a rare opportunity."

"That's right. Furthermore, one doesn't need to be strong in terms of military might—technical skills will do. Now that planet Baiji will be undergoing construction, when it comes to fighting for merits, people with technical talents can also go over and try their hand. I specialize in communications technology and come from a famous school in Huangzhou. I feel that I can go over and fight for some merit."

Regardless of how frequently recruitment videos were shown or how many outstanding examples were brought up, there was not enough attention and viewership. Nowadays, young people of the New Era did not care much about such things. When they mentioned military service, very little were willing to take risks or suffer. but after news of Fang Zhao was released, they felt as if it had happened right beside them. It had a profound impact.

Many people did not necessarily have a military complex or want to serve for the good of humankind. Suddenly being fired up was partly due to adoration for the strong and partly a yearning for power. Fang Zhao's example only ignited the fires in their hearts.

This had a profound impact, especially on people in the gaming circles. They could now stand a little taller and rebut when facing people from outside the gaming circles. There was a sense of pride and, at the same time, a sort of yearning.

The virtual world and the real world were always at odds. A lot of people thought that the virtual world and real world were completely separate—gaming gods of the virtual world and kings of the real world had nothing in common—but now, Fang Zhao was like a miraculous point and was blurring the lines separating the virtual world and the real world.

Very quickly, Fang Zhao's new photograph was published and circulated by many large and popular media outlets.

This was not the action of an entertainment company or netizens gossiping. Rather, it was the government's promotion!

The thought process of the top brass was this: Don't you all love to chase stars? We won't obstruct you this time, so chase to your heart's content! If you are able to chase all the way, you will be rewarded!

Regional television channels, internet television channels, major entertainment news channels, and even non-entertainment news channels were reporting on this.

A reviewer used Fang Zhao as an example in his newly posted article analyzing the power of idols. In the article, he jokingly wrote a line: "I'm afraid that the October applications for military service on planet Baiji are going to explode."

As for people within the entertainment industry that disliked Fang Zhao, they did not feel so good. They had discovered that, just a week after the terrorist attack, Fang Zhao had made the headlines again! And this time, it was a g*ddamn government-approved headline! Even hiring the internet water army wouldn't be able to suppress it.

At the Silver Wing Tower, 50th floor.

As the others were having a passionate discussion, Zuo Yu received a new message. He was informed that he would have a new colleague.

Zuo Yu sighed. "There will be a newcomer."

Zu Wen was puzzled when he heard Zuo Yu. "Our department is hiring? How did I not know about this?"

The department had developed and was bigger now. Zu Wen's position had also risen. Generally, when new personnel were hired, he should receive the news first, but this time around, he had not been informed.

Zuo Yu looked up and explained, "Not yours. Strictly speaking, I don't belong to the virtual idol department. I only have one boss who pays my wages: Fang Zhao."

Zu Wen and the others were curious. "Boss hired someone new? Isn't he undergoing military service?"

"Mmhm. He hasn't even been serving for long and he has already accepted a new bodyguard." Zuo Yu felt a sudden pressure. He decided to chat up a few old comrades later. When the time came, what would happen if he could not beat his new colleague? Wouldn't that be a disgrace to the special forces?

A few days later, at the Yanbei City Retirement Facility.

Great-Grandfather Fang received a package. The sender's address was planet Baiji. When Great-Grandfather Fang saw it, he did not brag to his old companions. He hurriedly called his wife and the two impatiently returned to their apartment to unwrap it.

They unwrapped the case with the military medal first. When they saw the golden third-class merit medal, the two old Fangs beamed.

"Third-class merits!"

Actually, when they had received news from Fang Zhao, the two old Fangs had guessed that he would have gotten such a medal, but they had never expected Fang Zhao to send it over immediately.

The two old Fangs had a number of third-class merits between them. Compared to second-class and first-class awards, it wasn't that conspicuous, but the significance wasn't the same. Never in their wildest dreams had they thought that a descendant of theirs would receive a third-class merit medal or that it would actually be their

celebrity great-grandson.

Great-Grandmother Fang urged her husband on from the side. "What about the other one? What could it be?"

"What's the rush, am I not unwrapping it now?" Great-Grandfather Fang might have been grumbling, but his hands did not slow down. When the second case was opened, the familiar jet black gun left them with blank looks.

After a short while, Great-Grandfather Fang reached down and picked up the black gun.

There were some hints of smoke and blood on the gun. For these two elders, it was the same old smell of a battlefield that they had been so familiar with a long time ago.

"The bullets have all been used up," Great-Grandfather Fang said hoarsely as his voice trembled slightly.

The two elders knew very well what sort of circumstances would have resulted in all the ammo being used up. Because they knew this, they felt proud, yet their hearts ached a little when they saw the military medal. Having experienced it personally, they knew that third-class merits were achieved by staking one's own life.

When they thought about their artistic great-grandson, the two old Fang's had mixed feelings. They laughed, yet they felt like crying. Oh, how they loved their little great-grandson!

After finally calming down, Great-Grandfather Fang could not help but want to look for people to share the news with, but when he noticed the time, he realized it had gotten dark. It was not appropriate to disturb others at this time. He was really excited and had originally wanted to brag to others but was forcefully dragged back by his wife.

Great-Grandfather Fang paced a few times in the apartment. This feeling of being unable to go out and share the news was unbearable.

"How about you post it online?" Great-Grandmother Fang suggested.

"Oh right, there is still the internet!"

Great-Grandfather Fang logged into his social platform that he rarely used and posted an elaborate photograph of the third-class medal.

The two old Fangs had spent an hour trying to get the perfect shot. Accompanying the photograph was a coolly written line: "Just received a package mailed by my great-grandson from planet Baiji."

Not long after it was posted, people began to circulate it.

The first to share the post was Silver Wing's gaming department manager Wayne. When Wayne had sat with Fang Zhao during Fiery Bird's annual gala, he had found out that "ATreasuredKnifeDoesNotAge," who had been bidding, was actually Fang Zhao's great-grandfather, so he had searched the social platforms and found Great-Grandfather Fang's account and followed it. However, Great-Grandfather Fang never updated his status, so Wayne had forgotten about it.

Wayne was browsing the entertainment news at night when he noticed a sudden notification from the user "ATreasuredKnifeDoesNotAge" and tried to recall who this was. When he saw the contents of the post, he came to the realization that this medal was probably Fang Zhao's third-class merits medal. A while ago, he had seen some netizens discussing Fang Zhao's promotion. Some had been saying that since they had not seen a military medal, they were wondering whether the news was fake, but now Wayne saw this post. Immediate Share!

There were not a lot of people following Great-Grandfather Fang, but as Silver Wing's gaming department's manager, many people followed Wayne, and there were popular characters in Silver Wing's gaming department.

Jinro, Dorrian, Milo, Schwarzer, and the others also shared the post in succession. As always, Schwarzer did not forget to bootlick and also added a line: "Boss is mighty!"

When they shared the post, a lot of people saw it. Every entertainment media outlet was quick to catch on, and with the recent discussions, it was shared more and became trending.

In less than 30 minutes, the number of shares broke the five-digit mark. A shocked Great-Grandfather Fang got up to get a glass of water. When he returned and clicked open the web page with a trembling finger, he was stunned. Six figures! And it's picking up speed!

Great-Grandfather Fang had not expected this. All he had wanted to do was share some of his own joy. He had not expected that, at his age, his post could actually become a trending topic.

Chapter 216

Fang Zhao Style

Great-Grandfather Fang's post, which had reached trending in only a short while, was circulated by a number of media outlets. Some people managed to get Great-Grandfather Fang's contact details using some unknown method, and they immediately contacted him to request an interview, but they were all rejected.

After rejecting yet another interview, Great-Grandfather Fang grumbled, "How irritating! Nonstop calls the entire day!"

But paying closer attention to Great-Grandfather Fang's expression, although this old man's tone did not sound pleased, there was an uncontrollable smile on his face, and his creases had deepened.

Today he had not even needed to head out and brag. A number of old companions in the retirement center had run over upon seeing the news.

Great-Grandfather Fang had not left the military medal case inside today. He brought it outside to flaunt to others.

When people were young, they compared their careers, military deeds, military ranks, and positions. When they retired, they compared their children, then younger generations. It was not that the Fang family had not produced any outstanding descendants but that their achievements had not been in the military. Fang Zhao was a rare case. Great-Grandfather Fang's many years of desire had been accomplished, and if he did not brag with all his strength, he would be letting down his hopes and aspirations of so many years.

After ending the call and just as he was about to head out, Great-Grandfather Fang saw another old fellow from the retirement center carrying a case in. He knew that the other party had a descendant currently in the military who was doing rather well. The descendant had also rendered some meritorious services and had more than one third-class merit. This was a challenge, heh!

However, Great-Grandfather Fang did not feel embarrassed at all. Rather, he was all

smiles and praise. "This guy from your family is not too bad. In the future, his achievements will surely be even greater than yours. My great-grandson cannot compare with the one from your family. Your descendant trained in military school, while mine dabbles in the arts. Striving for a third-class merit and getting promoted during his military service is more than enough to satisfy me!"

Behind every military award was a price paid that normal people were unable to imagine. Great-Grandfather Fang would not vilify these awardees or think lightly of their contributions, but he would not forget to show off his own great-grandson.

He had not said anything wrong. For a youth who dabbled in the arts and was without any military school background to achieve such results not long after enlisting was very rare indeed. The news had mentioned that this was the first case in close to a hundred years. Therefore, Great-Grandfather Fang bragged very confidently.

Great-Grandmother Fang was listening to the discussion in the room and smiling as she watered the plants on the balcony. This was enough already. The two old Fangs were already satisfied with third-class merits. Now all they wished for was Fang Zhao safely getting through his military service.

However, when they thought about the discussions online, Great-Grandmother Fang furrowed her eyebrows. She was worried that all the flattering would go to Fang Zhao's head. Fang Zhao was too young and did not have a stable enough mentality. It would be easy for him to stray off his path. Too much flattery would also cause others to be disgusted. Some of the discussions under her husband's status might seem like honeyed words, but they were actually hypocritical and sarcastic.

Great-Grandmother Fang decided to remind Fang Zhao to stay grounded the next time he called back.

Yet the person everyone expected to have his head in the clouds from all the praise was actually more calm than anyone else.

Far away, on planet Baiji, Fang Zhao had heard from Kevin Lin about his current popularity and had seen some of the adulation he was receiving from reports, but he did not really have much of an opinion about this.

Fang Zhao understood clearly that this situation was just based on the power of a celebrity and chance. It just happened to be the case that the top brass had needed to

set a benchmark, which had given rise to the current state of affairs. Fang Zhao did not think his own actions had been that outstanding. This wasn't being modest—compared to the efforts of older generations, this couldn't be considered a big deal. However, gaining lawful gun ownership was very convenient. This bit pleased Fang Zhao.

Now, he just did whatever needed to be done. After helping Fan Lin tidy up the fields, Fang Zhao participated in the expansion of the outpost.

In the formulated design plans for planet Baiji's development, the five outposts that had been attacked were part of the first batch of outposts due for expansion. During the day, Fang Zhao took part in the construction of the outpost. At night, after returning, Fang Zhao found the time to record his daily inspirations and make amendments to what he had written down previously.

Kevin Lin had already gotten used to this sight. Some nights, before he slept, Kevin Lin would record and send a short 30-second clip to let everyone know how hardworking Fang Zhao was offscreen.

Kevin Lin was hot stuff now. He had never dreamed of this much popularity when he managed to snag the special reporter assignment. Plus, given that Fang Zhao was not someone who acted and showed off in front of the camera, during every live broadcast, Kevin Lin actually had more screen time than Fang Zhao. However, Fang Zhao did not nitpick this. From time to time, Kelvin Lin also filmed things that could help Fang Zhao raise his popularity.

Project Starlight's column released the received videos on the same day, and they immediately led to passionate discussions by netizens that happened to see them.

"Still composing at night? Is Fang Zhao going to release new works?"

"I nearly forgot about Fang Zhao's composing background until I saw this."

"What, composing background? Wasn't Fang Zhao a gamer?"

"New fans should check up on how Fang Zhao became famous early on. Fang Zhao has a composing background indeed, and he has some reputation in Yanzhou music production circles. It was only later on that he made a name for himself in gaming."

"Am I the only one that is more interested in the light beside Fang Zhao?"

"I see it too. Previously, when the outpost was attacked, it appeared in the video Kevin Lin took while in the underground bunker!"

"That isn't a light! That's a sea slug! It's a choppy-haired variety, but we prefer to call them sea rabbits. Sea slug owners should all know this."

"A living light!? Anybody know where I can get something similar? I wish to buy one!"

"The pen and notebook Fang Zhao is using, does anyone know where I can get them?"

...

At the start, the online discussion about Fang Zhao's profession changed to discussions about "Fang Zhao-style merchandise."

Everyone knew that celebrity merchandise was the hottest marketing term. Previously, in the five Project Starlight channels, besides Fang Zhao, the clothes and products they wore and used had similar models in the market. Many people even copied their hairstyles. This was the effect of celebrities.

As the four celebrities of S1–S4 were not undergoing military service, they had a greater degree of freedom in their clothing and appearance. Thus, they paid better attention to their hairstyles, clothes, and the products they used daily. All these were brands that they endorsed or collaborated with. From their shirts, outdoor sportswear, bags, and others, everything had been meticulously planned early on.

Fans just loved to use the same products as their idols. Even if they could not use the exact same product, fans would try their best to find similar-looking ones. This let them feel like they were lessening the distance between themselves and their idols.

Businesses helped fan the flames and, at the same time, borrowed celebrities' popularity to market their goods. This sort of situation was common—basically, the moment a live broadcast appeared, merchants would start promoting similar merchandise. Exact same clothes, bags, sunglasses, accessories, and so on.

Comparing this, Fang Zhao was at a disadvantage. As he needed to undergo military service, everything he used was military standard issue. Even his hairstyle was required to keep in line with military demands: no long hair, no fringe, no beard, no wigs, and no dyed hair. In the military, there were only a few monotonous hairstyles, and anyone who deviated from the norm would be criticized.

Right at the start, when Project Starlight had been announced, from a commercial viewpoint, there had been a really drastic difference in value between Fang Zhao and the others. Therefore, not many people had been optimistic about Fang Zhao, and very few businesses had approached Fang Zhao for collaboration.

Now it was different. Previously, there had only been a few big names like Fiery Bird that had approached Fang Zhao over his "Diting ears." Now, with the explosion in channel S5's viewership, the number of brands wishing to collaborate with Fang Zhao kept increasing.

Isn't it just military service? It's just one year. Given the publicity now, even if Fang Zhao's popularity is no longer that high after he completes his service, it will still be profitable. This was what many businesses were thinking.

As for the fans, Fang Zhao was not on Earth and the distance was too great. They were helpless even if they wanted to chase him. Thus, many people could only pin their hopes on the items Fang Zhao often used or came into contact with.

Business was booming at a website of a certain shop selling military items.

"Shopkeeper, are there Fang Zhao-style military uniforms?"

"Peddling military uniforms is illegal. However, there are imitation uniforms. They look similar, just without the planet Baiji insignia. There are strict rules regarding the sale of military items."

"What about Fang Zhao-style epaulets?"

"...Second-lieutenant epaulets? It is illegal to sell those too. You wouldn't be able to wear it even if you got your hands on one. There are harsh punishments if you get caught. However, our shop sells a few epaulet substitutes..."

"How about guns? Real ones are illegal, but you should have models, right?"

"Oh, we do have those, but the models with a 1-to-1 ratio are sold out. We still have 1-to-6, 1-to-12, and 1-to-18 models; do you want one?"

"No, thanks, when will there be stock for the 1-to-1 size? I would like to make a reservation!"

Similar conversations appeared in many places. Internet personalities also rode the coattails of this trend and imitated Fang Zhao's look. Decked out in imitation uniforms, epaulets, and knee-high military boots while toting a 1-to-1 exact replica. These personalities would then strike a pose they reckoned was the coolest and upload it to their accounts on major social platforms so they could share their own look-alike photos. Regardless of whether they were praised or abused, it didn't matter. After all, as long as there was internet traffic, their goals had been achieved.

As for the sea slug that served as a night light, it quickly became a best seller in the pet market. Every shop put up "Fang Zhao-style white choppy-hair sea rabbits" signs. Online shops also displayed pictures and videos of a white blob that lived in the water and resembled a rabbit. At first glance, it looked really similar to the one Fang Zhao kept.

In the past, choppy hair variants had been considered hot sellers and had always ranked in the top 10, but during this period, it straightaway rose to the number one spot, and when "Fang Zhao-style" slogans were put up, they sold like hotcakes.

But shortly after purchasing, many people gave poor evaluations immediately after receiving the goods.

A buyer inquired, "Shop owner, why does your shop's choppy-hair sea rabbit not shine?!"

The shop owner was helpless. "It's not just my shop, no shop's 'rabbits' can shine. There's nothing that can be done. They cannot compare to Fang Zhao's. His choppy-hair sea rabbit has 50% extraterrestrial genes."

"Never mind that, why is it so small!?" the buyer asked again.

"...Because it doesn't have extraterrestrial genes."

It was indeed impossible to find a similar product in the entire ornamental seawater pet market. There was no choice, so everyone could only settle for second best. It would do as long as its outer appearance was similar.

Lighting manufacturers were delighted when they saw this situation and immediately hatched a plan to custom-make lights in the shape of a choppy-hair sea rabbit, the sort that would light up with the tap of a finger. Now, doing homework at night would let people feel a sense of purpose.

Chapter 217

Military District Established

"Fang Zhao style" had exploded to prominence on the internet. Silver Wing's operations team had played a part, as had merchants who had seized the opportunity to make more profits, and there had also been assistance from the government. When many brands saw this, they were envious and also wished to collaborate with Fang Zhao, but they could not get ahold of him.

Planet Baiji had restored its communications network, but there were emergency measures in place, so contacting Baiji was rather difficult. Nobody outside knew what was going on. There were rumors online that the twelve continents had sent a fleet over to establish a military district, but there had been no official announcement yet and these rumors could only be considered guesses.

However, the common folk did not really care much about a large military district or military affairs, as those were too far away to impact their lives. So what if Baiji became a large military district? Their wages wouldn't rise and their taxes wouldn't be cut. Everyone would just go about their daily lives as normal. Thus, they preferred watching meaningful entertainment gossip. In the case of planet Baiji, their attention was on Fang Zhao.

Anyone browsing online was very clear on the level of Fang Zhao's popularity right now. Because of this, Shanta once again came looking for Fang Zhao.

"We will be collaborating with the the Inter-planetary Fund to organize an online auction and will bring out a few items to be auctioned off. You can contribute an item too. I heard that the item you celebrities bring out will be highly coveted. You don't have to spend too long thinking about it, just something simple like clothes or daily necessities will do just fine."

Although planet Baiji had emergency measures, as the highest-ranking officer on Baiji, Shanta had special privileges. He had seen the popularity of "Fang Zhao Style" online.

Shanta told Fang Zhao that, for this sort of auction, all the money earned would be used for planet Baiji's construction. Therefore, Fang Zhao did not need to provide

something of value; a token item would be enough.

"Don't worry. Even if you auction of a piece of paper, it won't fetch a low price."

Shanta did not elaborate much, but Fang Zhao could still guess the reasons.

As of now, planet Baiji's position in the development sequence was fifth, and the spot was near the front.

Were they lacking investors?

No.

Lacking money?

Not anymore.

As for the auction Shanta had spoken about, simply put, it was actually another chance for companies or investors that had not been able to squeeze into planet Baiji's construction efforts. This auction would provide a means for them to spend money to purchase a spot, and it was being publicly announced by planet Baiji, meaning it was highly reliable.

For those lacking connections or who did not have enough status or ability to get a spot investing in planet Baiji, this was indeed a really good opportunity, perhaps even their only chance in the near future.

Shanta had approved this sort of method to attract even more teams. Whether it was for balance or external power, to canvass more funds, or for a whole range of other reasons, Shanta would not disclose these reasons and Fang Zhao would not ask.

Shanta had looked for Fang Zhao to bank on his popularity and get the ordinary audiences to place their attention on and understand planet Baiji's development. The views of the masses could not be ignored.

Although Shanta had told Fang Zhao that any item was fine, Fang Zhao would not just randomly produce an item. He did not pay much attention to the happenings online, but he had learned quite a bit from Kevin Lin. Nowadays, news about him was under the scrutiny of the public. Putting forward a random item might seem half-hearted and lacking in sincerity. This could easily turn into fodder for gossip. The auction would

not be soon, so Fang Zhao still had time to make preparations.

Soon, teams from every continent's military district arrived in succession. Hong Lou had brought men from Yanzhou and had arrived on Baiji base.

If not for the continuous construction on planet Baiji over this period, there would not have been enough space for so many people arriving all at once.

Hong Lou was 70 years old. In the New Era, this was considered the prime of one's life. His rank was major general, and he already held considerable authority. He had a lot of room for growth in the future.

When Fang Zhao saw Hong Lou, Hong Lou looked tired, probably from all the bustling, but he was in a good mood.

When he noticed Fang Zhao, a smile appeared on Hong Lou's face. His originally imposing manner of a leader dissipated somewhat.

"Haha, Fang Zhao, I really have to thank you this time. However, recently there have just been too many matters. After this busy period is over, let's have a good chat. Are you serving at Outpost 23's district?" As he spoke, he pointed to the other three people in the room. "These three will be following you temporarily."

Fang Zhao glanced over. To the side were three men standing silently. From their epaulets, there was one major and two captains. They had probably been lectured by Hong Lou, but whatever was going through their minds was not displayed on their faces. One of them even grinned when Fang Zhao looked over.

Fang Zhao looked at Hong Lou suspiciously. "They are?"

"My wife... Your director Duan feels that it is not safe enough for you here. In the future, there will surely be more people coming to planet Baiji, and with so many personnel, things can get complicated. There is also no telling what else might happen. You have a special status, and it's better to have a few extra men protecting you. Don't worry, I have instructed them not to appear in the live broadcasts; nobody will know about it," Hong Lou replied.

In short, he meant that he was assigning men to protect Fang Zhao.

Fang Zhao wanted to say it was not needed, but from Hong Lou's manner, it looked like

it had been arranged for some time already and he had discussed with Duan Qianji before making this decision. Fang Zhao remained silent and did not reject it.

Hong Lou had a lot of stuff to attend to. Every day, he would be summoned by Shanta to discuss important matters, so he did not say much to Fang Zhao. He just told Fang Zhao to look for him if he encountered any troubles. After that, he hastily rushed off toward the base's conference room.

Fang Zhao then brought along his three new bodyguards and headed toward Outpost 23.

Seven days after the teams from all twelve continents' military districts arrived, the alliance announced the establishment of planet Baiji's military district, which was also the fourth large off-world military district.

Planet Baiji was ranked fifth on the development sequence. Of the first four planets, three already had established military districts set up and were what everyone knew as the three large off-world military district. But now, the big three had become the big four. At the same time, planet Baiji was officially included in the immigration plan and became the key area of development for the immigration plan.

A large military district and a key area of development. These two labels proclaimed the splendid future of planet Baiji.

Since Baiji Military District was being established, the duties and ranks of many people originally at Baiji base would change as well. Shanta was promoted from a lieutenant general to a general and so remained the highest-ranking commander in this military district.

Establishing a military district and getting promoted to general was double happiness for Shanta. It could even be said that Shanta was recently flushed with success. When he was pleased, he could not help but recall all the past grievances he had suffered and he could not help but contact some old acquaintances to share his sentiments. Whether he was on good terms or bad with them, he contacted them all the same.

Connected to exploratory spaceship Arcturus, commander Luo Sha.

"Old Luo, what are you so busy with nowadays. If you have the time, come over to my planet Baiji for a gathering, ha!"

Arcturus commander Luo Sha remained expressionless and gave an ice-cold reply, "Get lost! No time for you!"

Connected to exploratory spaceship Formalhault, Commander Ma Jika.

"Old Ma Ji, when will you have time to come over to Baiji~ Military District. We can all catch up..."

Ma Jika's temperament was not as straightforward as Luo Sha's. When he heard Shanta's words, he paused momentarily and laughingly replied, "Okay, but we have to discuss something first. Transfer Fang Zhao's military service record over here—"

"Scram!" Before the other party had finished talking, Shanta had already severed the comms.

After ending the call, Shanta thought back to when he had first received Fang Zhao's military service application. It was funny, but at the same time, Shanta was glad. Back then, if any of those two had decided to accept Fang Zhao's application, planet Baiji would never have gotten to see this day.

A single person could really change the fate of an entire planet.

Chapter 218

Broken Teeth

After the Baiji military district was established, various collaborative partners started entering the planet. Large-scale projects were smoothly launched in succession. There were people, equipment, power supplies, technical talents, and armed forces. Planet Baiji was changing every day.

At the core of Baiji base were the large shining words: "If you lag behind, you will come under attack!"

These words had been personally inscribed by Shanta with the aim of reminding everyone in the Baiji military district of the recent terrorist attack.

When the terrorists had been formulating a plan, why had they picked Baiji instead of some other planet?

Because when the terrorists had been picking a target, grade A power ore had not yet been discovered on Baiji and they had still been placed far back in the development sequence. Back then, Baiji had been a poor and barren place, and even their detector probes had all been outdated.

In simple words, the enemy's line of thought had been this: Because you are weak, we shall attack you!

What could be done to not be bullied?

To strike back better, planet Baiji needed to become stronger! Even if the planet suffered terrorist attacks once more, they would not be caught in the predicament of a one-hour communications blackout anymore! Their outposts would not be bombarded so badly, and they would not be oblivious to when the enemies entered the planet!

Should they encounter future terrorist attacks, Shanta hoped that the enemies would all be blasted to shreds even before they entered the atmosphere!

After the general assembly mobilization meeting, Shanta would gather the high-level officers for a meeting from time to time. This was to understand the progress of the developments and to solve problems.

Conference room.

First, Shanta listened attentively to the various reports. His face was solemn and he put on the dignified air of Baiji military district's highest-ranked commander. Only his brows and eyes would flicker from time to time, showing that he was satisfied and pleased.

After the important matters were discussed, Shanta raised the topic of the auction.

"The auction will be in another 15 days time. Has everyone prepared their items? From the charts, only three or four have submitted? We have to pay attention to it!"

When this topic was raised, Shanta remembered Fang Zhao. Fang Zhao had yet to report on the item he would be submitting for the auction, and Shanta had no idea what the little fellow would put forth.

At the same time, in the woods on the outskirts of Outpost 23.

A squad of troops was pushing forward in the woods.

For the expansion of the outpost, the surroundings needed to be surveyed. A few specialists had been dispatched from the military district to survey and plan. Every day, people from the outpost would operate a flying transport and make a few rounds in the air to protect them, as they needed to enter the woods to take samples.

Fan Lin had wanted to go into the woods and have a look too. He wished to do a study on the species in this area and take some samples for research. He wanted to do it personally, as he did not feel comfortable leaving too many tasks in the hands of others.

Yan Biao and the other wounded had already been sent back to Earth, where they would undergo medical treatment at a designated military district hospital and receive prosthetics and rehabilitation. Bie Liao and 10 others had represented Outpost 23 to see Yan Biao off.

Bie Liao and the others had wanted to cheer Yan Biao up, but they had never expected

to see Yan Biao in rather high spirits. He hadn't been depressed at all, and there had been no visible scars on him. His mood had been what it had seemed, so much so that the others had not needed to cheer him up.

However, Yan Biao had not mentioned the reason for his change and had only exhorted again and again that they perform well. Especially the new outpost team leader, Bie Liao, who had been pulled aside and talked to for 10 minutes. At the end, Yan Biao had specifically emphasized making sure to take care of Fang Zhao.

Even if Yan Biao had not said anything, Bie Liao and the others would still have done so. However, in the few days after that, Bie Liao realized that Fang Zhao did not really need any looking after. As long as the outpost team coordinated well, there would be no troubles. On the contrary, Kevin Lin was the troublesome one.

Kevin Lin expressed an extreme interest when he knew about the assignment to survey the woods, but as he had the fighting strength of a weak chicken, he lagged behind when he followed them in. After all, the outpost team needed to protect the priorities: the surveying specialists, Prof. Fan, and the scientists. Now the outpost team would need to spend extra effort to protect Kevin Lin, and with every added person that tagged along, the safety level of the entire team decreased.

Kevin Lin spent a whole night carefully considering and felt that the distance between his imagination and reality was too great, so he decided to undergo a second round of military training. In the meantime, he would let Fang Zhao bring along the camera to record as he followed the team. After Fang Zhao returned to the outpost, Kevin Lin would edit the footage before sending it to the program column.

Kevin Lin did not have the ability to protect himself, but Fang Zhao's ability was clear for everyone to see. Moreover, Fang Zhao had three bodyguards with him.

When Bie Liao had first seen the major and two captains, his eyeballs had nearly popped out of their sockets. Now that he had assumed the role as outpost team leader, his rank had risen to captain, which was the same rank that Yan Biao had had when he was in charge. But when Bie Liao saw the major and two captains, he felt really awkward. The pressure of being the outpost team leader was considerable. Fortunately, those three had only been tasked with protecting Fang Zhao and would not interfere in matters of the outpost team. Bie Liao would still remain the authority figure here.

Over the past few days, interactions had been pretty good. When Bie Liao chatted with them, he no longer felt the initial awkwardness. Instead, he now pitied those three. Not because their talents were being wasted in an insignificant position but rather...

Bie Liao eyed Fang Zhao, who was controlling the camera and filming Fan Lin, and he gave a silent laugh.

As the survey team moved through the woods, Fan Lin would stop from time to time to take a look at certain plants and instruct a scientist to collect samples.

Fan Lin knew how to use simple words to get his message across and get the audiences excited. In between, he would inadvertently advertise his own company's seeds and divulge some information on the hybrid crops he had created with half-extraterrestrial genes. Audiences really loved this style, and when it was aired after Kevin Lin's editing, the segments received good reviews.

Fang Zhao held a gun in one hand, his other hand controlling the camera that was floating in midair, but he did not lower his guard.

As he filmed, Fang Zhao's felt a nip in the air. His acute senses had detected something watching them, seemingly like a snake that had its eyes on its prey.

The air was warm and humid. There was a river somewhere off in the distance, but for safety reasons, they had maintained a distance from it.

A black shadow rushed out from the muddy bog over 10 meters away.

Almost at the same instant the black shadow leapt out from the bog, a number of bullets buried themselves in it

The beast that had just leapt out from the mud fell to the ground, twitching twice before all movement ceased.

A fishy smell drifted over but was quickly carried away by the wind.

After the momentary silence, Bie Liao got some men to drag the beast over.

"This thing, it is a little frightening," Bie Liao said as he inspected the corpse of the beast, which was close to a meter long.

The skin of the beast had luster to it similar to steel, but it was not real steel and it was unable to stop bullets. The bullets had torn straight through it.

Fang Zhao did not know much about the species in this place and had not known if a single bullet was enough to settle the danger. Thus, he had shot a few more times. Nowadays, he had sufficient ammo, and guaranteeing everyone's safety took priority.

Bie Liao had said it was frightening because this seemingly flat beast opened its mouth sideways. Inside, it was full of sharp teeth in a disc, and the whole thing looked like a sawmill blade and had an extremely strong cutting power.

"Its teeth seem similar to the helicoprion shark that were in ancient archaeology reports found back home. However, this one has a horizontal mouth opening and limb-like fins. It probably spends most of its time in the water, lying in ambush in bogs or the river bank to hunt unsuspecting prey," one of the scientists said.

Once bitten by these sort of teeth, a whole chunk of flesh would be sliced off. If the beast was slightly larger, a person bitten by it might be sawed in half.

Although the attire they wore provided some protection, who knew what sort of injuries one would suffer should they get cut by these electric saw-like teeth.

Bie Liao was puzzled. "It was so close to us. Why were we unable to discover it just now?"

They now had newly issued equipment. Goggles on their helmets displayed nearby life-forms. Generally speaking, even if it was hiding itself in the mud, it should still have been detected.

"It's probably due to the skin," Fan Lin said rather excitably. "Its skin is rather interesting. Bring it back to the base and let the crew study it. Perhaps equipment can be improved according to the principle behind it."

Although this beast they had just encountered was very dangerous, a new discovery of course got the outpost team excited. If it was as Fan Lin said, their outpost had done a meritorious service.

"Its teeth are broken." Bie Liao pointed at a portion of broken teeth in the beast's mouth. They had been hit by bullets.

Fang Zhao picked up a single broken tooth. It was flat and triangular. Around one-tenth the size of a human palm, it had a white porcelain sheen to it.

"Fang Zhao, what are you picking it up for? Spoils of war?" Bie Liao asked when he noticed that Fang Zhao did not toss the broken tooth aside.

"It's a suitable item to be auctioned."

Bie Liao was curious. "Are you going to submit it just like that?"

"No, I will engrave something on it." Fang Zhao wiped away the bloodstains and placed the tooth into his pocket.

While Fang Zhao and Bie Liao were conversing, the three people assigned to Fang Zhao did not utter a single word. The three of them glanced at each other and could only hang their heads and give a bitter laugh.

How many times had it been?

It was commonly said that the third time was the charm, but they had already experienced this sort of situation three times today!

Ever since they had been assigned to Fang Zhao's side, over the past few days, similar situations had happened every day.

When they had first entered the woods and encountered a native beast attack for the first time, the three had only just shouted "be careful" and had not yet drawn their guns when the beast had been disposed of by Fang Zhao.

The second time, they had not even managed to say anything before the situation had been settled.

The third time, it had been settled before they had even felt the danger.

Fourth time...

Fifth time...

All the way to the recent incident, time and time again, Fang Zhao had gotten rid of the danger before they had even been able to act.

From shock it had turned to curiosity before they had gotten used to it. Countless times in their hearts, they asked the same question: Who is the new soldier and who are the veterans? Who exactly is protecting whom?

Fang Zhou was not intentionally provoking them. This was not a matter of killstealing. A step slower and someone might get hurt or lose their lives. This was entirely an unconscious reaction and reflex shooting by Fang Zhao.

But the three of them did not know this and thought that Fang Zhao was just proving his strength to them.

In the days that followed, the three of them could feel sympathetic gazes from members of the outpost team.

What could they do?

They were also despairing!

The person they were supposed to protect was so much stronger than them. These few days, there had simply been no chances for them to do anything.

The three felt like they were pieces of trash.

Chapter 219

Auction Item

When the team returned to the outpost, Bie Liao immediately called a few men to send over that unidentified creature to the base and let the specialists there study how it had managed to avoid detection.

This time, Fang Zhao did not follow them and return to base, nor did he want to fight and claim meritorious deeds. Instead, he straightaway went to ask the outpost's quartermaster, "Do you have an engraving machine?"

"Engraving machine? What sort?" The outpost's quartermaster was considerably older and had gotten hurt during the attack, but it had not been too serious. He had returned to the outpost shortly after receiving some treatment at the base. Perhaps because he had experienced the attack, he was a lot more sincere toward Fang Zhao.

Fang Zhao fished out the broken tooth and told the quartermaster, "I wish to inscribe some words on it. There might be a lot of words, so it has to be a little smaller."

As an experienced quartermaster who knew every machine's capabilities by heart, he shook his head when he heard what Fang Zhao said. "The outpost doesn't have something like that. You will need to borrow it from the base. I can help you check first. Normally, nobody uses this sort of machine. However, there are no guarantees. After all, the base has many large projects running concurrently, as planet Baiji is expanding, Perhaps someone has already borrowed it? Oh, there is still one machine. I'll help you make a reservation."

Fang Zhao thanked the old quartermaster and contacted Bie Liao to collect the engraving machine from the base. Fang Zhao had already made a reservation through the intranet, so Bie Liao could retrieve it straightaway.

Fang Zhao left the equipment room and returned back to his own room. He saw Kevin Lin lying stiff like a corpse. Kevin Lin had been like this for the past few days.

To improve his professional ability and be able to follow the outpost team in future, Kevin Lin was undergoing military training that was even more rigorous than what

Fang Zhao had gone through in the Yanzhou military district. Kevin Lin's training was more oriented toward combat capabilities.

The two in charge of training Kevin Lin were veteran soldiers who knew what methods were most appropriate for him. They did not hope that Kevin Lin's combat capabilities would see a sudden change, but what they wanted Kevin Lin to grasp was how to flee in dangerous situations and how to improve his physical constitution.

According to Kevin Lin's own formulated plan, he'd felt that he could become a superhuman, but now he just didn't feel like doing anything. Just a tiny bit of high-intensity training was already enough to make him lie down.

Hearing the sound of Fang Zhao entering, Kevin Lin remained lying there and feebly asked, "How was it today?"

"Not too bad. I gained quite a bit," Fang Zhao replied.

Kevin Lin only raised his head at this and asked curiously, "What sort of gains?" Having collaborated with Fang Zhao for so long, Kevin Lin somewhat understood Fang Zhao. What Fang Zhao meant was that, besides the normal happenings, something unexpected had happened today.

Fang Zhao recounted the incident with that creature and fished out the broken tooth. "This is its tooth."

Kevin Lin's lackluster attitude dissipated and his spirits raised. He brought the camera over to him and forwarded to the part Fang Zhao had spoken about.

"It's not bad, but we still do not know the base's verdict. If it can really improve our equipment, that would be a talking point, but if the results are out, we have to edit away that conversation in the video. What do you intend to inscribe on it?" Kevin Lin asked curiously. He had learned of Fang Zhao's purpose for picking up the broken tooth.

Fang Zhao simply said two words: "Song score."

Just these two words were enough to make Kevin Lin pause his video editing. "Song score!?"

Although Fang Zhao had not produced many songs, every one of them had sold for a

high price. Recently, Kevin Lin had been thinking about what sort of news to release to attract attention. Now Fang Zhao had just given him a topic on a silver platter.

"Has it already been composed?" Kevin Lin no longer bothered with editing the video as he glanced at the notebook Fang Zhao had taken out

"Not yet. I still need to make adjustments," Fang Zhao replied.

Kevin Lin expressed his concern. "Will you be able to make it in time for the auction?"

"Yeah, I'll be able to."

Kevin laughed and walked over to the other side. "That's good. Go on then, I shall not disturb you." He also did not continue with the editing and went to browse online instead.

Along with construction on planet Baiji, the networking and communications were being improved daily. With the improved facilities, certain people had also received benefits—for example, military reporters and people like Kevin Lin. They were able to use planet Baiji's communications to connect to Earth's internet, but with a time constraint. Every day, usage was limited to an hour. Anyone that exceeded the time would have to pay for the expensive internet fees they exceeded.

Due to technological advancements, internet and communications had developed and internet fees were much cheaper. However, now, they were not on Earth but the distant and remote planet Baiji. The internet here had not been made available for public use and these people were receiving a special privilege and would need to pay extravagant fees for overuse.

Kevin Lin was willing to pay the high internet fees. After all, he would not be the one forking out the money. If what he browsed was within the scope, he could set an expense report. The only issue was the lag time as he browsed, and everything he wanted to upload had to be audited, but on the whole, it was even more convenient than before.

The first thing Kevin Lin did was to update a new status on his on social platforms. If one didn't make ripples for three days, all that would remain on the river was folklore. The entertainment circles had a short memory. Although Fang Zhao had been all the rage online a while back, after a few days, all sorts of news had squeezed him out. To maintain popularity, there was a need to constantly refresh one's presence all over the

internet.

Kevin Lin had enjoyed a brief period of celebrity treatment and had already gotten addicted to that feeling. Thus, he would not let such a good opportunity slip by.

The other four channels trying to stir up news had squeezed out his popularity. Two days ago, there had been news about S2's Fritz having an allergic reaction and being disfigured. Yesterday, news had been stirred up about S4's Tianhao and a female nurse. Today, S1's Li Xiaoxiao had announced a collaboration with the Animal Protection Society to appeal for the protection of native species, which had created considerable activity. These d*mn four channels had conspired take turns generating hot topics!

With his many years of experience in this field, Kevin Lin could tell that Fritz's allergic reaction and disfiguration had been exaggerated. The allergic reaction was definitely true, but definitely not to that extent that it had been hyped up.

The sex scandal that S4 had stirred up was also fake. Woo Tianhao would be asking for trouble if he were to brazenly approach women on the base. Whether he'd really had the intention or not, at most, this matter was only to generate more discussions. After two days, they would pull the same method and clarify the situation. The operations team had chosen to stir this news after observing Woo Tianhao's fans.

As for channel S1's animal protection society calling for conservation of the ecology and the protection native species, it didn't amount too much. However, when Kevin Lin browsed the comments, somebody mentioned that "certain celebrities were too cruel and merciless when killing animals" and other such comments. The person leaving the comments was also an internet personality. Even though names were not mentioned, Kevin Lin knew that the person being spoken about was Fang Zhao.

In the videos Kevin Lin had sent back over the past few days, there had been a number of scenes where Fang Zhao had shot creatures, which might have upset some sensitive parties.

That was not to say that protecting indigenous species was wrong. Kevin Lin himself had also donated lots of money to these sorts of associations. He used to have a dream of buying an apartment in a scenic area in Muzhou to be close to nature. Many people that had grown up in a concrete jungle since they were young had this sort of desire.

There was an ecology-monitoring system on planet Baiji. Previously, when planet Baiji was not being developed, every year, people would be dispatched for an inspection. Outpost teams had also had strict restrictions when it came to hunting. People in the New Era regarded these sorts of conservation as important.

But during those dangerous situations in the videos, were they supposed to just stand there and wait to die? Even if Fang Zhao had not shot those beasts, the others would have done so.

Moreover, did they break the rules normally? Did they kill indiscriminately? Was there overhunting?

No!

But Kevin Lin could not clarify it straightaway. If he made any sounds, people would talk about a guilty conscience.

In the past, Kevin Lin would have surely made known his thoughts and started scolding, but now, Kevin Lin's temperament was different. When one's status was on the rise and they were becoming more popular, their lines of thought would change. He would not lower himself to the level of those fools by replying them. Instead, that effort would be better spent thinking about how to stir up more stuff in future.

Ever since planet Baiji had been moved into the top five in the development sequence, lots of topics had inevitably been generated. For example, the upcoming auction would surely continue to bring a lot of internet activity. This was also the reason the other celebrity teams were rushing to raise their popularity and presence—so that their popularity would not take much of a beating when the time for planet Baiji's auction came.

After the terrorist attack, people who were concerned with political news watched the military affairs channel. The reports there were more comprehensive and professional. Kevin Lin knew that his own political reporting could not be compared to those more senior reporters on the military affairs channel. If channel S5 were to continue on with the angle of military affairs, it would appear incongruous and would not be favorable to either side. Previously, the high viewership had been due to the terrorist attack. Now that it was over, people were no longer as interested.

The column's editorial department had given him all sorts of suggestions. After

considering them, Kevin Lin decided the channel should revolve around Fang Zhao.

Since he already knew Fang Zhao's intention, Kevin Lin posted this status on his social platform:

[La La La~ Just saw Fang Zhao preparing his auction item. I can't say what it is yet, but I can only let everyone know this: prepare your money! You will not make a loss if you can get that item! XD XD XD]

Whetting everyone's appetite was enough, but the three successive XD emoticons at the end made many people gnash their teeth in disgust.

After posting, Kevin Lin did not bother checking on the rapidly increasing messages that were left under his status. He disconnected and started editing today's video. He still needed to send the video back to the column; this was his everyday job.

At the same time, Fang Zhao's three bodyguards assigned by Hong Lou had a discussion when they returned to base. They plucked up their courage to leave a message for Hong Liao requesting a transfer back.

By chance, Hong Lou had just ended a meeting and seen the message. His two sharp eyebrows twitched grotesquely as he contacted the three right away and inquired after the reason.

The three of them had pained expressions on the video display as they recounted the situation of the previous few days. To get where they were now, the three had experienced their fair share of real combat. They had also had lofty ambitions when they had followed Hong Lou over to planet Baiji. Originally, when Hong Lou had assigned them to protect Fang Zhao, they had been a little unwilling but had only been able to grudgingly obey orders. However, they had never expected to receive such a blow from Fang Zhao.

The major among the three told Hong Lou about what had happened today. When he recalled how Fang Zhao's reactions and marksmanship were a step quicker than theirs, he could not help but ask. "General, didn't you say he was an artist?"

Hong Lou had no way of replying to this question.

He also had no idea either and would have to ask his wife. His wife had told him that Fang Zhao was a celebrity with a composing background in the company. Wasn't that

just an artist?

Chapter 220

High Valuation

The date for the auction was inching closer, and every day, Kevin Lin was even more anxious than Fang Zhao. Kevin Lin was worried that rushing Fang Zhao would just add pressure, which would affect the quality of the item. Thus, he could only worry helplessly from the side.

Bie Liao joked about Kevin Lin in private: the emperor was not worried but the eunuch was anxious. However, they were all eagerly anticipating the auction. They had been disconnected from the internet for too long and did not have means like Kevin Lin's to connect back to Earth's internet. The base's intranet could not be considered internet. Every day, they could only view military and political news, and in this sort of restricted environment, the information they could receive had its limits.

"I heard that Fang Zhao prepared a broken tooth with song scores inscribed on it. Do you reckon it will sell?" Riode asked Bie Liao.

Bie Liao gave an unsure reply: "Probably? Didn't Kevin Lin say that Fang Zhao's song scores cost a lot? Surely people will buy it."

It was not that they didn't think much of Fang Zhao's item but that they did not understand this aspect. If it was up to them, they would definitely not spend a large sum to purchase a broken tooth. Even if the sounds of nature were engraved on it, they still would not buy it.

But whatever they said, Fang Zhao was a member of Outpost 23. If Fang Zhao's item could really fetch a high price, they would also benefit too. Should there be any gathering with comrades from other outposts in the future, they would be able to brag a whole bunch about it.

"Let's say Fang Zhao's auctioned item fetches a high price. Would our outpost be able to receive one-tenth?" Riode.

Since Riode had mentioned it, Bie Liao also had this thought now. "If so, I will send in an application request." After all, money made from the auction would be diverted to

planet Baiji's construction fund. The base would not lack any money, so it would be up to each outpost team to fish for funds.

Noticing Bie Liao having ideas, Riode continued to give advice. Lowering his volume, he said, "I heard from Kevin Lin that none of Fang Zhao's past works were worth less than this figure."

"Ten million? The rumors were true? That means that even if we receive one-tenth, one million, we can upgrade a lot of equipment." Now that Bie Liao had assumed the leadership role, his shoulders felt burdened with a heavy responsibility. Especially after the terrorist attack, he fully approved the words "If you lag behind, you will come under attack!" displayed at the base. With upgraded equipment and facilities, even if development teams wanted to come over to the outpost's area, they would have power.

Equipment issued from the top was fixed, but there could never be enough of these kinds of things, and occasionally, additional equipment and tools were requested rather than hoping for others to hand them over.

One's own territory had to be safeguarded securely.

Whether it would be approved or rejected was a different matter, but if they did not even try, how would they know it was not possible?

