by Lazy Cliché
Superstars of Tomorrow
QIDIAN
webnovel.com

# SUPERSTARS OF TOMORROW

– 未来天王 –

## - VOLUME 6 -

-AUTHOR-
Chen Ci Lan Tiao
Lazy Cliché

[ Webnovel ]

# Chapter 251
# Spotted a Suspicious Person

On the first Memorial Day after Baiji military district had been established, the entire military district was in upheaval.

On the night of Memorial Day, well-informed people more or less received the news, but the majority were still in the dark. Only on the second day, when the news was spread, did they find out that the military district had arrested a gang of ore thieves last night and that the ore the thieves had nearly made away with was worth 10 billion!

For most people, this was already a very large quantity and extremely costly.

"Were they caught last night? I didn't hear any activity."

"I didn't hear anything either. They were probably prepared so it didn't disrupt everyone's celebrations."

"Nonsense. If they made a lot of noise, how would they have caught the perpetrators? They are still catching others right now!"

"I heard that even the mecha-troops were deployed!"

"What? What background do these perpetrators have? Terrorists? To think that mecha-troops were deployed!"

"I heard that a number of people were caught."

"Let's wait and see. They still have to catch some more people. To steal that much ore, only a few people can accomplish that. With a rigorous investigation, some people are going to get really unlucky."

"Our military district's prison will have a use this time."

At dawn, when Fang Zhao returned to the family district, he heard a number of people

discussing this matter.

Originally, he had been scheduled to end his shift at noon, but because of the mining area's strict investigation, Shanta and his subordinates had acted and implemented other actions, allowing Fang Zhao to return early.

As the person in charge of the mining area, ever since Major General Edmund had appeared last night, nobody had returned home and had instead investigated through the night, simply not giving those people any chance to forge data or cover their traces.

Even now, the investigative inquiry was continuing, and Edmund and a few other important personnel of the mining areas had gone over to give Shanta a report. As before, they were met with a round of Shanta's spittle on their faces.

Inside the prison.

The mine thieves that were detained inside looked extremely exhausted. They didn't feel like saying anything. They had already been interrogated numerous times, and now their leader had not yet returned, so the others were wondering if their boss was undergoing some cruel punishment.

The thought of torture made them tremble uncontrollably.

At the moment, one of the perpetrators sitting on the floor was pondering. They had planned and made preparations for half a year, had taken advantage of Memorial Day when many people were in festive moods to make their move, and had found everything was going smoothly. What exactly had gone wrong?

He made an effort to calm himself down and carefully recalled every step of their plan and realized that the part where they were most likely to have screwed up was the part where they were getting the third stamp, when they were at the guard post.

Now he recalled the person at the guard post wishing them a "Happy Memorial Day."

Simply venomous!

The guard had even wished them a happy Memorial Day. On Memorial Day next year, it would be the one-year anniversary of their time in prison!

Yes, it had definitely gone wrong there!

The more he thought about it, the more he reckoned this was the case.

But who was the person who had helped them stamp their passes? Was it Lu Yan?

When he tried remembering the guard's voice, it sounded a little different.

If it was not Lu Yan, then who was it that had substituted for Lu Yan?

As he thought about it, their boss, who had been dragged out for interrogations, returned. He did not seem to be in good shape, but there were no visible wounds or injuries on him.

"How was it? Did they use violence?" a few people asked.

Following this question, the man who had just entered flew into a rage and sent a fist flying into an asker's face, dislodging a few of his teeth.

"Are you a f*cking moron!? Why didn't you properly check who was manning the guard post before we went to get our passes stamped? For the third stamp, the person there wasn't Lu Yan, it was Fang Zhao, that Fang Zhao! The Fang Zhao with the rumored godlike hearing ability! He clearly could hear that there was something wrong with you guys! Just a bit more, and we were actually foiled at that step!"

In the small cell, the loud roaring was earsplitting, but the other seven weren't bothered by this. Rather, they were shocked by the bit of information their boss had brought back.

Fang Zhao?

That Fang Zhao who had many rumors about him?

Why would he have appeared at that place?

They had surveyed and made careful plans before the operation. They had investigated Lu Yan and had caused some trouble for Lu Yan so that he would be distracted. Never had they expected that Lu Yan would actually get Fang Zhao to replace him!

For the three stamps, the process of obtaining them was in decreasing difficulty, with the first having the most stringent checks. It could even be said that the third stamp

was nothing more than a straightforward process that would have no problems. They had never expected that a problem would occur at the easiest part of their plan!

Was that Fang Zhao just like how the rumors had described him, being able to detect truths and lies and everything else just from his hearing?

These were the thoughts of the eight people locked up in the prison and everyone else who knew about this matter. In their hearts, Fang Zhao's ears had already achieved divine status.

Shanta had said it himself: Fang Zhao's godlike ears had rendered a great service in this incident.

Shanta was being rueful. He had not expected that his subordinates would take his words and overly visualize it. However, Shanta did not pay much attention to how his subordinates evaluated Fang Zhao's ears. Following the interrogation results of these eight and their investigation results, another bunch of people were caught.

Shanta was very pleased with the arrests. After strict investigations, those that deserved to be imprisoned should be thrown in jail!

Because of Shanta's attitude here, parties trying to secretly pull tricks in the mining areas curbed themselves.