Therefore, after the talk with Riode, Bie Liao immediately wrote an application request and sent it in. His words were sincere and staggering. Bie Liao's letter to the leaders bemoaned the poor and destitute conditions of the outpost. Before the auction started, it was best to take advantage and fight for some benefits.

Over at the outpost, outside the security fencing of the experimental plots, on a large tree that had been growing for who knows how many years, Fang Zhao sat leaning against a tree branch. In his hands were a pen and a notebook, and he was writing and drawing in it.

The area survey had already concluded. The engineers had already returned to base to give their reports. Fan Lin and his team had also disappeared back into the laboratory. Now that the outpost team no longer needed to protect these people when they headed into the woods, other than making their daily patrols around the area,

their only other duties were standing guard and extending the outpost.

A new batch of soldiers had arrived at the outpost and their numbers had doubled. Everyone was getting along just fine.

A few off-duty outpost soldiers were playing cards a short distance away from Fang Zhao. This place had much less electronic entertainment equipment, so they could only use some ancient entertainment items to enrich their lives here.

Among the new batch of people, there were some that came looking for Fang Zhao's autograph after arriving at the outpost. They might not necessarily have been the ones chasing celebrities, but they at least had relatives who were fans of Fang Zhao.

After completing a round of cards, someone from the group playing cards in the shade of a tree glanced at Fang Zhao and softly said, "What is he writing?"

"No idea. Perhaps a diary?"

"There are really people who keep a diary while undergoing military service? I persevered for a few days but could not continue writing on."

"Someone said he was composing?"

"Shut up, everyone. Don't you know his "Diting ears" nickname? Don't think he can't hear you even if you are whispering."

The few of them stopped gossiping and continued playing cards.

Regardless of whether the sky was clear or overcast, whether the winds from afar were strong or weak, they carried with them moisture and sweat blended with the smell of mud, grass, and leaves.

In the surroundings, every single sound originating from nature, from the rustling of branches to the chirping of insects to the beating of a bird's wings and the cries of creatures, brimmed with the vigor of life.

With his superior hearing, Fang Zhao could hear the distant river that was blocked by the woods. In his mind, he could imagine the splashes created by aquatic creatures leaping in and out.

There was a lack of the apprehension and restlessness of the Period of Destruction. Although there was danger in this world, its nature had a peacefulness here that people during the Period of Destruction could never have hoped to imagine.

Every single sound seemed to carry musical notes that embedded themselves in Fang Zhao's mind and came out in scribbles when the pen nib touched the notebook.

This time, Fang Zhao had chosen a more gentle style that did not have the thickset flavor of an epic. This was something he had composed after arriving on planet Baiji and after coming over to Outpost 23. From filtering the sounds of the mountains and forests, the sounds of all living things, he had a tranquil tune.

After amendments, Fang Zhao transcribed the score sheet. However, this time, his annotations were using musical symbols of the New Era and not his own symbols that only he could read.

Without the need for any musical instruments, Fang Zhao performed this piece in his mind countless times.

By the time he got off the tree, it was already noon. Kevin Lin had already begun his afternoon training. Fang Zhao glanced over for a bit before entering the outpost and heading for the equipment store. There he took out the engraving machine.

Fang Zhao had spent six days amending his composed score. Today was the seventh day of amendment. The score was finally complete, and he started the engraving.

During the Period of Destruction, many people had liked to use the teeth and bones of creature they killed as a form of significant ornamental jewelry. Children born during that period had also loved these sort of decorations, as they portrayed ferociousness and bravery.

Fang Zhao would only know whether the creature's tooth was suitable for engraving when he tried it. That creature's tooth that had been broken off by a bullet belonged to the sort that was suitable for engraving.

First, a cleaning fluid had to be used to remove the bloodstains. After that, the shattered corners had to be ground till they were smooth and then polished till they shone. Only after all this came the engraving.

The tooth did not have the hatred and blood a mutated beast had, but it still had a

primitive flavor to it.

The engraving machine was not large, and it could inscribe delicately. All Fang Zhao needed to do was set the stipulated area for engraving, then write down the song scores for engraving on the writing board.

Fang Zhao wrote every single stroke earnestly. The blade of the engraving machine carved each note on each part of the tooth according to how Fang Zhao wanted it. Every stroke was exactly the same as Fang Zhao had handwritten it, just much smaller. The strength that Fang Zhao used for each stroke on the writing board would affect how the the engraving blade cut.

With the aid of the machine, this song score was inscribed very quickly.

When Fang Zhao returned to his room, it was one of the rare occasions where Kevin Lin was not like a corpse. Kevin Lin was holding on to his camera, and when he noticed Fang Zhao, he asked eagerly, "Is it done?"

When Kevin Lin had returned after his military training today and heard that Fang Zhao was in the equipment store, he knew right away that Fang Zhao was over there engraving. He had wanted to go over and film it but had been afraid of disturbing Fang Zhao and interrupting the engraving. Thus, he had waited back in the room.

Fang Zhao handed over the creature's tooth with the inscribed song score. "It is finished."

Kevin Lin carefully accepted the case with the creature's tooth in it and gently placed it on the table and starting taking photographs.

However, he changed his method of photo taking. He changed the focus so that the song score on the creature's tooth would be blurry, but he also revealed a clear portion of some musical notes.

Kevin Lin showed the photographs he had taken to Fang Zhao. "Do you think these shots are all right?"

Fang Zhao did not find anything inappropriate. He could guess what Kevin Lin wanted to do. "They are fine."

The next morning, Fang Zhao submitted that broken tooth with song scores engraved on it to the base. Kevin Lin logged into his social platform and posted a few photos of

the creature's tooth taken from different angles.

"Fang Zhao spent seven days making this. On it is his latest work, which was personally engraved by him~. It has already been sent to the base."

Fang Zhao had used a machine to aid him, but the notes had been handwritten by Fang Zhao, so it could be considered to have been personally engraved.

When Kevin Lin updated his status, he did not add anything else. The videos taken from the woods would have explanations. Fang Zhao had picked up that broken tooth to make an item for the auction. It was already finished, and the song score engraved on it was new and had never appeared before!

That meant to say that whoever won this broken tooth would own this song score.

So what if it was a new song? How was the quality? Other than Fang Zhao, perhaps only the person who had the winning bid would know.

However, not many people thought well of it.

After all, Fang Zhao was still considered a newbie. Although he had works in the entertainment circles, they were not many and were not concrete enough.

"How much can that piece of tooth even be auctioned for?" someone asked. This was the question the normal internet audience was dying to know the answer to.

"Wait for a professional to appraise it."

There were experts in this area. Some old masters who had many years of experience working at auctions finally had a chance to show off their skills.

For the value of an auction item, they would evaluate it from many different aspects. Not only would the material, manufactured place, manufacturer's status, and commercial value be considered, there were also a number of other factors from different aspects to take into account.

Finally, a few old master appraisers' joint comprehensive evaluation had this outcome: the item put forward to planet Baiji's auction activity was valued at 30 million to 50 million. It would not be lower than 30 million.

When this valuation was reported, it was met with doubt from many people.

"Isn't this too high?"

"It's just a creature's tooth with some song scores engraved on it and it's worth 30 to 50 million? Nonsense!"

"Last year, there was this really famous film star who auctioned off a jade pendant, and the winning bid was only slightly more than 50 million. Fang Zhao can't be considered on his level."

"That's right, overhype! It's definitely overhyped!"

"Was the appraising master bribed?"

"Sit tight and wait for some face-smacking."

Chapter 221

I Want That Tooth

The valuation of this tooth gave rise to a lot of online disputes. To back their evaluation, those appraising masters quickly gave their explanations and analysis to justify their opinion.

Planet Baiji's online auction had a significant meaning and a political agenda. Anyone could see planet Baiji's situation just from browsing the news a little. In a commercial sense, planet Baiji was now a treasured ground, and that was not an exaggeration. Lots of parties wished to get a piece of this pie, but even if they used all their effort, they would not necessarily be successful.

In fact, this auction was just a subtly disguised donation drive for planet Baiji's military district. It was also a chance for people to spend money to get a spot on planet Baiji. Nobody felt this wrong, as it had always been this way.

Therefore, for Baiji's auction, there would be exorbitant bids.

There was a prerequisite—the items had to be from Baiji military district. For example, the items put forward by certain high-ranking officers within planet Baiji's leadership. How could such a good chance for bootlicking and fostering better relations be missed? Businesses and merchants would all fight for the chance to throw money in.

Fang Zhao was far from that status and was not considered core personnel of Baiji, so businesses would not target him for bootlicking.

But any money garnered through the auction went to Baiji's construction fund. With such a large backing, the value would be jacked up, thus the appraisers giving such a high valuation. The range was reasonable and not excessively high.

A song score might be valuable, but without listening, who could know the quality? Fang Zhao might be really popular in the eyes of netizens, but his status in composing circles was not yet at the level where his name alone would be approved by everyone.

Listening to the appraising masters explain their reasoning, everyone was convinced.

Although Fang Zhao would not receive any money his item made from the auction, his social status would invariably be raised and he would be mentioned in a wave of news. It was worth it!

For a moment, there were people envious of Fang Zhao's good luck, and there were also people who were jealous and had sour words.

When Kevin Lin saw the quoted valuation online, he spent the whole night laughing heartily.

"Fang Zhao, if your auctioned item can fetch 50 million, your social status will swell!" Using his many years of professional experience, Kevin Lin gave Fang Zhao a lowdown on the pros and cons and imparted a number of appropriate responses.

Fang Zhao appreciated Kevin Lin's kind intentions and listened attentively to his suggestions. Fang Zhao had seen the valuations and analysis online and thought the same as well. Given the factors from all angles and parties, it was indeed within that range.

"However, we still have to see how the auction plays out on the actual day itself. How about this, I can help you jack up the bids." Kevin Lin did a mental calculation of his savings. Although he couldn't raise the bid by much, even if it did not hit 50 million, it wouldn't be unsightly.

"There is no need," Fang Zhao replied.

Kevin Lin thought about it. "Makes sense. Your company will surely do something. Silver Wing is a large and rich company in Yanzhou. Even if those investment firms do not throw money in, your company can also raise the price up. They won't let such a good opportunity slip by."

Fang Zhao smiled but did not elaborate. He was actually thinking that even if Silver Wing did not do anything, there were others who would surely help jack up the bids.

Kevin Lin posted new information on this topic, and in no time, people starting sharing his social platform's status. They were gaming celebrities from Silver Wing—Jinro and the others shared the status one after another. Schwarzer continued with his ass-kissing: "Boss is really, really mighty!"

Silver Wing's virtual projects department had also held an internal meeting and prepared to jointly raise money to take part in the bidding. After all, the valuation had been hyped up already. When the time came, if it did not hit those heights, wouldn't that be losing face? That would make Fang Zhao's situation awkward.

Because of this auction, these underlings of his worried for Fang Zhao.

Besides the internal members of Silver Wing's virtual projects department, there were a number of gaming stars that showed their support for Fang Zhao. Even Ma Xier, who had just finished a shooting competition, posted a rare status update: "See you at the auction."

This meant that the former runner-up on the global individual leaderboards, Ma Xier, would be participating in this auction.

When Kevin Lin saw this news, the worry in his heart lessened. It was already night in the outpost. Normally, at this time, Kevin Lin would already be preparing for bed, but today, he got more and more excited as he browsed.

While browsing, Kevin Lin suddenly exclaimed, "The f*ck, this idiot is making trouble again!"

Fang Zhao was feeding the "rabbit" in the water tank. Hearing Kevin Lin's exclamation, he asked, "What happened?"

"That senior master from Leizhou is criticizing others again. He even gets unsettled from eating a watermelon!" Kevin Lin did not have a favorable impression of this senior master from Leizhou's aristocratic Renault family. In front of outsiders, he would rarely express his disdain, but having been with Fang Zhao for so long, he knew that Fang Zhao was not a person to talk irresponsibly, so Kevin Lin let his remarks fly.

"Senior Master Renault posted a status on his social platform earlier ridiculing the watermelon he flew over from Muzhou today because it was seedless."

That's right. Over this matter, after Zaro's outburst, he received joint abuse from netizens.

"You even want to criticize seedless watermelons. Isn't having a watermelon without having to spit out the seeds a good thing? Doesn't it save you the trouble? So g*ddamn hard to please!"

"Isn't the main point him transporting the watermelon from Muzhou?"

"Having fresh watermelons is already not bad. You are being picky! Why don't you fly to the heavens and stay there!?"

Despite being the agricultural continent, there were not many places suitable for growing watermelons in Muzhou. Every year, the land used for growing watermelons was limited. Furthermore, with weather conditions or other factors that affected it, there were not a lot of watermelons produced every year.

There were people that had employed methods to grow watermelons indoors but had afterward discovered that the costs were too high and the taste of the watermelons varied greatly. Unable to control the risk, they had quickly given up on this idea.

The rarer something was, the greater its value. In the New Era, only those with extravagant lifestyles were able to eat watermelons from Muzhou.

Thus, from the viewpoint of many people, Zaro had too much time on his hands and was asking for trouble.

However, Zaro's reply was full of conviction. "How can it be considered eating a watermelon without spitting seeds? I might as well just have some watermelon juice! Having a watermelon and spitting seeds go hand in hand. That is the sentiment of having a watermelon!"

This reply gave rise to netizen's discontent.

"Ostentatious dog!"

"Go on pretending! If you weren't a Renault, you would be nothing more than a fart!"

For his reply, Zaro took a screenshot of his own ID with a close-up of the name Zaro Renault. "Sorry, but that's just the name my mum and dad gave me. I'm stuck with it."

His surname was all the backing he needed.

Kevin Lin did not know what to say after watching the matter.

Watching so many online users get hopping mad, Kevin Lin turned to Fang Zhao and sighed. "How is this guy such a piece of work? Can't he live properly? Can't he be

content with what he has? Hey, Fang Zhao, what do you think?"

Fang Zhao chuckled, as if he had thought of something. "He's tolerable. At times, that little fellow seems like he needs some sorting out and deserves a spanking, but he isn't all that loathsome."

Back then, old Renault had loved these sorts of lively children. Fang Zhao still remembered that old Renault's grandchildren had been especially naughty. Although old Renault had normally been fuming with anger, he had always had a soft spot for his mischievous grandchildren and had pampered them. The current Leizhou governor was the same. The reason why Zaro dared to be so arrogant in Leizhou correlated to the Leizhou governor's bias. If Zaro caused any trouble, he just had to act pitiful in front of his governor grandfather and all would be well.

What many others saw as a big deal would only be a trivial matter in the eyes of the Leizhou governor and similarly ranked persons. Nothing more than some kids being noisy.

This was also another reason people disliked Zaro. Did having a grandfather as the governor make you a big deal?!

"If his surname wasn't Renault and he didn't have a governor grandfather and that family background..." Although Kevin Lin was older than both Zaro and Fang Zhao, every time he saw Zaro's online shenanigans, he could not remain calm and would get pissed.

"Actually, you can think of it this way," Fang Zhao suggested. "If it were you who had such a family background, what would you be like?"

Kevin Lin followed Fang Zhao's words and mused. If his ancestor had been a great general of the founding era, if his family had great power and influence in Leizhou, if his own great-grandfather was the former governor, his grandfather the current one, and his own dad possibly the next in line, if his mum was from a rich and powerful Leizhou family, and if he had an extremely large allowance every month...

Kevin Lin's expression was dreamy. When he recovered, he took a deep breath and sighed. "If I was in his position with such a background, I would surely... be even more troublesome!"

So much for being content with what one had or being honest and upright. Kevin Lin

clearly knew his own character.

However, putting himself in Zaro's shoes, Kevin Lin now felt that the little fellow was not that bad. After all, these things did not cross a line. How many people who did not have a status comparable to Zaro did immoral deeds such as murder and arson every day?

Zaro did not know that there were people looking upon him at this moment. Right now, he was p*ssed. In a fit of fury, he decided that he would rent a plot of land in Muzhou to specifically plant sweet watermelons with large black seeds like he liked.

Zaro's assistant rolled his eyes. So d*mn picky!

Glancing at Zaro's agent, the little assistant felt a little better. The agent's face seemed drab and on the verge of tears, as if he was mulling over a crisis.

In Muzhou, it was very difficult for foreigners to purchase a farm. However, there were some farm owners who had no interest in working the land or had no time and would rent out their own farm's fields for exorbitant rates.

His agent's tone was ice-cold. "Senior Master, we don't have enough funds at hand."

Zaro did not give a d*mn about his agent, who seemed to be in a bad mood. "Don't treat me for a fool. I just checked the bank account yesterday. Stop pretending. Hurry up and ask around for a suitable piece of land in Muzhou to plant melons!"

Zaro's agent took deep breaths and tried to make his tone as gentle as possible. "Senior Master, you should learn from the other Renaults of your generation. From what I know, they are already preparing to invest in planet Baiji."

Zaro shook his legs. "Didn't you say that Baiji was closed already?"

Zaro's agent tried to divert this senior master's attention so he would not waste money. "There was surely no way of squeezing into the first batch—that was the business of the Renault elders. However, for you younger generations, you can use your own means and participate in the auction to obtain a project."

Zaro's interest was piqued. "Auction, what auction?"

Zaro's agent had anticipated that Zaro would be interested in this. Thus, after

analyzing the political and commercial importance, he explained it as simply as he could to Zoro. Zoro would not understand overly complicated matters.

Zoro nodded his head in approval. "Sssso there is this sort of method. Participate! I will surely participate in it!"

"This is the name of a lieutenant general who holds considerable power on Baiji. I have already arranged for it already. During the auction, when you see these few names, you can bid..."

Zoro's agent had not finished speaking when Zoro, who was browsing the news excitedly, slammed his hands down on the table. "Bid for this! It is being hyped up all over the internet!"

Zoro's agent stretched his neck over to take a look and nearly puked out blood.

"Fang Zhao's auction item is not within our plan! There is no use bidding for it!"

Zoro did not listen. He felt that, with all the online hype, if he won the bid, it would be glorious. "This is it. Prepare the cash; I want that tooth."

Chapter 222

First Lot

In Muzhou, Su Hou was conferring with Su Feng on whether to place a bid at the auction.

"I can probably chip in 10 million," Su Hou said as he scratched his head. Ten million was the total sum of his savings. He had gotten quite a few red packets this year, which had beefed up his savings. He had planned on using the money to buy seeds but then Fang Zhao's tooth had come up for auction, and he felt obliged to help out. Compared to his contemporaries, 10 million was already a huge sum, but it was still peanuts by auction standards.

Su Feng felt conflicted too. It was not that he wanted to help, but he had to bid for Fan Lin's item. However, he could still help drive the price up for Fang Zhao's lot. Even if he bought it by mistake, so be it. They owed Fang Zhao. He had saved Su Hou's life, after all. Lending a helping hand was the right thing to do.

Yanbei, Yanzhou. Retirement home for former government officials.

Great-Grandfather and Great-Grandmother Fang were at a loss too. The hype was getting out of control. They could tell that some folks were trying to drive prices up. If the feeding frenzy kept up and Fang Zhao's lot didn't fetch a handsome price, it would be a major blow to him.

The elderly couple took stock of their savings. "It's not enough," they lamented.

"Let's at least be prepared. If the price is too low, we can put in a bid. Actually, in the best-case scenario, if prices are through the roof at the outset, if there's a bidding war, then there's nothing left for us to do either."

"True."

Qi'an, top floor of Silver Wing Tower.

"Chairwoman Duan. As far as the auction is concerned, for Fang Zhao's lot, should we

get involved?" the head of Silver Wing's operations department asked.

"You stay out of this," Duan Qianji responded.

The operations chief got the cue. "You stay out of this" meant that someone would take care of things. Who knows—Duan Qianji might even place a bid herself.

Duan Qianji felt that she owed Fang Zhao a favor because he had done her husband Hong Lou a good turn. Hong Lou had had so much competition from his contemporaries. In the end, it had been the intervention of Shanta, the most senior commander, that had sealed the deal. Tens of millions was nothing compared to the opportunity Hong Lou had secured. Opportunities like that couldn't be bought with money, so Duan Qianji decided that not only was she going to prop up prices for Fang Zhao's lot, she was going to buy the tooth outright. She was taking the tooth home.

Elsewhere in Qi'an.

Ming Ye, the Hull virus patient, could finally say "Mom" and "Dad" articulately after nearly two years of treatment.

Ming Cang and his wife were so emotional they felt they were about to explode. They both went completely blank and froze, recovering their senses only after an extended period of time.

Ming Cang's voice started quivering. Ming Ye's medical team started checking his various vitals. Ming Cang's wife left the hospital room.

Ming Cang's wife quickly ducked into another room, closed the door, and burst into tears. After all these years, her son could finally address her. She couldn't control her emotions.

Ming Cang paced frantically in the corridor, panting and heaving. His bloodshot eyes had become tearful. He wanted to distract himself, but he didn't know what to do. He was so emotional he felt confused.

He calmed down after a long walk. When he stopped, he noticed his face was covered in tears.

After wiping his face, Ming Cang forced himself to settle down, but to no avail. He kept pacing neurotically and mumbling to himself. "He's finally recovered, finally! I should

tell everyone. Who should I call? I also need to thank... Who do I need to thank? That's right—Fang Zhao. It was Fang Zhao who pointed us in the right direction. It was Fang Zhao."

He dug out Fang Zhao's number and was about to call when he suddenly realized Fang Zhao was still performing his military service and was thus incommunicado.

After taking a few more deep breaths, Ming Cang felt a bit more composed. He couldn't reach Fang Zhao, so he was going to share the good news with others.

Ming Cang was just about to send out a status update on his social media platform when he saw a pop-up box that contained several news items. He was just about to dismiss the box when the top headline, "Fang Zhao Auction Lot Estimated at 50 Million," caught his eye.

What actually first caught Ming Cang's attention were the two words "Fang Zhao." Only then had he read the rest of the headline. He clicked on the link and got the full story.

Ming Cang stared at the picture of the animal tooth engraved with the musical score.

"I'm taking that tooth home!"

He decided to join the bidding not only to thank Fang Zhao but also to mark the occasion of Ming Ye's first words since falling ill.

Folks following the auction online wondered who else was getting ready to place bids. As people with different motives got involved, the hype kept on heating up.

People who viewed Fang Zhao as a formidable opponent were peeved. Why are we seeing his name among the top search items again?

Regardless of the hype and controversy online, the Baiji military district proceeded with its preparations for the auction.

Organizers unveiled the official list of auction items on their official website the day before the auction.

The range of items that the military could chip in was limited. Other than belts, wristbands, and bullets donated by general-level military officials in positions of real power, what was left was commemorative coins.

In the age of virtual currency, only two types of people bought commemorative coins: collectors and the wealthy that treated antique coins as a fad. The former group comprised mainly genuine collectors. They bought coins for their personal collections or to make the occasional profit. Meanwhile, the rich bought coins to flaunt their wealth.

The official auction website published large pictures of the Baiji commemorative coin. One side of the round coin was engraved with the logo of the global alliance—standard practice for all commemorative coins—and the other side was engraved with the picture of a white-flag dolphin, which was Baiji's official animal.

The act of naming streets, buildings, residential districts, and even organizations after extinct animals or using them as logos was common practice in the New Era. Baiji had been named thus because, observed from space, it looked paler than Earth 1. So the planet's logo took after the white-flag dolphin, which had been picked from the list of extinct animals.

The official website also published the rundown of the auction, which was based on the stature of the person who donated the item. The more important the donor, the later his or her item would be auctioned. The first lot was Fang Zhao's tooth.

There was no way around it. Among all the donors who had contributed items, Fang Zhao was the lowliest in terms of status and influence. Fan Lin and others ranked higher than he did. The list ended with the various items donated by Baiji's senior military command. The set of commemorative coins was the final lot.

Online observers got a kick out of the rundown.

"First lot, huh?"

"That's great. We don't have to wait. We get our headline at the beginning of the auction."

"It's hard to say how much the tooth will fetch."

"We'll find out tomorrow."

"The time of the auction is midnight in my time zone."

"It's noon on our continent."

"Our timing is the best. It's around dinner time on our continent."

...

Meanwhile, on Baiji, Kevin Lin was even more nervous than Fang Zhao. He stayed up all night browsing headlines and struggling to sleep. He had spent the past few days quarreling with Fang Zhao's online critics. He and Fang Zhao were brothers from the trenches, so naturally, he had to stand up for his brother. His diatribes grew more and more passionate—plus he had been in a "I don't give a flying f*ck" mood. Whenever he saw a comment he didn't like, he went after the author.

The next morning, Kevin Lin got up with bleary eyes. He looked around and realized the entire squadron was in the same condition.

"What happened? Did someone attack the base last night?" Kevin Lin asked.

Bie Liao and the others chuckled without answering.

They had been even more nervous than Kevin Lin. They couldn't go online, so they had peeked over Kevin Lin's shoulders. Kevin Lin had given them an update on the pre-auction analysis.

Once they had heard that Fang Zhao's broken tooth had been valued at 50 million, the soldiers had been ecstatic. Bie Liao had felt vindicated in his decision to accept Riode's suggestion to apply for 10 percent of the proceeds from Fang Zhao's lot to beef up their outpost.

Indeed, the bosses had approved Bie Liao's proposal, which was why the squadron was so hung up on the auction.

Ten percent of 50 million was 5 million. They could use it to buy new supplies and other projects.

But some folks online had said that was only an estimate and that the actual auction price might be much lower, so Bie Liao and company were also worried. The more invested they were, the more they were affected. The squadron had gotten together and chatted through the night. They had overthought the situation, tossing and turning in a case of collective insomnia.

Anyone who wasn't on duty had gathered in the main lounge. Kevin Lin was going to

project the live feed from the auction. Bie Liao had put him up to the task after his proposal had been approved.

Soon, Fan Lin and his research team joined. They had also donated auction items, but they weren't worried about their donations fetching low prices. They had already received word that quite a few major farm owners in Muzhou were going to bid for their lots. The scientists were there to enjoy the show.

Fan Lin was worried that Fang Zhao would crumble under the stress of the situation, yet one quick scan of the room and he was taken by surprise. Clearly, the person who had slept the soundest in the entire room was Fang Zhao. The others seemed exhausted from an all-nighter.

Geez, whose items were being auctioned after all? The people who should worry were perfectly calm, while the people who shouldn't worry were stressed out.

The countdown clock on the official auction website approached zero. The discussion in the lounge died down gradually, replaced by a solemn silence.

"Battling terrorists is less stressful," Bie Liao said. As he watched the counter hit zero and the website refresh to indicate the start of the auction, he couldn't help clutching his chest.

After Baiji's white-flag dolphin logo and the organizers' logos appeared, the auction rules scrolled by. In an online auction like this that was open to the public, the top bid would be displayed next to the auction item. In line with the rundown the organizers had released earlier, the first lot to appear was Fang Zhao's engraved animal tooth.

The starting price was 10 million.

Bie Liao and the other soldiers clenched their fists, their palms sweaty, as they glared at the screen.

Another countdown appeared in the center of the screen: 3, 2, 1.

Kickoff!

The counter displaying the highest bid started shifting immediately, jumping from 10 million to 30 million. Before Bie Liao and the others could catch their breath, it had hiked to 40 million, then 50 million, then 55 million, then 61 million, and finally 80

million.

Bie Liao was dumbfounded.

What... what was going on?

Was there a system glitch? Hadn't the tooth been valued at 50 million at most? Now the bids had hit 80 million and were still going strong.

Chapter 223

Crazy

Everyone on the internet could see the bidding situation online. After the item had been put up, in less than a minute, it had broken the 80 million mark.

This was significantly higher than the previous valuation, but from the viewpoint of those auction-appraising masters, if the final figure stayed at 80 million, it was still within a reasonable range. He was a celebrity, after all; there would always be fans with lots of money to spare, or perhaps a team was behind this and was jacking up the price.

But in this circumstance, the bids were still rising upward.

Great-Grandmother and Great-Grandfather Fang had intended to help drive up the bids, but they had never expected that, when the auction started, they would not even get a chance to do anything and would have to watch from the side.

Silver Wing virtual projects department.

At this time, the gaming team had not entered the game, and they were all gathered in the lounge to watch the "battle situation."

Jinro rubbed his chin as the figure displayed on the screen kept increasing. Laughing, he said, "We don't have a chance to show off."

Regardless, the bids had already exceeded the initial valuation. That was more than enough, and everyone's mood while watching the auction became lighter.

The figure on screen was still changing. Eighty million, 85 million, 88 million, 90 million...

——

Ming Cang's finger was constantly tapping his screen.

He was currently in an overly excited state of mind and had lost a little of his rationality. So much so that he simply did not check the highest bid. As long as someone was vying for it, he would increase his bid.

Increase bid!

Increase bid!

There are still people bidding? Increase once more!

Then he realized... bid failed. He had insufficient savings.

Only now did Ming Cang calm down. Thinking back over the years, he and his wife had practically spent the majority of their savings seeking medical treatment for their son. Now that they'd had a treatment direction for the last two years and expenses were being covered by all sorts of medical research collaboratives, he had been able to bring together some money. Still, it was a far cry from the past, and even if he wished to place the winning bid for the tooth, now he could only watch on.

In distant Mazhou, Ma Xier, who was currently participating in a competition, stopped increasing his bids. He viewed the auction from an investment angle. He thought highly of Fang Zhao and felt that if the valuation was in the 30 million to 50 million range, he would bid for it. But now, it had already exceeded his budget, so he rationally stopped.

Online, people who had been watching the auction attentively started to get excited at this moment.

"It's 90 million already!"

"This is double the estimated value given by those appraising masters! Can anyone explain what's going on?"

"Ninety million for just a tooth? Are they crazy?"

"Perhaps it's the company that manages Fang Zhao promoting!"

"Spending so much to promote it? This is hard-earned capital!"

"It's probably going to settle at this range. 90 million is sky high! Fang Zhao is going to

be even more popular, his status will increase by a few times!"

"Oh shoot! There's a new update! One hundred million!"

When people in the discussion section heard the news, they rushed to check the web page. Indeed, the current bid had changed. In bright red, the figure was 100,000,000. One hundred million, without a doubt!

In the outpost, everyone in the outpost roared as they started to discuss.

"It... it... it... it just crossed 100 million?"

It was unknown who said this, but every single word seemed to float, as if it the words were being blown by a hurricane as they left his mouth.

Bie Liao's palms were clammy, and beads of sweat continuously appeared on his forehead.

Was this a dream?

Was it real?

One hundred million. The base had approved them keeping one-tenth for the outpost. This sort of planetary military construction and immigration plan auction was not taxed. That was to say that the outpost would receive a full 10 million!

Beside him, Riode was muttering something incomprehensible. His entire body was soaked with sweat, perhaps from nervousness or excitement, but he was no calmer than Bie Liao.

Bie Liao turned and asked Kevin Lin, "Wasn't it said that this tooth would not exceed 50 million?"

"That was just a valuation. Ultimately, the bidding decides the final price." Kevin Lin's face was flushed with happiness. Crossing the 100 million mark, that was worth bragging about. How should I write this news?

Leizhou.

Zaro watched the screen proudly. "Wanna challenge me?!"

Indeed, the 100 million bid was his. He totally disregarded the unsightly expression of his agent and the depressing atmosphere in the room. Right now, he even wished to break out in song.

His assistant trembled uncontrollably at the side.

However, Zaro was pleased for less than three seconds, as the figure shown changed once more—

One hundred ten million!

Zaro glanced at the figure on the screen and sneered. "Trash, you only have this much ability!"

As he spoke, his finger reached out to the tap the increase bid option so quickly his agent was could not stop him in time.

One hundred fifty million!

Zaro had directly increased the bid by 40 million!

When this bid appeared, the internet once more started buzzing.

Although it was a public online auction, at the moment, the identities of the bidders were still unknown. Even so, watching a straight increase of 40 million, for a bid of 150 million, also crushed the hopes of quite a number of people.

Yanzhou Qi'an city, Silver Wing tower.

Duan Qianji frowned as she stared at the screen. The 110 million bid had been hers, but she had not expected that some other party would directly raise the bid to 150 million. Who could it be that had made such a big move?

Whoever it was, this move told everyone still in the bidding not to compete; this person was determined to win this tooth.

The current bid was already so high; should she continue bidding?

Duan Qianji hesitated.

As there were currently no new bids, the webpage displayed a 30-second countdown.

At the moment, the office was deathly silent except for the "di, di, di" sound of the timer countdown.

When the countdown timer was at 15 seconds, Duan Qianji set her resolve. Opening her eyes wide, she reached out and prepared to increase the bid by 10 million and sound out the other party's intentions.

Just that before Duan Qianji could increase her bid, the countdown timer suddenly disappeared. The highest bid had jumped from 150 million to 200 million.

Two hundred million!

Duan Qianji stared blankly and unknowingly sat straighter and pulled herself closer to the screen, as if she wished to see who was behind this figure.

There was still another person?

Besides the person who had raised it to 150 million, there was actually another who would increase the bid by 50 million to 200 million.

The assistant standing behind Duan Qianji covered her gaping mouth in shock. As a staffer in an entertainment company, she knew that every celebrity with their status and position would have a valuation. As for Fang Zhao's current status within the circles, in theory, it shouldn't have been so high. Two hundred million, this transaction would be making a loss.

At this moment, online audiences were also stunned.

"Two... Two hundred million!"

"Crazy! This bunch of people are mad!"

"Who said that he would eat a hot pepper live on stream if the figure crossed 100 million? Come out now!"

The appraising masters were at a loss. Below 100 million was within a rational range, but anything above 100 million was not worth it.

Could it be that the people participating in the auction had not seen the appraising masters' analysis article?

That was not likely. Even if they had not seen it, people who could put forward such high bids would have advisors beside them, right?

Baffling, totally unfathomable.

Meanwhile, Zaro stood up abruptly when he saw this, his chair creating an ear-splitting screech as it scratched against the ground.

What the f*ck, there was actually someone even more pretentious than him!

This made him... unable to restrain himself!

Zaro was triggered.

Noticing Zaro's manner, his agent quickly went forward to block him. "Senior Master, calm down!!" his agent exclaimed, and his agent held on to the hand that Zaro had raised toward the screen. However, it was a pity, but he could only hold on to one hand. He unable to stop Zaro's other hand.

The sound of an increase bid rang out. Zaro's agent glanced over at the screen, and at that moment, everything he saw lost its color.

Wastrel!

On the screen, the highest bid had changed to 250 million. Zaro had just increased the bid by another 50 million.

Zaro even grinned evilly at the screen. "Let's see how you compete now! Bring it on!"

Zaro's agent felt the urge to hit someone when he heard those words.

A few assistants had distanced themselves when they had noticed the situation going south.

The agent's face was contorted beyond recognition. His cheeks were twitching nonstop, his chest was heaving, and his nostrils were flared.

He had raised funds all over the place, and for what?!

He had painstakingly amassed several hundred million to bid on something useable and get a plot of land on planet Baiji. But now, Zaro had actually wasted 250 million on a tooth?

What would happen if they could not win the later auction items?!

Who did I go through so much trouble to raise funds and prepare data for? Ah? Who was it f*cking for! Zaro's agent bellowed in his heart.

But his rage turned to joy and relief in a flash when he saw the figures on the screen change once more.

Zaro's bid of 250 million had only been up long enough to take a screenshot when it quickly became 300 million.

Zaro: "!!!"

Realizing Zaro's provoked stance, Zaro's agent did not let him make a move this time round. He shouted to the assistants that had all backed away, "Every one of you better come over right now!"

Combining their strength, they stopped Zaro from making a stepping forward and making a stupid decision.

With no new bids, the figure showed 300 million and the countdown timer began.

Many people watching the countdown had mix feelings as they watched the seconds tick by, and they collectively exhaled when it concluded.

At last, there were no more increasing bids!

Finally, the first item of the auction, the creature's tooth with a song score engraved on it that had been put forward by Fang Zhao, had been won with a bid of 300 million.

Kevin Lin once again threw his head back and brayed with laughter.

Fang Zhao also felt that this was inconceivable. This price had vastly exceeded his expectations. Who was it that had won the bid?

According to Interplanetary Fund guidelines, after all the items had been auctioned off, only then would the identities of the winning bidders be revealed. There was still no way of knowing who had bid, and the internet was abuzz with discussions and guesses, but they had no useful information yet.

Looking at the price that had been reached, Bie Liao gulped a few mouthfuls of air and choked on his own saliva. Hurriedly, he grabbed a glass and downed some tea.

What the f*ck!

What the f*ckity f*ck!

Three hundred million!

One-tenth of that was 30 million!

How much equipment could they buy!?

At this moment, Bie Liao clearly understood. Their outpost was rich!

He wondered whether the senior officer that had handled the application request was regretting now.

Who cared anyway. Bie Liao rubbed his palms together in glee. After all, this money—30 million and not a single cent less—every bit would be transferred to the outpost's military expenditure!

People in the outpost were all very happy, but there were some people whose faces turned green as they saw the price that had been reached.

Certain merchants and businessmen were prepared to cling onto generals on planet Baiji, but when they saw the price reached for the first item, they knew that they would have to cough up a lot of hard-earned capital this time around.

Their objectives were the few generals later on, and they did not think highly of a little celebrity's item.

But! The first item had achieved such a high price. How much would they have to bid to obtain the later items?

Surely it couldn't be any less than this little celebrity's price. If they wished to get into those generals' good books, would they dare show their faces to the generals if the bids were not at least 10 times greater? Generals had their own temperaments too.

Chapter 224

Hundred-Billion-Dollar Auction

After Fang Zhao's animal tooth sold for the astronomical price of 300 million, Kevin Lin sent out this status update: Ha! Ha! Ha!

When he had posted the picture of the tooth a few days ago, some folks had commented that cr*p like that would never fetch a high price. Now Kevin Lin felt totally vindicated, even though he had only posted three words.

Facts were the best revenge.

Browsing the headlines again, Kevin Lin noticed that news of Fang Zhao's engraved animal tooth fetching a jaw-dropping price was all over the place. Regardless of what people's motivations were in posting the news item, Fang Zhao was the beneficiary of a new round of hype.

"This fella Fang Zhao is scary."

That was what many members of the entertainment industry thought.

When Fang Zhao had made a name for himself as a composer in Yanzhou, many folks hadn't taken it seriously. For one, Fang Zhao had been too young. He had still enjoyed limited status and influence. Secondly, composers worked behind the scenes. They were hard to promote and thus didn't pose a big threat.

Lo and behold, Fang Zhao had soon taken over gaming headlines, even earning the "god" moniker from gamers when the few clips showcasing his gaming prowess had emerged.

Not to mention that Fang Zhao had been backed by a huge corporation in Silver Wing Media, e-sports was itself a big industry. Folks had suspected the rise of a new gaming superstar, so many people had started feeling wary of Fang Zhao, be they entertainment conglomerates or gaming clubs. Everyone had brought their A game.

Yet while his enemies had geared up for battle, Fang Zhao had thrown a curveball by

announcing he would be performing his military service, blowing so many minds in the process.

Many folks had secretly mocked Fang Zhao for being an idiot. Performing military service at the peak of your popularity? What, you're worried you're too famous?

But many entertainment companies in Yanzhou had breathed a sigh of release when they had heard the news. Great, military service it is, then. Get out of sight. We won't have to deal with him for a year.

Just as everyone had been kicking back, lo and behold, Project Starlight had launched, and in an amazing stroke of luck, Fang Zhao had been included, the reason being that the military wanted to encourage celebrities to serve in tough locations. Fang Zhao's actions were being lauded.

The folks who had just started to relax had been dumbfounded.

If you could broadcast live from your service location, fewer celebrities would become draft dodgers. What a great chance to boost your popularity, and now it had been stolen by Fang Zhao.

If only they had known that Project Starlight had been in the pipeline, every entertainment company would have forced their celebrities to perform their military service—the tougher the service location the better.

But of course, hindsight is 20/20.

So be it, let Fang Zhao have his live broadcasts. After all, Fang Zhao had the fewest advantages out of the five celebrities picked for the first stage of Project Starlight. He was also boring and had no idea how to entertain audiences. There was no way he was going to be a hit. Entertainment industry executives felt they could rest easy again.

But it had only been a brief respite. The day Fang Zhao had started his military service on Baiji, he had made a major discovery.

The discovery of a grade A power ore had had global repercussions. Fang Zhao's "Diting" reputation had thus been born. Word had it that Fiery Bird had already signed an endorsement deal with him a year in advance to tout their new headset design for next year. So many folks were dying of envy.

The Baiji ore had been the lead story for local and internet TV stations and had inundated personal news feeds. As the discoverer of the power ore, Fang Zhao had naturally seen his profile rise as well.

Under those circumstances, even a smear campaign wouldn't have gotten anywhere. Fang Zhao's enemies could only wait for the hype to die down.

Finally, the hype had receded and the focus had shifted to development plans for Baiji and not Fang Zhao the individual. Lo and behold, a terrorist attack had shifted global attention back to channel S5.

At some point, some folks had hoped that Fang Zhao had been killed in the terrorist attack. Fang Zhao's competitors within the entertainment industry couldn't stand the sight of this "freak" who defied convention and yet managed to grab headlines anyway. Lo and behold, the freak had survived, earned a service merit, and been promoted. Local governments had even started promoting him as a model soldier.

The twist and turns of Fang Zhao's fortunes were so unbelievable that some folks wanted to write a screenplay out of it.

And now his auction item valued at 30 to 50 million had been sold for 300 million.

Fang Zhao's fellow celebrities who viewed him as a formidable opponent were refusing to watch the news. They ignored the headlines popping up on their phones. Those headlines were bound to be about Fang Zhao again.

Main hospital of the Yanzhou military district.

After being shipped back to Earth, Yan Biao had been fitted for prosthetics here and put through rehab.

His prosthetics had been attached. He went for training walks at this time of day every day, but he had skipped his session today to watch the auction online.

"Who would have thought that something donated by a two-bit celebrity would fetch such a high price," a nurse delivering medicine to Yan Biao marveled as she checked out the auction footage.

The nurses at the hospital were used to seeing senior military officials. Generals were a dime a dozen, so for them, Fang Zhao only qualified as a minor celebrity.

Yan Biao tried hard to suppress his smile. He was dying to tell people this was his future boss.

As an employee, his fortunes were naturally tied to those of his boss. Seeing Fang Zhao's item fetch such a handsome price gave Yan Biao extra motivation to tackle rehab.

In Leizhou, Zaro was moping around. He felt he had lost face—big time. As a scion of Leizhou's most powerful family and an internet sensation, he had never seen any competition when it came to auction bidding.

Suffering such a major setback when always used to getting his way—Zaro hadn't felt this stifled in a long time.

"P*ssed!" Zaro was vocal about his feelings. He scanned the room, glancing at several of his assistants before fixing his gaze on his agent.

The agent played dumb, secretly cursing his client. You sit there on your fat ass and don't have to worry about a thing. All you have to do is click to increase your bid. Sure, it makes you feel good, but you have to think about the overall interests of our company too. What, you think money grows on trees? Why can't you be like your peers in the Renault family? All of them are standouts. I'd be accomplishing big things if I were working for any of them, but such is my luck that I have to be assigned to Zaro. Why must my life suck? I can never stop worrying.

"Our profits are slim. We're short of cash," the agent responded emotionlessly.

Zaro was in no mood for dissent. "Try another excuse."

"The new 100-episode TV series that just aired—we suffered a significant loss," the agent said coldly.

This time, Zaro went silent and felt awkward. "It was just 20, 30 million."

"Ninety million," his agent corrected.

In the new TV series they had invested in, the female lead was Senior Master Zaro's new girlfriend yet again. The plot was bizarre and didn't make sense at all. The acting was OK, but it was completely outweighed by the crappy story, and they had made 100 f*cking episodes. Lord knows where Zaro had gotten the idea that the more bizarre

the story, the more popular the TV series. He had insisted on greenlighting the series, and now look how "popular" it was.

I f*cking fell for your bullsh*t. We're losing our shirts here!

Every episode was a major production. If the show had only lasted 10 or 20 episodes, maybe they could have broken even on account of Zaro's internet popularity, but Zaro had insisted on dragging out a story that could have been told in 10 episodes over 100 episodes. Boy did that series tank.

This was the result of Zaro's stubborn streak.

Zaro didn't deny the failure of the TV series.

"What do you think we should buy?" Zaro was a pragmatist, after all. He had missed out on the first lot and his manager had just pointed out a recent flop. There was no point in continuing to argue.

"The first lot got so expensive, the items that follow won't be cheap either. Given our budget, I'd say all we can bid for is Fan Lin's seeds," Zaro's agent said. Investing in Fan Lin was better than investing in Fang Zhao.

Zaro was re-energized.

"Let's do it. Let's bid for some watermelon seeds. I want 'em watermelon seeds!"

Zaro's agent automatically filtered the expletive coming out of his mouth before speaking. "Then it's decided."

The auction continued. As expected, the bids went even higher. Just some 10 seconds after the second lot went up for bidding, the bids had exceeded 300 million.

Fang Zhao's animal tooth was followed by some power ore and a machine part donated by two noted engineers. They fetched 450 million and 500 million respectively. Fan Lin's seeds were next.

This time, Zaro got his fix. He placed a successful bid of 1 billion for Fan Lin's seeds, beating out the major farm owners from Muzhou.

As the countdown clock wound down and the screen flashed "sold," Zaro was instantly

in a better place.

Zaro's agent stayed silent during the auction. The offer was higher than he had expected. He had other considerations as well. It was impossible to buy land on Baiji now, but thinking outside the box, he could rent Fan Lin's experimental plot. If Fan Lin's experiments were going well, they should be winding down. It was hard to say if he would keep planting. They could leverage their successful bid for the seeds into early negotiations with Fan Lin about leasing his plots. If they could take over the plots right away, that would be even better. The plots were quite big.

He had gotten a glimpse of Baiji's development plan through connections. Outpost 23 was a priority area for development. It was a good location. That was also why he hadn't stopped Zaro from upping his bid.

The people who placed bids each had their own considerations. Some probably felt they were getting a bargain, and others felt they were getting ripped off, but the general public didn't care about their reasons. They were simply stunned by the astronomical sums being tossed around.

They thought that the 300 million Fang Zhao had gotten was a high price. Little had they known the winning bids would get even higher. Even if higher bids were expected, the huge gap between bids was baffling. What were people thinking jumping from 400 or 500 million to 1 billion?

"It must be those major farm owners from Muzhou," Kevin Lin told Fang Zhao, as if he were an expert on the matter.

"The major farm owners from our Muzhou are quite brash," a soldier from Muzhou bragged.

After Fan Lin and the others, it was finally the turn of Baiji's generals.

The final few lots truly hammered home to the general public what crazy rich people and big capital were all about. After the starting price was displayed, the bids escalated at a rapid pace. The capitalists were going all out.

The bid counter comprised a digital counter followed by the unit of 10,000. Here, 10,000 was the default unit.

This lot went for 5 billion, the next 8 billion, then 10 billion. By contrast, the 300

million for Fang Zhao's animal tooth was nothing.

Folks watching online were bewildered by the huge sums.

"Have... have... have they all gone mad?"

"I have no idea. I'm too busy counting the zeros. This is my first time watching an auction like this."

"You think they're actually after the auction items? What they're eyeing is the land. This is an investment in Baiji real estate."

"If you think of it that way, then these seem to be bargains."

The auction finally ended after the set of commemorative coins was sold for 20 billion. Someone did the math. The total sales came out to just over 100 billion.

One mere auction had earned the Baiji military district 100 billion. There were so many jealous people out there.

"This is the first time I have felt concretely that Baiji's prospects are going to be great," Bie Liao marveled.

Chapter 225

Auction Outcome

An auction that clocked up a hundred billion worth of investments, and these were only the transactions shown to the public.

This was the driving force of the development sequence!

Everyone just loved throwing money at planets at the front of the development sequence, and investors were all frantically trying to get in.

For those at the tail end of the development sequence, nobody even bothered to give them a second look. People there had to rely on themselves.

Just comparing Baiji's past and present circumstances would do. Baiji base leadership felt the difference the most. Compared to the past, the difference was as vast as heaven and Earth.

Not just audiences and viewers, even Shanta and the other leaders had not expected this. One hundred billion was three times their original estimation.

"Was it ever so crazy before?" a senior Baiji officer asked.

Shanta shook his head. "Before? It has never been this crazy in the past." During the previous planet's auction, he had still been young and had not even been an officer yet. This round's auction forecast and estimations had been made with references to the previous examples, and that was why the results were so shocking.

Of the five planets at the front of the development sequence, there were only three habitable planets, including Baiji. Businessmen had probably seen the huge commercial benefits from the development of the previous planets but had been too slow to get a slice of the pie. Thus, this time, they had paid close attention to planet Baiji.

Of course, there was the matter of Fang Zhao's first lot obtaining a high price, which had had the effect of raising up the prices of the other lots and affecting investors'

mentalities.

Shanta had had two reasons for letting Fang Zhao be part of the auction. The first had been to attract the attention of the masses, and the second one had been to help Fang Zhao raise his reputation, as Fang Zhao's discovery of Baiji ore had been the catalyst. This had been meant to mutually benefit both parties.

Shanta's estimation of the first lot had also been 35 million. He had never expected...

Shanta raised his head, and his hawk-like gaze swept across everyone present in the room. "However, who was it that jacked up the bid?"

Currently, every officer here was a trusted aide of his. Even if they had made a move, he should still have been informed.

But every single person in Shanta's field of vision shook their heads. It really hadn't been them.

There were regulations that prohibited the military district from interfering with the auction. Of course, when there was a policy, there would be countermeasures. Even if they did not do it personally, naturally, they would get others to help them do it. But even if they had raised the bids, the plan had been at most 100 million. They would not have jacked the bids this high. They had no prior experience and had been worried that problems would arise if the price was too high. Therefore, a bid of 300 million could not have been from their side.

"Could it be those newcomers?"

"Those newcomers" referred to people dispatched from the various continents' military districts after the terrorist attack.

When this was said, many people nodded their heads in approval.

"That's possible. Doesn't that Hong Lou know Fang Zhao? I heard that Fang Zhao is signed to his wife's entertainment company."

The person with the highest probability of jacking up the bid was Hong Lou's wife, Duan Qianji. However, jacking it up that high, wasn't she afraid of being investigated?

The symbolic boosting of a price could be attributed to a variety of reasons and pushed

to a company's operations teams. Everyone knew this and would close their eyes to it. But jacking the price up to 300 million, did Hong Lou not want to stay on planet Baiji?

Now, planet Baiji was under intense scrutiny. If the investigation proved this, the authority Hong Lou had painstakingly sought to achieve would be gone. Was he that foolish? Or perhaps... was his wife, head of an entertainment company, that stupid?

At this moment, Hong Lou was also anxiously making a call to Duan Qianji.

"Wife, did you bid for the first lot?"

"I participated in it."

"The 300 million bid wasn't you, right?"

"Nope."

Hong Lou let out a sigh of relief. "That's good to hear." As their social status was rather high, personally jacking up the price was not a good thing. Whether for themselves or Fang Zhao, the disadvantages outweighed the benefits.

"But if it was not you, then who else could it have been?"

"I am clueless as well. Wait for the announcement to come out in awhile."

This was something that many people wanted to know. People online had been discussing why the items in this auction had fetched such high prices. One of the reasons was that the first lot of the auction had been too high.

There were some people who thought they had deduced the truth.

"That's it! It's a f*cking Baiji military district scheme! They purposely jacked up the bids. This is just unsightly."

"It's a little too early to come to that conclusion. Let's wait for the announcement."

"I don't think it was people from Baiji's military district. If they had jacked up the bids, it would be found out in the audit. They wouldn't do such things that could be held against them."

"Who knows if that bunch of military officers used their brains. Rationality is forgotten when there is greed."

"That senior master Zaro from Leizhou just posted a status. The item that Fan Lin put up was won by him. The one who bid 1 billion was him!"

Netizens flocked over to view his social platform. Indeed, Zaro could not wait and had posted a screenshot of the transaction.

"The f*ck, why did a Leizhou person like him bid for Fan Lin's item? Shouldn't that be done by people from Muzhou?"

"Could it be that senior master Zaro no longer wants to invest in entertainment and film and instead has switched to investing in farming?"

Concurrently, numerous large Muzhou farm owners were pissed and rather regretful.

As the bidding had been anonymous during the auction, they had assumed that other Muzhou farm owners had made that bid. Never in their wildest dreams had they thought it would be from Leizhou!

To make it worse, it was that idiot!

"If I had known that it was that fellow from Leizhou, I would have surely increased the bid!"

"Regretting now. How regrettable!"

"Who knew that a Leizhou person like him who dabbled in the entertainment circles would actually come over and compete with us!"

"How disgraceful! To actually let a Leizhou person snatch it from us!"

All large news organizations and entertainment media outlets also reported on this news. Everyone was guessing whether Zaro was really going to be switching professions this time.

Inside Outpost 23's conference room, Fan Lin had felt secretly pleased with himself when the item he had put up had achieved such a high bid of 1 billion. It was much higher than the initial valuations and past auctions. He even thought to himself, Could

it be that Muzhou had abundant harvests this year?

Unexpectedly, reality was like a little stab to his heart.

Watching the displayed news on the screen, Fan Lin's expression was extremely complex, and he did not talk to anyone for a large part of the day. He had to ponder carefully. What exactly was that senior master plotting? What would his reaction be if Zaro came looking for him?

The outpost soldier from Muzhou that had spoken a while back looked dumbstruck.

It was rare for Kevin Lin not to be posting a status update at this time. Noticing Fan Lin's unsightly expression, Kevin Lin instead focused on the interplanetary fund's official auction web page. The auction results would be released anytime now.

Sure enough, a few seconds later, the screen refreshed automatically and displayed the information of all the winning bidders.

Taking a quick look, the winning bidders of the Baiji officers' items were globally renowned companies and investors. The winning bidders of the first few items were also announced. The winning bidder of Fan Lin's lot was indeed Zaro Renault. Other engineers and professors from the Academy of Science had probably had some secret dealings, and the ones who had placed the winning bids were large companies from the same industries. If Zaro had not stepped in, Fan Lin's item should have been won by certain reputable Muzhou farm owners.

It was only natural that the focus of netizens was not on this. Almost immediately after the results were announced, everyone straightaway scrolled to the first lot and wanted to see what sort of person had placed the winning bid for Fang Zhao's creature's tooth inscribed with a song score.

"Anonymous?"

"What sort of outcome is this?"

"This means to say the other party doesn't wish to reveal his identity."

"It's highly probable that it's Baiji military district jacking up the bidding. Since it's anonymous, it is surely them. Hiding the name, anyone can tell they have a guilty conscience!"

"Maybe it is Silver Wing Media, the company that manages Fang Zhao?"

"Cough, spending 300 million to do this, are the people at Silver Wing imbeciles?"

"No, there is still another possibility."

"I have thought about one as well."

"During Fiery Bird's annual gala at the start of the year, someone won the bid for Fang Zhao's team uniform for 50 million. The person's ID was 'Anonymous' too."

"There was such a thing? Let me check."

Some people who did not pay attention to the gaming circles hurriedly went to search for the related information.

"It really is true!"

"Don't tell me it is a fanatical fan of Fang Zhao's?"

"Three hundred million is no small amount."

"With such a high bid, it is possible to get a plot of land or foster a good relationship with Baiji military district leaders? What is this person scheming?"

"Since the interplanetary fund has had such a conclusion, surely they have examined the other party's identity. There shouldn't be any other issues."

"What's the point of being so secretive. Can't he just be straightforward?"

"Perhaps his identity is a sensitive issue? If he can fork out such a large bid, his status can't be low."

"Don't tell me it's an important government figure? Do government employees also chase stars? And to this extent?"

"Are there any regulations stipulating that government employees are not allowed to chase stars? There are so many government employees that chase after celebrities!"

"A government employee throwing 300 million to chase a celebrity? Does he feel that

his life is too comfortable? Now anticorruption is an important issue!"

"That person's position is surely very high up. Perhaps he might be a figure that everyone recognizes."

"I guess we can only ask Fang Zhao himself."

"Speaking of which, during the bidding, there were two parties. One was anonymous, but who was the other one?"

"That method of boldly increasing bids... I recall a certain person who gets really lively when it comes to this sort of event."

"I guessed that too."

"I know who you all are talking about. A certain Za..."

Zaro would not be stupid enough to pop out and say something. To him, losing a bid was like a stain in his lifetime. He would never be foolish enough to reveal such a thing.

Kevin Lin was also extremely puzzled when he saw the outcome. He turned to Fang Zhao and asked, "You still have such a fanatical fan? Have you ever seen the real person?"

Fang Zhao shook his head. "Nope."

Fang Zhao had no idea who the other party might be, and he had never been contacted by such a person before, but he felt that the person who had won the creature's tooth this time around and the person who had won his team uniform during Fiery Bird's annual gala were one and the same. He decided that when he saw Shanta next, he would try to sound the general out for some information regarding this.

The Baiji military district leadership let out a collective sigh of relief when they saw this outcome.

"It wasn't our people that raised the bids."

The auction results had been announced after some time, as the interplanetary fund had needed to investigate the identity of the auction winners. That it had already been announced meant that there had been no problems.

The auction was a complete success!

"All right, following this we will be building up our domain!"

Shanta felt that the two most correct things he had done in his lifetime were assuming command of planet Baiji and approving Fang Zhao's military service application.

On the same day, not long after the auction had ended, the Baiji military district publicly released an announcement to account for where the money would be going.

The message of this was: Our practices are also for the benefit of the people. This is the curtain raiser for construction on planet Baiji. In the future, the pace of the work schedule will pick up. After a few years, you people can visit and tour Baiji! We hope that the general public will continue showing support to the Baiji military district in certain voting activities.

Whether or not planet Baiji would really be ready for tourism in a few years, they would paint a beautiful picture first.

For many youngsters that were witnessing such an affair for the first time, the craziness of this auction was unbelievable. They could feel the magic of planet Baiji and the impact power ore could have on a planet's development. Thus, the announcement by the Baiji military district was a focal point for the masses.

Following that, the Baiji military district also released a video that captured the current situation of areas undergoing construction. Information touching on certain military matters and classified information was omitted or censored out, but it told everyone that the residential district for family members of troops had begun construction.

With the level of technology now, building houses was very fast. The most time-consuming process was the planning beforehand. After it was fixed, and funding was allocated, with sufficient manpower, machinery, and energy, they could construct practically one building a day.

A few days before Fang Zhao had gone over to submit the creature's tooth, the construction blueprints for the family residential district had been finalized. Now, in the released video, it showed an already constructed block. Soon, the first batch of family members would be able to move over, allowing the officers and soldiers in the Baiji military district feel a genuine sense of belonging.

Schools, hospitals, and other amenities would appear shortly as well.

Troops and their family members were considered the earliest immigrants. In the future, any children they bore would count toward planet Baiji's population and would receive lots of preferential treatment. There was no need to worry about their livelihood and schooling, as everything would be arranged by the military district.

This was to give a message to people who had never really paid attention or understood planet Baiji's people: It is really great to be a soldier! Everyone, come over to Baiji military district. Come to Baiji to undergo your military service! This is a land of dreams! Although there is some risk, opportunity coexists with risk. It is not much different from youngsters chasing their dreams!

Anyone that saw this knew that the number of applicants in this October's military service batch was going to explode.

Just when everyone was discussing planet Baiji's immigration undertaking, Zaro was seeking his father's approval. He had won the bid for Fan Lin's item and had decided to head to planet Baiji to learn to work the land together with Fan Lin.

Chapter 226

Zaro Is Coming

Fang Zhao only returned back to the base a month after the auction ended. There had been many activities going on over at the outpost. After the 30 million had been received, Bie Liao had organized an exuberant celebration and then started upgrading the outpost and obtaining better equipment for the outpost team.

Outpost 23's region was a key development area in the base's plans. Already, a development team had been dispatched to the outpost, and surface and subterranean constructions had been started. According to the plans, a city was to be built in the region of Outpost 23.

As a key development area, the outpost team's strength of 200 was not enough. Bie Liao had applied for an expansion and requested the base transfer another 100 men over.

The one hundred troops during Yan Biao's time had expanded to 300 now. In the aftermath of the terrorist attack, there had been changes to his military duty. He had also been promoted to the rank of captain. If everything went well, at the end of the year, his rank might rise by one more grade.

There were other outposts, but Outpost 23's strength was being increased to 300, whereas other outpost teams that were not in key development areas were remaining at 100. In the near future, Outpost 23 would undergo a name change to the 23rd Battalion, and Bie Liao's rank would naturally rise following that.

As long as Bie Liao did not court disaster or make any critical errors, he would steadily rise following the development of the outpost region.

This was the reason many people pitied Yan Biao. If nothing had happened to Yan Biao, given his background, he would surely have risen faster than Bie Liao.

Channel S5's live broadcasts captured the everyday changes of Outpost 23's region. This also verified Baiji's military district's words. It was indeed a land of dreams. Youngsters who had been unable to join the previous two immigration planet

constructions were welcome to join this team and make a large contribution to the immigration cause.

Fang Zhao was here for military service and naturally did not idle. He was not someone to have different personas on-screen and offscreen; he worked industriously all the time.

This dragged on, and only after a month did Fang Zhao return to the base, since Shanta had requested for him.

Originally, Shanta had decided to let his secretary explain matters to Fang Zhao, as he was busy with official duties every day and did not even have lunch breaks. Thinking it through, though, Shanta decided to personally meet Fang Zhao face to face.

When he met Fang Zhao, Shanta asked right away, "Do you know who it was that bought your creature's tooth?"

"No idea." Fang Zhao surveyed Shanta and waited for what would follow. Given Shanta's expression, he probably knew some information about the other party's identity.

Shanta asked again, "Do you really not know?"

"I really don't."

Shanta peered at Fang Zhao with his incisive gaze for a few seconds before nodding. "I also found out after the auction was over. The person who bought your song-inscribed creature's tooth is someone from the Interplanetary Fund."

When Shanta had first found out about the other party's identity, he had spoken to that side after the auction. The reason the other party had forked out such a high bid for the creature's tooth was this: there were not many youngsters who were calm and not fickle in their circles like Fang Zhao was, and this was something that should be encouraged.

Shanta also did not really know whether the other party's words were genuine or not. He had thought to himself, You can say it however you like. In any case, it is still Baiji military district receiving the benefits.

Shanta did not tell Fang Zhao which high-ranking official in the Interplanetary Fund

had bought his item, but he gave Fang Zhao two important pieces of information. First, the other party's family clan had set up the interplanetary fund. The Interplanetary Fund involved itself in three main areas: scientific research, military constructions, and nurturing talents. When Fiery Bird had first been founded, the company had received help from the Interplanetary Fund. Therefore, forking out 300 million to win that creature's tooth was not that strange. After all, that person had serious financial muscle. No matter how headstrong Shanta was, he also would not say anything more.

The second reason, as the other party had mentioned, was just to encourage youngsters. There was no other special significance. Therefore, Fang Zhao should not think about borrowing this connection with the Interplanetary Fund to seek even more benefits.

Shanta was frank and explained it simply so that Fang Zhao's thoughts about this matter would not go askew.

Fang Zhao only displayed slight astonishment and, following that, nothing else. The responses that Shanta were worried about did not appear.

When he saw Fang Zhao's reaction, Shanta praised Fang Zhao silently in his heart. This little fella is relatively upright, unlike certain little celebrities in the entertainment circles who jump at the chance to cling onto someone influential.

Since this was the case, Shanta also did not need to worry anymore. He took out a communications device and handed it over to Fang Zhao. "The other party wishes to say some words to you. But I don't know when you will receive the call. Take this first.

"This isn't anything major and was just one of the matters I wished to speak to you about. As for the second matter, you should have seen it on your way here. The family residential district's construction is nearly complete. The first batch of family members of military personnel on the immigration name list will be divided into three trips. The first round has already arrived."

Shanta's wife and parents had already come over. His children were still working back on Earth and would transfer over in the future. When they had all really settled down in future, this would be their home. When they traveled to earth for meetings or other matters next time, it would now be considered going on a trip instead of returning home.

It was little wonder that Shanta had always had a smile on his face despite being dog-tired lately. When a person had something to strive for and had a clear-cut direction to follow, his entire state would be totally different from before.

Fang Zhao was also very satisfied with planet Baiji's current condition. "Congratulations."

Although it was only family members of military personnel immigrating, the immigration cause had already taken its first step. Fang Zhao was really gratified. He had not seen the dawn of the Founding Era, but he was getting to witness the process of a foreign planet's immigration.

Shanta no longer showed the air of a commander. "Hahaha, same to you!" After all, Fang Zhao was different from other people. Although he would no longer let Fang Zhao get involved with troop deployment and personnel transfers, he would give Fang Zhao some benefits in other areas.

"In the family district, I have reserved a room for you in block 5. During your military service duration, you can stay alone there or you can let your family members join you. When you have decided, you can submit their names, and if the audit has no issues, we can bring them on the third round of transportation."

Fang Zhao's identity information had already been input. As long as he went over to scan his ID, he would be able to enter.

"Besides this, there is still the third matter. I spoke to you about this before. Other planets wish that you head over for a visit. You can choose when to go, and it will count as military service duties. What do you think?"

Fang Zhao had no objections. "All right."

"Then you can make arrangements for that when you return. After all, you guys still have to do live broadcasts. Speaking of this, there is still a fourth matter that I wish to speak to you about. I just received news that Leizhou's Zaro Renault will be coming."

When he spoke of Zaro, the smile on Shanta's face dimmed slightly. At the position he was at, if the person coming over was anybody else, he would not have had to fret about it and would naturally have gotten his subordinates to handle it. However, Leizhou's governor had personally made a call asking Shanta to look after Zaro. As a form of respect for Leizhou's governor, Shanta could not disregard it.

"You also know that, during the auction, Zaro bought Professor Fan Lin's item. When he comes, he will surely look for Prof. Fan, and he will probably arrive within two days. When you return to the outpost, do inform the people there and make preparations."

Fang Zhao was still thinking about what Shanta had said when he left. The four matters were all worth pondering. He did not return immediately to the outpost and instead went to the family district. There were already people that had moved into the newly constructed flats.

When he found block 5, Fang Zhao took the elevator to the 10th floor and went to the house number Shanta had told him of. Scanning his ID, he went in to take a look.

There were two rooms and two sitting areas in this nearly 100-square-meters apartment. Furniture and appliances had already been set up and installed. Concise and practical, they carried a slight military style.

As for the family members that Shanta had talked about, Fang Zhao decided to make a call to Great-Grandfather and Great-Grandmother Fang and ask them if they were willing to come over and stay for a period of time. They could treat it as a vacation.

While Fang Zhao was musing it over, the communications device Shanta had given him rang. When Fang Zhao answered, he could hear a tune playing in the background. Fang Zhao could tell that the tune was not generated by music software but was rather a performance by a live orchestra.

The tune being played was the one he had had inscribed on the creature's tooth.

After the call was put through, the other side did not seem in any rush to speak and waited over 10 seconds, as if letting Fang Zhao identify the tune currently being performed.

When the performance ended, a voice broke the the silence. "Fang Zhao?"

The other party had a voice that sounded gentle and delicate, probably belonging to a very young lady.

"Yes," Fang Zhao replied.

"It was an exceptional piece; the mood was fitting. Keep it up."

At that, the call ended.

Fang Zhao looked at the notification on the communications device and was puzzled. The other party had made a call from somewhere far away and only said one line? However, this simple sentence gave Fang Zhao a strange feeling.

Were these words meant to commend and encourage, or was there some hidden meaning?

Fang Zhao shook his head. Young ladies nowadays were getting even more difficult to understand.

Fang Zhao left his apartment and took a walk through the family district. A primary school as well as a kindergarten had already been constructed in the neighborhood. The teachers there were all family members of military personnel.

When Fang Zhao passed by, a kindergarten teacher was praising a little kid. "You did well on this test. Keep it up, continue working hard. Here, teacher will reward you with a big red flower~."

Fang Zhao: "..."

He finally remembered. Why had the other party's attitude during the call given him a strange feeling that felt a little familiar? It had resembled the scene that was unfolding before him.

Coming to that realization, Fang Zhao also felt rather glad.

After he left the family district, Fang Zhao returned to Outpost 23 and looked for Kevin Lin.

"I have two pieces of news," Fang Zhao said to Kevin Lin.

Kevin Lin, who was editing videos, became alert and stopped what he was doing and asked. "One good and one bad?"

"You could say so."

Kevin Lin prepared himself mentally. "Then let me listen to the bad news first."

"I will be leaving Baiji for a while. I have an assignment," Fang Zhao said.

"Leaving Baiji? Aren't you still undergoing your military service? What will you be doing when you leave? Can I come along?" Kevin Lin was unresigned. Tagging along and filming was all right too.

"You can't."

Kevin Lin vehemently objected to this piece of news. "Then what will happen to channel S5? What about our daily broadcast every day? I'm just a specially dispatch reporter; I'm just in charge of interviewing, explaining, and filming. I can't do a live broadcast alone. You need to find me a person to coordinate with! How can we not have a star for Project Starlight?"

"That is where the other piece of news comes in," Fang Zhao replied.

"Go on."

"Zaro is coming."

"...WHAT?!"

Chapter 227

Please Call Me Smiling Angel

Kevin Lin stood up from his chair in shock. "Coming here? To the outpost?!"

"From what I reckon, he will surely be coming. He should arrive on planet Baiji within 2 days," Fang Zhao said.

Kevin Lin's eyebrows twitched. He had been thoroughly battered by this piece of news. In his mind, he was already speedily analyzing the pros and cons.

The room fell silent. Fang Zhao also did not disturb him, letting Kevin Lin ponder in peace.

In a short time period, Kevin Lin thought a lot.

"So what you mean is that you intend for him to take your place and continue the live broadcast?" Kevin Lin asked.

A popular internet personality, also known as the great internet celebrity of Leizhou, Zaro was also a celebrity. Although Zaro's acting skills had not impressed many people, he could still be considered a star... and a rather strong one at that.

The title of "great internet celebrity of Leizhou" was not bragging. If Zaro really came over, viewership would surely increase. However..."Doesn't it seem like this would be in line with the concept of S5?"

Given that sort of arrogant attitude of Zaro's and his way of doing things that had a tendency to cause trouble, Kevin Lin felt that coordinating with Zaro would be tough.

Kevin Lin had a solemn look on his face as he seriously pondered this. "Zaro does indeed have some presence. Although most of the time he makes people feel like whacking him, it does raise his popularity." Viewing his internet traffic and viewership, Zaro's inclusion would surely let channel S5 maintain its popularity and generate discussion, but was it worth it?

"Fang Zhao, you also know that a lot of channel S5's audiences are of an older demographic. Will they enjoy Zaro's style of live broadcasts?" Kevin Lin knew that Zaro's audience, be they fans or antifans, were normally young, and there were rarely any that were a few decades old or above 100. If Zaro took over the live broadcast, would the previous audiences give up on the channel? Kevin Lin wasn't really that willing—after all, there were viewers who were working in related departments, and the evaluations of those older audiences were important too.

"Actually, you can view it from a different angle," Fang Zhao said. "Think about it, why do you think Zaro was able to become the most loved by the Leizhou governor in his current generation?"

The Renault family had expanded till this day and was already an extremely large family clan. Among the Renaults of Zaro's generation, there were also many elites and many who, like Zaro, were not that proper. So why did the Leizhou governor have a bias toward Zaro?

Kevin Lin agreed with what Fang Zhao had just said. "Oh, right, thinking about it this way, it makes sense."

"Furthermore, Zaro's status can help you gain even more explosive information," Fang Zhao continued.

Kevin Lin nodded his head once more. He had not thought about this. No matter what, Zaro was still a Renault. Zaro's mother's engineering company had investments on this planet. There were also trusted aides of the Renault family here who had come over from Leizhou's military district. With Zaro here, he would surely receive even more convenience.

Fang Zhao's words made Kevin Lin fall silent. Indeed, he had some prejudice, but if he continued with this attitude, he felt that he was just being petty.

Just like Fang Zhao had said before, Zaro's attitude tended to rub people the wrong way.

Kevin Lin finally made up his mind. "Makes sense. We won't know if we don't give it a try." Afterward, he sent a message to Zaro through the Baiji military district's communications network to negotiate cooperating.

The selected celebrity of Project Starlight was not supposed to be changed no matter

what, but Fang Zhao's circumstances were different. Shanta had already arranged matters. All Fang Zhao needed to do was arrange a substitute for himself.

While Zaro's manager and Kevin Lin were negotiating the terms of cooperation, Fang Zhao also contacted his two elders in far-off Yanzhou.

"What?! To planet Baiji? Allocated family residential apartment? But is your rank sufficient... Oh, so that's how is it... We will definitely go! It's no issue! Recently we have been idle. We don't have any matters..." Great-Grandfather Fang simply did not bother to hide his excitement. His aged eyes were glowing with emotion.

Great-Grandmother Fang looked up at her husband. This old head had just made plans with other old folks in the retirement facility just yesterday. He had said that they should take the opportunity while they were able-bodied to travel and go on a global tour to see other continents. They had never expected to receive this sort of news today. However, even if the choice were up to Great-Grandmother Fang, she would still travel to planet Baiji all the same. As for other matters, they could just leave them behind.

In their lives, the most glorious times they'd had were the times when they had been in the military. After so many years, they had expected to spend the remainder of their lives in the retirement facility, being idle and waiting to die. Never had they expected to receive a chance to take a long-distance voyage, and to the Baiji military district that was all the rage recently at that.

For the two elder Fangs, this was a rare opportunity.

After ending the call, Great-Grandfather Fang excitedly told his wife. "Hurry, hurry, hurry, pack our things. We are heading to Yanzhou military district. Little Zhao says that we will be sent to the space station. Following that, together with other military family members, we will embark on the third transport ship to planet Baiji."

Actually the two elders did not have many things. After all, they were ex-soldiers and were familiar with the procedures. Bringing along too many things might get them delayed at the security check. Certain electronic equipment was also prohibited. Many things in the military district would be distributed when they arrived.

Therefore, they only took half an hour to pack their luggage. In the remaining time, Great-Grandfather Fang went out to flaunt. "Old comrades, that global tour, you guys

have to go without me. I will be personally heading over to planet Baiji to see my great-grandson!"

On the day of departure, Great-Grandfather Fang dragged his luggage along and took a photo with Great-Grandmother Fang before posting it on his social platform. Together with the photo, he posted a status:

"Setting off to planet Baiji!"

After this status was updated, the comments on it increased at a rapid rate. However, Great-Grandfather Fang did not check them. He had just been showing off a little before moving on. He still had to hurry.

Great-Grandfather Fang and Great-Grandmother Fang were the envy of everyone in the retirement facility as they set off for Yanzhou military district in a flying car.

Over at planet Baiji, on the day before Fang Zhao left Baiji, at the end of the day's live broadcast, he spoke to the camera lens. "As I have some temporary assignments that require me to leave the planet for a short duration, someone will be standing in for me and continuing channel S5's live broadcasts. During this short time, I believe everyone will receive a nice surprise."

The information Fang Zhao had just revealed gave rise to passionate discussions from online viewers.

"Fang Zhao is heading out on an assignment? Isn't he just a conscript? Why does he have other assignments? What sort of secret assignment is it that he can't reveal the details?"

"I'm more concerned with who is taking over for Fang Zhao in the live broadcasts."

"Given how popular planet Baiji is, the person standing in for Fang Zhao is probably some big-name celebrity. Otherwise, the person would not be able to handle it."

"It could be a military officer from the military district. After all, channel S5's style is different from the other channels."

"Maybe there is some secret transaction going on that we don't know about."

Regardless of how it was being discussed online, First Frontline did not reveal any

information regarding the person who would be taking over.

There were also people that guessed Zaro, but the notion was rejected immediately whenever it was mentioned. Given how Zaro was, could he handle channel S5's style? If they really wanted to use Zaro, channel S5's accumulated reputation and praise would all be ruined!

Thus, everyone's conjecture was focused on celebrities that were really popular nowadays and hadn't been seen in the past few days.

To give his fans a surprise, this time around, Zaro did not divulge his whereabouts. Ever since he had decided to head to planet Baiji, he had started on a series of preparations. There also had not been any activity on his public social platform for many days.

For netizens, this was simply unusual!

The last piece of news about Zaro was that he had gone to the Leizhou governor's official residence. As this involved the governor, although Leizhou's large media organizations had captured images, they had only discreetly release news, and they didn't dare to make any irresponsible claims. After all, Zaro visiting the governor's official residence was not an uncommon occurrence. Perhaps the reason there was no news about him was because he had done something wrong and had been locked in a room by the governor and forced to face the wall?

By the time Zaro arrived on planet Baiji, Fang Zhao had already left the planet.

Shortly after, a flying transport left Baiji base and headed for Outpost 23.

The flying transport was different from the one the Baiji military district base used. It was another model bearing four words: "Luo Bu Construction Corporation."

Luo Bu Construction was a leading enterprise in Leizhou's construction industry and was also a firm belonging to Zaro's mother's family clan. At the moment, Luo Bu Construction had signed a large contract with planet Baiji. Zaro's mom was a senior management executive in Luo Bu Construction.

Onboard the flying transport, Zaro looked at the scenery of Baiji below him. "There is a rather pleasing atmosphere here. The flowers and plants are thriving, fleeting clouds..."

Zaro's agent was calmly arranging information regarding Outpost 23 and did not even raise his head when he heard this. "Be more straightforward. Be more straightforward with the main point." Stop pretending to be artistic

This time, it was clear and simple. "I suddenly don't feel like eating watermelons."

Zaro's agent's expression was as calm as the ocean when there was no wind. Silently watching Zaro for a few seconds, he said. "Senior Master..."

Zaro raised his hands to cut off his agent's words, and Zaro corrected his agent. "Please call me 'Smiling Angel'."

All right, not eating watermelons, not growing watermelons, Zaro's manager had long gotten used to Zaro, who had a new idea in his head every day. As for "Smiling Angel" or whatever, that was definitely the temporary halo Zaro had decided to crown himself with.

"The governor has said that, this time, you must bring about a direct and positive influence. You even guaranteed it," Zaro's agent said solemnly.

"I know. Positive, isn't that smiling more and not arguing? Thus, having arrived here, I am no longer Senior Master Zaro. From now on, please call me Smiling Angel."

Zaro's agent: "...I feel that there is a difference between our understanding of the governor's words."

Zaro spoke sincerely. "Trust me, everything will be fine."

"That was what you said last time, when we invested in the 100-episode web drama. In the end, we made a loss of 90 million."

Zaro pretended not to hear anything and looked out of the transport. "Hey, I can already see Outpost 23!"

At the outpost, Kevin Lin had received news and was already waiting.

Today, Zaro had worn a fluorescent yellow outdoor jacket, as if afraid that he wouldn't be noticed.

"Where is Fang Zhao?" Zaro asked as he glanced at the surrounding people.

"He has already left planet Baiji. Does Senior Master have any words you wish to pass on to him?" Kevin Lin asked.

Zaro raised his hands and shook them to and fro. "Nothing else, just tell him to rest assured and complete his assignment in peace!"

Kevin Lin: "... " These words seemed a little unpleasant to him.

"All right, cut the chatter. Hurry, lights, camera, cameraman, hair stylist... Forget it, I didn't bring my hair stylist. Get into position, everyone, I'm ready to begin the live broadcast." Zaro quickly got into his own character.

Fan Lin, who was standing to the side, had thought that Zaro would look for him first after arriving. He had not expected that Zaro would do a live broadcast first. He did not say anything, instead silently walking to the side. After all, he had not thought about how to talk to this famous youth from Leizhou.

While Zaro was going over his image, Kevin Lin and Zaro's agent had a short discussion. Zaro's agent told Kevin Lin that Zaro wasn't the good-for-nothing loser that people made him out to be and that his constitution wasn't that weak.

Zaro's own father had drilled Zaro hard for a year during his military service midway through his university time. After completing that, he had not left the planet and had done his military service in Leizhou's military district. This matter was not considered a secret. There were videos during that time that showed Zaro's training was tough enough and that Zaro was not as idle as people thought. He had frequently been assigned tasks that required physical strength. With regard to self-preservation and gun handling, Zaro was much more capable than other celebrities. When all was said and done, he was still a Renault.

Kevin Lin had set a notification for the live broadcast beforehand, letting channel S5's audiences know that the broadcast was about to start.

After five minutes, the camera switched to live broadcast mode.

Zaro faced the camera lens and flashed a smile he reckoned was completely sincere and dazzling.

"Greetings, everyone! I am that mysterious person who will be taking over for Fang Zhao and continuing with the live broadcasts~."

Online audiences: "..."

"Surprised? Unexpected? Are you guys happy?!"

Online audiences: "..."

"In channel S5's live broadcasts that follow, I intend to spread love and righteousness. From now on, please call me Leizhou's Smiling Angel!"

"Online audiences: "... It feels like channel S5 has released an extremely deadly super weapon.

Chapter 228

Life Ark

When Zaro was starting the live broadcast as Leizhou's smiling angel, Fang Zhao was on his way to planet Wai.

Planet Wai's position at the tail end of the development sequence was similar to the planet Baiji of the past. The planet's circumstances were not much different from the old Baiji, as it essentially relied on military funds and donations to get by. However, their condition was slightly better than Baiji's had been, as it was a little warmer there.

This warmth did not mean the planet's climate but referred to the life forms on this planet.

Perhaps just looking at planet Wai's plants and animals, there wasn't really anything unusual, but when compared to those on planet Baiji, these life-forms were really much warmer.

If creatures from planet Baiji were rated on a scale from 1 to 10 according to how dangerous they were, here on Wai one would rarely see anything that exceeded a 5.

Because this planet was not as dangerous and the soil quality was pretty decent, every year, more research personnel came to planet Wai than went to planet Baiji. Even Fan Lin had come over to survey. If not for the fact that experiment results at planet Baiji had been more favorable, Fan Lin would have established a laboratory on Wai instead.

Although no large corporations or investing initiatives supported them, many researchers had set up laboratories here. In the past, planet Wai's situation had been much better than planet Baiji's. Furthermore, with its natural conditions and warmth, military service applications to this planet were not under the "extremely arduous" category.

Fang Zhao had seen planet Wai's introduction. Here, they only had grade A- power source ore. Just a grade lower yet the difference was so vast. When the people at the Wai base saw the resources that planet Baiji had, it was little wonder they felt anxious. Even if the latest models of detection equipment weren't able to detect grade A power

ore, they would still have put aside their pride and approached Shanta to ask to borrow Fang Zhao for a while just so that they could confirm whatever expectations they had in their hearts.

The person sending Fang Zhao over to planet Wai was none other than Edmund, the colonel who used to be in charge of the mining area. Now he had probably become a major general. Since the establishment of the Baiji military district, Shanta's trusted aides had been on the uprise alongside the developments; they had all been promoted.

Originally, Edmund had starting writing his application to transfer to civilian work, but now, he would not leave no matter what. Only an idiot would choose to leave planet Baiji when they were reaping in rewards.

Edmund was very grateful to Fang Zhao for discovering the grade A power ore. Many people said that even if there hadn't been a Fang Zhao, Baiji ore would still have been discovered eventually by miners, but Fang Zhao's discovery had been too timely. Other people might have had the patience to wait, but Edmund was different. If the discovery had been 10 days later, perhaps he might have already submitted his transfer application. Once it had been submitted, there would have been no retracting it. When he recalled this, Edmund still shuddered at the thought.

Shanta had appointed Edmund to take charge of this transit. It was rare for Edmund to be in this sort of amiable manner, and he had not grumbled about this assignment. He had even given Fang Zhao the best room.

When people on the transport ship saw the always stern Edmund flash a warm smile at Fang Zhao, goose bumps appeared on their skin. People who were oblivious might even mistakenly think Fang Zhao was an illegitimate child of Edmund's.

Before arriving at planet Wai, Edmund told Fang Zhao about the situation there. Other than classified information, Edmund spoke a lot so Fang Zhao would have a rough idea of the situation there.

Also, planet Wai was where one of the other stars of Project Starlight was based—Channel S4's Woo Tianhao.

The transport ship was not suitable to enter the Wai base and so stayed in space. Smaller transport crafts flew out from inside the transport ship. Fang Zhao was within one of these smaller transport crafts.

Wai base's commanding officer, Lieutenant General Huo Yi, was already waiting in the parking space. As the commanding officer of a military base, Huo Yi was not required to personally receive them, but there was special significance this time. To show his sincerity, Huo Yi had decided to personally meet Fang Zhao when he had received news of Fang Zhao's arrival.

When he saw Fang Zhao disembarking from the transport craft, Huo Yi's smile widened and he strode forward.

"Welcome to planet Wai!"

Edmund walked to the front of all the people disembarking from the craft. Whether it was intentional or accidental, he blocked Fang Zhao from Huo Yi's line of sight. When Edmund arrived in front of Huo Yi, he saluted. "Baiji military district's Edmund in charge of transporting Baiji ore. All 10 tons have been safely delivered!"

Edmund's voice was loud and clear, and he placed an added emphasis on the words "military district" and "Baiji ore."

The looks on the faces of those from Wai base did not seem so good. Although they tried their best to hide it, Fang Zhao could feel that the surrounding atmosphere was not that great.

The Wai base commanding officer, Huo Yi, had an unassuming smile on his face, but deep down, Edmund's words were making him boil with rage. I know that you have established a military district and have mined grade A ore and you are now showing off, but just hearing from your tone, I would have thought you had delivered a kiloton of ore. In the end, there are only 10 tons. How petty!

"Major General Edmund, still as imposing as ever. Cough." After he said this, Huo Yi's gaze went past Edmund and glanced at Fang Zhao behind him. "You must be Fang Zhao? How does your first time on planet Wai feel? Isn't there a sort of especially placid and refreshing feeling?"

Fang Zhao agreed with what Huo Yi had just said. Indeed, since he had left the transport craft, Fang Zhao had not felt the need to keep up his guard at every moment. Although it could not be considered entirely safe, in comparison to Baiji, the place was rather peaceful. It was not just limited to Wai base, on the whole, it seemed especially peaceful.

Without waiting for a reply from Fang Zhao, Huo Yi went on. "Here it isn't as dangerous as planet Baiji. It is really suitable for living. Perhaps you might build a large manor or chateau?"

Manors and chateaus were a fantasy of many youngsters. Huo Yi had decided to use this angle to entice Fang Zhao.

When Edmund heard these words, his complexion darkened. Your father is still here! And you are so impatient to try and poach from us?

However, Huo Yi was the commanding officer of this base and had a military rank of lieutenant general. This was also his territory, so Edmund did not dare to make a fuss. Perhaps in the past, even if he was a colonel, he would have put in a few objections, but now, Edmund felt that there was no need. Getting into a dispute with the dirt-poor Wai base was beneath him. All he did was take a mental note of what Huo Yi said. When he returned, he would mention it in his report to Shanta.

Huo Yi also did not want to get into an argument with Edmund. He got his men to do an inventory check. Ten tons of power ore was planet Baiji's assistance to the poor. Although his heart did not feel so comfortable, any free benefits were better than nothing. This was genuine grade A power ore!

After the inventory check, Huo Yi did not have any intention of keeping Edmund here any longer.

Edmund also did not wish to remain here for too long. It was always busy on planet Baiji and he still had a bunch of matters to attend to. Edmund repeated some words to Fang Zhao, then brought his men and left.

After Edmund and his men left, the mood lightened.

Besides Fang Zhao, there were three others: a major and two captains from the Yanzhou military district. Huo Yi had checked up on them already. Although these three belonged to Baiji military district now, they were not men that Shanta could dispatch. Their duty was to ensure Fang Zhao's safety, and Huo Yi would not make things difficult for them.

After the arranged banquet, Huo Yi did not immediately bring Fang Zhao to the mines. He instead arranged for his men to show Fang Zhao around and take in planet Wai's scenery. He would let Fang Zhao relax first and adjust to the place before bringing Fang

Zhao to the mines the next day.

Huo Yi was worried that Fang Zhao would be too tired. In his heart, he was itching to pull Fang Zhao to the mines and use his "Diting ears" to listen, but for the sake of getting the most accurate results, he was willing to wait a while more. They had already waited for so long, what was another 10-odd hours of waiting?

Actually, Huo Yi himself knew that planet Wai probably did not have any grade A power ore. Therefore, although he hoped for a good result, he had also mentally prepared himself for bad news.

When he thought about the current state of planet Baiji, Huo Yi had a pained feeling.

In fact, he and Shanta had been dispatched to planets Wai and Baiji around the same time. Then, Huo Yi's methods had won him the upper hand, and he had managed to get the warmer and less dangerous planet Wai.

If the situation was as before, comparing the two planets with similar grade ore, planet Wai would surely have developed faster than Baiji. But now, the two could no longer be compared. At the current rate of development, even after a hundred years, planet Wai might not even have developed to the point of setting up their own military district.

How regrettable!

As Huo Yi was sighing ruefully about his life, Fang Zhao was led to the research section of the base.

Planet Wai's base headquarters was three to four times the size of the old Baiji at best. At the side was a special area for researchers. The person showing Fang Zhao around pointed to the buildings ahead and showed Fang Zhao which were the researchers' dormitories and where the laboratories were. Fang Zhao also caught sight of a vast experimental plot.

From all of these, it could be seen that if grade A power ore had not emerged on planet Baiji, planet Wai would surely have developed much faster than planet Baiji. Its investment value was slightly higher too.

Fang Zhao gazed at the not-too-distant experimental plot, and his voice revealed his slight surprise. "Are those... peach trees?"

Wheat fields and other grain crops were nothing surprising. The base needed to grow its own food supply. But what were those in front?

Fang Zhao thought his own eyes were playing tricks on him.

Although he had seen some being planted on Muzhou farms, the large majority that should have become extinct during the Period of Destruction had actually appeared here.

The person showing Fang Zhao around was momentarily stunned by Fang Zhao's outburst, but it was quickly replaced by a sense of pride. "That's right, those are peach trees. Follow me. Although we can't enter, observing from the outside should provide you with enough content to brag about for half a year."

His tone implied that he was going to bring Fang Zhao to gain knowledge and experience.

"Over at this side are peach trees, over there are apple trees, and at that side..." The person leading him suddenly got stuck. He could not recognize the tree species.

"Tangerine trees, oranges trees, apricot trees, and those are cherry trees." As they walked, Fang Zhao called out the names of many different fruit trees in succession.

As they continued forward, there were even many ornamental plants that had only existed in the Old Era!

"Yes, yes, yes, that's right, these are the ones! These are still in the experimental stage, I think for a few decades already. I heard that they will be able to hit the market soon. This isn't an illegal laboratory. Any experiment run here has to be approved. Actually, we have been applying for a separate research base, but it hasn't been approved yet." The person leading the way sighed helplessly. After sighing, he asked Fang Zhao, "How is it? Are you interested in investing here?" Even at this sort of time, he wouldn't forget about trying to solicit investments.

A faint fragrance lingered in the air.

The scent of osmanthus flowers.

As though Fang Zhao was in a daze that had brought him back to the past.

It turned out that even though many people did not know about it, they had survived on another planet, away from home.

The seed bank that many people had given their all to protect, the ark 1 that preserved life, had never been stranded after all. It had been sailing all along.

Chapter 229

Investment

Fang Zhao found his composure and asked the tour guide, "When are these fruits going to market?"

Noticing Fang Zhao's interest in the fruit trees, the tour guide became even more enthusiastic. "Soon. These experimental trees are being planted in secret. All visitors are required to sign confidentiality agreements, so the results haven't been announced yet. The higher-ups want to see how the experiments come along, but judging from the progress, they may go public this year."

The experiments were winding down. There were no major technical issues that needed to be resolved, so only the lab technicians working for research scientists remained.

The tour guide said Fan Lin had started quite a few experiments here as well, but they no longer required his direct supervision. A few of his students had been running the final phases of his projects for several years now. That was also why Fan Lin focused his attention on Baiji. If those experiments panned out, it would be a major technical breakthrough and elevate his influence in his field.

Channel S4 had avoided discussing the experimental fruit trees because of the confidentiality requirement.

The gene bank had once been hailed mankind's last line of defense. Perhaps only people who had survived the Period of Destruction could appreciate its incredible value.

There had been a saying in the Old Era: "Eating is everything." Filling your stomach was a big deal.

There were many plant species out there, but not all were edible by man.

As Earth's major food producer, Muzhou had started out by planting seeds preserved in the gene bank before developing new crops based on technological innovations.

Then had come the advent of space exploration and the introduction of colonization programs. Once a foreign planet was deemed livable and troops were dispatched, the Academy of Agricultural Science would select certain seeds, based on the planet's conditions, for the soldiers to plant on a small scale. The experimental plots would be gradually expanded based on their success.

There were also the hunting quotas, which, besides curbing excessive aggression on the part of the soldiers, were aimed at guaranteeing food safety.

No one knew if the animals on foreign planets carried any untreatable viruses or whether eating them would have any long-term side effects.

Meanwhile, the decision of which species from the gene bank to revive had been reached after extensive discussions among about a dozen senior professors at the Academy of Agricultural Science.

Which plants to test on a foreign planet, whether the ingestion of local animals would bring ill health to soldiers, whether that would impact colonization plans—all these questions required long-term studies and observation to answer. This was also why the soldiers received multiple physicals every year.

It took too long to reach firm conclusions, and it was a major drain on finances and manpower. By contrast, it made more sense to revive "safe" plant species from the gene bank that were suitable for human consumption. Long-term scientific studies were needed too, but running experimental plots and expanding them was less costly.

In times of desperation, during food shortages, it was easy to compromise, but now, material conditions allowed humans to prioritize safety and efficiency.

In choosing extinct species from the gene bank, food crops were preferred because humans needed full stomachs to do anything else, after all.

After full stomachs came a taste for refinement, so next on the list were delicious fruits and plants. Aesthetically pleasing, recreational plants came next.

Few medicinal plants were revived, because many such species had actually survived the Period of Destruction and played a major role in combating disease.

There were quite a few experimental plots on planet Wai, but it had never been certified an "experimental base" because Wai ranked low on the development

sequence. Transportation was a major expense. Official budgets only allowed for an annual dispatch of lab technicians from Earth. Other expenses were covered out of pocket by the project leaders.

The reason the tour guide responded so effusively to Fang Zhao was because he wanted the famed composer to invest in Wai's experimental plots. Most investors shied away from Wai because they knew that short-term profit was unlikely, and now that Baiji had stolen the limelight, investors were flocking there instead.

Fang Zhao hadn't promised to invest, nor had he rejected the possibility. The tour guide didn't know what Fang Zhao was thinking. He was about to launch into another spiel when the weather took a turn for the worse. A light drizzle started, so the tour guide scrambled to get Fang Zhao back to base.

The lodgings the Wai base offered to Fang Zhao were decent. Fang Zhao still hadn't seen Tianhao from S4 or his assigned journalist. He had heard that they were on a trip. Tianhao had been going on quite a few excursions of late. He was either doing live broadcasts of himself fishing at a lake or showing off his handicraft. He made specimens out of the fish he caught and the wild flowers he picked. Word was that they were going to be given away as gifts in an online lucky draw.

This was also a gimmick that S4 had come up with in light of S5's strong viewership numbers.

It didn't matter whether Fang Zhao saw Tianhao or not. Kevin Lin treated Tianhao and his assigned journalist as competition, whereas Fang Zhao simply viewed him as the young descendant of an old friend.

Fang Zhao enjoyed his lavish treatment at Wai. The next day, he was woken up early in the morning.

"Your flying transport is ready. Commander Huo Yi is leading the expedition personally. Seems like the Wai authorities are taking your visit seriously," a bodyguard told Fang Zhao.

Fang Zhao noticed that Huo Yi wasn't in the best shape, but one couldn't tell at first glance. Huo Yi had done a good job of hiding his condition.

Huo Yi had read a development plan for Baiji last night. He was filled with jealousy. A torrent of thoughts prevented him from falling asleep. One moment, he was

fantasizing about the discovery of a grade A power ore on Wai, then the next rational thought told him that it was impossible and he had to accept reality.

Huo Yi managed a smile when he saw Fang Zhao. "Let's go. Let's check out the closest mine first, then move further."

Upon arrival at the first mine, Fang Zhao knocked on the walls and listened, just like he had done on the previous live broadcast. Huo Yi and company were familiar with these moves. Lord knows how many times they had replayed the footage of Fang Zhao discovering the new ore on Baiji. They remembered Fang Zhao's every maneuver.

When Fang Zhao stopped knocking, a major general next to Huo Yi couldn't help but ask, "So?"

"Nothing." Fang Zhao shook his head.

Disappointment was visible on the faces of Huo Yi and co.

Another mine.

"Anything?" the major general asked again.

"Nothing," Fang Zhao responded.

The next mine.

"Nothing."

And the next.

"Nothing."

...

"Nothing."

...

"Nothing."

...

After touring the last mine, the senior military officials from the Wai base had turned neutral. Disappointment had become resignation. This was the result they had been expecting. How could the most advanced detection equipment fall short of the human ear? But they hadn't been able to help but raise their hopes. Now there was nothing to look forward to.

Huo Yi was among the more clear headed. He had adjusted his mindset when they had set foot in the first mine.

So be it.

Such was their fate.

If he hadn't used underhanded tactics to secure the assignment to Wai, maybe he would have been sent to Baiji instead. But hindsight was useless now. It was best to accept things as they were, lest he become more and more depressed.

Fang Zhao had expected the same outcome. His hearing was good all right, but it didn't rival the most advanced detectors. Technology had its advantages. The reason he had discovered a new energy ore on Baiji was because miners there had still been using older detectors due to poor funding. The older models couldn't detect the new ore, but the newer models were a different story.

So Fang Zhao wasn't disappointed that he had failed to discover another power ore. He took advantage of the tour of the mines to carefully observe the physical landscape of planet Wai. It was definitely less harsh than Baiji, even taking into consideration its virgin forests, which could be easily accessed by ground troops with modern weaponry and battle gear.

Because Baiji was ranked high in the development order, every infrastructure project and the zoning for every plot of land had been carefully planned. Fang Zhao had no say. This was a turf war between titans of business and politics, where wealthy businessmen were going to cash in. For now, Fang Zhao wasn't qualified to take part.

As far as planet Wai was concerned, now that it had missed out on the new energy ore, it could no longer secure the most advanced equipment or long stays by top-of-the-line military vessels, which meant it was stuck in no-man's-land in the short run. If the experimental base certification came through, the Wai base would have an extra

source of funding. If not, they were stuck with the status quo.

Wai didn't boast any grade A power ore, so it was likely no major investor groups would be willing to commit for the next century or so. The discrepancy between Wai and Baiji would grow bigger. In a few years, the gap might be similar to the difference between a first-tier city from the Old Era and a podunk village.

This was the reality that the leadership of the Wai base had to accept.

Back at base, the atmosphere was a bit stilted. The military officials were less hospitable. Fang Zhao didn't mind, though. He didn't enter the base compound immediately. Instead, he sat on a large rock located near one of the experimental plots.

The base leadership let him be. Fang Zhao's three bodyguards, however, did their duty and stuck with their subject, even though they had no idea what Fang Zhao was up to. The trio exchanged puzzled glances, frowning at Fang Zhao's strange behavior in their own secret language.

One of the bodyguards became alarmed when he saw Fang Zhao turn his head toward the neighboring woods.

No one could be observed emerging from the woods, but Fang Zhao's expression clearly said he had detected something. The three bodyguards knew they probably weren't as competent as Fang Zhao, Hearing-wise, they were definitely inferior, so if Fang Zhao sensed something out of the ordinary, then something had to be wrong.

"Are your ears really as sensitive as legend has them?"

A figure emerged from behind one of the trees in the woods. The person wasn't embarrassed at all about being discovered.

The man was Tianhao. He had heard that Fang Zhao had arrived on Wai, but it was too late and he and his assigned reporter had been quite far from base at the time. They had only returned today. He had wanted to test Fang Zhao, to see if Fang Zhao was really a good enough fighter to earn a second-class merit. He was confident about a successful ambush even though Fang Zhao was guarded by three men. Little had he expected to be discovered before he could approach.

Fang Zhao gestured with his right hand, signaling the three bodyguards to stand down.

Chapter 230

Collaborating to Purchase Land

Tianhao walked over and moved a large stone over to Fang Zhao's side and sat down, his gaze sizing up Fang Zhao and the three bodyguards. Clicking his tongue, he thought to himself, This bastard is rather pretentious, having a major and two captains as his bodyguards. So many people would be jealous if they knew.

Not bothering at all about the looks from the three bodyguards, Tianhao sat cross-legged and plucked a strand of straw before placing it in his mouth. Without enunciating his words clearly, he said to Fang Zhao, "We are all participants of the first segment of Project Starlight and are more or less colleagues already. We shouldn't be that unfamiliar with each other. How about heading back to the base for a drink?"

"I'm still undergoing military service," Fang Zhao replied. There were many restrictions during military service duration, and in principle, conscripts were not permitted to consume alcohol. Of course, alcohol provided by senior officers for a celebratory banquet did not count.

"Oh, right, you are still a conscript." Tianhao felt that it was a pity. He had wanted to tell Fang Zhao that it was all right to secretly drink on planet Wai, but realizing the three bodyguards were staring at him, he stopped himself and thought, How are these bodyguards, they are simply monitors.

While under scrutiny, Tianhao would also not advise Fang Zhao to partake in any questionable activities. Changing the topic, he asked, "I heard that you are really good with history. Do you know about historical figures? Some people say that I resemble great general Woo Tong of the Founding Era; what do you say?"

Fang Zhao gave a simple reply. "There is some resemblance."

Tianhao, or Woo Tianhao, was a descendant of Tongzhou's Woo family. However, when he appeared in the the entertainment circles, Woo Tianhao generally did not display his family name.

Although he did not know whether or not Fang Zhao was flattering him, Tianhao

seemed rather happy when he heard this, and his smile grew wider. "I think so too." He loved it when people said that he had a great general's style or that he looked like Woo Tong.

"Have people from Wai base asked you about investing yet?" Woo Tianhao asked.

"They did."

"What are your thoughts on this matter? Actually, it is really good to invest here, and you aren't short of money." Woo Tianhao had made inquiries about the value of Fang Zhao's works and income from other endorsement deals. Making some calculations, he understood that Fang Zhao, this little celebrity, would not lose to him when it came to cash in hand! He also had another motive for finding Fang Zhao so urgently.

"It's worth a try," Fang Zhao replied.

"I think so too, and I have already started looking at places." Woo Tianhao raised his eyebrows and noticed Fang Zhao gazing at the experimental plots to the side. Turning to Fang Zhao, he said, "Brother, let's play a game. Do you know what I wish to build on planet Wai? If you guess correctly, you get a prize. You have three chances. If you get it on the first try, one million dollars. If you take two tries, 500,000. If you take three tries, 100,000. How about it? You have nothing to lose."

As he watched Fang Zhao look over, Woo Tianhao was secretly pleased, and he thought to himself, The bait has been set, but even if you rack your brains, there is no way you can guess it!

"Build a dojo into a mountainside?" Fang Zhao replied.

Woo Tianhao: "..."

Woo Tianhao nearly swallowed his straw and started coughing before spitting it out. Surprise and plain disbelief was written all over his face. "How did you know? Don't tell me your ear can 'hear' it?"

There was a faint smile on Fang Zhao's face. "Guessed it." Just like Su Mu had said many times about returning to tending sheep after the war, Fang Zhao also remembered that Woo Tong had talked about building a dojo into a mountain after the war many times as well. Woo Tianhao, this little fellow, actually had the same dream as Woo Tong.

Fang Zhao had actually had no idea what Woo Tianhao wanted to construct on planet Wai. However, since Woo Tianhao had said he was like Woo Tong, Fang Zhao had then remembered Woo Tong's words and thus made his guess, which had turned out to be correct. The result was really unexpected, but he wouldn't reveal the reason for his guess to Woo Tianhao.

Realizing that he wouldn't be able to get the reason, Woo Tianhao no longer pressed Fang Zhao for it. His motive in looking for Fang Zhao had not been this. One million was just 1 million. When compared to what he wanted to discuss with Fang Zhao, 1 million was not a big deal.

"Pass me your bank account number. I will transfer the funds to you when I get access to the internet," Woo Tianhao said.

The three bodyguards behind Fang Zhao shot each other weird glances. In their hearts, they were thinking. Really building a dojo? What the h*ll goes on in his mind? Still building a dojo in this sort of era? Not saying that people of the New Era would have no interest, but even if they had interest in this, there are all sorts of virtual classes online and all sorts of tutors for one-on-one lessons. With it being so convenient, even gyms gradually faded into obscurity over time. Things from the old era like dojos only exist in history textbooks. Is there a need to construct one?

Too much money and too few things to spend on? Or have the people of Wai base brainwashed him and made him retarded?

On the contrary, Fang Zhao did not find it strange at all.

In the Old Era, the Woo clan had been a family of martial artists and had produced a number of martial arts action stars. It was reasonable to say that the Woo clan of old had not lacked methods of earning money, and Woo Tong had become a physical instructor. After the apocalypse had broken out, Woo Tong had rapidly gathered up a bunch of people and taken refuge. After that, it had turned into a resistance, counterattacking and recapturing Tong Zhao. In the end, he had become one of the great generals of the Founding Era, but due to certain reasons, he had been unable to accomplish his dream of building the dojo.

There was actually a commemorative dojo in Tongzhou, but it did not have the traditional significance and was not the sort of dojo Woo Tianhao wanted. In the New Era, other than Woo Tianhao, no one else in the Woo family had any interest toward

this. Snatching a spot in the first iteration of Project Starlight and coming to planet Wai was something that Woo Tianhao had meticulously planned for.

Woo Tianhao did not hide his plans. "Places in Tongzhou that I am satisfied with all belong to the ecology parks and nature reserves. They can't be randomly torn down or undergo construction, so I can only build it on a foreign planet. After looking around, I picked planet Wai."

In the New Era, land resources were scarce. There were too many people and there was too little land. Scenic places were protected by all sorts of regulations. Even if it was the Woo family's Woo Tianhao, he could forget about trying to get his hands on a mountain with a panoramic view. Moreover, on their home planet, for such scenic places, even if they were not protected by laws and regulations, the land would be excessively expensive. Even Woo Tianhao did not have the financial capability to buy a mountaintop.

"How about it? Any interest in buying land here? Construct a manor, own a large piece of land, own a few good horses. When your spirits are low, you can come for a stay and live like the nobles of the Old Era that we see on television. How flashy is that! For safety, you can bring along bodyguards. Although the cost of traveling is a little high, with your income, you shouldn't have any problems."

Woo Tianhao's intention was to rope Fang Zhao in. The risks if only a single person was investing were too high. After all, the land here belonged to the Wai base, and Huo Yi might not necessarily give the Woo family any concessions, as he was not from Tongzhou. However, Woo Tianhao was too satisfied with planet Wai's conditions and did not want to give it up.

Therefore he wanted to rope in a few people to share the risks. If anything should happen, more people would mean more assistance. Woo Tianhao had also approached a few friends, but they had given a host of reasons and had not promised him anything. People from the Woo family were either unwilling or had given Woo Tianhao a little funding as support.

Recently, Woo Tianhao had been anxious. When he had heard that Fang Zhao would be coming, Woo Tianhao had started having all sorts of ideas.

Woo Tianhao continued trying to persuade Fang Zhao. "Isn't retro in fashion again? Let's indulge in a round of nostalgia. There is beautiful landscape here and not many

dangerous creatures. Land here is so cheap because the people of planet Wai worry about selling it off. In simple terms, this is a rare opportunity. Aren't you interested in the experimental plots? If the research base gets approved, the price of land on planet Wai will appreciate. Let's get some land first. Otherwise, all the good areas will get snapped up by others."

He had not talked about the situation if the research base was not approved, and even if it was approved, it wouldn't have that much of an impact over here. Even if the price of land appreciated, it would not rise by much. A research base would not have much impetus.

Fang Zhao understood all this and had already considered carefully. However, he did have the notion of purchasing land to build a house. Just like Woo Tianhao had said, for that little bit of nostalgia.

In the early days of the Founding Era, survivors had also constructed ancient buildings of special significance in Huangzhou, such as pagodas, temples, palaces, and many more, with the purpose of passing on the culture to future generations. In the end, though, these buildings had been torn down bit by bit to build commercial buildings. Only a few were left.

Money still dominated everything else.

On planet Wai, the natural conditions were not too bad.

Fang Zhao had already had this idea, so when Woo Tianhao finished speaking, he asked, "Have you selected the area?"

Woo Tianhao expression became blank, and he hurriedly replied, "Not yet! I was just waiting for you!" Woo Tianhao was looking for partners, but he wanted partners that were serious about long-term investments. He had been waiting for another investor besides himself. When he saw that Fang Zhao had that desire, Woo Tianhao beamed. "If you wish to invest, let's jointly purchase land, and we can each build our own things. With regards to manpower, as long as you are agreeable, I can source the construction teams and we will split the expenses equally. How's that?"

Fang Zhao nodded. "Sure."

"All right. I will go draft a contract and send it to you in a bit. Just wait!" Woo Tianhao could not remain sitting any long. The collaborator he had waited so long for had

finally appeared, and he had to make Fang Zhao stay here. His "Tianhao" dojo was going to see the light of day!

—

Wai base. Huo Yi and the others were feeling slightly dejected, but when they heard that Woo Tianhao and Fang Zhao were going to purchase land and build houses here, their spirits lifted in a flash.

That was good news!

"Commander, when is the transport ship arranged to send Fang Zhao back scheduled to leave?" someone asked.

"What scheduled to leave? Push it back, push back the departure timing! What's the rush for! Everyone would think that you are trying to get rid of him, huh," Huo Yi chided.

The person who spoke cursed silently. Just two minutes ago you were saying "out of sight, out of mind" and to hurry up and send him away.

Huo Yi seemed like had had totally forgotten his previous words. He opened up a map that displayed the areas that were available. "Bring this to them. Let me know after they have chosen. I will give them the most favorable price!"

Huo Yi did not conceal anything, nor did he make things difficult for Fang Zhao. On the contrary, to get the funds from Fang Zhao and Woo Tianhao's pockets, Huo Yi even recommended professionals to help them. The places put forward could also be considered to have enchanting sceneries. There were many places like these on planet Wai, but it was hard to find any better on this planet, and they were not trying to scam Fang Zhao and Woo Tianhao.

In the past, there had been a news story about an investment firm being scammed on a foreign planet. Here, the places were all part of the base's territory, and they had all the authority here.

Huo Yi also knew that. Thus, when he heard that Fang Zhao and Woo Tianhao wanted to invest in planet Wai, he showed a great deal of sincerity.

This was a hard chance to come by. Now, planet Baiji was a investment hot spot, and

everyone would try to invest in Baiji. For planet's on the tail end of the development sequence, if they wished to develop faster, all they could do was use their own capabilities to solicit investments, which was down to their methods and luck.

It was rare for others to deliver stuff to his doorstep. Would Huo Yi let such an opportunity slip by?

Chapter 231

Riding Coattails

After taking a look at the map, Fang Zhao marked a few locations. These were all spots he had noticed while touring the mines. The mines on planet Wai were quite scattered, and Fang Zhao had spotted seven locations during the mine tour, but their flying transport had skipped all of them because the group had been on a tight schedule. Fang Zhao had never had the chance to examine them in detail. This time, he returned to the marked spots with his partner Woo Tianhao.

Woo Tianhao was no longer in the mood to test Fang Zhao's fighting skills. He had just landed a hard-earned partner. There was no point in spooking his partner now.

Indeed, Woo Tianhao was quite confident in his own abilities. Even though he had heard that Fang Zhao was a decent fighter, he didn't think he could possibly lose to a martial arts amateur who dabbled in the arts.

Screw the duel. I'll get around to it when everything is confirmed. I can't scare him off before the contract is signed.

They visited three locations in a row. Woo Tianhao thought all three were decent. The locations Fang Zhao had marked were all places he had checked out carefully while doing live broadcasts. They each had their advantages.

Woo Tianhao loved those towering mountains obscured by clouds and fog that were straight out of a fantasy novel. Building a kung fu school in a place like that was classy. He'd also build a bloody orphanage while he was at it and recruit kids who had the right builds and were interested in martial arts. He would get his fix serving as a head coach.

From Woo Tianhao's perspective, why else would you splurge except to feel good?

I'm happy to spend the cash. Who cares what anyone else says?

So even though his family objected to his obsession with building a martial arts school, Woo Tianhao didn't think he was in the wrong at all.

"This is the sixth spot? This place is decent too. I haven't done a live broadcast here. Hey, Tang Ke, mark it down. We'll broadcast live from this spot next time," Woo Tianhao yelled while turning his head.

Tang Ke was the reporter assigned to S4. He was a chubby man about the same age as Kevin Lin.

Tang Ke yawned and said, "Got it!" He would have passed on the trip had he known there were so many spots to hit. This was more work than a live broadcast, more tiring. Tang Ke had spent last night listening to Woo Tianhao bullsh*tting about his dreams and whatnot. He hadn't slept well. Right now, he was sleepy as h*ll.

"Next?" Woo Tianhao asked Fang Zhao after looking up the coordinates of the seventh location.

"Next." Fang Zhao had just uttered his response when he heard a rustling sound from the tall grass ahead of them. The noise was growing louder and was heading in their direction.

The three bodyguards tailing Fang Zhao, the two protecting Woo Tianhao, and the soldiers assigned by the main base all raised their guns.

"Wait!" Fang Zhao shouted.

A silhouette darted out.

It was a brown, furry animal about half a meter tall. It had a round head, a long tail, and ears that were checkered. Its main identifying feature was a blue ring surrounding its neck.

"Lab animal?" Woo Tianhao asked.

Woo Tianhao had seen everything after spending a good deal of time on Wai. He knew instantly where the animal had come from once he saw the blue ring around its neck.

"They're lab animals. They shouldn't be in the wild. They've been injected with medicine. The experiments they were used in have concluded, but the lab animals can't be set free because there are experimental plots nearby. The lab technicians have them sequestered elsewhere. This one must have escaped," Woo Tianhao explained to Fang Zhao.

"Even though they have GPS chips planted in them, catching them is quite a hassle if they escape. Let's cordon them off. The breeders in charge of capturing them shouldn't be far behind."

Surrounded by gun barrels, the animal froze, two round eyes bulging from its furry face.

Soon, the sound of flying transports could be heard. The animal's captors had arrived.

The two breeders disembarked from the flying transport, carrying what appeared to be traps. The bodyguards tucked their guns away.

Lo and behold, the animal ducked away from the breeders and dashed toward Fang Zhao.

Fang Zhao's three bodyguards drew their guns again. They were trained to kill anything that posed a threat to Fang Zhao.

Fang Zhao raised his hand again. "No need."

The three bodyguards could have killed the animal before it approached Fang Zhao, but Fang Zhao had halted them just in time, so they had missed the split second when they had the animal in their sights. The animal clung on to Fang Zhao's leg and hid behind his body, watching the two breeders in pursuit alertly.

Noticing that the bodyguards still had their guns trained on the lab animals, the breeders told Fang Zhao and company, "This thing is called a tiger-eared monkey because its ears resemble the ears of a tiger from the Old Era. It was named by the first researchers who studied them. This is the third time this little fella has escaped, but it's not dangerous. It won't attack humans on its own initiative. Don't worry, we'll take it down now."

One of the breeders approached Fang Zhao. The tiger-eared monkey didn't release its grip, instead climbing along Fang Zhao's leg from his calf to his thigh. Its claws gripped Fang Zhao's pants tightly. It wouldn't let go no matter how hard the breeder tugged, letting out a piercing scream instead.

The breeder stopped pulling. The little fella had sharp claws; they were worried that they might hurt Fang Zhao if they continued to use force.

The two breeders had no choice but to switch approaches. They glanced at each other and prepared their dart guns.

Lo and behold, the tiger-eared monkey started screaming even more loudly.

"Just beat it to death and cook it. It's so annoying," Woo Tianhao said with a frown.

After a fresh round of screaming, the tiger-eared monkey turned its head and glared at Woo Tianhao while baring its teeth in a vicious snarl. The screaming now was the loudest thus far.

The breeders laughed knowingly. "It's better if you don't mouth off. It's spent quite a bit of time with humans. It might understand what you say."

"Does it run in this direction every time?" Fang Zhao asked.

"Yes, he ended up in this area all three times. Last time, it was at the foot of the mountain." The breeder pointed for Fang Zhao's benefit. "The last time we caught it, it was napping in a tree hole after a meal. Even the howling winds, thunder, and rain didn't wake it up. Animals raised in captivity aren't as alert as wild animals."

Fang Zhao examined the spot the breeder pointed to and said, "Let's check it out. If there aren't any problems, let's use that location."

The breeders didn't like the idea. What if the little fella fled even further? Catching it would be a pain in the *ss, but the breeders kept those thoughts to themselves when they saw the colonel traveling with Fang Zhao and Woo Tianhao gesture to them, offering instead. "No problem. Let us lead the way. We know that spot well."

For the senior officials at the main base, a lab animal was far less consequential compared to these two potential investors. The most important task at hand was to secure the investment from Fang Zhao and Woo Tianhao.

The tiger-eared monkey was still clinging to Fang Zhao when he boarded the flying transport. The new location was only a short flight away, so Fang Zhao stood throughout the journey.

The flying transport took off for the foot of the mountain and found a landing spot. Fang Zhao got off and approached the woods in front of him.

"Say, now that I'm here, it feels quite good. I couldn't tell from on top of the mountain," Woo Tianhao said after taking in his surroundings.

He couldn't put his finger on what was so great about the location. It just felt right. The air even felt fresher.

"This is probably what the archeologists' notebooks referred to as good feng shui," Woo Tianhao said after pondering the matter.

Fang Zhao didn't know anything about feng shui, but he knew that the animals native to Wai definitely had stronger instincts for good locations than they did, even if they were lab animals. Based on what the two breeders had told them, this little fella was quite sensitive. Just because it wasn't aggressive like a wild animal didn't mean it couldn't discern between different surroundings.

Plus, if the tiger-eared monkey would sleep so soundly here even on a rainy day, the natural conditions had to be quite stable. According to the information provided by Huo Yi, this was not an earthquake-prone area, nor had any major natural disasters occurred.

The most important thing was that Fang Zhao liked the location too.

"Then how about we go with this spot? There are quite a few mountains around here too. I'll pick a good-looking one to build my kung fu school on," Woo Tianhao said. But as he canvassed the massive plot of land, he felt that the investor group comprising just him and Fang Zhao was a bit thin. "We can't rival those major investor groups. Two people isn't enough. Why don't we get more people involved. I have a few friends that I can con—I mean, persuade to invest." Woo Tianhao looked at Fang Zhao. "You know anyone who has money to blow?"

Fang Zhao pondered before responding, "Zaro Renault is on Baiji. I could ask him."

Woo Tianhao had never held Zaro in high esteem, but Zaro's reputation of splurging was known to all. Yes, let's bring that sucker in!

Chapter 232

Why Not Raise the Stakes

Since he had already pulled in one person, Woo Tianhao believed that, in no time, he would be able to rope in a second, a third, or maybe even more.

As for Huo Yi and the others of Wai base, of course they fully approved of Woo Tianhao's thinking. Pulling more people over would be better. When the time came, some methods could be employed to raise the popularity, and chances for the research base being approved would be higher.

The reason the top brass continuously rejected the notion of a research base was probably due to the slower development rate of planet Wai. There was not much human traffic and the operational costs were high. Furthermore, no large corporations had established themselves here, and places with experimental plots were not just limited to planet Wai. Since there were better choices, there was no need to choose planet Wai.

There was a limited quota for bases, so Huo Yi needed to hurry and declare it as soon as possible. Thus, he had made it more convenient for Fang Zhao and Woo Tianhao. Communication rules were also relaxed, but they still had to be in line with regulations.

With the help of Huo Yi, Woo Tianhao refined his list of who to contact. Roping in a few others would decrease the risk. If there was no human traffic here and they were unable to generate enough discussion, throwing that much money in would not even be able to create a ripple.

While the collaboration was still in the discussion stage, Woo Tianhao did not want to let others know about it. Therefore, during his live broadcasts, he avoided people and filmed on a nearby mountain. When he was doing his live broadcasts, he carefully made his pick of the nearby mountains.

But however much he tried to hide it, Woo Tianhao could not conceal his high spirits from finally roping in a collaborator.

Nearly all of S4's audience were Woo Tianhao fans and understood him well. When they saw how happy Woo Tianhao was today, they all had their own opinions.

"Do you guys feel that Tianhao seems to be smiling a lot today?"

"I see it too. Perhaps something good happened?"

"Fooling around with a nurse again?"

"That wouldn't give him such a reaction. I wonder what he encountered?"

Woo Tianhao was oblivious to these viewers online discussions about him. Even if he knew, he would not care. Now, a large proportion of his thoughts were on building the dojo.

After the live broadcast ended, Woo Tianhao stood on the mountaintop and surveyed the horizon.

"That mountain... that one, and that one, as well as that one over there, I... want them all." Woo Tianhao sighed. It was a pity he had only so much funds available.

Woo Tianhao turned his head and spoke to a bodyguard behind him. "Take note of these few mountains first."

The bodyguard went blank for a moment. "All of them?" He thought Woo Tianhao wanted to purchase all of these, but how much would that cost?

"Note down all of them. Never mind, pass me the map. I will do it myself." Woo Tianhao took the map and started to mark the areas. From among these places, he would choose the best mountain to construct his dojo. As for the rest, he would recommend them to other people he was close to.

At another location, there were also a bunch of people following Fang Zhao around as he took a look at places.

A breeder familiar with the terrain introduced the surrounding conditions to Fang Zhao and, at the same time, kept an eye on the tiger-eared monkey that was still holding on to Fang Zhao's legs.

With an extra burden on his thighs, he had walked such a long distance without feeling

out of sorts. This youngster was rather strange.

"What do you wish to build here? This area is not suitable for constructing skyscrapers with more than a hundred floors. I'm not saying that it is entirely impossible, just that... living here is not necessarily comfortable," the breeder said.

"It wouldn't be that high," Fang Zhao replied.

"Then what do you wish to construct here?"

"An old city street."

From Fang Zhao's memory, in his previous life before the Period of Destruction, his old house had been in an area rich with history and culture. There had been a marketplace and many interweaving roads. Although ancient, every year, lots of people had been attracted to the place for tourism. Later, when he had gone to the capital for work, the thing that had left the greatest impression had been that large palace.

The stockman understood Fang Zhao's intentions rather quickly. "Rebuilding historical sites?" Actually, this sort of idea was not just limited to Fang Zhao. Many youngsters loved to purchase land and construct manors like the aristocrats of the Old Era. It had the same intention and a sense of nostalgia, and it was something people of the New Era found rather flashy.

"There are too many building styles in the Old Era. Different time periods had different styles..." Fang Zhao explained to them different time periods of the Old Era and the special buildings of those different places.

Ancient city gates, markets, and streets that transcended space and time with thousands of years of history. People of the New Era did not understand much about those times and how resplendent each and every period had been.

Unknowingly, everyone accompanying Fang Zhao held their breaths as they listened to Fang Zhao describe scenes that only appeared in documentaries or movies. Even Woo Tianhao, who had concluded his live broadcast and come down the mountains, also slowed his pace and listened attentively to Fang Zhao's descriptions.

Nowadays, the only things left of architecture from different time periods of the Old Era were models, photographs, or emulations in virtual worlds. In reality, there were only a few similar replicas, but the scale was too small compared to the originals, and

they were not as stunning.

If Fang Zhao really constructed this sort of place...

The people of planet Wai would have it good.

When they had free time, they could form groups to tour this place and relax a little.

The stockman had told Fang Zhao to build the sort of ancient castles and pastures that younger people would be into, where they could enjoy riding horses on the vast lands. However, when he listened to Fang Zhao's accounts, he understood that Fang Zhao had a far greater plan.

"All that you have mentioned, even if we only choose and construct one building a week according to how it should be, is still a large undertaking," a Wai base colonel said. He meant to remind Fang Zhao that although land here was cheap, constructing buildings required quite a bit of money. If there were too many buildings or the buildings were large, the combined costs would amount to an enormous sum.

"Then lets take it slowly," Fang Zhao replied in a relaxed tone.

"When you think about it, it is actually a nice place, one where you can come over when you get older and retire. The atmosphere at this place is really suitable for retirees," the stockman said.

However, Woo Tianhao did not take kindly to those words.

Retirement? What retirement? He still wished to open a dojo here! The concept was obviously youthful energy; why did that guy make it sound so lethargic?

Woo Tianhao snorted. "I don't intend to purchase this land as a retirement plan!"

The stockman and people from Wai base looked suspiciously at Woo Tianhao. Construction at this sort of place, if not for retirement, then is it for reselling? Can it even be sold?

"It's a dream! Understand?" Woo Tianhao shook his head when he realized these bunch of people had no way of understanding. He didn't wish to talk to this bunch of salted fish. Salted fish without dreams would never understand what was going on in his mind.

The stockmen and Wai base personnel really could not come to terms with Woo Tianhao's thoughts. They felt that these people were foolish, that they had too much money and too few outlets for spending. But for planet Wai, this was a good thing, and they would not oppose it.

Woo Tianhao drew a large circle on the map. The land Fang Zhao had chosen and the mountain he had picked were encompassed inside.

"The area has to be enclosed. City walls?" Woo Tianhao asked Fang Zhao.

"City walls will be constructed around the exterior, but current technology still has to be used for defensive measures," Fang Zhao replied.

"Definitely."

Fang Zhao's eyes glanced at the tiger-eared monkey still hugging his thigh, and he asked the breeders. "Where are they raised?"

"There is a park district not too far from here built specifically for raising these sorts of lab animals. However, the park district needs refurbishing. Otherwise, these lab animals will keep escaping." The breeder's expression was pained. "Unfortunately, we just don't have the funds. Besides feeding the animals, every day we are busy chasing these escaped animals. Simple-minded ones are still easy to manage, but when it comes to the more intelligent creatures, we really have our work cut out for us."

These two breeders felt that it was only because of their temperaments that they been selected to tend to these animals. If they had been anybody less patient, they would surely have found excuses to secretly kill off these animals that loved to "prison break."

Fang Zhao continued to question them. "Have experiments for them been concluded?"

"For the majority of them, yes. In the past, we captured a few of this planet's wild animals and brought them to the labs to study. When the soldiers from the base might be scratched or bitten and contract viruses, there is a need to use these methods to find a cure. Thus, animal testing on these creatures was necessary."

The breeder continued explaining, "Now, those animals in the park district have already gone through experiments and tests and basically would not pose any danger to humans. They also do not carry any untreatable viruses. However, it is best not to consume them. Of course, if you really do want to eat them, it is not entire impossible,

but they might be hazardous. After all, they grew up in the laboratory. The food they consumed when young was all experimental foodstuffs. Now that the experiments are finished, they have switched over to their current food, but their bodies might have traces of medical drugs. If you really want to eat one, perhaps it is better to capture some wild ones. However, after capturing them, it is best to bring them to relevant parties for some testing first. You people are not from Wai base and have not had many vaccines administered, so there might be some risks if you eat without supervision."

Possibly from hearing the breeders talking about eating them, that tiger-eared monkey started screeching again.

However, this time, Woo Tianhao did not grumble about the ear-splitting screeches from the tiger-eared monkey. It was as if he completely paid no attention to the shrieks, simply continuing to stare at the map in his hands, his brows scrunched up.

"Fang Zhao, I suddenly have an idea," Woo Tianhao said.

"Let's hear it."

"I feel that our stakes aren't high enough. Since this chance is so hard to come by, how about we find a few more people and collaborate to make the territory even bigger. Just like how you mentioned the special architecture of different eras and different continents, if everyone contributes a little, wouldn't we be able to build it up? If we want to take a gamble, why not raise the stakes!"

The breeders and soldiers of Wai base could not understand Woo Tianhao's reasoning. You can jump straight into a hole alone, why do you have to drag more people with you?

However, Fang Zhao could immediately understand what Woo Tianhao meant. Laughing, he said, "In the Old Era, some film companies and movie-making firms created large-scale indoor and outdoor sets that were comprehensive. To achieve the most benefits, certain places also incorporated sightseeing tours besides just using them for filming. A place where art and commerce harmonize perfectly: a film studio complex!"

"That's right!"

Full of fiery passion and complex thoughts, Woo Tianhao stared at the map. At the start, he had not had such big plans. All he had wanted was to purchase some land to

build a dojo to fulfill his dream of many years. But after listening to Fang Zhao talk about all that, he changed his mind. Since he was prepared to rope in more people for an investment, why not have bigger plans! With this, he had the confidence to pull in a few more people!

They would bring to life historic sites and cultures that had perished during the Period of Destruction, and not just in virtual reality. Not just table-top models but actual life-size architecture that could be felt and touched would, after thousands of years, reappear at a place outside their home planet!

That... would be a feast for the senses!

Chapter 233

Cultural Film Base

Woo Tianhao wanted to raise the stakes. After analyzing, Fang Zhao felt that it was feasible. Here they could build something just like the celebrated film complexes of the Old Era. Furthermore, with current technology, construction would not be troublesome at all. All they needed to do was to put in effort in the planning phase.

Historic places and sites across all continents had been destroyed during the Period of Destruction. Due to the innovation of technology in the New Era, people did not wish to spend money rebuilding those types of structures. Even if they had been built, in the 500 years that had followed, many had been torn down to make way for housing buildings due to the exploding population.

In the movie and television industry, all that was required to churn out a film was film, a room in a high-rise building, and a special effects team. Regardless of whether it was historical, modern, fantasy, or sci-fi, everything could be settled with special effects.

But for film projects with high standards and requirements, real sets were still favored. Zaro's company borrowing equipment and manpower from the military was one such example.

However, as there were no historical sites preserved, there were very few historical films. In the industry, the historic genre was the least common, and even those that were done with special effects had to reference films preserved from the Old Era.

Relying on just Fang Zhao and Woo Tianhao to build up a film studio complex in a short time was an arduous task. Not just due to construction—publicity and popularity were also two other important matters.

What was most important was to rope in more people.

"Fang Zhao, on your side, who can you rope in?" Woo Tianhao asked. After musing, he added, "You definitely have to rope in Zaro."

"I have already left Zaro a message. As for how many I can pull in, I can only try. After

all, in the film and television circles, my connections are limited," Fang Zhao replied.

Woo Tianhao remembered that Fang Zhao was not an actor, so he could not pin too much hope on Fang Zhao.

"Can you still remain here for a few more days?" Woo Tianhao asked.

"Two to three days." As he was still undergoing military service, there was no way that Fang Zhao could have an extended stay here.

"You could talk to Huo Yi? He would surely let you stay for some time."

Fang Zhao shook his head. "After matters here are settled, when I have returned to planet Baiji to continue with my military service, I will continue to pay attention to things here in my spare time."

"All right, let's do our utmost and handle things separately." Woo Tianhao did not have much hope for Fang Zhao pulling in many people. As long as Fang Zhao could rope in Zaro, that would be enough. Woo Tianhao would rope in the others!

As it was getting late, everyone packed up their things and prepared to return. The tiger-eared monkey was also returned to the park district by the breeder.

After the party returned back to base, Fang Zhao and Woo Tianhao went to look for Huo Yi.

"Film studio complex?!"

When Huo Yi heard this news, he was startled and nearly dropped his canteen before shooting up from his chair.

He had only thought that Fang Zhao and Woo Tianhao wanted to purchase a plot of land and build a manor to have some fun. Never had he expected that they would make such a big play. However... he liked it!

Fang Zhao briefly shared the outlines of their plan. "If development goes smoothly, in the future, we can submit an application for a cultural film base or something similar."

"Cul-cultural film..... base?!"

Calling it a "cultural film base" succeeded in exciting Huo Yi. Having had no expectations, this sudden surprise jolted Huo Yi and made him feel giddy with excitement.

If this "cultural film base" was reported to the higher-ups and approved, did that mean that there would be monetary support? Or perhaps other political benefits?

The answer was definitely yes.

However, Huo Yi calmed down very quickly. He was still the commanding officer of a base and would not lose rationality over Fang Zhao's words. Sitting down again, he studied Fang Zhao and Woo Tianhao with a deep gaze. There was no longer any trace of excitement on his face. Instead, he had a serious expression. "You wish to construct a cultural film base with just the two of you?"

"There are others too," Woo Tianhao replied.

There was a little flash in Huo Yi's eyes as he stifled the excitement in his heart. "Who else?"

"It has not been confirmed yet. We are still contacting people."

A smile broke out on Huo Yi's face. He understood the two's intentions. "So your purpose for finding me is to request extended free communications for you two?"

"That's right. Of course, we still have to discuss the price of land," Woo Tianhao responded.

This time, Huo Yi was more expressive, waving his arms as he exclaimed, "The more land you want, the better the deal I will give you! It's up to you guys how much land you want."

Huo Yi did not have the final say. If the base was to sell a large plot of land, it still had to be reported to the top. But when it came to the cost, Huo Yi could influence the pricing to some extent.

After Fang Zhao and Woo Tianhao left, Huo Yi transferred over the selected land on the map and opened the file. His eyes were shining as he stared at the 3D view. That area was flat ground surrounded by a ring of mountains, and it seemed like the hull of a very large ship.

Whether this "large ship" could assume the mantle of a cultural film base and actually set sail, this depended on whether Fang Zhao and Woo Tianhao could rope in enough investors!

——

Planet Baiji.

Recently, Zaro had been feeling very pleased. He had gotten addicted to live broadcasting. Every day, he exceeded the allocated live broadcast duration.

Kevin Lin had spoken about this to him before. Exceeding by a little bit was fine, as an expense report could be submitted, but exceeding that much every day was not right. If it was exceeded by too much, the column would not pay for the communications expenses.

But who was Zaro? He only wished to enjoy himself to his heart's content. So what if he had to pay for the costs of exceeding the allocated time. So be it. Does your daddy care about these little communications expenses? I'll pay for it myself!

Zaro's agent: D*mn, the money hasn't come in yet and there is still an overdraft.

Actually, Kevin Lin was not particularly bothered by the added expenses of exceeding the allocated time. He also knew that Zaro would not haggle over this. What he was worried about was Zaro's live broadcasts.

Recently, channel S5's comments section had become a little darker.

When Zaro had taken over the live broadcasts, viewership had increased, but the majority had just been here to join in on the action. Kevin Lin was worried that channel S5's older audiences would stop watching. Kevin Lin's worries were spot on. Indeed, a number of original viewers canceled their viewership, and others lambasted the channel.

Kevin Lin was really worried, and he discussed with his superiors about suitable countermeasures they could take. Zaro was a person that easily provoked others. Could they think of any ideas to help change the situation? However, people from the column did not bother about this. Provoking viewers was not a big deal—all that mattered was revenue.

With the increase in viewership of channel S5, naturally, there was more revenue from internet traffic and advertisements. It was only natural that the column would not switch Zaro out.

Kevin Lin was at a loss. He even sent a message to Fang Zhao saying that Fang Zhao had not been able to foresee that Zaro could not retain the channel's original audience. However, in the few days that followed, Kevin Lin received a face smacking.

Some audiences that had originally canceled their viewership had returned!

Zaro had one other nickname—netizens had given him the name "Deceptive Little Expert."

Because when Zaro was broadcasting live, many times, he roasted his father's tyrannical actions back when Zaro had still been undergoing his military service.

"No food for you if you don't complete your tasks. You get a beating if you make any mistakes. My body was beaten by such a thick rod, and I was beaten till my mother could not even recognize me. It ached so badly that I was unable to sleep at night. In the middle of the night, I was still called out to assemble. It was totally brutal!"

Zaro's dad's reputation for being ruthless to his own son quickly spread.

It was rumored that Zaro's dad was so teeming with rage that he wanted to personally come to planet Baiji and beat someone up.

Other than this, Zaro revealed some political information that had not been released. Online audiences realized that the roasting of his own dad was not a big deal compared to the information he leaked.

No one could find out which family member Zaro had gotten this information from, but if he spoke about it, the reliability of the information was high. Although Zaro loved to show off, he wouldn't go so far as to make up stories.

Yesterday, Zaro's loose lips had revealed that some people from certain financial firms would be out of luck. This morning, there had been an announcement that the bosses of certain financial institutions had been arrested.

It was said that Leizhou authorities had not meant to investigate so quickly, but Zaro had given it away too early, so action had been taken immediately. It was also rumored

that, because of this incident, the Renault family and people close to Zaro had been called in for questioning and Leizhou's governor had thrown a fit.

Thus, many entertainment media outlets reported Zaro's matter—"Shocking! Leizhou's Famous Youth Reveals Fraudulent Activity during Live Broadcast."

Netizens watched the broadcasts with glee. Now, not only could they watch planet Baiji's developments, there was also humor. Perhaps they might even catch Zaro letting slip some political news that had not yet been announced.

Many viewers left a note on their own notification settings for channel S5 so that the notification that sounded every time live broadcasts were about to start was changed to: "The deceptive little expert that you follow is about to come online."

Fang Zhao also knew about all this, but he reckoned that reality was not quite how netizens described it. Even Woo Tianhao sneered at this when he found out.

Would the Renault family really let Zaro in on matters that were really supposed to be kept secret? Was the governor such a person? Did he not know what Zaro was like?

The entire household was putting on a play. They were just acting in tandem—and they were using Zaro's live broadcasts to go about it. It was just to ease the tension and let people have some mental preparation for any decrees that would be put into effect.

Even Zaro himself knew clearly which information he could announce to the public. If Zaro was really the sort that was unable to differentiate good from bad, there was no way he could have been showered with such favoritism by the Leizhou governor.

Of course, netizens did not know this. Even if there were people who analyzed and pointed it out, nobody really cared. Most people were just watching the live broadcasts for entertainment. Other than that, people did not really bother about the truth and had no intention of getting to the bottom of these matters.

The following day, Zaro was broadcasting in a wheat field.

This was an extended field on planet Baiji.

"Ahh, what fine weather. The air is crisp and refreshing. Today, I will be talking about steam buns. How are steam buns made? For that, we would have to begin with flour.

And how is flour made? We would have to start from wheat..."

Zaro spoke as though he was a person who had obtained exclusive cheat codes for a game.

In the New Era, there were very few people that made steam buns and other pastries in their own homes. There was very little consumption for these as well. Even if people ate steam buns, shopping online for quick-freeze or compressed food was very convenient and saved time and effort. Thus, when Zaro mentioned this topic, there were still a lot of people that were interested.

And many older audiences just loved watching Zaro's manner as he talked about such things with vigor and an incomparable swagger.

Zaro walked through the wheat field as he recounted the stories he had heard from other people, then gazed at the expansive field full of wheat in front of him and lamented, "Planet Baiji's wheat field is really big, even bigger than the largest wheat field I ever saw in Muzhou! We also have wheat fields in Leizhou, close to the Scarlet Crescent port. However, soon, the Scarlet port will have constru... Oh, I can't talk about this. Let's go back to talking about how to make steam buns..."

Online audiences: No, don't! Finish what you wanted to say about construction at Scarlet Crescent Harbor! Don't you know that people that stop a story midway will be beaten?!

Zaro did not care how others judged him, nor did he care how audiences living near Scarlet Crescent Port would be scratching their cheeks in frustration. Immediately after the live broadcast ended, Zaro rushed to check the message Fang Zhao had sent him.

"Purchase land? Film studio complex? This sounds fun!"

Further viewing the comprehensive map of the area, Zaro's eyes glowed as he pondered a little. There, he could build anything he wanted to. That was totally a heaven for pretentious beings like himself!

The more he looked at it, the more he was tempted. Zaro pointed at a few of the tallest mountains in the map. "This one, this one, this one, and the land here, I will take it all!"

Zaro's agent: "... Are you an idiot?"

Chapter 234

Grabbing Land

Zaro's agent had a stiff expression on his face, and he gave Zaro a cruel jab as Zaro's mind was wandering on the limitless possibilities. "Senior Master, we don't have any more money."

Zaro stared at him. "Impossible!"

"We used up most of our funds during the auction and to obtain land here," Zaro's agent patiently explained.

Zaro wore an expression of shock. "We really don't have money?"

Zaro's agent looked him in the eye and said seriously, "This time it is real." He was not lying to Zaro. They really did not have enough funds to purchase land, let alone the areas that Zaro wanted on the map. It was an impossible dream! Even if they had the money, he would advise Zaro to give up on this idea. The risk of investing in planet Wai was too great.

Zaro checked his own bank accounts in disbelief. After coming to terms with the cruel blow reality had struck him with, he sat down in a chair in a daze.

How could the great Zaro from Leizhou actually be in such a predicament where he lacked funds!

If he could not happily pretend all he wanted to, he might as well return home and plant watermelons!

Zaro mused for a bit. He was unwilling to give up this dream of obtaining land on planet Wai. In his heart, he thought of different ways to obtain money.

Noticing Zaro's eyeballs swiveling around in their sockets, Zaro's agent felt a lump in his heart. Having been by Zaro's side for so long, he could tell straightaway what this b*stard was trying to pull! For the sake of preventing Zaro from making an even more foolish decision, his agent decided to help out. Otherwise, this demented numbskull

might try to sell off the land on planet Baiji they had worked so hard to obtain from Fan Lin.

Zaro's agent spoke. "Senior Master, if you urgently need money, we can chase your debtors."

"Collect debts?" In Zaro's dictionary, the words "collect debts" did not exist. In his opinion, the affair of collecting debts was beneath him. Zaro was unwilling to do this. "How can I, the great Zaro of Leizhou, have the face to ask people to return those small amounts of money? That is too shameful."

Zaro might not bother about small matters such as debts, but his agent had recorded every single bit. Those "small amounts" were not really small. There were a few people in his records that had debts in the tens of millions!

Browsing through the agent's list of debtors, and seeing the total sum at the end of the list, Zaro was stunned once more. "That much?!"

He actually had not known he had loaned out that much money!

"Chase it! Chase every single one of them back!" Zaro clenched his teeth and turned to face his agent. "You go chase them!"

Zaro was still unable to bring himself so low as to personally do such a thing.

Zaro's agent was indifferent to it. He had long wanted to collect those debts. After all, their side was not the one in debt, so what was so shameful about asking for it back? Previously, he had been worried that Zaro would vehemently oppose it, but now that Zaro had encountered a situation where he himself lacked money, his agent had to settle it as soon as possible.

Zaro's agent was very satisfied with the decision Zaro had made. This time, he would allow Zaro to squander all the funds he reclaimed.

Zaro's agent pointed at the debtor that owed the most. "I can chase the others except the one from Lazhou. My status isn't sufficient enough, so it is best if Senior Master personally chases this debt."

—

Lakalinazhou.

An elegant-looking lass wearing a princess skirt was half-lying on the soft sofa. She had nearly dozed off when her bracelet, placed on the coffee table beside her, rang, breaking the peaceful silence in the room.

The lass opened her eyes, squinted at the name displayed on the bracelet, and knit her brows. She waved her pale slender fingers and her assistant hurriedly came forward and handed the bracelet to her.

Voice was selected instead of videoconference.

"Sha-ro 1?"

"Barbie!"

"We aren't that close. Please call me Barbara 2." Barbara felt like puking whenever she heard Zaro call her that.

"Return my money!" Over on the other end, Zaro simply did not care about anything else.

"Since when has this princess owed you any money?" Barbara retorted impatiently.

Although there was no longer any feudalism, with her identity and "Lakalina" family name, her status in Lazhou was similar to a princess. This was also what Barbara liked to call herself.

On the other end, after listening to what Barbara said, Zaro sucked in a deep breath of air and puffed it out. This told others how shocked he was.

Zaro raised his voice in disbelief. "You want to renege on your debt?! When we went to Muzhou to watch the competition, you saw a flying potato car and borrowed money from me to purchase it!"

"It's a flying pumpkin car!"

In their hearts, both Zaro and Barbara came to a certain evaluation of the other party: f*cking moronic!

Zaro had no way of understanding Barbara's weird aesthetic tastes, and Barbara looked down on Zaro's brain that could not differentiate between a potato and a pumpkin.

However, now that Zaro had mentioned it, Barbara recalled that she had borrowed 10 million from this moron to purchase a flying car. Back then, she had lost quite a lot of money betting on dogs, and following that, she had bought a few championship pedigree puppies. After that, she had seen a limited edition commemorative flying pumpkin car. At that time, several of the projects she'd had a hand in were not yet making profits, so she had been a little short. Back then, Zaro had been beside her, so she had borrowed the money from him. An IOU had not even been written, as the two had felt that this sort of thing was beneath their noble status. After returning, they had both forgotten about it.

"All right, I remember. It's 10 million, right? I will transfer it to you right away," Barbara replied impatiently.

"With interest, you have to return 20 million. That was what you said!" Zaro added.

"I did?" Barbara could not remember what she had said back then.

"Yes!" Zaro exclaimed confidently. When his agent had recorded down the debt, he had even left a note. This was definitely true.

Barbara tried to recall it—it seemed like that was how it had been.

"All right, so be it. Twenty million it is." Barbara would not argue over such a trivial matter. Projects she had invested in were making profits, and her treasury was abundant. She was prepared to let her assistant make the transfer when she paused.

Chasing her so anxiously over 20 million was not Zaro's usual idiotic style!

"What are you up to that requires this money so urgently?" Barbara asked.

Zaro was unwilling to share. "None of your business. Hurry up and return my money!"

"I will give you an extra one million if you tell me," Barbara said.

"Cough, do I look like I care about that small sum?"

"Five million."

"Land on planet Wai."

When the call ended, an elusive smile flash acrossed Barbara's face as she gazed at the mural on the wall in her room. The scene on the mural depicted an ancient castle from the Old Era. It was said that her family ancestors had once lived in that place.

Apparently, during the Old Era, Lakalinazhou had been densely covered with numerous castles, mystical castles that had had many years of history that were both romantic and frightening. Yet these castles had all been destroyed during the Period of Destruction.

Every member of the Lakalina family wished to have their own castle, but land was scarce and the family clan kept getting bigger, so a constructed castle could not just be for one person. If anyone wanted to occupy a castle alone, they could only look to foreign planets.

After managing to scrape through to invest in planet Baiji, the land Barbara had obtained was not a lot. The young generations had limited capabilities, and Barbara was not satisfied.

But now she had a new place to construct her castle.

On the other end, Zaro's agent remained expressionless after the call between the two spoiled youths. Only when he received a notification of funds received did he let out a smile.

After that, Zaro's manager continued to chase debts, and Zaro contacted Fang Zhao, asking the composer to reserve a mountain for him. He had wanted a large plot of land, but unfortunately, his reserves were a little tight and all the debts he had reclaimed could only purchase a mountain. Before Barbara made her move, Zaro would first take his pick.

Zaro also told Fang Zhao about Barbara.

Fang Zhao sent a message to Huo Yi regarding the mountain that Zaro had selected to make a reservation.

Huo Yi was also accommodating. When he heard that Zaro wanted to make a

reservation, he did not chase the funds. He immediately marked up that area.

"One more mountain sold." Huo Yi gazed happily at the 3D map on his table. He had already marked up the places that people had bought and areas that were pending. However, this area's land was too vast. Just the trio of Fang Zhao, Woo Tianhao, and Zaro would not be able to stomach it.

Just as he was worrying, Huo Yi received a long-distance call request originating from Lakalinazhou on Earth.

—

After Fang Zhao replied to Zaro's message, he received a new message from Duan Qianji. Fang Zhao had also left a message with Duan Qianji regarding this matter. After Duan Qianji had viewed the risk assessment reports done up by her subordinates, she had decided to agree to Fang Zhao's invitation and join in the investment for that area surrounded by mountains.

Duan Qianji wanted to imitate the large-scale period dramas of the Old Era. This genre had never really seen large-scale investments. Most period dramas were done by small companies and were cringy and full of mistakes. If there were no real sets, they would just have to create them so the images filmed had that thick and authentic historical flavor to them. When the period drama was completed, the constructed sets would still remain there and could be always used for other period dramas. In the long run, it would not be a loss.

"When the time comes, I will send someone to keep an eye on the development on planet Wai. You don't have to worry about a thing; just concentrate on your military service," Duan Qianji told Fang Zhao.

After all, during military service, attention would be on Fang Zhao. Duan Qianji was doing it for Fang Zhao's sake

—

At Woo Tianhao's end, he was persuading an uncle to join in and purchase a mountain on planet Wai.

"Have you seen the video I sent? Really, although that mountain isn't really that high, its landscape is especially 'celestial,' and it is suitable for filming that awesome

mystical sword fighting serial you talked about!"

On the other side, Woo Tianhao's uncle, who owned an entertainment company, was silent for a few seconds, possibly wondering when he and Woo Tianhao were ever that close.

"We can build however we like?"

"As long as it has a rich historical feel to it. There is no problem if we agree to work together to develop the film studio complex. These are good lands and the prices are preferential. First come first serve," Woo Tianhao said.

This uncle of Woo Tianhao had unintentionally read a book that had been discovered by archaeologists. At that time, he had become captivated by novels of the Old Era. After he had built up his own business, it had been his dream to film a series with magic and celestial beings using real sets and without using too many special effects. However, the mountainous regions back on their home planet were not "celestial" enough, and there were limited scenic areas. But now, in the video Woo Tianhao had sent over, there were a few mountains wrapped by clouds and mist that gave off that sort of "celestial" vibe.

Woo Tianhao continued persuading his uncle. "This is totally undeveloped land, and there are not a lot of restrictions. If you purchase a mountain and construct those scenes and landscapes, filming a long-running serial is not a problem. You can even enjoy yourself over there. How good is that!"

Woo Tianhao's uncle pondered for a bit. That was the good point about places far back on the development sequence. There were not many restrictions and the land was cheap. Picking out a suitable area and signing a 100- or 200-year lease meant he would be able to build anything that his heart desired. How great was that!

"All right. Mark out that mountain. I want it!"

Chapter 235

Hurry Up and Return

Woo Tianhao spent quite some time talking to his uncle. Not only did his uncle have an eye on the few mountains in the video, his uncle was also eyeing the mountain that Woo Tianhao had selected for himself. It took a while for Woo Tianhao to explain to his uncle that everyone would have their own territory. After ending the call, Woo Tianhao asked whether there had been any developments with Fang Zhao. He found out that Fang Zhao had not yet come out after returning to his room. Upon learning of this, he headed straight to Huo Yi's office.

He wanted to know whether Fang Zhao had managed to rope in Zaro within this short time.

"Zaro?" Huo Yi opened up the 3D map and pointed to a mountain that had been marked. "This mountain has been reserved for him."

When Tianhao stared at the map in front of him, his eyeballs nearly popped out of their sockets.

All he saw were shiny golden marks on the map. These marks meant that the areas had already been booked.

Woo Tianhao could not believe his eyes. "I was just away for two hours and all these... have been purchased?"

There were hints of joy in Huo Yi's eyes, but he was still rather calm. "Yes. The areas with golden markings have all been reserved."

Woo Tianhao swallowed his saliva. He somewhat rejoiced in his heart. Luckily, he had staked a claim on a few mountains. Otherwise, they might all have been snapped up. Weren't these people's actions a little too quick?

"Woo Tianhao was curious. Who bought all these?" Zaro alone couldn't have gotten them all himself. The markings on the map had initials representing their buyers, but Woo Tianhao could not guess who they were just from the initials alone.

Huo Yi pointed at an area encircled by mountains. "This area was purchased jointly by Fang Zhao and people from Yanzhou's Silver Wing. This, this, and this were reserved by people from Lakalinazhou. This side..."

Huo Yi told Woo Tianhao about the people who had bought these places.

Woo Tian had a bewildered expression. "Why are they involved? How did these people set their eyes on this area?"

"That..." Huo Yi shook his head. "I am not too sure." He had no idea why these people had used various means and contacts to get in touch with him and inquire about the matter of the cultural film base. He wasn't sure how they had gotten the news in the first place.

Huo Yi and Woo Tianhao could not understand it. Even Fang Zhao had not expected the situation to turn out this way.

Actually, when Zaro had been chasing Barbara's debt, it had caught Barbara's attention. However Barbara had been unwilling to take the risk alone, so she had gone looking for partners to collaborate with and had piqued the interest of a few others from the Lakalina family. A few had come together and decided to buy! They had reserved the place first and, following that, organized a survey team to head over to planet Wai to check things out. The deposit had already been paid, and if the preliminary surveys gave the go-ahead, the remaining funds would follow after shortly.

Over at Silver Wing's side, Duan Qianji had searched for a few collaborators. Just looking at the amount Silver Wing had claimed, it was clear that Silver Wing had prepared a large sum. This was also something that delighted Huo Yi to no end.

Who knew whether there would be even more people coming in.

Woo Tianhao eyed the map for a while longer before leaving.

The moment Woo Tianhao left, Huo Yi immediately became excited. A while back, when he had received news of Lazhou and Yanzhou investors forming groups to head over, warm tears of joy had welled up in his eyes when Woo Tianhao had come over. For the sake of protecting his image, Huo Yi had restrained his emotions and maintained the dignified and imposing manner of a base commander. Now that Woo Tianhao had left, he could finally let his emotions run wild.

Planet Wai would also have inspection teams visiting!

Huo Yi brought up the system's name list once again and ran through it from the top, not missing out on a single one. It was as if he was appreciating a treasured heirloom that had been passed down from generation to generation.

And on the other side, Woo Tianhao was trying to control his annoyance as he left Huo Yi's office.

Huo Yi had not said why these people had taken part in this campaign to purchase land, but from what Woo Tianhao had seen, Fang Zhao had surely done something.

Just from Yanzhou, besides Silver Wing Media, there were another two large Yanzhou corporations: a hotel chain and another high-risk investment organization. One look and he could tell these companies were not in it for fun and giggles.

There was also the inspection team from Lazhou. It would have been fine if Barbara alone had gone crazy, but they had actually formed an inspection team and reserved a number of mountains. Furthermore, given the Lakalina's obsession with ancient castles, Woo Tianhao was certain they were all serious about it.

Just from this, the number of people Fang Zhao had roped in was greater than his number! Woo Tianhao had only managed to pull one uncle on board and nobody else. Just by comparing this, it seemed like Fang Zhao had greater influence.

Woo Tianhao was unwilling to concede.

Thus, when he returned, Woo Tianhao contacted his close childhood friend.

After a few rings, the call was accepted.

"About the matter I spoke of previously—"

Before Woo Tianhao could finish, the other party began bawling. "Brother Hao, I really do not have money to invest. I just invested in a film a while back and my finances are tight right now."

"Your brother just has this to say: if you don't hop on soon, it will be too late. The land will probably all get snapped up soon."

The other party did not seem to care. "I really don't have any cash on hand."

Woo Tianhao paused for a while. Instead of the rage the other party had expected, Woo Tianhao spoke rather calmly. "Sure. After all, Zaro has already staked a claim on some land here, Lazhou's Barbara is cooperating with her family members to send an inspection team over, Yanzhou have already circled out the largest plot of land, and me and my uncle have also reserved areas here. It's fine if you have no interest."

There was silence on the other end.

If it was only Woo Tianhao, Zaro, and those few people, he would not have changed his mind, but to think that Yanzhou's famous Silver Wing Media, Woo Tianhao's uncle that ran an entertainment company, and other reputable companies from various continents had all joined in? These firms surely were not just following a bunch of rich and spoiled kids to have fun. Commercial companies were all rushing in for their own interests.

These people had all gotten involved and, as of now, no information had been revealed. This could only mean one thing—these people were plotting something big! They were afraid of others joining in and sharing the pie!

This childhood friend of Woo Tianhao's was using his mind and trying to verify the authenticity and benefits to be gained here.

Woo Tianhao spoke as if he was going to terminate the call. "I won't bother you if you are busy. I'll inform others."

"Brother Hao—" It was half a shout. "I haven't finished talking yet. Although I don't have cash on hand, as a brother, I have decided to borrow money to support your project!" Now that Woo Tianhao had already informed him, passing up on this chance was impossible!

"Don't force yourself," Woo Tianhao advised.

"Not at all! I'm totally supportive!"

"So that's it. Long distance communication fees are too expensive. I'll cut the chatter here."

"I'll pay. I'll pay! I will pay for the communications expenses! Brother Hao, on account

of us having grown up together, bring me along to dream and soar!!"

"What can you build if you come over? There are restrictions on construction styles here. It has to fit in with the film studio complex's development. The constructs ought to have historical or cultural implications."

"Mountain stronghold! I want to build the sort of mountain stronghold from ancient times! That should have sufficient historical and cultural implications, right? You know, right? When we were in primary school and the teacher asked us to write about our dreams, I wrote that I wanted to be a bandit chief."

"We don't accept thieves and plunderers here."

"Bah! I'm a law abiding citizen! It's just nothing more than a fancy of mine. Do you have a map? I want to pick a place."

Woo Tianhao sent a copy of the map over immediately.

"The f*ck, are the ones with golden markings already reserved? How do I choose when all the good places have already been taken?"

Woo Tianhao spoke unhurriedly. "That is why I said that if you don't hop on soon, it will be too late. Luckily I reserved a few mountains."

"Brother Hao—"

After the two finished discussing, Woo Tianhao's childhood friend decided to organize his own inspection team and head to planet Wai for a survey. If it was really suitable for large-scale investments, then he would purchase the plots of land.

On planet Wai, Woo Tianhao grinned after the call ended. "Pulled in yet another one."

Looking through his contact list, Woo Tianhao recommended places to his friends and acquaintances in succession.

And as Woo Tianhao was working hard to rope others in, Fang Zhao was no longer contacting anybody else. Instead, he was doing some research and drafting up construction plans.

Silver Wing's professional team would be arriving on the next transport ship to planet

Wai, and according to Huo Yi, there would be a few other affluent parties on board too.

Huo Yi held this project in high regard and would surely supervise it carefully. Fang Zhao was not worried about this. Perhaps by the next time he came to planet Wai, this land might already look totally different.

The next morning, Fang Zhao signed a contract with Huo Yi first.

"Signing a lease for 200 years straight?" Huo Yi asked.

According to alliance regulations, these sorts of leases could only be signed for a maximum of 200 years. After exceeding 200 years, the purchasing party would still have priority usage rights but would need to replenish the funds.

For many people, 200 years was more than their lifespan. Therefore, most people would only sign 100- or 150-year leases. When Huo Yi heard that Fang Zhao wanted to sign for 200 years, he did a double take.

Fang Zhao nodded. "Mmhm, 200 years."

After signing the contract, Huo Yi carefully put away the electronic file and hard copy.

"Anyway, the spacecraft is ready. It will fetch you for your next destination tomorrow afternoon," Huo Yi told him.

Fang Zhao returned to pack up his belongings after he was informed. As he was tidying up, he received a call from Zaro on planet Baiji.

The moment the call connected, Zaro impatiently asked, "Fang Zhao, when will you be coming back?"

"Not so soon."

"You gotta hurry up! I want to head to planet Wai and inspect my territory!" Zaro exclaimed. Having already had his fun with live broadcasting, Zaro's attention had switched to something else, and he could not wait to go over and see the plots of land he had claimed. The plans were currently being drawn up by his people, and once completed, construction could start.

Minutes after ending the call with Zaro, Fang Zhao informed Kevin Lin, and he then

received a video call from Kevin Lin.

"Fang Zhao, when are you coming back?" Kevin Lin grumbled. He had only known that Fang Zhao was heading to planet Wai after Fang Zhao had left Baiji, and he could guess the reason Fang Zhao had headed there.

This period had been too tiring, and he was always on the edge. Although channel S5's viewership numbers had increased by a lot, the amount of complaints had increased too. It was frustrating.

Back before Fang Zhao had been dispatched on this assignment, he had to listen to Kevin Lin's views and suggestions. But Zaro? One sentence from Kevin Lin would receive 10 sentences of objections and rebuttals, and none were repeated!

"Hurry up and complete your assignment and rush back home. If you don't come back soon, that 'rabbit' might die from Zaro's actions."

"What happened?" Fang Zhao asked.

"Zaro said he wanted to observe it up close and got his bodyguard to fish that 'rabbit' up. His bodyguard reached his hand into the water tank and got stung. Two seconds later, he was lying unconscious on the floor and foaming at the mouth. Only after Fan Lin administered the antidote did he recover. Zaro said that he wanted to cook it but Fan Lin did not allow that. I remember you saying that you want to buy it from Fan Lin. Hey, in short, just hurry up and return. If you don't return soon, nobody can guarantee the safety of your 'rabbit'."

Chapter 236

Friggin' Spicy

While those three bodyguards weren't around, Woo Tianhao wanted to finally test Fang Zhao's fighting skills before Fang Zhao left planet Wai. Who knew when his next chance would come once Fang Zhao left Wai.

Yet reality was a crude awakening for him.

The first time Woo Tianhao tried to ambush Fang Zhao, the latter was walking back to his dorm from the base cafeteria. He was discovered way before he even came close to his mark. There was no ambush to speak of because he was busted.

Failed attempt.

On his second try, Woo Tianhao decided to switch tactics. He would confront Fang Zhao directly.

The most famous skill of the Woo family from Tongzhou was their ability to shatter rocks with their bare hands. A senior member of the Woo family had demonstrated the method on a TV show several decades ago. Decades later, the rock-shattering chop was still what folks remembered the most when the Woo family was mentioned.

Woo Tianhao had yet to achieve that level of skill. He still had to wear gloves when chopping rocks. It might take him another few dozen years before he could use his bare hands, but his current skill level was enough to handle the professional soldiers stationed on planet Wai, so Woo Tianhao was still quite confident.

This time, he waited by Fang Zhao's dorm room. When Fang Zhao emerged, Woo Tianhao darted forward and attacked. There was no finesse to speak of. All he did was throw a punch.

Fang Zhao didn't duck. All he did was raise his arm, spread his fingers, and block Woo Tianhao's punch.

It was as if Woo Tianhao's fist had met a metal plate. All the momentum he had revved

up instantly vanished. He couldn't gain so much as an inch. The look on Woo Tianhao's face was one of utter astonishment. There was no way he could follow up.

Another failed attempt.

The third time, Woo Tianhao learned his lesson from the two previous failed attempts. He realized that he lacked power. Since he wasn't as powerful as Fang Zhao, he would strike strategically.

An ambush and a strategic blow.

So Woo Tianhao attacked while Fang Zhao was leaving his room with his suitcase. But before Woo Tianhao could celebrate his successful ambush, he found a gun barrel pressed against his head.

F*ck.

This dealt the biggest blow to Woo Tianhao. If they had been fighting for real, his first two attempts hadn't been lethal mistakes, but the third try definitely would have cost him his life.

Woo Tianhao was still recovering from his failed attempts when Fang Zhao left Wai. When he finally came to his senses, Woo Tianhao realized that he hadn't found out jack about Fang Zhao's fighting skills. All he knew was that Fang Zhao's hearing and reflexes were decent and that he was quite powerful. As for his actual fighting skills, Woo Tianhao was clueless.

Fang Zhao simply laughed off Woo Tianhao's attacks.

Fang Zhao was used to fighting to kill, and Woo Tianhao was someone who went all out quickly, so Fang Zhao had been worried that he would lose control and do permanent damage to his opponent. That would come across as an elder bullying a child, in which case Fang Zhao would be too embarrassed to pay his respects to Woo Tianhao's ancestor at the martyrs' cemetery come Memorial Day. So, ultimately, Fang Zhao had chosen a simple, straightforward block. He'd had no intention of fighting Woo Tianhao.

Not that Fang Zhao was arrogant, but if he were to evaluate Woo Tianhao based on the footage of him sparring with the soldiers aired on S4, Fang Zhao would say Woo Tianhao was just a kid.

If Woo Tianhao were privy to Fang Zhao's appraisal, he would probably be spitting blood.

Planet Wai was only the first stop in Fang Zhao's mission.

Out of the five planets included in Project Starlight, Fang Zhao had three more to visit after hitting Baiji and Wai. Protocol dictated that Fang Zhao's travel expenses were covered by the military bases on the five planets, given that he was an invited guest, yet the Wai base paid for Fang Zhao's trip from Wai to his next destination. Huo Yi was quick to pick up the tab. After all, Wai was slated for a new filmed entertainment culture complex thanks to Fang Zhao. The economic impact would be significant, so Huo Yi didn't have to pinch pennies now.

But Huo Yi hadn't told a soul about the planned filmed entertainment culture complex. All he said was that Fang Zhao hadn't detected any grade A power ore on Wai.

The base leadership on the remaining three planets prepared themselves for possible disappointment when they found out that a higher-grade power ore had eluded Wai.

Fang Zhao also didn't detect any grade A energy ore on the next planet. The mood was grim. He was given the red-carpet treatment when he arrived, but his farewell was perfunctory.

Fang Zhao wasn't upset. This was what he had expected. Huo Yi wouldn't have been so generous if not for the planned filmed entertainment culture complex on Wai.

Fang Zhao also came up empty-handed on the next planet. As he was preparing to head to the final planet, he got word his visit had been scrapped.

The base leadership on the final planet had likely come to terms with reality after Fang Zhao's first three outings had yielded nothing. They didn't want to burn the money—space travel was expensive, a major drain on their power ore—so when the senior officials on the final planet saw that their counterparts on three other planets had splurged all that cash for nothing, they told Fang Zhao to stay put.

Fang Zhao didn't mind his trip being cut short. He headed back to Baiji to resume his military service.

During his downtime on the tour of planets, Fang Zhao had done quite a bit of research on ancient architecture. He had also come across quite a few ancient instruments

while he was at it. Every time he spotted one, he would imagine its sound in his head. Melodies had flowed from these old instruments as songs of the past were unearthed from his memory. This was a major bonus for Fang Zhao as well.

When Fang Zhao returned to Baiji, Shanta, now the commander of the upgraded military district, summoned him for a briefing on his mission. Naturally, he had already learned through his own connections that no new power ore had been discovered on the other planets included in Project Starlight, which pleased him mightily.

Even though the outcome was what he had expected, confirmation from Fang Zhao's tour meant Shanta could now brag away without holding back. Baiji had a monopoly!

Such great luck that was. Shanta thought to himself that he was no ordinary Joe—he was born to accomplish great things.

Even though Shanta was secretly gloating, he still paid lip service by congratulating Fang Zhao on a job well done.

"It must have been an exhausting journey. I will log your contribution in your official records. There's still quite a bit of time left in your service period. Depending on how many merits you accumulate, you might get another promotion. Oh, the two elders from your family have already settled down in the quarters for military family members. You should visit them soon."

By the time Great-Grandmother Fang and Great-Grandfather Fang had arrived on Baiji, Fang Zhao had already set off for Wai, so they had missed each other, but Fang Zhao had gotten in touch with the two elders when he was on Wai. He had learned that they liked their accommodations on Baiji. They had no plans to move to Baiji permanently, but they could still get a feel for living on a foreign planet.

The two elders told Fang Zhao that they had run into a few former comrades in the housing complex for family members. A bunch of old folks living in the compound had been shooting the breeze one day and realized that all of them had served on the exploratory vessel Sirius, which had instantly drawn them closer.

After confirming he was allowed to take pictures on Baiji and post them, Great-Grandfather Fang had splurged on the exorbitant broadband fees so he could post pictures on his social media account. His friends back at the retirement home on Earth

were awfully jealous.

The folks at the retirement home for former officials in Yanbei weren't the only ones filled with envy.

Immigration was a hot topic. Thus far, the foreign planets ranked high in the development order and listed as possible immigration destinations weren't completely open to the public. The two highest-ranked planets had only welcomed visitors to their tourist spots.

Now Baiji had launched a major marketing campaign promoting itself as an immigration hotspot. Even though Baiji had been colonized after the first two planets listed as likely recipients of Earth immigrants, Shanta wanted to play catch up. The two planets weren't completely open to immigrants yet. Who knows—maybe Baiji could beat them to the punch.

The more publicity, the more investment and donations and the quicker the pace of development.

While Shanta was fantasizing about surpassing the two rival planets, Fang Zhao was en route to the residential compound for military family members. Great-Grandmother Fang and Great-Grandfather Fang had already gotten word and were waiting at the main entrance.

Even though Fang Zhao had a low military rank, everyone living in the military family compound knew that he was the one who had discovered the grade A power ore and reversed Baiji's fortunes. He had also helped fend off the terrorist attack, and he was only performing his military service on Baiji and was scheduled to leave next year, so he posed no threat. He wasn't a potential rival, so residents of the compound were friendly toward him.

During the two Fang elders' stay in the compound, their neighbors treated them with the utmost kindness and courtesy. That was also why the couple was in a such a good mood.

Great-Grandmother Fang was beaming as she tugged her great-grandson in her direction. "Quick, go on in. There's a whole table of yummy dishes waiting for you."

Great-Grandfather Fang followed, flashing a broad smile with his hands folded behind his back.

The Fangs ran into a crying child being comforted by his parents.

"That kid hasn't adjusted to life on Baiji yet," Great-Grandfather Fang mumbled.

It was unrealistic to expect the new immigrants to acclimatize in a short period of time. They harbored aspirations for their new life, and there were psychological and physical adjustments to make. They also missed life on Earth, but this was their new home. They had to regroup sooner or later.

Moving to a foreign planet brought mixed feelings. Even though the two Fang elders were vacationing on Baiji, even they got a sense of the conflicted emotions involved, let alone a vulnerable young child.

"When the communications infrastructure is better, it'll be easier to stay in touch with Earth. Kids will adjust more quickly as a result," Great-Grandmother Fang said.

The internet brought people closer together. Folks could only hope that the cap on data traffic to and from Baiji would be removed soon. Data transmissions were still restricted, and not everyone could afford the expensive broadband charges. Short calls were still affordable, but long conversations were simply too costly.

After having dinner with the two Fang elders in the military family compound, Fang Zhao got a message from Kevin Lin demanding his quick return to the outpost.

After bidding farewell to his great-grandparents, Fang Zhao boarded a flying transport bound for Outpost 23. He hadn't been away from Baiji for long, but the Baiji skyline was changing rapidly, especially in the core area that included the base and various outposts. New buildings and highways were popping up by the minute.

The space port near Baiji was still under construction. When it was completed, there would be even more flying transport traffic, a stark contrast to the empty skies on planet Wai.

Fang Zhao could hear Kevin Lin yelling the moment he set foot in the outpost.

"Fang Zhao, you're finally back!" Kevin Lin darted toward him. "Check out your 'rabbit' quickly. It's been convulsing all morning."

"What happened?" Fang Zhao asked as he hurried into the outpost.

"That idiot Zaro tossed a huge red pepper into its tank this morning when no one was looking, the kind being grown in the plots by the main base, the really spicy ones. The 'rabbit' gobbled it down, and there you have it," Kevin Lin said while pointing to the fish tank.

Inside the fish tank, the 'rabbit,' which used to be white, had turned red. Outside of meals, the 'rabbit' was typically idle. Now it was frantically racing around in the tank, banging up against the glass walls of the tank to create a pounding noise.

"But Fan Lin said it's still in decent health, just... a bit hyper." Kevin Lin thought of something and added with a laugh, "It's probably the red pepper. Isn't there that term from the Old Era, 'friggin' spicy'?"

Fang Zhao: "...That's actually the name of a dish."

Chapter 237

The Most Expensive Pet

There were two reasons why Kevin Lin kept pining for Fang Zhao's return. Besides the channel receiving lots of complains because of Zaro, ever since Zaro had substituted for Fang Zhao on channel S5's live broadcast, Kevin Lin's presence had been dropping! He could tell by observing the comments left on his own social platforms; all attention was on Zaro instead.

This was the same as encountering a tyrannical mic hog at a karaoke bar. What could he do?

He simply could not even snatch an opportunity to make an appearance on the live broadcasts.

Even Zaro's agent had more screen time than Kevin Lin!

This was why Kevin Lin was anxious. Even if it brought S5 a lot more viewership, even if the column supported Zaro continuing to broadcast live, Kevin Lin was unwilling.

How great had it been when Fang Zhao had been here. Fang Zhao had not minded too much about screen time, so Kevin Lin had been able to show his face from time to time. But ever since Zaro had come, Kevin Lin had simply no long had any presence, and his online popularity was taking the hit.

Fang Zhao could roughly guess what was going on in Kevin Lin's mind, but he did not ask too many questions, instead turning to face Fan Lin who was walking over. "Professor Fan, is the little thing really all right after changing this way?"

"Test results show that its condition is within the normal range and that there aren't any major issues." Fan Lin probably had no way of keeping Zaro in check, and his tone carried a tinge of helplessness. "I have also asked the person who bred it, and he says there is no problem, you don't have to worry."

Fang Zhao looked at the "rabbit" bouncing around in the tank and continued to ask Fan Lin. "Are you selling this small thing?"

Fan Lin lifted up his head in surprise and studied Fang Zhao. Realizing that Fang Zhao was not joking, he frowned and shook his head. "Generally speaking, these sorts of experimentally bred hybrids with Earth and foreign-planet genes are not sold to outsiders. However, in recent years, government regulations on this have been relaxed a lot. However, whether to sell or not, the decision lies firmly in the hands of the breeder. Do you really wish to purchase it?"

Fang Zhao nodded. "Mmhm. It is rather meaningful—it can double up as a light at night and as a live light. After my military service ends next year, I can bring it back as a commemorative item."

"If you are really intent on buying it, I will help you ask. The breeder's name is Denzel. He was with the Academy of Science HQ but has since left and started his own company and laboratory. It is rumored that he left to start his own company without any expectations because the research funds he requested kept being rejected. I will contact him first. If he agrees to it, I will put you in touch."

Denzel's projects used to be on ornamental aquatic creatures. After that, when he left the Academy of Science HQ, he had changed his focus and handed over the ornamental aquatic creature project to researchers under him and had chosen to spend his efforts collaborating with his friends on krill cultivation.

Krill was a major nourishment supplement in the New Era. Denzel wished to improve on this nutritional dosage.

When Fan Lin had arrived on planet Baiji, he had heard from others that Denzel intended to claim an area of water at the South Pole to cultivate krill. However, he had not succeeded and had to look for some other place.

This sort of research was extremely costly. The probability of Denzel selling that "rabbit" was very high.

Fan Lin also hoped that Fang Zhao would purchase it. Today, in the afternoon, he had heard Zaro say that he wanted to purchase it, but Zaro's agent had stopped Zaro, as they did not have sufficient funds on hand. For the time being, Zaro had given up on this idea.

However, this was only temporary. If Zaro's funds were replenished and he bought that little thing, that would be a pity.

Given how Zaro was, if this little thing ended up in his hands, it would meet an absolutely miserable end. Who knows, maybe on the second day, it would end up in a pot and cooked. In the eyes of Zaro, this little thing was nothing more than a water commodity of planet Baiji.

Comparing these, Fan Lin naturally hoped that Fang Zhao would hurry up and buy that little thing. He was convinced of Fang Zhao's character. Before Fang Zhao had been dispatched on his assignment, the little thing had been under Fang Zhao's care.

Since he had agreed to help Fang Zhao, Fan Lin made a brief round in the laboratory before returning to contact the breeder.

When Fang Zhao returned to the outpost's dormitory, his entire table was piled with Kevin Lin's materials after being away for quite sometime.

"Cough. I will move it right away." Kevin Lin hurriedly headed over and moved away the things on the table. "Our place is really too small. However, I heard that single rooms with larger spaces will be constructed in the outpost soon." Kevin Lin gave a comprehensive breakdown of the happenings in the outpost to Fang Zhao for the period Fang Zhao had been away. "Oh, right, where are the three bodyguards by your side?"

Kevin Lin remembered that, previously, Fang Zhao had had three body guards that had always been with him. This time, though, they were nowhere to be seen.

"They have returned back to their original posts," Fang Zhao replied.

The major and two captains that had been assigned to Fang Zhao's side by Hong Lou had returned to their own duties now that Fang Zhao had returned to planet Baiji. After Fang Zhao had discussed it with Hong Lou, they no longer needed to follow him around.

Hong Lou had found out some stuff concerning Fang Zhao from the three of them. From the moment they had been assigned to protect Fang Zhao, they had basically never had a chance to do anything.

Perhaps from suffering a shock during the time they had followed Fang Zhao, the three soldiers were determined to get stronger after returning back to their duties. Comrades from the same squad even thought there was something going on behind the scenes—perhaps a selection test to select the cream of the crop. Since all of their

comrades had arrived on planet Baiji with lofty ambitions, they followed the three and strived forward as well. Gradually, the mood of the entire detachment of troops changed.

When officers from other continents witnessed this scene, they returned and made the troops under them go through more drills: Look at Yanzhou's soldiers! If you all don't work harder, people from Yanzhou will steal all the glory!

Troops from every continent were drafted into the Baiji military district. There were limited spots for climbing up the hierarchy, so there was intense competition among troops from every continent.

However, this had nothing to do with Fang Zhao.

Half an hour later, Fan Lin contacted Fang Zhao and gave him a number.

"Denzel says he is open to selling and the price is negotiable. Now, he is a merchant, so his asking price might be slightly high," Fan Lin said.

Fang Zhao saved the number. "Understood. Thanks."

After ending the call with Fan Lin, Fang Zhao made a video call to the researcher Denzel, who was far away, on Earth.

Denzel was 70-odd years old and was in his prime according to New Era standards. He was slightly skinny and wore a pair of glasses with a large-frame. These were not glasses for nearsightedness but, rather, eyeglasses with special functions, probably to aid in his research.

"You must be Fang Zhao?" Denzel took off his glasses and glanced at the screen. "I think I saw you somewhere in the news before."

Normally, Denzel did not follow entertainment news, and he viewed very little in the way of political news. The majority of his efforts were spent on research and experiments, so he only had a vague impression of Fang Zhao.

"Fan Lin had many good things to say about you. However, I am now a merchant. Business is business, and there are no special discounts based on friendship," Denzel told him.

Although he ran his own company, by saying that he was a merchant, he displayed his rather straightforward disposition.

"Five million, nonnegotiable." As he was probably worried that Fang Zhao would find this price too high, Denzel hurriedly explained, "Among ornamental aquatic pets, sea slugs are the most popular kind. As of now, the prices of sea slugs in the market can range from tens of dollars to tens of thousands depending on their breed. At the start of the year, an extremely superior breed, 'neptune,' was hyped up to 2 million. For the choppy hair variety on planet Baiji, it is a hybrid, as half its genes have extraterrestrial origins. Compared to the ornamental sea slugs on the market, this variety has a much stronger vitality, can eat anything, and are really easy to keep. I spent a lot of time and effort breeding them, so it is natural that the price is double. Furthermore, with the final price of 5 million, I will help you to handle all the procedures. If you went about it on your own, the procedures might take more than half a year." When Denzel opened his mouth, he rattled on and on just for the sake of telling Fang Zhao that this price was absolutely right!

Fang Zhao nodded his head and did not haggle. "That's fine with me."

Denzel was astonished for a split second but very quickly flashed a smile. "All right, since you have already made a decision, let's complete the transaction now."

Denzel clearly did not want to waste too much time on this. He had a lot of matters on hand. Since a deal had been made, he wanted to go about it immediately.

Animals with extraterrestrial genes all had specialized records. Once Fang Zhao had transferred the money over, Denzel changed the ownership rights of that "rabbit" to be under Fang Zhao's name.

"All right, from now on, it belongs to you. However, only the ownership rights have been transferred to you, so you still can't bring it back to Earth yet. After this, I will help you complete the relevant procedures. Your military service ends next year? By then, you will surely be able to bring it along with you. I guarantee all the procedures will be in order." As if thinking about something, Denzel added, "The feed that you use on planet Baiji is probably common feed. When you return back to Earth, purchase specialized feed from me. It is really easy to raise—even if you feed it some weird and bizarre stuff, it should still be fine."

Denzel had a habit of pushing his glasses back up his nose. Pushing up his glasses, he

said, "I heard from Fan Lin that someone fed it chilis? Don't worry, it will probably return to normal tomorrow. If you don't have any feed and have no idea what to feed it, you can just place the tank under sunlight and it will switch to plant mode and undergo photosynthesis. One more piece of advice: although it is immune to poison, it is best not to feed it anything poisonous. It can stockpile and release poison when it feels threatened. For safety reasons, do not come into contact with the poison."

As he spoke, Denzel's face straightened and he exhorted, "Although it is really easy to raise, you still have to be attentive. If it dies from being fed, your 5 million will have been a bad investment. It is probably the most expensive pet that you keep, so treat it carefully."

Fang Zhao: "...Right."

With the transaction completed, Denzel no longer continued with needless chatter. He ended the call.

Completing a transaction and receiving 5 million, Denzel felt rather happy and returned back to his laboratory. He only came out when it was dinner time.

As he brought his dinner back into his office, Denzel mused for a bit and decided to read up on Fang Zhao's information once more.

Previously, when Fan Lin had come looking for him, Denzel had not thoroughly screened Fang Zhao. All he had seen was the recent entertainment and political news, and he otherwise had limited knowledge. Now that he had a little more idle time, he wanted to see what sort of person Fang Zhao really was.

Denzel contentedly ate and drank as he read through the information pertaining to Fang Zhao.

All the way until he saw a piece of news concerning Muzhou's competition dogs.

"Muzhou's heated sheep-herding competition is underway. All eyes are once again on the champion dog of Dongshan Farm, said to have a value of 100 million. And the owner of this competition dog is..."

"Plosh—"

Denzel's mouthful of soup spurted out.

Regret!

The price he had quoted was far too little!

Chapter 238

Imperial Palace

But regardless of how much Denzel regretted his offer, he couldn't change his contract.

Fang Zhao brought the rabbit-like furry sea slug mixed with alien DNA back to his dorm room from Fan Lin's lab. This time, he wasn't borrowing the creature—he was taking custody of his own belongings.

Just as Denzel had predicted, the next day, the "rabbit" that had been in hyper mode after eating the red pepper returned to normal. Its red coloring had mostly faded, although not completely; its furry tail was still reddish. That was the "toxin storage" function of the creature Denzel had spoken of at work.

Fan Lin had reached the following conclusion during his testing: if a human hand was stung by the sea slug, it would present with a small, painful burning wound and a spicy sensation of sorts.

As a precaution, Fang Zhao kept a pair of gloves handy.

Meanwhile, Zaro quickly packed his things and left for Wai after Fang Zhao's return. As for everything else—the live broadcast, the sea slug—all these matters were cast aside. When Zaro left the outpost, he will still trying to reach his design team on Earth.

Now that he was back, Fang Zhao had to continue his military service. As far as the public was concerned, military service wasn't a vacation. If they noticed Fang Zhao slacking off during his live broadcasts, viewers would definitely complain.

But Fang Zhao never gave them the chance.

Most of the time, the most dangerous aspects of construction projects in the vicinity of the outpost were completed by robots. However, areas where robots could not function had to be manually inspected and cleared.

The robots would stall in certain parts of Baiji because of the geological makeup. In that case, the soldiers that were part of the outpost had to saddle up and assist the

engineering team.

Fang Zhao and his fellow soldiers scaled towering cliffs and ventured into deep natural tunnels. Some of the spots were truly dangerous.

Take scaling the cliffs, for example: the geological makeup of some cliffs and nearby magnetic fields rendered robots useless. Engineering equipment had to be installed on the walls of these cliffs by hand.

These cliffs were virtually perpendicular, and the winds were strong. In most cases, the person in charge of installing the equipment would sway from side to side when they rappelled down. The person wore protective gear and other precautionary measures were taken, but who knew?

There was also the danger of unknown debris, like falling rocks, which made the job all the more dangerous.

Drone cameras couldn't operate in these conditions, so Kevin Lin had to handle the camera himself. He refrained from rappelling down the cliffs, instead shooting from the bottom of the cliff or over it with the help of robotic arms.

So S5's tone shifted again from absurd to adventure.

Many folks used to think that robots were invincible, that they could take care of everything when it came to developing foreign planets. Only after watching the S5 live broadcasts did they realize that some things could only be accomplished by people.

Critics who were watching Fang Zhao like hawks, waiting to pounce on any slip-ups, were rendered speechless.

Fang Zhao treated himself like a soldier who was part of the outpost squadron, not a celebrity appearing on a variety show. In some cases, he did a better job than the veteran soldiers, even keeping an eye on some of the less experienced ones.

This also gave rise to the illusion that Fang Zhao was actually a veteran soldier.

Regardless of what the viewers thought, there was one thing that everyone agreed on: Fang Zhao's military merits were the real deal. While his promotion had partly been motivated by politics, Fang Zhao's competence was laid bare for all to see. This was indisputable.

During this downtime, Fang Zhao started doing research and sketching designs for the film studio compound.

Duan Qianji had already arrived on planet Wai with her delegation. Also on Duan Qianji's flight had been passengers from other continents. After Zaro's arrival on Wai, the principals involved in the film studio complex project met via videoconference.

The meeting was chaired by the Wai commander Huo Yi.

Huo Yi was more competent in this regard than Shanta. Whether it was military hardware or commercial development, once a project was approved, he could see the whole picture. He could host the meeting on his own. If it were Shanta, he'd probably be surrounded by advisers.

In short, Huo Yi was slicker and more cunning than Shanta. He knew how to secure his own interests. This was an important project he took very seriously, so naturally, he had to be very hands-on. He wouldn't let investors destroy and build at will, nor would he put up so many obstacles that he turned them off.

After the videoconference, Duan Qianji reached Fang Zhao by videoconference for a private discussion about the design of the film studio compound.

Duan Qianji had consulted quite a few experts in architectural history so they could accurately replicate old buildings, but the scale of the project was huge. Not everything could be built at once. She had to prioritize.

"I've decided to built the imperial palace first," Duan Qianji said. "The one that appears most frequently in archive footage, the biggest one that combines the highlights of ancient Yanzhou imperial court design."

"Understood." Fang Zhao knew exactly which building she was referring to. He had visited the same imperial palace several times for inspiration in his previous life, before the Period of Destruction.

The ease of data storage helped preserve many artifacts from the Old Era. The grand imperial palace that had once stood on the Yanzhou continent had been one of the world's five biggest palaces during the Old Era.

There was archival footage of the palace and historical documents about it, as well as TV shows and films featuring the structure preserved on various data storage systems.

But descriptive text and footage had its limitations. There were details that even the most senior researchers couldn't confirm.

As the only living person who had actually laid eyes on and visited the imperial palace, Fang Zhao was a godsend, fleshing out details that were ignored or glossed over in the blueprint and adding footnotes.

Fang Zhao's expertise meant Duan Qianji could complete the palace in a much shorter period of time than she had budgeted. The hard part was design. As long as the design was completed, construction was straightforward. Robots could build the palace in no time.

So as others involved in the project were still working on their designs, the core area in the film studio complex started construction.

—————

The days passed by. It was life as usual for folks on Earth. The improvement of broadband infrastructure allowed many people to work from home. Even at a big company like Silver Wing, many employees worked at home instead of commuting to Silver Wing Tower.

Whether someone worked at home or in the office, they spent their idle time browsing the news online, searching for interesting videos or entertainment gossip headlines to break the monotony of the workday.

On this particular day, a news item caused ripples in the Yanzhou entertainment industry. It was quickly reposted by many entertainment news outlets.

After keeping a low profile for some time, Silver Wing's filmed entertainment department had posted this status update on their social media account:

"Shooting on our period epic TV series 'Beauty' will begin soon. The actors and crew will be filming on planet Wai."

The post came with a group picture of the "Beauty" cast. Serving as the backdrop was the entrance sign to a space port.

Silver Wing fans: "???"

"An imperial court drama?"

"Isn't the emphasis on the planet Wai?"

"Wai? Isn't that were Tianhao from S4 is?"

"Why shoot a period drama in outer space?"

"Again, why shoot a period drama on planet Wai? This isn't a space adventure."

"Does the 'period' in period drama refer to ancient times before the Old Era?"

"Someone once said there are so many crappy period dramas out there. Check out the ones online. They're an absolute eyesore!"

"The period TV dramas streaming online are mostly low-budget productions. They're designed as brainless entertainment for fans. But this time, Silver Wing is mounting a big production. You can tell from the cast. The leading actors are all A-list stars from Yanzhou. I'm guessing this series is award bait."

"I have the same question. If Silver Wing is splurging on a period drama, why shoot on Wai?"

"For this kind of drama, a simple set and some special effects will do. Is there a secret weapon on Wai we don't know about?"

Chapter 239

Why Is He Everywhere

The photograph of the cast and crew of "Beauties" just before they left the planet created a lot of buzz on the internet, but discussions were mainly from Yanzhou's side. Even if people from other continents saw it, they were not particularly bothered. As the majority of cast and crew members weren't celebrities they were familiar with, after the initial excitement, they lost interest rather quickly.

After Silver Wing's official announcement, there was no follow-up. No matter how much fans asked, Silver Wing's public relations department maintained their silence.

At the same time, the crew of "Beauties" that were being discussed were en route to planet Wai via transport ship.

As there were no passenger spaceships that took the route from Earth to Wai, the crew could only travel on the transport ships that delivered military supplies to foreign planets. There were many rules and regulations on these sorts of ships, and walking about freely on the transport was prohibited. There were also no entertainment facilities, and all one could see after leaving their own room was the icy-cold glares of gun-toting soldiers, as though they were criminals. Even if they were a really popular celebrity, in the eyes of these soldiers, that celebrity was no different from anybody else.

Having heard that Silver Wing's big boss had also ridden on this sort of transport ship previously, the crew felt more at ease. If even the big boss had to go through this, then people like them shouldn't expect too much. Otherwise, they might be beaten to death by the soldiers without ever getting justice.

Since Huo Yi wanted to look after the people coming over, he got his men to specially install a guest area on board the ships so passengers could have a place to reside and engage in activities. There were bedrooms, dining halls, and a small lounge allowing for guests to gather and chat.

At this moment, in the guest area, a few leads of "Beauties" were gathered and trying to guess the motive behind this trip.

Finding out they would be heading to planet Wai for filming had come as a surprise, and the crew were all at a loss. Although they had been all smiles in the photograph showing them heading off to the spaceport, they had all still been muddled beneath their happy facades. The crew had no idea why they'd had to sign a confidentiality agreement when they were just filming an imperial court drama or why they needed to travel all the way to planet Wai. There had also been not much information from the higher-ups. All they had been told was this: "everything will be revealed in time."

Silver Wing A-list actor Wen Shengyi joked, "Don't tell me we are being shipped off to be sold?"

As A-list film stars contracted to the company, they were not as restricted compared to other smaller celebrities and could speak more freely as long as they did not go overboard.

A Silver Wing A-list actress who was not yet 30, Ju Taohe, joined in the fun. "Let's say we are really being sold. Silver Wing's film department would suffer heavy losses just from our cast's value."

"Only a few people know about this, but a while back, the big boss went to planet Wai. Most likely, Silver Wing has something deployed there, maybe a sealed film studio or something. In any case, it's something that will not hurt us," Silver Wing A-list actress Vicky said in an absent-minded way as she admired her freshly painted scarlet fingernails, her expression containing a certain captivating charm.

This was not her natural disposition. Recently, she had been getting into character for a role, and subconsciously, her words and actions were in the style of the character she was to play.

Silver Wing's A-list film star Maqiyaduo asked, "Teacher He, can't you reveal just a little more? There isn't anybody else here; our lips are sealed." She was in her early twenties, and her voice exuded the air of exuberant youthfulness. She had begun acting at a young age as a child star. Having gotten famous early on, she was the youngest among the four A-listers here. However, while she might be the youngest, her ability was in no way lacking. Regardless of how she was normally, when it came to acting, she was a total monster.

The company's four immensely popular A-listers looked toward a man seated at the side who had yet to utter a single word. That man was also the only S-rank film star

among the cast and was one of Yanzhou's top superstars: He Lisi. He Lisi was older than the rest of them. He was 40-plus, and with his current status, his relationship with Silver Wing was more complicated, more like that of cooperative partners than employer and employee.

He Lisi was not a solemn person. Catching the four others glancing over, he laughed. "Actually, I do not know much either. Duan Qianji has probably set up a film studio on planet Wai. All we have to do is go over there and do our job conscientiously. However... from what I know, the reason Director Duan chose planet Wai for filming has something to do with Fang Zhao."

The four of them were astonished.

"Fang Zhao?"

"The gamer composer from our company's virtual projects department?"

"I heard that fella is really impressive. He played a large role in the virtual projects and gaming department's rise in fortunes last year.

Wen Shengyi was a gaming fan and knew slightly more when it came to this. "He is 'Battle of the Century's' global number one on the leaderboards; how can he not be impressive?!"

"Isn't he also undergoing military service on planet Baiji?"

He Lisi shrugged. "I am not too sure either. When I was discussing terms with Director Duan's secretary, I heard her mention this. No concrete reasons were given, but the matter of filming on planet Wai definitely had something to do with Fang Zhao. From what I know, Director Duan started planning for this series a few years ago, but it had not been brought to fruition. Filming had originally been slated to start this year, and the set was going to be at a certain coastal city. The set was already halfway constructed, but there was a change in plans at the last moment.

"Fang Zhao... We do not know much about the virtual projects or gaming department. Normally, everyone has their own tasks and assignments, so I have never run into him in the company. However, I do know a someone who has come into contact before." He Lisi looked toward the pantry and raised his voice and shouted, "Little Ji, Ji Polun!"

Ji Polun had just woken up from a nap. He had headed into the pantry to make himself

a cup of tea and had been returning to his room to read the script. As he was returning back to his room, he had walked past the lounge and thrown over a curious glance when he had seen the few very successful film stars seated there. He swore that he had only looked over because he had been curious—he'd had no other intentions.

Suddenly hearing someone there shout out his name, Ji Polun shuddered. If the cup had not been covered with a lid, most of the tea would have splashed out.

The moment he saw that it was a first-tier senior who had shouted his name, Ji Polun scurried over and nervously said, "Greetings, my seniors!"

Even though there were people younger than him among the four, comparing their statuses, Ji Polun was considered second-tier and felt it was best to call them seniors.

Although he had already risen to a B-grade contract with the company and had seen a round of popularity from the previous year's idol drama, he was still considered second-tier in Yanzhou. However, this was already consider doing very well.

He had managed to snag a supporting role in "Beauties," playing a eunuch that was always beside the emperor.

When others in the company had read up on what a "eunuch" from the Old Era was like, many people had been unwilling to take up the role, as they were afraid it would destroy their image. At the start, Ji Polun had also been hesitant, but he had made his decision quickly and snatched up the chance. Luckily, his reaction had been quick. If he had been any slower and others had returned to their senses, he might not have gotten this role at all.

First-rate Yanzhou actor He Lisi was playing the role of the emperor. He might not have such a large influence on a global scale, but when it came to Yanzhou, he was indeed a well-known superstar.

Ji Polun did not have many scenes in the series, but they were not too few either. Even if some of his scenes ended up being deleted during postproduction, Ji Polun felt that this was still worth it. He could learn a lot just by being at the side of a first-rate superstar.

Ji Polun might be narcissistic, but he also knew how to reflect on his own shortcomings. Back when he had helped out at the virtual projects department, he had learned a bit from Fang Zhao.

Noticing Ji Polun being all jittery, He Lisi put on a warm smile and pointed to a sofa at the side. "Don't stand, take a seat."

"Aye!" Ji Polun could not act normally in front of these people and sat himself down nervously like he was a student under the gaze of a strict teacher.

"Didn't you work with the virtual projects department before? Do you know Fang Zhao?" He Lisi asked.

Ji Polun replied honestly, "Fang Zhao? I know him, but we aren't considered really close. I am more familiar with the others in the virtual projects department. I occasionally dropped by, but I rarely ran into Fang Zhao."

"What sort of person is Fang Zhao?" Wen Shengyi inquired.

Ji Polun could only think of this description: "A rather... remarkable person."

Maqiyaduo was curious about something. "There are rumors online that say Fang Zhao and the big boss are relatives. Is that true?"

"That's not true!" Ji Polun hurriedly replied. "Fang Zhao and the big boss have no such blood relations! All those online conjections are rubbish!"

Before, there had been people online that had said Fang Zhao was an illegitimate son of Duan Qianji's. Some people had even guessed that the two had some shameful relationship. However, Ji Polun frequently went down to the virtual projects department and knew the truth. Fang Zhao and Duan Qianji had no such relationship whatsoever. All that was just gossip and guesses that had been made up anyhow.

"That, I believe," He Lisi said. "Fang Zhao's contract is different from any other at the company. Furthermore, from what I know, Fang Zhao had a hand in Duan Qianji's husband being able to head to the Baiji military district. From this, we can see Fang Zhao's capability."

This Fang Zhao person was indeed remarkable. Everyone present thought to themselves that if they got the chance to meet Fang Zhao, they would have to interact more with him.

As they were rather curious about Fang Zhao, over the next few days, Ji Polun was frequently called over to rehearse lines together with these big-name stars. The other

lesser celebrities in the cast were all envious when they saw this.

"Ji Polun is really crafty. I have no idea what methods he pulled to ride on their coattails!" someone jealously exclaimed.

But Ji Polun also knew that being called over to rehearse together was just an excuse. They just wanted to find out more about Fang Zhao.

When the transport ship arrived on planet Wai, the cast and crew members were ferried over to the film studio complex by flying transport.

Disembarking from the flying transport, the cast and crew were stunned.

In front of them was a palace that stretched out as far as their eyes could see. Majestic and imposing, it seemed to have centuries worth of history and culture ingrained within it. Everyone stood frozen in place, their mouths and eyes wide open. If it were possible, the entire place would have been littered with their eyeballs.

Mocking words with a glacial tone dragged everyone's attention away from the palace. "Tsk, how ignorant!"

Everyone's attention turned to a person dressed in black with ghastly makeup and was wearing two sharp prosthetic teeth. He was disdainfully looking over the party that had just arrived.

He had probably just came out from the place, and had a few bodyguards and assistants with him. Due to the thick makeup, his appearance was indistinguishable, and nobody could recognize who he was. However, this person who dared to ridicule these few first-rate celebrities was probably not be an actor from Yanzhou.

Watching the other person's arrogant back as se walked away, all the cast and crew had the same thought: Who does this f*cker think he is!?

But in no time, their attention returned to the place before their eyes.

"What the f*ck!"

"This, this, this..."

"Is this real? It isn't some projection or virtual thing, right?"

"Let me touch... It is real! It's all real! It really exists!!"

"I heard that back on our Yanzhou mainland, this was the sort of place ancient emperors resided in!"

"I feel that my new villa is nothing but a chicken coop compared to this," He Lisi lamented.

Pillars made out of white jade, ash-colored brick roads, scarlet platforms on the ramparts, yellow ceramic roof tiles, vermilion walls...

The ancient construct before them was a myriad of colors. It was both dignified and dazzling!

The party followed instructions from the receptionist and walked in the direction pointed out to them. The more they saw, the more their hearts fluttered. For people of the New Era, viewing these ancient sights was a rather great battering and shock to their senses.

Strolling through the dusty-grey brick roads one step at a time, they felt as if they had traveled back in time several millennia. Especially He Lisi, who was playing the role of emperor. At this moment, he was so excited that both his hands were trembling. This was the something he had never experienced before in all his years of acting. No other film set had ever given him this sort of feeling.

Only those born within would know the aura of an imperial family!

Only they would know absolute authority and glory!

This was the glittering gem spoken about in ancient culture and seen in art as in the information provided.

The few leads had actually been given a lot of material and images about palaces, with the purpose of helping them assimilate better into their roles. Originally, it had been assumed that they were headed to planet Wai for sealed filming to avoid harassment from the paparazzi, but never had they expected such a pleasant surprise upon arrival. As these film stars walked on and on, they fell into character!

When the director noticed the mannerisms of those few actors and actresses changing, he did not let anyone go over and disturb them.

"I don't know if anyone noticed, but just now, before we entered the palace gates, there was a stone tablet beside the gates that was inscribed with the name of the design team," a cameraman muttered quietly.

"Eh? Why didn't I notice? Are there any photos?" someone beside him asked.

"I have them!"

The cameraman selected the photograph he had taken just before they had entered the palace gates and enlarged the part with the stone tablet.

On it were close to 100 names of designers and architects, probably arranged in order of importance. The first few people were renowned experts in the fields of history, archaeology, engineering, architecture, and a few others. Anyone not in the know could just search for their names on the internet and there would be lots of related information. Some of the accomplishments on record were enough to dazzle the reader.

But people among the cast and crew had not expected to see a name among the front twenty that would surprise them.

"Fang Zhao?"

"Why is he everywhere?"

"Is he the same Fang Zhao as the one we know?"

"It is highly probable that it is him. I heard that Fang Zhao's history is really good and that he is even a member of the advisory panel for 'Battle of the Century' that Fiery Bird consults with."

"That means to say that the reason we came to film here might really have been because of Fang Zhao?"

"If that is the case, we really have to thank him!" the director exclaimed.

Compared to film sets of ancient constructs, this sort of experience was something that many people in the industry had never come across before.

"It really is a large project!"

See, till now, which company had ever done what Silver Wing wanted to achieve:
filming such a large and extravagant period drama!

Chapter 240

Flash Mob

The first building to go up in the film studio complex, besides the eye-catching palace, was a hotel, but it was a hotel with a retro design based on an ancient Chinese inn, not one of the skyscrapers that were ubiquitous in the New Era.

The cast and crew felt a sense of novelty staying at such an old-school hotel for the first time.

"This trip was worth it!"

This was what the members of the cast and crew were thinking. Even though they weren't used to planet Wai, there were many inconveniences, and they wouldn't see their families before shooting wrapped, as far as filming locations went, this one was decent. It was a form of alternative tourism.

There were no tall buildings, and they were surrounded by lush mountains and pristine waters, as well as the faux-ancient buildings that were being completed over time. All their anxiety had gone out the door.

"I have a hunch that this place is going to become a popular destination," the director predicted while standing on the second floor of the hotel.

Just from initial appearances, you could tell that this wasn't just another run-of-the-mill investment. Silver Wing was in it for the long haul, not to mention the fact that there were investors from other continents.

Just as the "Beauties" cast and crew settled into their hotel, Zaro had returned to his turf on a neighboring mountain dressed like a vampire, his entourage in tow.

He checked out the progress on Silver Wing's imperial palace every day, followed by a tour of all the neighboring projects.

He was upset that construction on his own project was slow in comparison to the Silver Wing palace.

"How come it's still not done? Silver Wing is about to finish their Phase I. I visited their construction site today—they're getting ready to start Phase II. How come our Phase I hasn't even kicked off?"

Zaro's agent had no answer for his client's grievances. He had been working in earnest with their design team for days now. The complexity of the project had just become apparent. "Who knows why Silver Wing is so quick. Maybe they prepared ahead of time."

Everyone was overwhelmed with work. Only Senior Master Zaro had the time to dillydally.

Even though Zaro's agent had opposed the investment initially, he had felt more reassured after meeting other investors when they had arrived on Wai. He still believed there was a profit to be made.

In which case, they had to do things properly. The design of their building had to be meticulous. This was the hardest part.

"Silver Wing is in a hurry because they need to start shooting their TV series," the agent added.

Zaro sneered. "You mean that period drama you were talking about? I hear it's just about a bunch of women bickering and fighting. It's bound to flop, haha."

Zaro's agent wanted to tell his client that this was a project handpicked by Silver Wing's CEO, that she had better taste than he did and that her decision was most likely based on in-depth market research, but considering the obnoxiously confident look on Zaro's face, he shut up. Anything he said would fall on deaf ears.

In fact, they all knew there were few period TV dramas being made. Everyone was reluctant to make them because they were typically scrutinized by academics relentlessly and were derided as being historically inaccurate or having crappy props and special effects and whatnot. The number of period dramas that had won prizes at the major award ceremonies in recent years could be counted on one hand. Most were of the art-house variety and didn't strike a chord with mainstream audiences.

When Zaro had first arrived on Wai and found out that Silver Wing was shooting a new TV drama, he had felt that his company was obliged to follow suit. They were building a film studio, after all.

Let's do it!

Let's make a period drama too!

But Leizhou's historical sequence of events was different from Yanzhou's, both during the Old Era and during the ancient times prior to that. So Zaro had done quite a bit of research and found out what other investors in the film studio complex were making. Woo Tianhao and his uncle were going to shoot a kung fu series with a lot of wire stunt work, and Barbara was going to remake a few children's plays from the Old Era. When he had visited her yesterday, Barbara had been ordering a pumpkin carriage and glass slippers from Earth. Zaro had thought she was insane.

After extensive research and intelligence gathering, Zaro had decided on a genre: a vampire film.

"We're not going to make a typical vampire movie. Weren't there movies about vampire dukes and whatnot during the Old Era? I built myself a castle, so let's make a 'vampire duke' movie."

"Have you decided on the cast?" Zaro's agent asked.

"The last leading man you picked didn't cut it. All he had to offer was a pretty face. What good does a pretty face do? It takes talent to carry a movie," Zaro complained.

"Talent? What kind of talent do you mean?"

"Like mine."

"..." Zaro's agent went silent. From where does Zaro's boundless confidence come?

Zaro had decided to star in the movie himself. That was why he was running around in a vampire outfit. In his own words, it was part of getting into character.

"I think I need to come up with a stage name for myself." The idea had struck Zaro after chatting with a few of the Silver Wing actors today.

Zaro's agent didn't bother to lift his head. "Celebrities use stage names when they join the industry to improve their fortunes or for other purposes, such as drawing attention."

"But from what I hear, more than 90 percent of the most influential actors don't use their real names. I think it's better if I come up with a stage name. Who knows, it might change my fortune and lead to major box office success."

"What do you have in mind?"

"I asked around. Folks like to add syllables to their own names. My name is Zaro. We can spice it up into Kaizaro or Pizaro or Bizaro."

The agent silently cursed. Why don't you just call yourself Zaro the Idiot?

"Or I could follow Woo Tianhao's lead and get rid of my surname," Zaro continued.

"What different does that make for you? Zaro Renault minus the surname is still Zaro."

"True. Then which name should I use?"

Zaro's agent was in a ruthless mood. "Forget it. You're too famous in Leizhou, Senior Master. No amount of disguising will make a difference."

Zaro pondered the response and found himself in agreement. It's true. I only have myself to blame for being so famous in Leizhou. This thought pleased Zaro mightily.

"When will construction finish on our end?" Zaro asked.

"The design has to be meticulous. It's going to take a while. Silver Wing must have prepared in advance. Who knows how far in advance their planning started. And now they're in a hurry to shoot. You can understand why they finished construction quickly, but take a look at the others. Has anyone else finished as quickly as Silver Wing?" Zaro's agent asked.

"That's true. Woo Tianhao's uncle's rooster crown palace isn't ready yet."

"It's called an amusement palace."

"Whatever. Our castle has to be completed before theirs is."

"The blueprint will be finalized in the next two days. Then progress will be quick. Send someone over from company headquarters first and let them decide on the cast. Have them send the cast and crew over as soon as possible."

Talk of the new film got Zaro excited again. His underlings would also bring along his new costumes and props. The outfit he had on didn't feel aristocratic enough.

"Let's make the surroundings a bit spookier," Zaro critiqued while examining the design.

Zaro's agent ignored him.

"I noticed Fang Zhao's name is among those engraved in the stone monument near the entrance to Silver Wing's palace that honors the designers. Remember to engrave my name on our monument," Zaro barked before he left.

"Got it," Zaro's agent said, but again, he was secretly cursing. Fang Zhao's name was included because he made an actual contribution. What have you done? All you've done is boss people around even though you don't know jacksh*t. But of course your name has to be engraved, given your personality, and it has to be listed first. Well, let's credit you as the owner of the castle, not a designer, then.

On the internet.

Silver Wing's official social media account posted another update.

"Epic imperial court drama 'Beauties' kicks off shooting!"

Silver Wing's filmed entertainment department also posted nine pictures. The first was a picture of the creative team, the backdrop being a grand imperial palace. The other pictures included stills of the palace and shots of the leading characters in costume. There were also pictures of the actors posing inside the palace in character.

He Lisi was resplendent in emperor's yellow, oozing imperial authority and presence.

The female leads were decked out in elaborate costumes and accessories, looking either elegant and dignified or shapely and flirtatious.

Because it was such a big-budget production, the creative team paid incredible attention to the wardrobe and accessories. The production had a completely different feel compared to the low-budget period dramas of the past. Add to that the good-looking and talented cast and it was a mouth-watering prospect for eager fans.

The last picture was an aerial shot of the imperial palace set. The caption noted the

set was an exact replica of the actual palace.

"An actual 1:1 replica!"

"No special effects? They built an actual ancient imperial palace on planet Wai?"

"No wonder they had to shoot on Wai. Silver Wing built a friggin' palace there!"

"I'm floored. Silver Wing has really gone all out."

After the photos were posted, the reverberations weren't limited to Yanzhou. Fans from other continents were also blown away by the scale of Silver Wing's investment.

Prior to Silver Wing, no one had actually built such a massive set on a foreign planet. Even if there were examples, the scale was smaller.

The Silver Wing publicity team was also fanning the flames behind the scenes. In no time, news of Silver Wing's massive set dominated entertainment headlines in Yanzhou. Silver Wing got major global exposure as a result.

Just as fans were engaged in fervent discussion about Silver Wing's Wai set and pundits analyzed whether or not it was a wise investment, film studios from other planets made their moves.

Tongzhou's Legend Pictures issued the following social media update.

" 'Mountain of Immortals' cast and crew head to planet Wai."

The update was posted with a picture of the cast and crew posing for a picture at the entrance to a space port.

Soon, Zaro's Wireless Media from Leizhou posted an update.

" 'Vampire Duke' cast and crew en route to Wai for upcoming shoot."

The accompanying photos showed a similar backdrop—another space port.

In Lazhou, Cinderella Entertainment announced:

" 'Cinderella' cast and crew heading to planet Wai."

The accompanying photo was also a group picture at a space port.

The three updates were bombshells in the entertainment industry.

"Cinderella Entertainment? I've never heard of them before."

"Word has it the company is owned by Barbara Lakalina. Lakalina!"

Even if folks from other continents had no idea who Barbara was, the Lakalina surname gave her instant credibility.

"Is there a space port flash mob going on?"

"They're addicted!"

"These are all well-connected movie studios."

"Come to think of it, shooting on Wai is suddenly the cool thing to do."

"I just want to know when these studios started investing in planet Wai. I'm curious what else is being built on Wai."

"I'd like to check out Wai for myself."

"I'll spare you the trouble. I'm looked into it already. You can only reach Wai by freight vessel for now. None of these flights are open to the public."

"Isn't S4 based on Wai? Did they mention these movie sets during their live broadcasts?"

"No. Woo Tianhao's got tight lips."

Many folks were puzzled that the film studios had started pouring money into planet Wai, and why Wai?

The entertainment headlines were dominated by news of the new TV productions on planet Wai. As hard as the publicity teams for other new TV shows tried, they couldn't escape being overshadowed.

Fans were obsessed. Every time they saw an announcement about a new TV series, all

they asked was where the show was being shot and why it wasn't being shot on Wai.

Other competing entertainment companies were at a loss, their bosses bewildered by the headlines about the upcoming productions on Wai. They had no idea when Silver Wing, Wireless Media, Legend Pictures, and the newly formed Cinderella Entertainment—studios that had previously had nothing to do with each other—had secretly joined hands for a new venture on Wai.

We gotta get to the bottom of this. When did they form an alliance? What exactly are they up to on Wai?

Chapter 241

Appreciate

Everyone wished to know why these few entertainment companies had joined hands and when it had started, but no matter how much people dug, they could not find any concrete information. It seemed as if these companies had come together all of a sudden.

A few entertainment reporters had gotten wind of Silver Wing's plans to film the new drama and even gone to the coastal city where Silver Wing had been constructing the set. In the end, when the information was released, they felt as if Silver Wing had made a fool out of them!

Watching various casts and crews releasing photos and information every day to tantalize people's appetites, all entertainment reporters could do was scratch their cheeks in frustration.

Renowned paparazzi from every continent were specifically targeted by netizens for abuse.

"What are the paparazzi kings from every continent even doing!"

"Nothing but a bunch of trash!"

"Stop fooling us with trivial matters from other drama series! What we really want to know are things concerning planet Wai. Whatever drama series, be it 'Beauties,' 'Mountain of Immortals,' 'Vampire Duke,' or 'Cinderella,' any of them is fine. Our expectations are not high, just a few shots of those celebrities every day will do!"

Entertainment reporters viewing these comments could only feel bitter.

This is called not having high expectations?! If I could snap such a photograph, would I still have to be here doing this?

Silver Wing and the other entertainment companies had a complete grasp of all information now. Unless they chose to release information, nobody would be able to

dig anything up.

Was protecting themselves against these reporters the reason they had chosen to film on another planet?

Treacherous, how sinister!!

"We can't allow this to go on!" a middle-aged reporter cried out helplessly as he browsed the discussions online. All they could do was wait for information from planet Wai to reach them.

"What can we even do? It's not like we have a spacecraft to fly across the cosmos in," a young entertainment reporter said as he lay down on a chair.

"Maybe we can try sneaking on board a transport ship headed to planet Wai."

"Like a stowaway?"

"My *ss! Are you tired of living? And being a stowaway, do you think the guns being wielded by those soldiers are toys?"

"So your meaning is?"

"Scout out what other drama's production team is headed to planet Wai and infiltrate the crew. After that, follow the crew over to planet Wai."

"That is the only way."

Yanzhou.

Wang Tie, considered by many the paparazzi king of Yanzhou, groaned as he saw the online abuse calling him 'trash.' Very well, You people have gotten my blood racing!

Isn't it just planet Wai? He would always find a means of getting there.

He only feared Fang Zhao. Nobody else could make him afraid, and now that Fang Zhao was undergoing military service on planet Baiji, Wang Tie did not have to be worried about encountering him.

Each and every continent's paparazzi king was competing with the others. Now, using

this matter as an excuse, they could prove who among them was the king among paparazzi kings!

Without having to worry about entertainment reporters on Earth, celebrities in Wai's film studio complex could film in peace. During their free time, they could even play to their heart's content without worrying about having their photograph taken.

Only celebrities without much reputation wished to stir up news. Most of the celebrities that had come over did not need to self-hype. As long as filming was completed, their respective companies would help them stir up their popularity. All they needed to do was go about their filming conscientiously.

After yet another scene was shot, the cast members had a short rest period.

Ji Polun sat aside summarizing his inadequacies. No wonder He Lisi was a first-rate Yanzhou superstar. With just an action of lowering his eyebrows, he could make other people feel anxious. Just now, Ji Polun's trembling had been a natural reaction, not him acting.

He still had to work hard; otherwise, he would only have the life of a supporting character. Moreover, he did not want to continue acting as a eunuch for future roles.

However, following beside a first-rate superstar still had its perks. He Lisi had divulged some information to him.

"Beauties" was a project their big boss had personally decided on, and their standards were high. Duan Qianji might seem rather mild normally, but that was on the basis that she was satisfied. If anyone displeased her, she would make sure that person did not have an easy time. Therefore, regardless of whether any celebrities had any conflicts or grievances normally, when it came to filming, all such things were set aside—otherwise they would be out of luck.

Everyone had assumed that "Beauties" was a project the big boss had planned for a long time and regarded as very important, but according to the information He Lisi had revealed to Ji Polun, this imperial palace drama was just testing the waters. If it was successful, there would be an even larger project to come. It would be a period piece as well, but on a larger scale and about a monarchy and a power struggle.

Whether Ji Polun could get into the cast for the next project would be up to his own ability. If he didn't act well this round, by the time the next project came along, he

might have to pack his bags and leave.

Of course, Ji Polun did not want to leave. Taking part in the company's large film project here naturally brought about lots of benefits. Another reason was that, at this film studio complex, besides Yanzhou's Silver Wing, there were other film companies and production teams from other continents. Getting to know more people was always useful—who knows, it might help him achieve global popularity that much faster.

Thinking back to the stone tablet beside the palace gates, Ji Polun sighed in his heart. Fang Zhao was really remarkable. Nobody knew what role Fang Zhao had had in this matter; all they knew was that Fang Zhao had participated in the investment of this film studio complex and was part of the design team. Those from other continents seemed to have connections with Fang Zhao. Someone from the production team had said that when he had heard Tongzhou's Woo Tianhao and Leizhou's Senior Master Zaro talking, Fang Zhao had been mentioned.

In the future, I have to stop by the virtual projects department more often, Ji Polun thought to himself.

—————

Woo Tianhao watched the image captured by the camera. He was wearing a flowing snow-white chang pao and clutching a jade-handled fan. Elegant and graceful, the image portrayed a confident and handsome youth!

"Handsome!" Woo Tianhao exclaimed as he stroked the long wig he was wearing, hinting to special dispatched reporter Tucker to begin.

When the indicator lights of the live broadcast turned on, Woo Tianhao chose the angle he had meticulously picked out and put on an expression he thought made him look coolest. At the moment the live broadcast started, he made a half turn and opened the fan with a swish. With a graceful smile, he faced the camera. "Woo Tianhao, Mountain of Immortals."

Tucker's cheeks twitched as he operated the camera. So freaking pretentious!

However, Woo Tianhao's fans were lapping it all up, as S4's comments section had gone into a frantic whirlwind of discussion.

Who cared about how excited Woo Tianhao's fans were? People who had other

purposes for viewing this channel had their attention on something else.

"Does that mean he is acting in 'Mountain of Immortals'?"

"Is he starting to publicize it?"

"I just want to see what's going on at planet Wai and why they are so secretive about it."

Woo Tianhao simply did not care about what others were thinking. He just wanted to show off first at the start of the live broadcast. After showing off, he continued, "I know that everyone wishes to ask about the happenings on planet Wai and wishes to see the surroundings. However, I'm sorry to say that, for the time being, I won't be able to answer all your queries. The best I can do is to show you around my dojo."

Any news regarding the filming of "Beauties," which had already started, could only be released by Silver Wing. This was something Duan Qianji had specifically discussed with him.

He was not from Yanzhou and did not have to give Duan Qianji face. However, he needed to comply to the development agreement of the film studio complex. Not just Silver Wing, all other parties had the same opinion. Any information was to be released by the party themselves, not from any other sources. If anyone wished to release information through the live broadcast, they would naturally look for Woo Tianhao and discuss a collaboration. If not, Woo Tianhao would keep his lips tight. He also had to pay special attention to what the camera was filming so as to not accidentally reveal stuff.

Anyone who broke the agreement would be kicked out of the film studio complex. This had been clearly stated even before the agreement had been signed.

Even his own uncle's constructions had not been shown. The real sets of "Mountain of Immortals," with temples with red pillars, green tiles, and eaves, was still under construction. His uncle had said that they still needed an air of secrecy, so Woo Tianhao had not filmed anything.

Viewers were slightly disappointed, but even if they could not see other areas, they could still get to see the "dojo" Woo Tianhao was talking about. All the viewers of channel S4 were still very curious about this.

"Oh, he built a dojo on planet Wai?"

"Is it that sort of place where people in the Old Era gathered to practice martial arts?"

"Is it also for filming?"

"Hurry, hurry, hurry, let us see what Tianhao's dojo looks like!"

Following that, as all the viewers were eagerly anticipating what was to come, Woo Tianhao showed them the foundations of a building.

The audience: "..."

On the contrary, Woo Tianhao was in high spirits. "Here is where the first dojo will be. Construction starts today. Following this, every day, we will get to see the changes and watch as the dojo comes to life!" Woo Tianhao brought the audience around to admire the foundations of the dojo before saying, "I know that many people are disappointed, but I have a surprise for everyone today."

Viewers that were preparing to change channels widened their eyes momentarily and stared at the screen without blinking as they waited for the surprise Woo Tianhao had mentioned. Could it be a special appearance by a celebrity, or perhaps it was some other special construction?

As they thought about it, the viewers' anticipation gradually built up once more.

At the moment of unbearable tension, a ghastly white face with sharp fangs dripping with fresh blood and dark circles around its bloodshot eyes suddenly appeared and covered the entire screen. "Arrghhh!"

Online audience: "..."

"I was having my meal, and now all my food is on the floor!"

"F*ck! This! Sh*t! Your daddy was lying in bed watching the live broadcast. I was startled by it and knocked my head when I jumped out of bed!"

"It is late over here where we are at. Now I'm totally awake."

"Who is this idiot!"

"Speaking of idiots, I just remembered a person."

In the live broadcast, that face that covered the entire screen backed away with a weird cackling laughter. As he wiped away the "blood" from his mouth, he said, "Greetings, everyone, it is I, the vampire duke Zaro. Are you surprised, are you glad? Hahahaha! What you just saw was my berserk mode—I bet you were all frightened!"

Online audiences: "..."

"Indeed, it is him. The moment I heard that Wireless media was investing there, I just knew he would go over."

"I watched this sort of rubbish on channel S5, so I switched to S4. Why do I still see him?"

Although viewers had been startled by Zaro's frightful disguise, they were still very curious. Zaro even brought them to take a look at his first castle and show off a great deal.

In the days that followed, every day, channel S4's live broadcast revealed some photographs and videos that each film company wanted to release.

On a certain day, all the casts and crews that had arrived on planet Wai gathered for a group photo. The location tagged in the photograph was "Wai Film Studio Complex."

"Wai Film Studio Complex?"

"Planet Wai actually built a film studio complex?"

"This sounds really impressive. A film studio complex, eh? The few companies from Yanzhou, Tongzhou, Leizhou, Lazhou are all filming there, so the quality there must be really high!"

Teams from the companies involved had also made arrangements to jointly hype it up and publicize the Wai Film Studio Complex. Through the joint publicity campaigns, netizens had started to feel that, unless filming was done on planet Wai, it would not be considered a large investment.

The Wai Film Studio Complex had made its mark. Especially in the film and television circles, it could be considered to be known by everyone.

In photos released from the film studio complex, ancient constructs that had only appeared in history books had reappeared at full scale on planet Wai!

It was not just one building or one street. Instead, it was extensive, and there were buildings from many different periods in time. Unique ancient architecture from every single continent, covering a wide range of different styles, communities, and methods had appeared before the people of the New Era!

Flavors of civilization, culture, and history!

Not just those actors, even the masses wished to go over and see it for themselves. Many historical researchers also decided that they would make plans for a trip to planet Wai.

This also became a criteria for fans when it came to considering a movie.

Shooting a period drama and not heading to the Wai Film Studio Complex for filming? In that case, was the finished product watchable? Surely the quality would be about the same as those low-cost productions of the past!

Too large an investment? No way! Could a heavily invested firm not head to the Wai Film Studio Complex?

Upon knowing the thoughts of the fans, many entertainment companies also started having their own ideas.

Ones that wished to invest in planet Wai started inquiring through contacts about purchasing land from the Wai base and participating in the film studio complex project.

Those wanting to invest in planet Wai were largely film entertainment companies or hotel and restaurant chains.

Naturally, Huo Yi had given very preferential rates to the first batch of investors, but for those that came after, he was no longer so kind. Since the reputation had already been built up and the planet's popularity was being stirred up, parties wishing to invest here would still enjoy some preferential treatment, but it would not be on the same level as what the first batch had received, and the land would be more expensive.

In the future, as planet Wai's popularity rose even more, those wishing to invest in

planet Wai would receive poorer rates the later they came. This was something everyone understood.

Entertainment companies that had abundant resources contacted Wai base straightaway to purchase land and start their own constructions!

But entertainment companies that had various reasons for not purchasing land—such as the high investment risk, long construction periods, or troublesome planning phase—felt that it would be more convenient to rent those sets.

Now that period dramas that touched on ancient history were all the rage, they also decided to ride the winds and engage in their own small-scale period dramas. When it came to filming, they would head to the film studio complex and rent a few suitable sets for filming. Over at the film studio complex, regardless of the location, rent would be calculated daily. Although the rent was not low, it had a much lower risk compared to investing.

Some smaller companies and private teams felt that filming between 10 days to half a month was all right. The main motive was to borrow the hype of the Wai Film Studio Complex. On a whole, it seemed rather cost effective.

There were parties who said they would be heading over for filming, but in fact, they were just visiting the place. No sets would be rented and they would just spent a few nights at the hotel and take a few photos to stir up news about themselves. After all, fans would not know whether they were really renting any sets for filming.

Actually, lots of parties had the funds to rent sets in the film studio complex, but they just could not get a spot!

How many entertainment companies across the twelve continents had the same idea of renting sets? There was a limit to area in the film studio complex. Even just renting a tavern required taking a queue.

At Planet Baiji.

Fang Zhao finished reading the latest financial reports sent over from planet Wai and continued to make amendments to the design plans.

Construction of the palace was a collective effort by the design team. Such a large palace was not just an exact replica on the outside. The palace court, inner rooms,

surroundings, roof sculptures, materials, and many other details, right down to a pot of bonsai, had gone through meticulous planning.

Every single brick was being made with technology from the New Era. Although it might seem very similar to those from the Old Era, they were much more durable. After all, the materials used for construction could not be exactly the same. For people of the New Era, those Old Era constructions were way too weak. The bosses did not wish for the constructions they had so painstakingly strived to build getting ruined after only a few series were filmed either.

Now, Fang Zhao was in the midst of drawing up the plans of the street and official residence. Displayed on a screen beside him were all sort of materials and resources. These resources assisted him as he tried to recall the images buried deep in the recesses of his memory.

Fang Zhao was different from other historians of the New Era because his views and angles on these matters were different from those of others. He could view things from the angle of a person from the Old Era, while historians in the New Era would miss certain things.

"Construction on planet Wai hasn't been completed yet?" Kevin Lin asked as he dropped by.

They had already moved into their new single rooms, which were much more comfortable. Kevin Lin had gotten excited from browsing through the news and did not feel like sleeping, so he had come over to chat with Fang Zhao about the progress of the Wai Film Studio Complex.

"Soon. There is still one more street; after that is done, everything will be complete." Fang Zhao put down his pen and looked at Kevin Lin. "What news did you receive this time?"

"Heh, internal news. I heard that planet Wai has submitted an application for a film entertainment cultural base, but I have no idea whether it will be approved. However, if it is approved, those constructions that you people have invested in will no doubt appreciate in value."

Chapter 242

Dual Function Base

S4 saw a rise in viewership, but S5 remained pretty much the same. Viewership did not drop by much as there were still many interesting events occurring on planet Baiji and a lot of news.

Every time Fang Zhao followed people from the outpost team to assist with construction, some thrilling or exciting scene was captured—the weird creatures and plants of planet Baiji that could be both dangerous and violent.

Also, sometimes Fang Zhao followed the outpost team and completed more dangerous tasks that were not convenient for Kevin Lin to follow. Thus, in these cases, Kevin Lin headed to the military district and did some interviews to help the masses understand the thoughts of the pioneer immigrants. This aroused the curiosity of the many viewers as well.

The pioneer immigrants did not have as easy a time as others imagined. When they arrived here, they needed to adapt to all sorts of things. Physical acclimatization was still considered light—the main issue was psychological acclimatization. Fortunately, there were professional psychologists in the military district.

The masses learned about all these through Kevin Lin's live broadcasts and video interviews.

Kevin Lin also interviewed Great-Grandfather and Great-Grandmother Fang. Probably due to them having similar experiences before, the two elders had not had many problems adapting after arriving at the military district. The people here were warm, friendly, and treated them well. As they loved the environment, the two elders would wait till Fang Zhao was discharged from the military next year before leaving together with him.

Shanta allowed Kevin Lin to have more interviews with the two Fang elders. This was good publicity for planet Baiji's immigration plan and told people that, among immigrants that came over, while there were some that did not adapt well, there were also others that adapted superbly.

Now, network fees were slowly dropping as the communications network structure was upgraded more and more. People who had been unable to adapt at the start no longer had such intense reactions.

Entertainment allowed people to divert their attention elsewhere. "Beauties" had already started airing with two episodes per day. Technological advancements had greatly shortened the time required for postproduction. As long as filming was smooth, each episode could be churned out quickly. There were special effects, but they were all supplementary, unlike those older period dramas in which, besides the cast, everything else was made from special effects. Some companies did not even have physical casts and used virtual idols instead.

The drama series that Zaro had reckoned would be awful quickly became the hottest show on all the large internet video websites after it started airing. A large majority of viewers were females. Many people from the military district here also loved watching it, and immigrants gathered together to watch it and save on network expenses.

After "Beauties," other drama series, including "Vampire Duke," "Mountain of Immortals," and "Cinderella," began rolling out.

Although Zaro might normally have seemed unreliable, this time, he had been triggered, and his acting had improved a lot. Leizhou's audiences were all discussing what had caused such a big change in Zaro.

Zaro's agent felt gratified when he saw the amount of clicks on the internet. Bringing Zaro to watch Woo Tianhao film had had its upsides and had provoked Zaro into being slightly more serious when it came to acting. Why was it that Zaro's performance this time seemed especially good?

Because he had few lines!

If Zaro wanted to portray nobility, he could really do so. After all, he had been born into the Renault family and knew what it was like to be an aristocrat. If he was serious, he could really scare people—the only prerequisite was that he not speak. When this b*stard opened his mouth, people would just feel like hitting him.

During a discussion with the script writer, to obtain even better results, Zaro's agent had insisted that Zaro's original lines be cut by 70%!

"Vampire Duke" was popular among many youngsters. Ornamental silver crosses like

the one that appeared in the series were best sellers. Even garlic saw a rise in price. In addition, household items that appeared in the series with special characteristics, along with that especially pretentious black cape, were selling like hotcakes.

Taking into account advertising fees, copyright fees, endorsements, and other sources of revenue, these drama series profited quite a lot. The money spent on purchasing land and constructing the castle was all recouped.

The other drama series all had similar circumstances, and all the companies involved were very satisfied.

Now, among very popular drama series, nine out of 10 series were shot at the Wai film studio complex. There were fairy-tale romances, action thrillers, medieval fighting movies, movies about court power struggles, supernatural horror flicks set in ancient times, and slapstick comedies. There were films that adults loved to watch and films suitable for children. Having watched lots of interstellar conflicts, superheroes vs. monsters, and explosive flicks, watching these films and dramas set in ancient times was a novelty for everyone.

The popularity of these few drama series gave rise to a new wave of historical fads. Filming outdoors on planet Wai was also convenient. If it were to switch to planet Baiji, if a group headed into the forests without a military squad for protection, nobody could say for certain whether anyone would return alive.

Presently, Silver Wing was also filming another drama on Wai, "Warring States," which was set in ancient times and was about a power struggle. Many new constructions were added for the filming of this next series.

Some Yanzhou celebrities that had opened their own studios made connections with Silver Wing and came over to planet Wai for filming. Earnings were secondary; these people came with other motives. First, they wished to know what the Wai film studio complex was like, and second, with so many production teams here, there were actors, directors, and investment firms from continents across the entire world. Getting to know more people could help pave a few more roads in future.

Many people seemed to soar in Yanzhou, but when put on the global stage, they were nothing more than infants learning to talk. Yanzhou alone was too small. Any actor or actress with ambition aimed to develop themselves on the global stage, and Wai film studio complex gave them such an opportunity.

As Wai film studio complex was more or less fully developed and was being hyped up in the news, Wai base's commanding officer, Huo Yi, submitted an application for a film entertainment cultural base.

At the start, Huo Yi had been rather apprehensive. After all, previous applications to be a major research base had been rejected multiple times. Now that he was applying to be a film entertainment cultural base, he had expectations, but he also made mental preparations for rejection.

However, when he received the results and saw the words "application approved," Huo Yi's hands trembled and he wanted to scream, but he restrained himself from doing so. Suppressing the billowing ecstasy in his heart, Huo Yi sat in his own office the whole afternoon and carefully considered many things. However, when he returned to his senses, he realized he had not come up with anything.

On the same day, Huo Yi, informed every investor that the Wai film studio complex had officially been named "Wai Film Entertainment Cultural Base"!

When a few companies and superstars posted new statuses on their social platforms, the tagged location had already changed to "Wai Film Entertainment Cultural Base."

Film studio complex and film entertainment cultural base. It was obvious from the names which of the two was of a higher level. Since approval had already been obtained, the original film studio complex would surely continue to expand, and development and would not be limited to the extent it was now.

Planet Wai could not be like planet Baiji and bank on having high-grade power ore to develop the planet. Wai had to take its own special path, so Huo Yi decided to build up the major research base and film entertainment cultural base. There was no need to compete with planet Baiji—all that was needed was to compete with other planets that were of similar levels.

The film entertainment cultural base being approved let a lot more people know about planet Wai. In the past, even though there had been the influence of Project Starlight, not many people had understood planet Wai. Now, with the rebuilding of those ancient historical structures, a lot more people were learning of planet Wai.

When investors that had adopted a wait-and-see approach saw this piece of news, a portion of them immediately made their choice, but the remainder continued to

hesitate till Wai base had yet another announcement. Wai Major Research Base had been approved.

After the film entertainment cultural base had been approved, Huo Yi had clenched his teeth once more and submitted the application for a major research base. From an economics point of view, there were many examples. For example, during the filming for the film Silver Wing had invested in, "Beauties," many of the plants within the palace had been transplanted from the experimental plots. Furthermore, with the extreme popularity of this series, a few of the bonsai plants featured inside had become highly sought after.

Through these means, plants from the experimental plot had publicized their existence. This was something that had been discussed between Silver Wing and the relevant researchers.

A few large wholesale vendors of the flowers and plants market had contacted planet Wai to place an order for a batch of these goods.

With popularity and economic value, the probability of it being approved had been much higher, but even so, when Huo Yi had received the results, he had not been able to control himself as tears flooded his eyes.

Finally approved!

A dual-function base!

Double insurance!

When the extent of the film entertainment cultural base and major research base got even bigger, Wai base would surely be expanded. Wai base would still be a far cry from Baiji military district when it came to power, benefits, and development rate, but it would still be much stronger than before!

After the major research base was approved, the "Ark plan" experiment was going to continue, and crops with high economic value were going to be resurrected from the stored seeds. As long as there was interest to provide the impetus, there would be sufficient plants for this research.

In the past, whenever investors had heard about the plan to head for planet Wai, the first thought that had come to their minds was this: Cough. Don't even think about

tricking me into investing there!

Now, although planet Wai was continuing to seek out investors, the rates were no longer as favorable as before. The prices of land here had increased many times over, and there were restrictions from other ends as well.

For people paying attention to Project Starlight, they could not help but think about this. Among the five channels, first it was S5 that had triggered a planetary reform of sorts. Next the planet S4 had been become a dual-function base. Viewers couldn't help but wonder whether the remaining three channels could come up with any more big news.

The people that had proposed Project Starlight were now beaming with pride. Hasn't it already changed the fates of two planets?

On Planet Baiji. Fang Zhao read through yet another weekly financial report. In the past few weeks, both revenue and expenses had been rising, but on the whole, the financial situation was good.

Now, more and more people were heading to Wai's film entertainment cultural base for filming. Some only rented small sets—for example, a tavern and two shops.

Kevin Lin browsed through the news and lamented, "Now everyone knows the two must-sees on planet Wai. The first is the film entertainment cultural base, to admire every continent's ancient structures and styles and have a time-transcending experience, and the other is the major research base's peach garden. I heard that the best time for admiring the peach blossoms is over. Next year, when the garden is flowering, I shall head over for a look."

As he looked at planet Wai's sceneries and remembered the conditions on planet Baiji, Kevin Lin felt that if planet Baiji had not discovered high-grade power ore, its position on the development sequence would have continued to slide down as time passed by, not because its landscape was no good but because Baiji was just too dangerous.

"The Wai Film Entertainment Culture Base has so many celebrities. Perhaps one might even run into a few superstars when having a meal there. I really wish to go for a visit. Special dispatched reporters should have clearance, right? We aren't entertainment reporters, after all." Kevin Lin searched the web but did not find any definite regulations. All he found out was that there had been an increase in spaceflights to

planet Wai. Besides transport ships, there were also other spacecrafts, but anyone heading there was required to go through a thorough inspection, and the number of troops garrisoned on planet Wai had been increased.

"If your company helps you apply for it, the probability will be even higher. If you apply as an individual, that side might not necessarily permit you on board," Fang Zhao replied.

Kevin Lin muttered a few lines to himself. Then, as if remembering something, he suddenly asked, "Hey, Fang Zhao, you will surely head over often after your military service, right? Moreover, your company has a leading piece of land over at the film entertainment cultural base? You also invested in it as well. Perhaps you can even have a small role in a certain drama just for fun. Nowadays, celebrities with some reputation are invited to cameo in films, just like that shooting champion from Mazhou, Ma Xier. He had also starred as a sniper hitman in a film. Having these sorts of small roles can raise your popularity."

For what Kevin Lin saw, Fang Zhao getting a cameo or two, showing his face, and satisfying some cravings was good enough, There was no way he could have any important supporting roles, let alone play a lead character.

Fang Zhao laughed but did not say anything more. His communications device was ringing.

Fang Zhao was astonished when he answered. "Denzel?"

"Fang Zhao, have you returned to the outpost?"

Denzel looked skinnier than the last time they had talked and did not seem to be in good shape, as if he had not slept in a long time.

"I'm back already, what's up?" Fang Zhao asked.

"Could you help me contact planet Wai? I wish to rent a body of water at the pole of planet Wai. All the paperwork and cultivation qualifications are all complete. If not for the fact that the bodies of water at the poles of Earth are not permitted for private leasing, I would have already successfully cultivated here."

Denzel had heard from the researchers on planet Wai about Fang Zhao visiting planet Wai. Although he might have already left the Academy of Science, he still had contacts

and could find out this information rather easily.

The bodies of water at the polar regions were no longer available for lease. Denzel had prepared all the required documents and resources only to be told that they were no longer available. Denzel was awfully anxious right now and had contacted many people for help, and he had found out from a few ex-classmates at the Academy of Science that the bodies of water of the polar regions on planet Wai were close to those of Earth's. But now, planet Wai's checks were really stringent, and they could not help him. But they mentioned that perhaps Fang Zhao could have a word with Huo Yi.

Now, Huo Yi was full of confidence and could put on airs. Planet Wai was no longer short of research projects, and the major research base had already been approved, so there was no need to let other research projects in. For these sorts of applications that requested claiming a body of water, Huo Yi just browsed through and deleted them.

Many people were watching planet Wai, and Huo Yi was not willing to make any mistakes, so he would rather not accept any new incoming research projects. Now that a major research base was being developed, it would all get smoother in future. He could not afford to damage their bright future.

There was no need him to personally vet through the applications anymore, as he had a professional team in charge of reviewing potential investors. All Huo Yi needed was to just have a brief understanding.

Therefore, Denzel had contacted Fan Lin and received word on the timing of Fang Zhao's duties in the outpost. After Fang Zhao had completed his duties for the day and returned to his room, Denzel had contacted him right away.

"If it is successful, I can give you a 30% discount for feed purchased from me. No, 50%! As long as you are willing to help, 50% off for feed, is this all right with you? That hybrid sea slug eats a lot, I can't give the feed to you for free, but 50% off is already the best price." Denzel continued on, "I don't require anything much, just so long as you just mention a word to Huo Yi."

Fang Zhao did not give a reply straightaway but instead asked, "Are you just cultivating krill? Let me take a look at the electronic file."

Denzel sent Fang Zhao a large file right away. The required files had long been prepared. If not for the fact that Earth's bodies of water were not for lease, he would

not have needed to come running to Fang Zhao.

Denzel was also feeling sullen. Originally, when he had found out about Fang Zhao's dog that was worth 100 million, he had decided to sell the feed to Fang Zhao at a premium. Unfortunately, before he had even been able to put the plan into action, he'd had to come looking for Fang Zhao again. Not only could he not sell it at a high price, he needed to give a discount.

Fang Zhao briefly browsed through the file and nodded. "I will ask first and inform you immediately if there is news."

After ending the call, Fang Zhao went through the electronic file carefully. Denzel had already filed for patents for the technological procedures mentioned in the file and so was not afraid of it being stolen. Otherwise, Denzel would also not having been willing to hand over the file just like that.

After reading through it, Fang Zhao brought up a map of planet Wai that Huo Yi had given him. The map was not complete, but it displayed the areas that could be purchased.

After viewing the polar region's bodies of water, Fang Zhao spun the map around before suddenly stopping. He had spotted a place on the edges of a desert. He looked at the climate data displayed for that area. There, the relative humidity was low and there was little life. It was one of the few areas on planet Wai that seemed to have an aura of death.

Chapter 243

Revolutionary Project

Fang Zhao studied that area once more. There were mountains and valleys, but it suffered from low rainfall and had a desert climate. The surrounding were all sand and rocks, and there were very few species living there. Because of this, the entire area emanated an aura of death, unlike other regions. Even without personally heading over, he could tell just from looking at the map.

Looking at the time, Fang Zhao contacted Huo Yi.

As Fang Zhao had been among the first batch of investors and had contributed greatly to the film entertainment cultural base, Huo Yi gave Fang Zhao special treatment and let Fang Zhao contact him directly for any important matters.

Recently, Huo Yi had been very pleased, and it was written on his beaming face in the video call. "Fang Zhao? What's up? Don't tell you are looking to invest somewhere?"

Fang Zhao selected that area on the map and showed it to Huo Yi. "Are you selling this plot of land?"

The area was slightly larger, and Fang Zhao did not have sufficient funds on hand to purchase it. His funds had been invested in the film entertainment cultural base and would not return so quickly. However, a loan was possible. He just wanted to make inquiries as to the price of this piece of land first.

Huo Yi was stunned for a moment when he saw the area Fang Zhao had brought up. Afterward, patting the back of his own head, Huo Yi said, "I almost forgot! That map has not yet been updated. You can forget about that area; somebody has already bought it. Previously, I was so busy I forgot to update the map. I'll get somebody to update the information in a bit and show the areas that have already been purchased. Just wait a moment, let me send you the newest version."

Upon receiving the new map Huo Yi sent over, Fang Zhao was even more astonished when he saw that area on the map. Not only was the area he wanted to buy taken, a large part of the surrounding areas had also been encircled. The entire area claimed

was three times larger than the amount of land of every investor of the film entertainment cultural base put together.

Fang Zhao was curious. "The entire thing was bought by somebody? The entire thing? Who?" It was reasonable to think that nobody would have noticed the area on the map. Right now, all planet Wai investors were looking for scenic locations and pleasant places. Exactly what sort of person would set their eyes on this sort of area?

When Huo Yi heard Fang Zhao's questions, he fell silent for a few seconds, and then he said, "The Interplanetary Fund."

Only a big player like the Interplanetary Fund had the power to claim such a huge expanse of land right when planet Wai's land prices were rising.

"Is it for building a city?" Fang Zhao asked.

"I have no idea why the Fund purchased such a large expanse of land, but it definitely isn't for a city. We have signed a confidentiality agreement regarding that area. In the future, regardless of whatever is built there, no questions will be asked. However, what I can confirm is that there are no immigration policy plans."

Huo Yi scanned through the map, feeling puzzled deep down. There were so many good areas on planet Wai. Whether it was for commercial or residential purposes, there were many better choices. Why did they view this area as important?

The Interplanetary Fund seemed to be up to something mysterious. It was as though they did not want anybody to know what was going on there, and they had already assigned an engineering team to begin constructing a perimeter wall, preventing anyone from looking inside. If it had been anyone else, Huo Yi would have long ago punched them in the face. Trying to put on airs? How can any area on planet Wai be out of Daddy's control?!

However, when the buying party was the Interplanetary Fund, Huo Yi was terrified.

He had climbed to the high position he now held with support from the Interplanetary Fund. Now he could not go against them. Besides, the Interplanetary Fund had said that his status on planet Wai would not change. As long as the Interplanetary fund did not do anything that harmed Wai, Huo Yi would not ask any questions.

"Forget about that area. How about you pick another location," Huo Yi suggested.

Fang Zhao pointed to a body of water near the polar regions. "Are you selling this area?"

"Polar waters? They can be purchased, but what do you intend to do there?" Huo Yi asked.

"I'm asking on behalf of someone." Fang Zhao sent over a series of files regarding krill cultivation. "Earth no longer permits cultivation at the polar regions, so he can only look for other alternatives. The waters at these areas of Wai are similar to the ones back on Earth, and he wishes to purchase an area to cultivate krill."

Huo Yi browsed through the files that were sent over and noticed a brief mention that the purpose was to improve nutritional doses. This made Huo Yi's heart skip a beat.

That company manufactured nutritional doses, and that was something the base also needed. However, Huo Yi did not immediately agree to it. Instead, he said, "The auditing process for krill cultivation is even more stringent."

"The information and resources are in order."

"Let me take a look first. If there are no issues, the area will be available to purchase."

Fang Zhao sent all the required information as well as audit reports to Huo Yi. Huo Yi then got specialists to verify it and confirm that it would not bring about any serious negative impacts to planet Wai's bodies of water before returning Fang Zhao's call.

With Fang Zhao's mediation, Denzel finally discussed terms and signed a contract regarding the purchase of a body of water on planet Wai. However, this time, Huo Yi did not personally attend to it. He left it to the relevant parties to handle.

Two days later, Fang Zhao received news from Denzel that Denzel had purchased the expanse of water he had been looking at. Soon, Denzel was going to bring along a batch of company workers and head for planet Wai to begin krill cultivation. He would also make some of the special feed for Fang Zhao's hybrid sea slug, so Fang Zhao could get someone to collect it.

On that day, Duan Qianji came over to Outpost 23.

As Hong Lou was part of Baiji military district, Duan Qianji was considered a family member and could live in the family district. However, as a boss, Duan Qianji was

rather busy and frequently shuttled between Earth, Wai, and Baiji.

Every time Duan Qianji came, she also brought along some lifestyle accessories and higher quality foodstuffs for Fang Zhao. Fang Zhao did not keep them solely for himself, though, and called people from the outpost to share them.

Although Duan Qianji could contact Fang Zhao through his communications device, she chose to visit him personally every time. Fang Zhao had helped Hong Lou, and Silver Wing had invested in the Wai film studio complex because Fang Zhao had roped them in. It could be said that, compared to Yanzhou's other companies, Silver Wing had taken the first foray into the global film scene, and Fang Zhao's contributions could not go unnoticed. Visiting him personally was something Duan Qianji ought to do.

Duan Qianji discussed matters about the newly constructed housing street over at the film entertainment cultural base. Duan Qianji regarded Fang Zhao's opinions and design plans highly and recorded everything down. In addition, certain details in the drama series that had gone unnoticed were spotted by Fang Zhao, and she recorded them down so as to prevent making the same mistakes in the new drama series.

Duan Qianji did not stay at the outpost for too long. After finishing their discussion, as she was preparing to leave, she asked Fang Zhao, "Are there any other problems?"

"Yes."

Under Duan Qianji's puzzled gaze, Fang Zhao asked, "The revolutionary film project that kept being shelved, are they going to restart it?"

On the global scale, there were only a few film projects that could be termed "revolutionary." As for continuously being shelved, there was only one.

Back when Fang Zhao had only been in the virtual projects department for a short while, Fang Zhao had heard Rodney, Song Miao, and the others mentioning this, a film project regarding many important characters from the Period of Destruction. The project had been raised many years ago but had kept getting shelved.

That was a genuine blockbuster that would involve the film circles of all the twelve continents and all the respective aristocratic families, a revolutionary, groundbreaking film project!

Duan Qianji's face changed and her smile faded. With a grave expression, she said, "What news have you heard? Frankly speaking, I received information early on saying that the revolutionary film project might be restarted within the next few years, but that is all I know."

"A few days back, I took fancy to an area on planet Wai and felt that it was suitable for scenes of the Period of Destruction. I originally wanted to purchase the land and build something like a Period of Destruction cultural park in the future. As you all know, I have an interest in all things regarding the Period of Destruction, but little did I expect that the area had already been bought."

"Who?"

Fang Zhao opened up a map and pointed to an area much larger than the film entertainment complex. "The Interplanetary Fund. This whole area was purchased by them."

According to convention, for this sort of revolutionary film project, there was a very high possibility that the Interplanetary Fund would invest in it, and now they had bought that large area. Fang Zhao had asked Huo Yi and a few researchers on planet Wai and found out that there were no valuable minerals there and that didn't have as much scientific value as other areas when it came to conducting experiments. As for planet Wai's two distinguishing characteristics, one was the Ark plan—resurrection of stored seeds—and the other was film culture. Since the former was unlikely, what about the latter?

Therefore, Fang Zhao had surmised that perhaps somebody also wanted to develop the area into a landscape similar to the Period of Destruction and use it for other stuff, such as filming?

To get a better understanding of whether the situation was as he had guessed, Fang Zhao had asked Duan Qianji this question.

Duan Qianji did not doubt what Fang Zhao had said. She fell silent for a bit before nodding her head. "If that area was really made into a landscape from the Period of Destruction suitable for filming, then there is a high possibility of what you just said happening. That revolutionary film project might just be restarted!"

Many people had their eyes on this revolutionary project. When she had heard that

the project could be rebooted in the coming few years, Duan Qianji had already starting making plans and rushed to generate a few films and series that could capture the eyes of global audiences and promote the film stars in her own company.

Choosing historical dramas could be considered a strategy. Regardless of the genre of any film, as long as their reputation and fame was put forward, that was good enough. If one series was no good, then two or three!

For such a revolutionary film project, forget about the company's A-list film stars, even their S-rank first-rate superstars might not be able to snag a satisfactory role!

As for other people, if they did not have enough fame or sufficient ability, they would not even be able to get a significant supporting role!

Duan Qianji left hastily. She wanted to go over to planet Wai and scout out the situation.

Fang Zhao browsed through entertainment news from every continent. Upon closer inspection, he realized that competition in the global film circles had escalated. Now, film companies from every continent were churning out large-scale productions in quick succession in order to tussle for viewership and popularity. It was probably as Duan Qianji had said. When everyone had gotten the news, they had rushed to promote their own company's celebrities and make them more noticeable so when the time came, they would have even more firepower when it came to vying for roles in the revolutionary project.

However, many people had not expected that the Wai Film Entertainment Cultural Base was going to pop up this year and result in historical works becoming highly popular. This time, Silver Wing's stars had successfully raised their global fame.

Fang Zhao opened his own notebook and flipped to the last page. On it were plans he had recorded. Picking up his pen, he added a line to it.

Who set the rule that only renowned actors could vie for roles in the revolutionary film project?

—————

After Duan Qianji left the outpost, she changed the course of her journey. Originally, she had intended to return to Earth, but now she decided to head to planet Wai to

make discreet inquiries as to the situation.

Following which, Duan Qianji gathered the company's few top film stars and agents for a meeting.

As a second-tier actor in the company, Ji Polun did not have the qualifications to be called for that meeting. After completing "Beauties," he had successfully managed to squeeze into a role for "Warring States." Originally, Ji Polun had been rather satisfied. Although that role might be a little effeminate, it was still an important supporting role, wasn't it? He had already acted as a eunuch, would he still be afraid of this? How many even wanted this role but could not get it!?

But after the few big names had been called over by the boss for a meeting, Ji Polun discovered that their attitudes had changed completely. Their acting had always been very professional, but now, this bunch had a change in attitude, as though a fire had been lit in their bellies.

Previously, Ji Polun had heard a few first-rate actors grumble during their mealtimes that the film schedule was too pressing and how they were exhausted and missed their homes and could not wait to return and rest. Now, though, even outside filming, even when they were extremely tired, these people seemed to have an inner fire. Ji Polun never heard them mention "returning and resting" ever again.

Intuition told Ji Polun that he could not take it easy!

Actors and actresses of a higher tier, even first-rate superstars, were all so hardworking. As a second-tier actor, how could he have the cheek to slack off? Furthermore, watching this bunch act up a storm, Ji Polun felt his own blood surging. What a great opportunity to learn!

The changes on the set of "Warring States" did not capture the attention of too many people.

There were now many production teams in the bustling film studio complex. Hoteliers here were making a windfall.

Because there were many people and identities were all confusing, it gave an opportunity for people to take advantage.

With his own superior disguises and the gift of gab, Wang Tie had successfully

infiltrated the film studio complex.

However, just as he was about to step into the palace grounds, he saw the tablet beside the gates. When he caught sight of Fang Zhao's name, he had no time to even think as his balls shrank.

After making some inquiries, he felt that the name shown on the stone tablet had a high likelihood of being the same one as his greatest fear.

Making careful considerations, Wang Tie decided to avoid Silver Wing's sets and turned around. He headed over to other sets for a look. Every day, before he started work, he would first head online to check whether channel S5 had any live broadcasts and whether Fang Zhao had appeared in them. Only after confirming that Fang Zhao was still on planet Baiji would he set about his job in peace.

On Channel S4, today's live broadcast was Woo Tianhao instructing martial arts... to a bunch of tiger-eared monkeys.

These animals would not hurt people on purpose because they did not have a hostile nature. Woo Tianhao's uncle had said that the mountains needed some live animals so the scenes would have more vitality. Since Woo Tianhao's mountain was not used for filming, a few of these animals had been released there.

Woo Tianhao had proposed it, and the breeders had been more than happy to agree. On the second day, a group of tiger-eared monkeys had been sent over. At the start, these tiger-eared monkeys had still been quite guarded and had stayed away from humans, but gradually, they had discovered that getting closers to humans granted them even more delectable goodies. There was no need to worry about food and water here, and the food was much better than what the breeders had fed them. Now they wouldn't budge even if you chased them away.

On a certain day, when Woo Tianhao was practicing his martial arts, a tiger-eared monkey had imitated Woo Tianhao's actions and movements. Woo Tianhao had found this rather amusing and had not chased it away. Who could have known that two days later his Dojo would have a larger group of monkeys.

Never in Woo Tianhao's wildest dreams had he expected that his first batch of disciples would be a bunch of alien monkeys!

After the broadcast ended, Woo Tianhao received a call from his uncle.

"What's up? Wanna trick me into acting in a film again?"

Hearing his uncle approaching him to act in a new drama series, Woo Tianhao had prepared to reject him, but the following words made Woo Tianhao halt.

Excitement ran across Woo Tianhao's face as he asked, "That project, is it certain that it will be rebooted?"

"Around 80% probability that it will be rebooted. Filming will probably begin next year, latest by the following year. How about that, do you wish to strive for it?"

"You don't say! Of course I do!"

On another mountain.

Zaro's agent had just ended a call. He mulled it over for a bit before turning to gaze at Zaro who was bragging to some people at the moment. The assistant beside him felt that it was the sort of look a breeder gave a swine as he pondered how to fetch the best price for it.

Chapter 244

Bookworm

Netizens were not really in the know when it came to the intense competition between large film companies and private studios, as there was just too much news and gossip about films, serials, and whatnot. While this was all going on, yet another new round of military enlistment began.

There were two enrollment periods for military service: one in April and the other in October.

Generally speaking, the April batch saw more enlistees than the October one, as near the end of the year, it seemed like Memorial Day was drawing closer. Many people would choose to wait and spend Memorial Day with their family, have discussions, and make preparations before applying for enlistment in April.

However, the opposite happened this year.

The number of applicants for this October's batch of enlistees exploded by a whopping 291%. This was the figure given in an official announcement. Even without looking at all these statistical figures, most people could have guessed that this October's batch would increase by a lot. Especially among people in universities, many students that had yet to serve had decided to enlist.

Project Starlight was a success. It had brought about a zeal in youngsters for military service and brought about even more attention.

To best support the enthusiasm and zeal of youngsters, this round, the top brass had decided that the five planets involved in Project Starlight would take charge of enlistees applying to their respective planets. This meant that anybody who wanted to apply for military service on these five planets could do so, and those that were approved would be sent there. Only after being rejected would these enlistees than be allocated to another location by the system.

Youngsters looking to chase stars naturally chose the planets their idols were at for their own military service. Among Project Starlight's first batch, the planets S1, S2,

and S3 had similar situations. They had more enlistees than previous years, but it wasn't too exaggerated. The exaggerated ones were the planets that channels S4 and S5 were on—planets Wai and Baiji.

Planet Baiji's position in the development sequence had shifted and was developing rapidly, which gave rise to a lot more people wanting to go over and strive to do their best. Who knew if it could benefit them in their own future careers.

Planet Wai also received a similar number of applications to planet Baiji because of the film entertainment cultural base. Military enlistees were mostly youths in their early twenties, with the majority being university students, and there were many that chased stars. The Wai Film Entertainment Cultural Base had a strong appeal to these people, especially with entertainment news reports claiming that it was easy to run into a celebrities even when picking a random restaurant for a meal. These sorts of reports made these youngsters rub their hands in glee.

However there was a limit for accepting enlistees. Even though planet Baiji and Wai had both increased their quotas, the amount of applicants greatly exceeded their plans. Thus, they had to use the system to filter applications before filling up their quotas.

That meant to say that for this round, the criteria that planet Wai and Baiji were using for accepting enlistees was much higher. If there were any stains on their personal files, any unsavory records, serious psychological illnesses, or other issues, that party would be filtered out. Especially for planet Baiji, where they also examined the physical records of potential enlistees as well as the physical fitness examination results from primary school all the way to university. Applicants that were physically fit took priority.

After the filtering process, the system then sent the results to the applicants.

Applicants that received notifications that Baiji Military District had accepted their application were required to head to the allocated hospitals in their respective continents for a medical checkup and then head to the respective military districts for basic military training, just like Fang Zhao had done back then. After a month of training, they would then be sent to planet Baiji.

On the transport ship headed toward planet Baiji, the young conscripts were full of nervousness and complex thoughts. When they could not fall asleep, they gathered

together to chat.

"Hey people, since we are all going to be comrades, brother, what speciality are you going for?"

"Medicine."

"I specialize in Veterinary studies."

"Hahaha, looks like we are in the same field heh!"

"...It's different."

"Hey, what about the brother in front, what's your specialization?"

"Me? I'm in network engineering."

...

Under normal circumstances, if one wished to rise up in the military, generally, a whole lot of time was needed to grind one's way to the top. But right now, planet Baiji was going through a period of rapid development and expectation, and this counted as special circumstances. Using this as a pretext, it was a really good opportunity to vie for meritorious deeds, so everyone had their eyes on planet Baiji. Planet Baiji gave people from all professions a chance to strive forward for greater future prospects.

But when these young conscripts finally arrived on planet Baiji, they were welcomed with a bug feast.

Baiji's commanding officer had said that the bug feast was a tradition. No matter how much Baiji developed, this tradition would be preserved so every newcomer to planet Baiji would remember the sort of harsh life people had had when they had first come here in the early days. We have to remember the unpleasant past and take delight in our present situation!

However, even though it was the same bugs, now, when these new conscripts partook in the bug feast, it was still much better than how people used to have them in the past. At least now the bugs were no longer served half-cooked.

Even so, many new conscripts were still tormented by the bug feast. On the second

day, close to 60% of new conscripts had pale faces, as if their hearts were still reliving the horrors of the bugs. Some people were even starting to wish they had chosen planet Wai instead. Having grain on planet Wai was way better than having bugs!

But very quickly, the doubts in these young conscripts heads were replaced with newfound zeal at a commendation ceremony.

This commendation ceremony was organized by Baiji Military District to honor outstanding conscripts and set a good example for the new batch.

Naturally, Fang Zhao was among the awardees. Fang Zhao and the other conscripts of his batch had already undergone half a year of military service. Previously, when some people had seen Fang Zhao getting promoted, they had become really proactive. Throughout the military district, there were some conscripts and talents from different fields that had produced outstanding performances. These people had also rendered several meritorious services, and although they might not necessarily be third-class merits, with many contributions, Baiji military district took the opportunity to take a few exemplary role models and made an exception to promote them and honor them specifically at this commendation ceremony.

Previously, Fang Zhao had been a second lieutenant. This time, he was once again promoted, to the rank of first lieutenant. In this half year, he had followed the outpost team every day and completed assignments and missions and had rendered quite a bit of meritorious service. Everyone thought highly of his contributions and performance. He had saved people numerous times in critical situations, and having seen it for themselves, audiences watching the live broadcast did not have any complains.

A few experienced officers privately gasped in admiration. Whether it was his psyche or his natural ability, both were at truly extraordinary levels. If Fang Zhao continued to develop in the military, he would rise even higher in future.

When chatting with the two Fang elders, many people in the military district had said that Fang Zhao not being in the military was such a pity.

The two Fang elders naturally protected their own great-grandson in front of others, but they could not help but feel wistful in private. However, this was Fang Zhao's own choice. Everything was fine as long as Fang Zhao was happy. Besides, whenever Fang Zhao went on missions, the two elders didn't feel at ease. Watching those videos of

Fang Zhao on those assignments, they couldn't help but feel fear and trepidation when they saw the numerous times the outpost team was caught in dangerous situations.

Every time after watching it, Great-Grandfather Fang would get angry. It is just temporary military service, why do you have to strive so hard? Everyone else just acts and pretends during their military service, why do you have to be so serious? Can't you be more shrewd and avoid all this?

Today, after the commendation ceremony, when Fang Zhao was having a meal in the family district, Great-Grandfather Fang could not help but start preaching.

"Veteran troops handle dangerous places. You new soldiers have too little experience. The next time you encounter those dangerous situations, just stay away, all right?"

In the past, if Great-Grandfather Fang had heard people speaking this way, he would have snorted in disdain. What he couldn't stand the most was spoiling children this way!

However, when it came to himself, Great-Grandfather Fang became soft-hearted too.

Although he kept nagging, when Fang Zhao left after having dinner, Great-Grandfather Fang could not help but smile foolishly to himself as he replayed today's honoring of conscripts at the commendation ceremony over and over.

At the other end, Fang Zhao left the base and headed for the outpost.

Due to the commendation ceremony, Fang Zhao had received a day off and was not following the outpost team out on a mission today. After returning to the outpost, he headed into his dormitory and engrossed himself in composing.

Now, Kevin Lin was full of admiration. During the day, Fang Zhao was just a tireless iron-blooded soldier. At night, he returned to being a harmless artistic youth and continued producing his works. Kevin Lin thought to himself that this was something he would absolutely be unable to do.

The piece that Fang Zhao was composing was an accompaniment piece for a scene in "Warring States."

Before this, Fang Zhao had already made a number of accompaniment pieces for "Beauties" and "Warring States." These works would be part of the OST 1 for the two

drama series and would be uploaded online.

As he was writing away on his notebook, someone called on him.

The visitor seemed to be of a similar age to Fang Zhao, but he had an air of class and the haughtiness of an elite—he seemed to treat people politely, but there was a sort of arrogance deep down.

"My name is Joseph, a liaison with the Interplanetary Fund. This is my name card; you may verify my identity."

The other party put on a fitting smile as he handed over a golden card embossed with the Interplanetary Fund's insignia.

Fang Zhao did not need to personally verify the information. Bie Liao, the outpost team leader, had already sent over Joseph's detailed information.

Before entering the outpost, Joseph would surely have needed to go through a round of identity verification that was even more stringent. Therefore, Fang Zhao did not need to check on it personally, as Joseph's personal records were included in the information sent to him.

There was no doubt of his identity. He was indeed from the Interplanetary Fund and was certainly an elite.

Majored in economics from a famous school in Huanzhou, a doctorate in management, and had professional credentials in the areas of banking, medicine, engineering, art, and many more. It could be said that he was knowledgeable about everything, from astronomy to geography. When around people in the outpost team, he could chat with them about the latest entertainment gossip or discuss the direction of political reforms.

At the bottom of the information Bie Liao had sent to Fang Zhao, he had added, "This liason from the Interplanetary Fund is actually a bookworm!"

Joseph politely asked, "Sorry to bother you. Are you busy, Mr. Fang? I'm in no hurry, so we can chat after you are done with whatever you are busy with."

Fang Zhao did not reject him, simply pointing to a sofa to the side. "You can take a seat there and help yourself to anything."

The furnishings here were simple, and there were no customs here. Furthermore, Fang Zhao had gotten some inspiration a while back and did not wish to stop halfway.

Joseph pointed to the bookshelf at the side. "May I take a look at these books?"

When Fang Zhao had moved into his new quarters, he had purchased a bunch of electronic books and gotten the person in charge of printing at the base to help print them. Fang Zhao still liked to use paperback books and would bring a book with him during the day. During idle periods in between their missions, he would read them. At times when electronic equipment could not be used, paperback books were still very convenient.

The majority of these books were on music, film, history, and architecture.

"Please make yourself at home," Fang Zhao replied.

"Thank you." Joseph gave his thanks and walked over to the bookshelf. He ran his eyes through the titles displayed on the spines of these books. They were all printed on planet Baiji and their dates were also displayed on them.

Joseph took out a slightly thick book about history and flipped over the book.

"..." I don't understand.

His real intention was not to read the contents of the book but to view the notes Fang Zhao had written in the book. From there, he could find out what sort of person Fang Zhao was.

There were many notes and markings on the book, and there were even a few pages of densely packed scribbles. However, Joseph could not understand any of these symbols.

He flipped over to another page.

Still don't understand.

The polite smile on Joseph's face had disappeared. There were so many markings and annotations in this book, yet he couldn't understand a single symbol!

A minority language?

Didn't seem like it.

Shorthand?

Now that seemed a little likely.

Looking at the strokes, it was probably shorthand

But why would he use shorthand when making notes in the book?

A mental case!

Joseph did not buy it. All these books had been printed in the last three months. There were close to a hundred books here, and some were especially thick. There was no way he could have finished reading them all, and there was no way he used the same sort of method to make notes in every single one, right?

Ten minutes later.

Joseph sat on the sofa, as quiet as a mouse.

Chapter 245

Fang-Style Cursive

Joseph sat silently on the sofa, having lost much of the arrogance he'd had in his heart.

Actually, those symbols had not dealt him such a severe blow. Although he felt like he had hit a wall when he had tried deciphering those scribbles, what had given him a bigger shock were those books.

Fang Zhao had actually finished close to a hundred books in the space of three months!

He still had some ability when determining whether he was being deceived. Even though he could not understand the scribbles, from what he had seen, the person had made markings and taken notes randomly and had read them seriously. All the underlines, notes, and remarks on blank spaces clearly showed that the person had read it really seriously and taken notes conscientiously!

What sort of speed was this!

Of course, reading books quickly did not mean much—his main objective was to see how capable this Fang Zhao person was.

Recalling when he had investigated all the information regarding Fang Zhao, Joseph felt that it was best for him to maintain silence.

Continuously staring at someone was an impolite gesture. Joseph could not bring himself to fix his gaze on and analyze Fang Zhao, so he stared at the bookshelf. He had wanted to ponder some questions, but as he thought about it, he found himself in a daze.

Only when he heard a book being closed did he return to his senses and put on a polite smile once again.

Fang Zhao placed the notebook into a drawer and looked at Joseph. "Sorry for making you wait."

This time around, Joseph was more humble. "No, no, not at all. It's me who is being a bother." Whatever the case, Fang Zhao was someone worth admiring.

Joseph noticed that Fang Zhao did not seem impatient, so he did not delve straight to the main topic and instead picked out the thickest history book from the shelf. "I have a question I wish to ask, Mr. Fang. Are the notes inside written using shorthand?"

"Yes," Fang Zhao joked, "this is a shorthand I created: Fang-style cursive. One stroke per book."

Actually, it could not be considered a cursive script 1 ; rather, it had gradually evolved from one. A few more complicated words inside had been substituted with other symbols, and that was how it had become Fang Zhao's own shorthand style. Fang Zhao could practically write a whole sentence with one stroke.

It was just taking notes. He wrote it this way as it was for himself to read. If it were for others, he would write in the normal words that everyone knew.

Just like when Fang Zhao was composing, the script was written in a code that only he understood. When it was for other people's eyes, he would change it to common musical notes.

During the Period of Destruction, Fang Zhao had frequently used this sort of shorthand method for formulating battle plans and taking notes. When there had no longer been any use for those notes, Fang Zhao had destroyed them. Those times required being prudent, not just against the foreign enemy but against vile characters as well.

Thus, those "handwritten notes of a great man" in the New Era memorial hall were actually nothing personal. They had been written for others to see and were not secret, so he naturally hadn't used "Fang-style cursive."

However, now the notes no longer needed to be destroyed and were nothing like the formulated battle plans that could decide the lives or deaths of troops and needed to be safeguarded. However, this was a habit that Fang Zhao continued to retain when he went out on missions. Idle time in between was shorter, so this method of cursive saved time and effort.

Furthermore, perhaps due to his body's physical changes, Fang Zhao's current reading speed kept increasing, and his brain thought faster. To best save time, Fang Zhao would

write out all the thoughts in his head, regardless whether he was in battle mode or not. Using this "one stroke per book" was the most appropriate.

During the Period of Destruction, these sorts of shorthand note-taking methods had all been lost, so now, Fang Zhao had no fear of anybody else understanding it.

"So that's the case." Indeed, it was shorthand.

Joseph asked a seemingly harmless question. "All of these have been read by you?"

"Yes. I'm almost done reading them," Fang Zhao replied. Actually, there were still around 10 more books that Fang Zhao had shifted away to make room for newly printed books when he had been tidying the bookshelf, as it had been too full. However, Fang Zhao did not feel that it was necessary to mention this.

"I never expected that Mr. Fang would still read so many books while undergoing his military service," Joseph said ruefully. "I finally know why you know so much even though you only have a composing background."

Fang Zhao wanted to say "One will never cease to learn as long as one lives," but he swallowed his words just before he opened his mouth. This proverb did not seem too appropriate.

Noticing that Fang Zhao did not appear to be pleased or even have any other expression, Joseph did not mention it further. Straightening his face, he spoke about his motive for coming today.

"Does Mr. Fang know the revolutionary film project set during the Period of Destruction is on the verge of being rebooted?" Joseph asked.

Fang Zhao nodded. "I heard about it."

"Although it has yet to be officially announced, certain entertainment companies in every continent have received news of the pending reboot, and it is indeed a reality. As the investors and one of the producing parties of this project, the Interplanetary Fund has nominating rights."

Joseph seamlessly observed Fang Zhao but did not notice any trace of impulse or excitement, or any other expression, on his face. Fang Zhao was still the same as before, maintaining his calm demeanor and listening attentively.

"Mr. Fang is contracted to Silver Wing Media and is one of the members on the consultant team for 'Beauties' and 'Warring States.' You should probably know that for any dramas concerning history, a consultant team cannot be lacking. We have seen the two period dramas released by Silver Wing, and they are indeed top quality. The consultant teams for these dramas are indeed capable. Today, I'm here on behalf of the Interplanetary Fund to give Mr. Fang an invitation and hope you will join as a member of the consultant team for the revolutionary film project that is about to be rebooted."

When Joseph had first received this assignment, he had not understood why the top had a preference for Fang Zhao. As part of the film projects team, naturally, Joseph knew what the revolutionary film project was all about.

Although this project had been raised long ago, filming had been continuously put off, as the parties that were investing in the production were always at odds.

Besides the Interplanetary Fund, there were over 10 other coproducing parties that were large investors. These were all the famous families in each of the continents, and they had continuously argued—having opposing views on this actor or that, being unable to see eye to eye, and even arguing over the script. Parties would say that these were fabrications, slander, or overexaggerations that were misleading. The script had also seen many years of adjustments and amendments, but with so many disagreements, the project had kept being shelved.

Now, the Interplanetary Fund had increased their investment in this project and contacted the other investing parties with their decision to reboot the project. First and foremost was setting up a consultant team.

For the revolutionary film project, the consultant team would naturally be huge. It could be said that consultant teams for past film and drama series could not compare to this film project's consultant team in terms of manpower and capability. Perhaps even many years into the future, there might not still not be a consultant team that could compare with it.

Every investing party had their own consultants they acknowledged. The Interplanetary Fund had put forward two expert professors renowned in many circles for their research on the history of the Period of Destruction.

For the highly viewed online historical dramas "Beauties" and the currently airing "Warring States," many people did not bother watching the tiny words in the end

credits after an episode ended, but people from the Interplanetary Fund's film projects team paid attention to them.

Many consultants in many historical dramas were nothing more than consultants in name only and were being dragged along just as a facade, leaving after perhaps having a meal or making some small talk while having close to practically no use. Perhaps these titular consultants had not even watched the dramas in question, so there were lots of drama series that appeared with lots of inaccuracies. For these titular consultants, this would damage their reputation. However, many of these history consultants did not bother about their fame or reputation. They were more concerned about how much money they would get, and it was fine as long as they got paid. If the director did not need them, they were more than happy to relax.

But when the completed "Beauties" and currently airing "Warring States" that were really popular were released, everyone could see the quality. The masses were not blind, and it was shown by the popularity of the two series as well as their rankings on online video sites. This was what made the Interplanetary Fund pay attention to the consultant team displayed at the end credits.

Fang Zhao had already been eyeing this revolutionary film project. Having received an invitation, there was no way he would reject it.

Fang Zhao discussed the terms for the contract with Joseph and was required to sign a confidentiality agreement. There was no need for nondisclosure about Fang Zhao signing on as a consultant—rather, the confidentiality agreement was for the contents of the script he would receive.

The script had not been completely set in stone and required the members of the consultant team to run through it. Probably only when the script was fully set would there be an official announcement on the reboot of this project.

After signing the contract, Fang Zhao asked, "Who are the other members of the consultant team that have already been invited?"

Since the contract had already been signed, they now had a working relationship, so there was no need for Joseph to keep this a secret. He handed over a list of people who were already included in the consultant team. "These members have already been confirmed. There might be a few just like you who have been invited but have yet to be recorded on the list."

The list might not have been completed, but taking one glance through, Fang Zhao could tell right away why this was the consultant team for the revolutionary film project. This lineup was formidable, and past series could not compare.

The head of the historical consultant team was the president of the Academy of Social Sciences, an esteemed and respectable historian. Following behind him, there were names of people from archaeology fields, historical research institute staff, and literature award recipients. All of these were famous names in the fields of history, art, and literature.

Why did Fang Zhao recognize these names?

That was because a third of books in his bookshelf were written by these people!

Just looking at these names, Fang Zhao could tell that this project was absolutely of the highest quality.

If this revolutionary film project was rebooted and the names on the consultant team released, that lineup was enough to make the entire film circle tremble!

Compared to the names on the list, generally, as someone who did not specialize in history, Fang Zhao would not have received an invitation. With regards to advice and consultation, Fang Zhao's current status was a far way off from the others who had been famous for a long time already.

But Fang Zhao's "combat" experience was strong: consultant team member for "Beauties" and "Warring States," design team member for the Silver Wing region of the Wai film entertainment complex, and a member of the advisory panel for Fiery Bird's "Battle of the Century." These were actual examples displayed out in the open and could not be falsified!

The most significant was Fiery Bird's "Battle of the Century." The game had been set during the actual Period of Destruction, and Fang Zhao had provided many pertinent suggestions.

From an investor's point of view, Fang Zhao's resume was no less valuable than that of a few of these award winners.

And because of this, the Interplanetary Fund had dispatched Joseph over to deliver an invitation to Fang Zhao.

Even Duan Qianji would never have expected that, through the two meticulously produced historical dramas, none of her actors had managed to secure a spot, yet the historical consultant team had already set their eyes on one of her staff.

With his assignment completed, Joseph had no intention of remaining at the outpost for long and got ready to take his leave.

Fang Zhao called out to Joseph as he got up and prepared to leave. "Please wait."

Joseph raised an eyebrow. "Do you still have any doubts Mr. Fang?"

"Has the cast been confirmed yet?" Fang Zhao asked.

"Not yet. Only after the script has been finalized will the casting be decided on." Joseph assumed that Fang Zhao was helping Silver Wing make inquiries, so he did not find it strange. "For this series, significant supporting roles and leads all require approval from many different parties. After that, a vote will still be required to finalize the decisions. This will be up to how the various companies go about their operations. I do not understand all these too well, but one thing is for certain: people without a certain degree of fame will not even have a chance."

The "fame" that Joseph spoke about was not just being famous in one continent but rather on a global context.

"Thank you," Fang Zhao replied.

"Welcome." As if suddenly recalling something, Joseph turned around to face Fang Zhao. "Right, Mr. Fang is really talented in composing. I have also listened to the background music in the two Silver Wing drama series. They are very good, and I anticipate hearing more of Mr. Fang's works in the later episodes that will be released."

After he finished, Joseph flashed a courteous smile and left.

What he meant to tell Fang Zhao was this. Get your company to do some work and promote you and expand your reputation. Perhaps it will get noticed by the relevant parties at the Interplanetary Fund. After all, this revolutionary film project would also require background music and accompaniment pieces for all sorts of scenes. Sure, Fang Zhao still lacked the qualifications for the opening and closing songs, but for short interludes of various scenes in the show, Fang Zhao might have a chance.

Of course, Fang Zhao understood the underlying meaning behind Joseph's words. However, he had his own plans and would not do as Joseph had suggested. He still thanked Joseph for his kind intentions, though.

After Joseph left, Fang Zhao studied the invitation letter on his table. After scanning it on his personal terminal, he gained access to a group discussion platform for the consultant team, which was really easy to manage.

Shortly after entering, Fang Zhao received a few electronic files that were not related to the script. These were points to take note of for newcomers to the consultant team and to help newcomers adjust to the consultant team.

A consultant was not all about advising and not asking, nor was it all about asking and not advising. Worst of all was doing none of the above. This series was not a historical documentary, and it had some artistic value to it. The pointers were to remind some less attentive consultants about where to set out from and which angle to take when asking questions.

For a historical drama, it was first and foremost a theatrical piece of art, not a historical study. This art was expressed through film and music and had to be slightly larger than life, and for this art that had such a large investment, it naturally needed to arouse sufficient interest from audiences. Only then would there be greater returns. But as a historical drama, this art form could be excessive, but it still had to have a certain degree of authenticity.

After looking through these files, Fang Zhao had a rough of idea of what was going on. Being invited in now was just to report his attendance. When the time came, the contents of the script would be issued.

Just as he was pondering which events would be contained in the script, Fang Zhao received a call from Xue Jing.

Having already completed his global lecture tour on music, Xue Jing had just seen the video of Baiji military district's commendation ceremony and had seen the portion where Fang Zhao was honored.

However, besides showing concern, Old Xue Jing was also worried that Fang Zhao would walk down the wrong path. What if Fang Zhao decided to stay on with the military?

Xue Jing still had high hopes that Fang Zhao would undertake a greater pursuit of musical art and hoped that Fang Zhao would stay away from the military path. He wanted Fang Zhao to gain the recognition and approval of more people, especially the really fussy academics. If Fang Zhao did not walk down this path, academics would then judge Fang Zhao as having taken a "low-end route."

Fang Zhao described his daily routine. "I go on missions during the day and compose at night after returning to the outpost. I'm now working on a piece for a certain scene in 'Warring States'."

Hearing all this, Xue Jing's worry dissipated slightly, and he smiled a little brighter. "That's good. The ancient-style background music for 'Beauties' and 'Warring States' is really good. I have seen your work. If you keep it up, given your ability, once your military service ends, you can begin planning for your own individual concert."

"My sentiments exactly."

Xue Jing was delighted at Fang Zhao's reply, and they chatted about a few other music-related questions before Xue Jing reminded Fang Zhao to be careful and stay safe while out on his missions and then ended the call.

Fang Zhao remained silent for a while after ending the call with Xue Jing before dialing a certain number.

Yanzhou military district's general hospital. Yan Biao was undergoing a medical checkup. His prosthetics had already been fitted, and they were really expensive ones at that. The artificial limbs were nimble, and their functionality satisfied him. He had received a generous payout for his military discharge as well as bonuses. If he had not been discharged with merits and received particularly generous treatment and discounts, with just a normal discharge payout, he would never have been able to afford these sorts of prosthetics.

Yan Biao was also astonished to receive Fang Zhao's call. He had been keeping contact with Fang Zhao, but it had just been through text messages. Undergoing half a year of treatment and rehabilitation, Yan Biao's body had already recovered and he was in good spirits, probably anticipating what lay ahead for him. Furthermore, with the current levels of medical technology that were continuously improving, his recovery time had been much quicker than he had expected.

Yan Biao had sent a message to Fang Zhao last week saying he had already been discharged from the hospital, his body was at peak condition, and he could start work at anytime. Today, he had returned to the hospital just for a follow-up, and the results were all good.

Reading through Yan Biao's follow-up results and confirming that there were no issues, Fang Zhao said, "Prepare to start work."

Yan Biao brightened up, and his eyes shone with anticipation. "I have long been waiting for this day!"

After listening to Fang Zhao's instructions and ending the call, Yan Biao stood at the entrance of the hospital, sighing deeply as he stared at the sky. He had just started work!

But before that...

Yan Biao pulled up his trouser leg, looked at his lower leg, which had been replaced with machinery, and hesitated slightly.

This would be his first job after being discharged from the military. To give everyone a good impression of him, should he color this leg gold? Maybe silver-plated? Or perhaps a lower-profile skin-color tone?

Chapter 246

Protection-Fee Collectors

Gold and silver were too flashy. Plus, out of every 10 prosthetics at the rehab center, three were painted gold and two silver.

Natural skin color?

Yan Biao toyed with the idea and eventually shook his head. It was too pretentious. It was a freaking prosthetic—why pretend otherwise?

Yan Biao gave careful thought to what color he should paint his prosthetic legs, asking a whole bunch of folks for advice. After much consideration, he decided on the color his doctor suggested: titanium white.

Most doctors preferred titanium white because first, as doctors they were biased in favor of white and second, titanium white looked peaceful and less threatening. It was also the default color of most home robots. It was a color most folks in the New Era were familiar and comfortable with.

Titanium white was also nicknamed "suntan-proof." Duh! If a prosthetic could get a tan, that would be spooky.

During his rehab at the hospital, Yan Biao typically did the maximum number of exercises allowed by the doctor so he could be in the best shape possible, the kind that would enable him to engage in combat once he had gotten used to his mechanical legs. He was getting a substantial workout.

Because of his long training sessions, Yan Biao preferred to work out outdoors and bask in the sun as long as it didn't rain. The gym was often too crowded. He wasn't used to the cramped quarters.

Just as his name suggested in Chinese, Yan Biao looked a bit intimidating. Plus, he had gone on quite a few missions in the woods during his time on Baiji. His existing tan and the fact that he was working out outdoors every day now made him look like an ox.

Yan Biao typically wore long shorts or capri pants during his training sessions, both for comfort and to allow his doctor to better monitor his prosthetics. Today he wore pants, but they came off as capri pants after his prosthetics were painted titanium white. Yan Biao even donned a pair of white sneakers to match the color of his new legs.

His other limbs were heavily tanned, in strong contrast to his pristine white prosthetic legs.

Zuo Yu nearly burst out laughing when he saw Yan Biao. "What, are you pretending to be one those black horses with white hooves?"

Fang Zhao had brought Zuo Yu up to speed shortly after he had signed a contract with Yan Biao. Zuo Yu had already visited several times during Yan Biao's hospital stay. He was free anyway and had loads of time to kill, so he looked up Yan Biao to shoot the breeze and hear a few stories about Yan Biao's life on Baiji.

Even though they were competitive toward each other, they would both be serving as Fang Zhao's bodyguards from here on out. They were comrades now, so they also tried to get along.

Zuo Yu gave Yan Biao's titanium-white mechanical prosthetics a glance and commented, "That color looks a bit girly."

That said, compared to shiny gold, silver, any of those other weird, non-conventional colors, or the floral patterns with a dizzying effect, titanium white was OK.

Yan Biao laughed and stomped his feet. He felt good about his new legs. He was used to wearing camouflage in the army. Now that he was retired, he no longer had to sneak around. It felt good to wear a different color. But he sidestepped the issue and instead asked Zuo Yu, "You got the message from boss, didn't you?"

"Got it." Zuo Yu had reached out to Yan Biao after he heard from Fang Zhao, but when he had called, Yan Biao had been having his prosthetics painted and hadn't been able to talk. Zuo Yu had asked where he was and had decided to track him down in person instead.

"The next flight to Wai is a week from now. The tickets have been booked," Zuo Yu said.

Yan Biao was blown away. "You actually managed to swing tickets?" He had looked

online right after he had hung up with Fang Zhao. He had checked everything, be they freight vessels or chartered flights, anywhere he could secure seats.

But all flights for the next month had been completely sold out.

Wai was drawing tons of visitors after the establishment of the Wai Filmed Entertainment Culture Base. Most were the cast and crew of upcoming productions. The passengers were screened carefully, first when they bought tickets online and again prior to boarding. The tickets were also quite expensive, but that didn't stop the deluge of visitors. Many folks used their connections to land gopher jobs on upcoming TV productions so they would have an official cover to check out the legendary twin bases in person—the major research base and the filmed entertainment culture base.

But because of the limited number of seats, even production crews had to work their connections.

Yan Biao had access to Wai because he worked for an investor in the filmed entertainment culture base, but first he had to land a space transport ticket.

"I'm no miracle worker. Boss got us tickets and sent me a message. The tickets were just issued," Zuo Yu responded.

Yan Biao fired up his tablet. Indeed, there was an unread message waiting for him. It was too noisy, so he had missed the reminder. He was used to using military-issue electronic equipment in the service and was still getting used to the new consumer electronic devices on Earth.

Yan Biao made a mental note to buy a better tablet when he got his first paycheck.

A week later, Yan Biao and Zuo Yu boarded a space vessel bound for Wai.

The Wai Filmed Entertainment Culture Base was now crammed with various productions that were renting space from the major investors. They had all signed contracts.

There were quite a few production crews leasing plots from the area that Fang Zhao had bought. Fang Zhao didn't have the time to deal with the paperwork; Duan Qianji had assigned someone to help him out.

But Duan Qianji was also busy and frequently delegated to her staff. The production

crews paid their rent on time initially, but some tenants had started playing games when Fang Zhao's plot had started getting crowded. Tenants of the Silver Wing set were typically on time because they had dedicated staffers in charge of collecting rent. Meanwhile, production crews on Fang Zhao's plot had started owing back rent. These folks didn't dare take on Duan Qianji, but they thought Fang Zhao would let things slide.

Fang Zhao was willing to let production crews write IOUs or pay in installments, but the bottom line was that they had to show they intended to pay.

When he checked his books, he realized some tenants were messing with him this month.

It wasn't a big deal, and Fang Zhao was clearly in the right, so he didn't take the issue to Duan Qianji or the Wai military command. Zuo Yu was ridiculously free anyway, and Yan Biao had recovered. This was something for them to do. A former special forces and a retired major, both armed, would send the right message.

When Yan Biao and Zuo Yu arrived at the film studio complex and laid eyes on the clusters of replicated ancient buildings for the first time, they were blown away. Even though they had seen footage of the structures online, the real thing was more impressive.

Yan Biao took a look at his map and took a deep breath. "Wow—this entire plot belongs to boss?"

Zuo Yu triple-checked and nodded. "Yep, that's the plot."

Yan Biao was anxious to get started. "So, let's... go on patrol?" Walking in the streets of these sets felt like traveling through time. No wonder folks liked working here. Filming on a proper set definitely helped you get in character. Those talented actors would feel the difference.

"Let's go." Zuo Yu started a quick trot.

They were careful to avoid production crews that were in the middle of shooting.

They spotted folks arguing and fighting when they walked past the replica of an ancient inn.

Zuo Yu scanned the surroundings. "Are they acting or is this for real?" He didn't see any cameras, and the folks at the center of the fight wore contrasting outfits. Some were in costume and others wore modern garb.

"It's a real fight," Zuo Yu concluded. He asked, "Should we alert the soldiers stationed at the outpost nearby?"

Yan Biao flexed his arms and told Zuo Yu, "No need to bother the outpost over something minor like this. Let's keep track of what these folks damaged, and I'll take care of the rest."

He darted toward the crowd, yelling as he walked, "Hey, hey! What's going on? Stop fighting!"

Followed by three punches, two kicks, and a slap that took down the most violent parties.

The injured folks stayed down for some time. Their heads were spinning.

The other folks retreated immediately after a quick look at the menacing Yan Biao and an approaching Zuo Yu. "Who... who are you?"

"Us?" Yan Biao's tanned face flashed a toothy grin. "Debt collectors."

Judging from their demeanor, the crowd quickly translated "debt collectors" as "gangsters after protection money."

This kind of shady sh*t is going down here already? So soon after the film studio complex opened for business? Isn't the military paying attention?

But come to think of it, this was no surprise. Mobsters collecting protection fees were common around shops and film sets in remote locations on Earth as well as stores on black streets. It wasn't far-fetched for criminals to branch out to foreign planets.

"Don't mess with us. We're going to alert the soldiers at the outpost," someone who appeared to be a leader warned Yan Biao and Zuo Yu while wearing a guarded expression.

"We're civil, law-abiding folks," Zuo Yu responded.

The surrounding crowd: "...” That claim would have been more credible if the two former soldiers hadn't flashed the holsters on their belts.

Within a week of Zuo Yu and Yan Biao's arrival at the filmed entertainment culture base, Fang Zhao had collected all his back rent and received payment covering the damage the fight had caused.

Yan Biao gave Fang Zhao a briefing by phone.

"Some folks think they can stir trouble because the landlord isn't around. Boss, just me and Zuo Yu isn't enough. It is a big plot, after all. We can't resort to our guns when there are minor disputes. Using physical violence is also quite tiring. It's just the two of us, after all. Silver Wing has a dedicated team in charge of security. I paid them a visit. The team is made up of retired soldiers. We could put together a similar group, but we don't need that many people. Around 10 will do." Yan Biao continued, "I know some former soldiers who retired for various reason. Some of them were forced to retire because of injury, like I was, but I can vouch for their character."

Fang Zhao had been pondering the same issue. He readily accepted Yan Biao's suggestion. "Zuo Yu should be able to recommend some folks too."

"Understood."

Fang Zhao decided to send Yan Biao and Zuo Yu to the film studio complex first to collect back rent. Second, he also wanted boots on the ground. As the film studios got busier, trouble was bound to happen. Conflicts between different production crews wasn't uncommon.

After hanging up with Yan Biao, Fang Zhao checked his account balance.

Between his savings, payment for the scores he had written for the TV shows, and rental income from the filmed entertainment base, Fang Zhao had plenty of cash.

He planned on staging a concert after he finished his military service.

In Yanzhou, there were three leading performance venues: Five Notes, Vinyl Record, and Golden Age. The first two had strict standards when it came to choosing performers. The criteria was the number of prestigious music awards the performer

had received.

The concert halls typically refused to rent to performers who weren't up to snuff.

That left the final option, which was the only venue that rented to anyone who paid: Golden Age. This was Fang Zhao's venue of choice.

Golden Age was the venue where the widest range of artists performed. The age of the average performer was also lower than at the two other venues. It was an important stepping stone for many up-and-coming musicians.

Xue Jing had also suggested Fang Zhao go for Golden Age. Lacking the requisite award wins, the other two concert halls were out of the question. Considering Fang Zhao's current status within the industry, given he hadn't won any top prizes, the only option was Golden Age.

But Golden Age also scared off many potential performers, because it was prohibitively expensive.

Fang Zhao checked the rates for Golden Age, then his account balance. He could afford the venue, although he wouldn't be left with much cash after renting it, but as long as he had endorsement deals lined up for after his military service, he wouldn't be totally strapped for cash.

But precisely because Golden Age was available to anyone who could pay and its rates were exorbitant, it had a bad reputation. Purists refused to perform there, instead preferring to wait 10 or 20 years before renting the other two concert halls when they had accumulated the necessary accolades.

To prevent Fang Zhao from overthinking the matter, Xue Jing had counseled that even though Golden Age didn't enjoy the greatest reputation, it was a great venue for a newcomer, an ideal training ground. Whether it was too mass market or not was in the eye of the beholder.

"As long as you maintain a pure heart, you will always come out a winner." That had been Xue Jing's advice to Fang Zhao.

In fact, Xue Jing had no reason to worry. Fang Zhao knew very well that right now he needed a platform to showcase his talent.

Joseph had suggested hiring a PR company to launch a publicity blitz, but Fang Zhao had vetoed the idea.

If you didn't have the talent to back it up, a PR campaign could only get you so far. If you wanted the backing of major investors, that would be impossible, because they were all too smart to fall for such an act. They could detect a fraud from miles away.

It all came down to ability.

Chapter 247

Those Things About Great Persons

Although the Golden Age music hall was pricey, there was no shortage of reservations. Browsing the official website's booking schedule, Fang Zhao saw that the hall was already booked all the way to February next year, and if he wished to make a reservation, he would have to make it for three months after that. The weekends from March to May were already reserved, and only weekdays were still available for booking.

Fang Zhao would complete his military service and be discharged next April. Fang Zhao would continue producing music after his military service, and it was impossible for him to book it so early. Thus, Fang Zhao made a booking for a Saturday night in August. If there was not enough time, he could push his booking back, though his deposit would not be refunded.

Outside of military service, other than Silver Wing's composing assignments, Fang Zhao still had to prepare his own works and handle matters relating to the consultant team.

The consultant team's list of names was already more or less fixed, and the discussion platform had started to get lively. Every day, the team leader would raise a few questions to warm up and let everyone air their own views and suggestions on the targeted topic. The script had not been revealed yet, but everyone's enthusiasm in the group had already adjusted.

As the script had not been set yet, the members of the consultant team could speak a lot more freely. These people had all been engaged by those big investors. Some of these people held positions of power and authority, but when they spoke, there were no qualms.

On this day, the head consultant raised a topic about the character of Founding Era leaders and their livelihoods and other aspects.

Those people were heroes, but they had been humans too, not unfeeling killing machines. They had real feelings and emotions. This discussion was also for the sake

of supplementing various elements of these characters' lives in the series and making these great people appear more well developed.

Well-known military campaigns during the Founding Era were all documented in historical records, and examinations would touch upon them. Therefore, students who studied history well knew about all of these, but for the actual temperaments, lifestyle habits, and other aspects of these leaders, a large majority of people had no idea.

On a certain day, after Fang Zhao returned from a mission, he opened the discussion platform to find it bustling with activity, completely different from how outsiders might view an "academic research topic discussion"—serious and solemn.

Currently, this bunch was talking about the gossip of those great people. However, only those big shots in the historical and art circles were doing the talking. After all, only people with their sort of status would dare to gossip about these great people. For those younger ones, or those who were underqualified, they just watched silently from the side.

As a "junior" in these circles, it was not good for Fang Zhao to interrupt when these big shots were talking, so Fang Zhao just viewed silently, since he wanted to know what sort of awkward incidents these bunch of people had managed to dig up.

A big shot who studied history seemed to be excited. "Let's not talk about Wu Yan's mistress. The Wu family definitely would not let it be written in, but Wu Yan was afraid of dogs—this bit should probably be acceptable for the script."

"I'm warning you, although the current Yanzhou governor does not have the Wu family name, random vilification will not be tolerated. We need evidence."

The dominating and awe-inspiring Great General Wu Yan had actually been afraid of dogs? Of all the creatures to be afraid, he had been afraid of dogs? If this information was released, nobody would believe it!

"I contacted people from Xizhou and, with great effort, managed to convince them to contribute a portion of Great General Lu Xi's handwritten notes. It was mentioned in the notes that Great General Wu Yan was actually afraid of dogs, so he had not had that close a relationship with Great General Su Mu."

The others had their curiosity piqued and halted the discussion for the time being. "What else was there in Great General Lu Xi's notes?"

"According to the information provided from Xizhou, it was mentioned that Great General Lakalina's ancestor was an empress."

"That goes without saying. According to historical studies, Lakalina originally wanted to be an empress during the Founding Era. She even got a famed artist to paint a portrait of her titled 'Lakalina the First.' The painting is still on display at Lazhou's museum. After that, the entire world changed its political system to having only a governor. However, over at Lazhou, in private, the governor is still considered to be like a monarch."

"Hey, let me finish. The notes did not only mention Lakalina's royal ancestry but also said that she had originally been a germophobe. However, she gradually changed during the Period of Destruction.

"Germophobe?"

"After surviving through the Period of Destruction, even the greatest germophobe can change."

"That's true. What else?"

"Besides being a germophobe, Lakalina also had tryphobia."

"...For real?"

"That's what was written in those notes. Whether it is true or false, only Great General Lu Xi would know the answer. Or perhaps we could ask people from the Lakalina family?"

"The Lakalina family would definitely not admit it."

"Actually, whether she was a germophobe or had tryphobia, having survived through the many years of the Period of Destruction and having wielded such considerable power, it is obvious she overcame those a long time ago. There is no point in continuing to seek the truth in this matter. The focal points of the script will not be on this."

"Furthermore, the Lakalina family value their reputation a lot. Even if it is true, they will never agree to it being written into the script."

Fang Zhao watched them as gossip about each of the Founding Era generals was talked about in succession. Even the unlucky leader Fang Zhao, who had not managed to endure to the Founding Era, was discussed. Luckily, Lu Xi's notes did not have many awkward quirks about Fang Zhao, but it did record that Fang Zhao was a musician.

That expert that had been fortunate enough to obtain copies of Lu Xi's notes verified what he was saying by posting some photographs of the notes.

"A live symphony orchestra lives inside Fang Zhao's brain." This was the original line written in Lu Xi's notes.

After the discussion on gossip about the various leaders, the topic returned to the project.

"Seems like the great persons of the Founding Era were not so perfect either."

"Should these... be written in?"

"I think not?"

"But all these are crucial snippets of their characters. Nobody is perfect; we are only human because of our flaws. All of these cannot be written in wholesale, but we can filter some out and embellish them a little."

"Sounds fair."

Watching the chatter in the discussion platform, Fang Zhao knew now that the excited manner in which these big shots of the consultation team talked about gossip was like how entertainment reporters got excited when they talked about the private affairs of various celebrities.

By watching from the side, Fang Zhao discovered that the person the head consultant worshipped the most was "Founding Era leader Fang Zhao."

According to the contents of the script, "Founding Era leader Fang Zhao" could not be considered a lead role, but he was an important supporting character that had a role in many crucial scenes.

In the month of December, Fang Zhao received the first draft of the script and, together with the other members of the consultation team, began discussions on inaccuracies

or misrepresentations of the various characters and other aspects and how to amend them.

Toward the end of December, Yan Biao and Zuo Yu arrived on planet Baiji.

Fang Zhao had helped them handle the arrangements and procedures. This time, on his return to the Baiji military district, Yan Biao did not have the identity of a military personnel and so had to go through all the normal procedures.

Yan Biao was filled with mixed feelings when he saw what planet Baiji had become. However, on the whole, he was happy to take a walk down memory lane and catch up with old comrades.

Planet Wai had been Zuo Yu's first time leaving his home planet, and it felt like a tour for him. It was a novel feeling, patrolling the sets and watching others film. In short, Wai Filmed Entertainment Culture Base's atmosphere was much more relaxed. As long as they did not create trouble, it was generally very harmonious.

But planet Baiji was a whole different ball game. Before entering the atmosphere, Zuo Yu could already feel a more solemn ambience. The military presence was much thicker here than on planet Wai.

Over at the film entertainment compound, Yan Biao had recommended six discharged soldiers to Fang Zhao, and Zuo Yu had also recommended two. Currently, there were 10 personnel patrolling the streets of the Wai Filmed Entertainment Culture Base. Even if Zuo Yu and Yan Biao were not there, there were still eight others guarding the place. This was sufficient enough, so there was no need to worry about any production teams causing trouble in the film entertainment compound.

With supervision, production crews there that caused trouble in secret now knew their places. The matter of debts had also been reduced marginally. For some production crews that were unable to fork out a lot of money, Fang Zhao could give them some leeway as long as their attitudes were good and they had a certain reputation.

On this visit to planet Baiji, Yan Biao and Zuo Yu also helped Fang Zhao bring along specialized feed for Fang Zhao's hybrid sea slug.

"Denzel also said that he will send you a electronic file when he sees you online. It's regarding the feed dosage," Yan Biao told Fang Zhao.

"As for the area of land that the Interplanetary Fund has encircled, construction has already started there, but it is guarded heavily. I haven't gotten a chance to get close. Already there are people at the film entertainment compound making guesses about that area's use. A paparazzi went over to try and secretly snap photos but was caught and thrown in prison at Wai base. After that, nobody ever went close to it."

"There is no longer any need to keep watch on that area," Fang Zhao said.

News about the revolutionary film project being rebooted would not remain concealed forever. Having joined the consultant team and as an internal member of the project, Fang Zhao had a much clearer idea of the process. For the time being, there was no pressing need to find out what was being constructed in the Interplanetary Fund's golden circle on planet Wai.

Chapter 248

My Idol Is a Man of Many Talents

Yan Biao did not spend too much time on planet Baiji before returning back to Earth. Yan Biao appeared fine as they were leaving. He had gotten to meet his comrades and had been living well since he had been discharged. Although there was some regret and a slight reluctance to leave, people always had to move forward and look to the future. After adjusting his mentality, he felt more carefree.

On the contrary, Zuo Yu was really reluctant to leave. This foreign planet garrison was how he had always imagined it to be. These constructions in progress were where future immigrants were going to stay. He had not seen enough yet!

However, as Memorial Day was approaching, Zuo Yu could not continue staying on planet Baiji either. He and Yan Biao had a scheduled space flight to catch. As Memorial Day drew closer, certain construction sites ceased operating, as the workers all wanted to return back to Earth and celebrate with their families. There were too many people and too few scheduled space flights. As the time drew closer, it would be harder to schedule a return trip, so it was best if they left earlier.

Fang Zhao had given them a Memorial Day vacation. Recently, there had also been fewer production crews in the film entertainment complex, so not much manpower was required to keep an eye on things over there. Two of Yan Biao's old comrades would not be returning back to Earth, so they would stay they and keep watch.

Great-Grandfather and Great-Grandmother Fang had also decided not to return. After so many years, this was the first time they had gotten a chance to celebrate Memorial Day in a military district. This could very well be the last Memorial Day they would get to celebrate in a military district. In the future, as they aged, it might get inconvenient to travel far, let alone leave Earth and galavant on foreign planets.

Fang Zhao was different from the other outpost soldiers. He was only undergoing temporary military service, and generally speaking, conscripts had it slightly easier and got to enjoy a Memorial Day vacation too.

The two Fang elders had already helped Fang Zhao tidy up his quarters so he could

have a good rest on Memorial Day.

This Memorial Day, the top brass had given conscripts a three day vacation. In the early morning of Fang Zhao's first day of vacation, he brought along the water tank containing the "rabbit" from the outpost to the base's family area.

Kevin Lin also tagged along to the base. Given the nature of his profession, the base had arranged special quarters for him. However, Kevin Lin was very busy. He had already planned for a week-long "Military District Memorial Day" program. This had also been the column's request. Now he just needed to let Fang Zhao show his face for a bit during the live broadcast every day and Kevin Lin would not bother him after that.

Even without having a daily mission, Fang Zhao did not stay idle. He brought out the second draft of the script, which had been distributed to the consultation team, and checked the contents for areas that might need amendments.

As he looked through the script, as before, Fang Zhao connected to the internet and opened the consultation group's discussion platform.

The bunch of big shots were still as lively and did not realize it was close to Memorial Day. When heroes of the Period of Destruction were mentioned, these specialists would get very engrossed in chatting.

Fang Zhao had also been talked about many times. These bunch of people also knew that discussing too much about the personal affairs of the few great generals was not too good. If they went overboard, the big families of the respective continents would take issue, but for Fang Zhao, they did not need to worry about anyone looking into things. In any case, that leader did not have any direct descendants.

Relatives?

Five hundred years had already passed, who even cared if you were related to him!?

During the initial stages of the New Era, seeking favors through family ties had not necessarily brought about many benefits. Now, 500 years later, it was even more unlikely.

Therefore, even if there was anyone put on the pretext of being "Period of Destruction leader Fang Zhao's relative," it would do them no good.

However, when some people mentioned unsavory rumors about Fang Zhao, even without Fang Zhao himself saying anything, the old head consultant personally made a statement and listed some excerpts from the memoirs of Su Mu, Lu Xi, and the others to vouch for Fang Zhao's character.

Today, as he watched these bunch of people getting exhilarated from discussing important leaders of the Period of Destruction, Fang Zhao did not interrupt, as per usual.

For history of the Period of Destruction, Fang Zhao remembered those events that he had personally experienced, but regarding matters of the other continents, he might not know as much as these bunch of specialists who had studied the Period of Destruction.

Even for Yanzhou's history, if Fang Zhao said too much or mentioned too many details, especially for things that were hard to find evidence of, it would arouse suspicion.

After all, the setting for a historical drama differed from that of a game. The emphasis was also not the same. Thus, when Fang Zhao found stuff in the script that was not suitable and he could find evidence to back up his point, he put forward the examples. As for the rest, it was up to the screenwriters to do their part.

Watching these people start to gossip once more, Fang Zhao found it really funny.

Today, the style of the discussion platform had changed yet again. Today, this bunch of big shots were in fanboy and fangirl mode.

...

"My idol is well versed in art and warfare and has an impressive and imposing bearing!" a historian from Jinzhou enthusiastically said. The person he was speaking about was Jinzhou's Great General Chu Yuanjin.

"My idol is confident and elegant. His remarkable feats are unrivaled!" A historical archaeologist from Tongzhou eye's lit up like a fan when he talked about his idol. He was talking about Tongzhou's Great General Woo Tong.

"My idol is powerful, had bold vision, and was a natural beauty!" a historical literature scholar said. The one mentioned was Lazhou's "empress," Lakalina the First.

...

Following these were proclamations of adoration for Su Mu, Renault, and the others.

Every Founding Era great general had countless adorers. Even if many of these historians loved to unearth the private affairs of these prominent characters, choosing not to talk about these few great persons' personal affairs was doing an injustice to academics. But even after knowing that these people were not perfect, it still did not change their adulation for these great persons at all.

In the New Era, people viewed these heroic characters of the Founding Era with reverence and admiration. This was their conviction.

Each Founding Era general went through a round of praise, and Mr. Head Consultant paused but could no longer hold it in. "My idol is brave, a strong fighter, and a man of many talents!"

However, the moment Mr. Head Consultant said this line, a few others added, "He was an impressive person indeed, but he had ill fate.

Ill fated. This was the evaluation these historians had of Fang Zhao.

Having fought in Yanzhou for 90-something years, just as the the fighting had been about to cease, he had fallen and had not even left behind a single direct descendant.

When historians talked about Fang Zhao, they had the same enthusiasm they had toward gossip, but at the same time, there were sighs and they felt sorry.

Watching these people start to sigh about the "ill-fated leader," Fang Zhao had rather complicated feelings. He had never expected that these people would feel this even more greatly than him.

However, for this matter, Fang Zhao did not take it to heart. In his previous life, just before he had died, he had felt regret, but the regret had been that he would not get to see the day the fighting stopped. As for anything else, he hadn't worried excessively about it.

Furthermore, he had obtained the chance of rebirth. This was something those old friends of his had never gotten.

Laughing soundlessly, Fang Zhao continued reading. After he finished reading through the second draft, he marked the areas with problems and added words onto it before sending it to the head consultant.

Back on Earth, Mr. Head Consultant had just finished chatting in the discussion platform. After he disconnected and was lamenting about Fang Zhao's bad luck with a few colleagues, he received a message notification. Looking at the sender's name, he could not help but laugh. "Whoa, just as we were talking about him, that little fella appears."

"What? Your disciple?" the person beside him asked curiously.

"You wish. It is a little fella from the consultant team. I heard that he was recommended by the Interplanetary Fund. He has a really firm grasp of history," Mr. Head Consultant said.

"What? Showing concern for the younger generation? There are so many juniors and young ones at the academy, but I have never seen you even say a single line of praise for them."

"This is different." Mr. Head Consultant glanced at the sender's name once more. "It is rare for this person to not be inhibited by that name."

The few people beside the head consultant gather around to look at the sender's name displayed on the screen and laughed. "No wonder. Having the exact same name as one of the leaders of the Period of Destruction is not easy at all. If he isn't careful, he could easily be stifled by the weight of that name."

Chapter 249

Idiot

Was it such an easy thing to have the same name as a Period of Destruction leader?

Given the level of adoration most people in the New Era had toward the heroes of the Period of Destruction, even if historical truths revealed distasteful news about a certain important character, fanatical worshippers would not be bothered.

The line of thoughts of these fanatical worshippers was this: Negative news? Flawed Character? I won't listen! I won't believe it! In any case, my hero is always number one! How thick skinned can you get, having the same name as my hero?!

When people with the same name as their heroes were spotted, piercing gazes of scrutiny were placed on them. This gave those people with the exact same name rather immense amounts of pressure.

There were too many worshippers of heroes from the Period of Destruction. The numbers were not in the tens of thousands but in the hundreds of millions! And for people who shared the exact same name as these martyrs, wherever they went, they would have to face all sorts of questioning gazes.

There were still some worshippers who who did not want to see others have the same name as their heroes but had double standards for their own descendants and have them names similar to martyrs in the hopes that their descendants would become great people just like their own heroes.

However, for those people who shared the exact same name as martyrs, many could not handle the pressure and chose to change their own names.

Those that could hold their own under this sort of pressure and could even make a name for themselves were generally not such simple people.

This was what old Mr. Head Consultant meant by the line "It is rare for this person to not be inhibited by that name." When he had first seen a young person who had the exact same name as his hero, he had been extremely astounded and had paid even

more attention to Fang Zhao.

Even old Mr. Head Consultant had the same sentiments as other worshippers and would unconsciously draw comparisons when he saw the name "Fang Zhao" and saw how capable the other party was.

As the revolutionary film project consultant team head, when he looked through the suggestions and opinions of everyone, he especially paid attention to the articles Fang Zhao submitted and had high expectations. Up to now, every one of Fang Zhao's articles had had opinions that made him very satisfied.

Old Mr. Head Consultant thought to himself, Worthy of having the exact same name as my hero!

But if Fang Zhao's performance had been poor, the old mister would surely have thought this: What a joke, to think he would actually share the same name as my hero!

This was how these worshippers generally thought.

Of course, Fang Zhao did not know what the old Mr. Head Consultant was thinking. After submitting his article, he browsed through the discussion platform to see whether there was any news he had missed.

According to these people's discussions, based on Fang Zhao's experiences during the Period of Destruction, if he was written into the drama series, he would have a tragic supporting role.

In truth, this was how Fang Zhao was written in the script.

Compared to the Founding Era generals, Fang Zhao's impact was not as big. After 500 years, his deeds mainly appeared in history books, and people outside Yanzhou did not know much about him. Even in Yanzhou, besides studying their materials for examinations, most people would not voluntarily make an effort to understand him. What was the point of reading historical information? The past would be forgotten anyway.

However, during every year's Memorial Day, the Cemetery of Martyrs commemorative-painting vendors would remind everyone that besides the Founding Era great generals, there was still another important hero.

Browsing through this year's painting styles at Yanzhou's Cemetery of Martyrs and seeing the new image of himself, Fang Zhao felt that... it burned his eyes.

He would not be purchasing any this year. He would rather paint them himself!

On the second day of his vacation, which was also the actual Memorial Day, Kevin Lin came over to broadcast Fang Zhao's blessings to audiences live, and he left just as quickly.

Kevin Lin wanted to let Fang Zhao appear more in the live broadcasts, but the column's chief editor had other plans.

The column's chief editor had spoken to Kevin Lin in private. "Fang Zhao is no longer important," he had said. "What is important is how to get source material and take the opportunity during such a crucial time like Memorial Day to obtain more meaningful materials. Film those soldiers garrisoned here who do not have a high enough rank to bring their family members. Low-ranked soldiers who are unable to return home! And the new batch of wet-eared kids that from the October batch, they might not be adapting well, so film them too. This is also very good source material!"

In short, Kevin Lin was too look for more tear-provoking, gloom-inducing source material that would lead to passionate discussions.

Since it was a suggestion from the top, Kevin Lin could only listen to it. He had tactfully told Fang Zhao about it, but since Fang Zhao had not seemed to mind, Kevin Lin felt more at ease and was able to focus on his own assignment.

His colleagues from the other four channels were also rolling up their sleeves for battle. As they vied for views on this Memorial Day, Kevin Lin did not want to lag behind.

After the blessings on the live broadcast, Kevin Lin left and Fang Zhao continued with his commemorative painting.

Shortly after, Great-Grandmother Fang told Fang Zhao that there was a visitor.

The visitor was Lu Yan, a major from the mining area and a subordinate of Edmund. He lived next door and normally helped out the two elder Fangs with some small chores. Thus, he was familiar with the both of them. He had also brought along some Memorial Day presents with him.

Lu Yan passed the presents to Great-Grandmother Fang and saw the brushes and paper on Fang Zhao's table when he entered the room. Curious, he asked, "Painting?" As Fang Zhao had not yet completed it, Lu Yan could not tell who it was.

Fang Zhao placed the brush down and asked, "Just for fun. Is anything the matter?"

Lu Yan felt a little embarrassed. "Cough, I do have a request to make." Requesting for help from others on Memorial Day was not too nice, but at the moment, he could not find anyone else and could only try Fang Zhao.

Lu Yan explained his purpose in coming. "It's like this..." His wife was a doctor at the Baiji military district hospital. Before the military district had been established, she had been a military doctor here. Both he and his wife were veterans of planet Baiji.

Lu Yan's wife was pregnant, and the scheduled date for giving birth was not today, but a slight mishap had happened today causing her to go into labor and she had to be rushed to the hospital. As for Lu Yan, he was stationed to guard the mines from noon until his shift ended at noon the next day.

He had looked for other comrades to swap shifts with him, but they were all busy. Requesting a change of shift required making a request one month in advance, and his comrades had all been posted out to different areas and were not able to help him out at a moment's notice. As time was of the essence, Lu Yan could not try his luck at going through his contacts in succession. When he had seen the live broadcast Kevin Lin had filmed for Fang Zhao, he had thought about asking Fang Zhao to lend him a hand.

If it were anybody else, even a military personnel with a higher rank than Lu Yan, even if Lu Yan were able to get them to help out, it might still be troublesome. However, if it was Fang Zhao, Edmund would surely be easier to deal with.

Hearing the situation, Fang Zhao nodded his head. "No problem." He still had one more day of vacation tomorrow. Even if he was awake throughout the night, he would still have time to adjust tomorrow.

"Thank you so much! I really can't thank you enough!" Lu Yan exclaimed emotionally. Since Fang Zhao had agreed, he immediately sent a request to Edmund.

Edmund was a familiar face. Back when Fang Zhao had first arrived on planet Baiji and headed to the mining area for his military service, he had gotten to know Edmund. Although Edmund was still the person in charge of the mining areas close to the base,

the power-source mining area had already seen upgrades and was no longer the same as before. Edmund's rank had also risen to major general. Now Edmund's family had all moved to planet Baiji, and he no longer wished to return back to Earth.

As expected, the moment Edmund heard the request, he hesitated for a little before approving it. If it had been anybody else, Edmund would surely have taken longer to think and would have considered whether there were any shenanigans involved. He would have viewed this with guarded suspicion, but the person relieving Lu Yan was Fang Zhao, which dispelled any misgivings Edmund had.

Although his military rank might be a little lower, Fang Zhao was still very suitable to provide emergency responses, which was reassuring.

Stealing ore?

That couldn't be.

As the discoverer of Baiji ore, the military district had given Fang Zhao a lot of ore. Although he had not taken it out yet, when the military district had first been established, Commanding Officer Shanta had already signed the dotted line. That share of ore would be sent to Fang Zhao after his military service was completed. Fang Zhao simply did not need to risk all of his deeds and contributions just to steal a few pieces of ore.

Having gotten the approval for the a substitute, Lu Yan led Fang Zhao to the mining area's guard post to report for duty.

"What you have to do is very simple. You just have to verify the endorsed documents of anybody entering the mines against the system. If everything is in order, you can stamp the person's pass. At the side is a stamping machine. When the stamp is successful, an electrical current will pass through. If their documents cannot be verified, you just have to call the team guarding to settle the matter. You don't have to worry, though; this is just following a simple process, and there shouldn't be anything to worry about."

If it had been anything too important or too complicated or something that might have some degree of risk, Lu Yan wouldn't have looked for Fang Zhao. Luckily, it was not a hard task, and Fang Zhao was a earnest and trustworthy lad, so Lu Yan had looked for Fang Zhao to stand in for him.

Lu Yan made sure to explain or the important things to take note of. "Oh, right. Remember to put on the working attire that is to the side. The energy fields over at the mining area are stronger, around 15 times stronger than the fields you experienced when you first came. You mustn't get careless even if you stay in the guard post. If you are exposed to it for more than an hour, the energy fields might affect your state of mind."

After Fang Zhao had gotten a complete grasp of this assignment, Lu Yan thanked him once again before leaving.

Fang Zhao had nothing much to do, sitting around in the guard post. Fang Zhao looked around his surroundings. Both the interior and exterior of the guard post had surveillance cameras, but Fang Zhao did not have any devious intentions, so he was not afraid of being captured by the cameras.

While at the guard post, there was no way to connect to the internet or randomly contact others to chat. Thus, Fang Zhao just sat there and thought about the latest few tunes that he was in the midst of composing.

An hour later, two construction workers came requiring stamps. Following Lu Yan's instructions, after Fang Zhao verified their documents, he used the machine at the side to stamp their passes.

The sky gradually got darker. As the symphony orchestra in Fang Zhao's mind was playing, people once again appeared. Three men wearing mining uniforms and helmets had come. The visors of their helmets were covered with blotches, and Fang Zhao could not see through them clearly. However, this sort of attire was very common here. Previously, the people who had come to get their passes stamped had looked the same.

Fang Zhao ran through the documents and looked up to scan the three men standing outside the guardpost before accepting and stamping their passes.

An electric current flashed through the stamp, indicating that it had been successful.

"Happy Memorial Day," Fang Zhao said.

When they heard what Fang Zhao had said, they went blank for a moment before replying, "Thanks."

The three of them picked up their stamped passes and left.

When they had walked away to a less conspicuous area, while struggling to stifle his excitement, one of them softly said, "Hahahaha. I told you getting the passes stamped is very easy, right? Those in the guard post are always idle and are unable to tell! He even wished us a happy Memorial Day. What an idiot!"

Another one of them sounded really delighted. "We have already received the stamps here, that ought to be all we need. We certainly will have no problems when leaving!"

"Stealing right from under these people's noses feels great!"

Chapter 250

Swatting a Fly with a Baseball Bat

The trio returned to a storage facility with the stamped passes in hand. There were five others waiting. Next to them was parked a cart loaded with six large sealed boxes.

The men sitting on the boxes blurted out, "How did it go?"

"Well!"

"We got all three stamps." The man holding the pass snickered. "The soldier on duty in the outpost who gave us the third stamp even wished us a happy Memorial Day. What an idiot!"

"You got the third stamp at the outpost? Was it Lu Yan who was on duty?" one of the men sitting on the boxes asked.

"I don't know. He was in uniform. I didn't get a good look at his face," the man with the pass said. "He sounded quite young."

"He didn't give you a hard time?" the man sitting on a box asked. "Lu Yuan is quite talkative. Sometimes he likes to interrogate folks."

"Not at all. All he did was say, 'Happy Memorial Day.' Isn't Lu Yan's wife in the hospital? If I were him, I wouldn't be in the mood to interrogate anyone either."

"It doesn't matter whether it was Lu Yan or not as long as we got the stamps." The leader of the group pulled a mini-scanner from his pocket and aimed it at the stamps.

The stamps on the pass weren't visible to the naked eye. They would only illuminate when read by a special scanner. The three stamps were their ticket to the freight transport.

The men relaxed when they saw the three stamps light up.

"We're good. We got all three stamps—we're not missing any."

"So should we head out now?"

"Yes. Everyone is taking Memorial Day off, so the mines won't be guarded. We should hurry."

"I wonder what they'll think when they realize eight miners are missing, haha."

"What's so special about eight miners? What'll be interesting is when they realize they're missing 5 tons of Baiji power ore after the Memorial Day holiday."

Five tons of grade A power ore wasn't that much in the context of the entire mine, but it wasn't a small amount either. It wasn't a blip you could just write off. Some folks would probably be quite shocked by the discovery.

After he tucked the pass away, the leader instructed the men sitting on the cart, "Let's ask around first to see if anything is out of the ordinary."

The smuggling operation didn't rely on these eight alone. They also had inside help.

This was the result of six months of careful planning.

"All normal. Nothing out of the ordinary nearby," one of the men sitting on the boxes said.

"Then let's pack up and proceed as planned. Let's go!"

The eight men changed into their miner uniforms and packed their things.

Baiji space port.

After presenting all sorts of credentials to the guards at the space port, the eight men entered the space port without incident. The space port was quite empty, probably because of the reduced traffic during Memorial Day.

They parked their cart next to a freight vessel. Power ore excavated from the mining district they belonged to were typically shipped to this transport, which in turn transferred the load to a larger spaceship near Baiji.

But as long as they boarded this freight vessel, they would be good to go.

They maintained their composure under the watchful gazes of the security guards as they approached the freight vessel with their cart and the cargo on it.

The leader pulled out his pass and swiped it by the entrance to the vessel.

Buzz!

A bland beep sounded, and an access denied symbol flashed.

Access denied.

The eight men tensed up and glanced at the security guards nearby. They were starting to get some attention.

The leader of the group started frowning but still managed to project a sense of calm. "Maybe the swipe was incomplete."

This time, he swiped the pass slowly so that all three stamps could be scanned.

Buzz!

Another beep, another bright red access denied symbol.

The voice of one of the men started quivering. "What's... what's going on?" He had already spotted security guards heading their way.

One of the other men on the other side of the cart had a stern look on his face. He had already quietly gone for the gun hidden in his mining uniform. He was ready to blast open the door to the vessel, but in that case, a firefight with the guards was guaranteed.

The leader was sweating profusely as he gritted his teeth and swiped his pass again.

Beep!

A green access granted symbol flashed on the display.

Never had an electronic beep sounded so lovely, an answer to their prayers.

A few of the men secretly cursed. What a cr*pppy system!

A simple swipe took three tries to complete. If that isn't a cr*ppy system, I don't know what is. The Baiji military district is so rich now. Why don't they upgrade their scanners? We were scared sh*tless.

False alarm. As they watched the door to the transport open, the men relaxed and started to smile as well.

They had done it!

But their smiles froze when they got ready to move their cart and the door to the transport opened completely.

On the other side were eight soldiers wearing dark-gray robotic exoskeleton armor. A cold glint reflected off the the armor and the eight gun barrels pointed at them.

The eight men: "..."

Uhm... are we busted?

How come there are armored warriors here?

Aren't they reserved for terrorists and beasts?

All we did was steal a few power ore—and they actually sent armored soldiers.

What, they ran out of places to deploy their resources?

Why are they swatting a fly with a baseball bat?

The fingers of the ringleader who was holding the pass started shaking. He turned pale and was sweating big time.

Disappointment. Desperation. The carpet had totally been pulled out from under their feet.

What to do now?

Detonate a bomb?

They were carrying small bombs that were easy to carry and conceal, but such light-

weight explosives would barely make a dent in the exoskeleton armor, and yet they themselves might become collateral damage.

Not to mention that they were no suicide bombers. They didn't have the guts to sacrifice themselves. They were quite scared of dying.

They didn't even dare go for their guns. They had done their research on the preparedness of the Baiji military district, so they knew how ruthless these armored warriors that were considered the equivalent of military-grade weapons were. They had no intention of crossing these opponents. They had never thought that military-grade weapons would be used on them.

And if they thought about going for their guns? The armored soldiers would fire before they could touch their firearms.

Just one shot from the kinetic combat rifles the armored soldiers were equipped with would be enough to tear any of them apart—into shreds, that is.

These thieving "flies" simply quivered before these "baseball bats." They didn't have the guts to fight back.

The moment they were handcuffed, they still hadn't figured out what exactly had gone wrong.

They had spent half a year plotting their route, devising a plan, bribing the right people, and obtaining the necessary paperwork. The operation had gone smoothly step-by-step today. They had even gotten their stamps. How come they had been ambushed at the very last minute?

A flying transport landed behind them. From it emerged Major General Edmund, the officer in charge of the mines near the base.

The eight men were ghastly pale as Edmund stared them down.

His cold stare was followed by a command uttered in a restrained grunt that belied the level of outrage bubbling underneath. "Take them in. Let's let everyone get back to enjoying Memorial Day."

The soldiers answered in the affirmative, gagged the eight men, and led them away.

The eight men had come and gone quietly without so much as causing a ripple, as if nothing major had gone down.

Ignoring the eight arrested men, Edmund approached the cart they had left behind. The security guards had already opened the boxes.

"It's grade A Baiji power ore all right. Five tons. It's all here," the captain of the space port's security detail said.

"They're quite bold to have stolen such a big load." Edmund was speaking in a calm tone, but anyone could sense the incredible anger he was suppressing.

Edmund had been enjoying a meal with his family. It was the first time he had spent Memorial Day with his entire family since he had been posted to Baiji, and he had been in a good mood because of his recent promotion and rosy career prospects. He had even been drinking a little.

The moment he had gotten word from Fang Zhao, he had felt like someone had slipped a cube of ice down his undershirt. His festive mood had evaporated and he had sobered up immediately.

Five tons of grade A power ore wasn't a huge amount, but this was grade A energy ore they were talking about. Plus, the quality was good. Early estimates put their worth at more than 10 billion.

Edmund couldn't possibly contain the fallout from losing 10 billion dollars worth of power ore.

He had worked so hard to get where he was today and enjoy a cushy position. So many people wanted to see him gone. If this had gone down, all his ambitions would have gone out the door along with the five tons of power ore.

Thankfully, the thieves had been stopped in time.

After taking inventory of the power ore, Edmund briefed Shanta. The interception plan had been Shanta's idea. Only Shanta had the authority to deploy the armored warriors.

As far as Shanta was concerned, swatting a fly with a baseball bat was exactly his intention. That way it would be easier to follow up.

"You didn't tip anyone off, did you?" Shanta asked.

"No. Everything is normal elsewhere. No one noticed the interception," Edmund responded.

"Good."

Shanta wanted to keep the interception hush hush, not only because it was Memorial Day but also so he didn't alarm the collaborators of the eight thieves. The fact that the eight men had been able to smuggle so much power ore so easily meant there were other bad apples. This was not a simple operation that took a day or two to plan.

The mining companies that worked with the Baiji base would pilfer a few ore at most when they were being transported. Shanta didn't bother to quibble with them over a petty few stones; an official investigation would take tremendous manpower and resources. As long as the stealing wasn't excessive, Shanta was willing to turn a blind eye.

But this was completely different, and the amount smuggled was quite substantial. Did they think the commander was an idiot?

"I want a thorough investigation!" a furious Shanta bellowed.

After hanging up, Shanta was still panting. He had yet to find his composure. He sat in his office pondering how to clean house.

But Edmund's briefing also had him intrigued.

Unable to contain his curiosity, Shanta reached out to Fang Zhao.

"How did you know something was wrong?" Shanta asked.

"By listening carefully," Fang Zhao responded.

"It's your hearing again?" Shanta was reminded of Fang Zhao's reputation: "diting," "godly ears" and all.

"I listened and observed. Body language and heartbeat are great indicators. The trio were quite nervous when they approached the outpost. They were feeling guilty. Plus, they might have been armed with lethal weapons," Fang Zhao explained.

In fact, Fang Zhao could tell something was off just from his first-rate instincts honed during the 100-year Period of Destruction, but that couldn't be his official story.

"So you stamped their pass with an expired stamp."

The stamps were updated every few days, but few knew that. All outsiders knew was that three stamps were required for passage.

After the trio left, Fang Zhao had immediately alerted Major General Edmund, who in turn had briefed Shanta after confirming that something was wrong.

The eight men who had stolen the power ore had failed to open the door to the flying transport twice because they had the wrong stamp. Their first two stamps were the right ones, but the third one was outdated. When the door had opened on their third try, it had been done manually from inside the transport.

"Thank god for your tip. I'll log this as a merit in your personnel file."

The military was clear on merits and misdeeds. This wasn't a major accomplishment, but it wasn't a minor one either. After all, the power ore was worth some 10 billion.

After hanging up, Shanta skimmed Fang Zhao's personnel file out of curiosity. His "merits" column was filled with accomplishments both big and small. Another promotion when his service period concluded was a sure thing.

A kick-*ss soldier.

But Fang Zhao was a rarity among the conscripts. It was a pity he had decided to become an artist.

What a waste of talent.



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