Fang Zhao had no idea his ears were the topic of discussion. After returning to the family district for a bit, he went to the hospital to visit Lu Yan and Lu Yan's wife as well as their new daughter who had been born on Memorial Day.

Lu Yan was very grateful. "Thank you, Fang Zhao! This time, I really cannot thank you enough!"

Today, after hearing about the incident at the mining district, Lu Yan felt extremely glad. Fortunately, he had managed to find Fang Zhao to relieve him. If he had been the one manning the post yesterday, perhaps as those perpetrators had predicted, because of him being preoccupied with his wife's impending birth, he might have hurriedly checked through their papers and given them the stamp.

If that had really been the case and the matter of the theft of five tons of grade A power ore were revealed, the progression in his military career might have come to a halt then and there.

Lu Yan even suspected that his wife's mishaps had been purposely done by those ore thieves. Whether that was really the case, he would investigate it personally!

When he thought about that possibility, a hint of anger flashed across his eyes. However, when he heard Fang Zhao asking about his newborn daughter, warm tenderness returned to his eyes.

"Hahaha, my little baby is healthy and very beautiful. She is named An Ke 1. Hopefully she has a safe and peaceful future! Come take a look, isn't she cute?"

Fang Zhao looked at the baby wrapped up in infant clothes, and a smile unconsciously appeared on his face. "Really cute."

Lu Yan appeared a little stiff hugging his child. He was about to hand it over to the nurse beside him when he pause and pondered for a moment. He faced Fang Zhao and made a gesture to hand his child over.

"Hey, benefactor, come and hold her."

Fang Zhao: "…"

"Like this, like this. place your hands here to support her. Hey, don't learn from me. I'm also a newbie. Look! You see that nurse over there? Just hold her the way the nurse does."

Lu Yan corrected Fang Zhao's posture from the side as he jokingly said to his wife beside him, "Look at all these little youngsters. They are just so nervous. Look at how tensed up he is, just like a rock. He is even more nervous than me."

Fang Zhao was completely rigid from head to toe. Looking at the little thing in his hands, he could not help but feel all tense.

He had used guns and fought battles, he could compose just by picking up a pen. He could play games well and could drift while driving, but when he held a baby in his arms, this was simply an S-ranked task!

It was rare for the Fang Zhao that was always calm and collected to actually be nervous.

Fang Zhao really had no idea how to handle this sort of frail little creature. In his

previous life, he had seen many newborns but had not had much contact with them. He always felt that these newborn lives were too frail. He was used to fighting beasts, but handling little beings like these, he was really not accustomed to it.

Fang Zhao held the little life in his arms as it was bathed with warm light. With his hearing ability, he could hear the soft breathing of the infant circulating around his ears.

Watching her sleep peacefully in his arms, Fang Zhao did not feel calm at all inside. It was as though the sounds of a violin's strings being drawn and the striking of piano keys were resounding in his head like a flowing stream.

This was a child born on planet Baiji. She would start her life on planet Baiji.

Perhaps she would be different from children growing up on Earth. She might be bolder and have to face even more challenges, but her pace would get more steadfast as she grew older, and the paths she took would get wider and wider. Her parents hoped that she would have a safe and peaceful life, and Fang Zhao also hoped that her future would be warm and radiant.

Luckily, Lu Yun was uneasy letting Fang Zhao hold his child for too long and took her and handed his daughter over to the nurse.

At this point, Fang Zhao exhaled a large breath of air.

This manner of his was joked about for a while by Lu Yan. However, it was all in the name of fun. Just before Fang Zhao left, Lu Yun and his wife once again sincerely thanked Fang Zhao from the bottom of their hearts, thanking Fang Zhao for substituting for Lu Yun and helping them foil a disaster and for all he had done for Baiji military district.

After bidding the couple farewell, Fang Zhao went downstairs but did not leave right away. Instead, he went behind the hospital to the garden and sat down. This little garden was where patients and family members could stroll around. Fang Zhao sat on a bench at the corner, took out the notebook he always kept with him, and started writing at a tremendous speed.

A nurse who was wheeling a patient on a wheelchair passed by and noticed the strange person seated there and made a mental note.

The person's head was hanging down, so his appearance could not be seen clearly. However, the nurse could see that the page his paper notebook was flipped to was filled with many scribbles, but she could not understand a single one.

She had not meant to pry into another's secrets and only had given a passing glance to clear her doubts.

Today, the hospital had received news. The head nurse had informed everyone to maintain a high vigilance and take precautions against any abnormal situations. This nurse felt her heart beating faster as she quickened her pace, and after wheeling away the patient, she immediately contacted the hospital's security team.

"I just spotted a suspicious person, and he was writing in some strange language or perhaps a secret code!"

The moment the security team heard this situation, they went on high alert.

Today, the entire base was in upheaval. Last night, the security chief had been called over for a meeting regarding the situation and had brought his team to guard the hospital for the entire night. Shanta wanted to catch the thieves, so the security team needed to maintain guard in case certain people tried anything funny. As such, the security chief had not managed to rest one bit. Now that the perpetrators had mostly been caught, the chief could relax a little and had intended to take a nap.

He had barely shut his eyes when he heard that a suspicious person had appeared at the hospital. All hints of sleepiness were gone and he sprang up, overflowing with killing intent.

"Where is the suspicious person? These sorts of people deserve to be taught a lesson. If we don't beat them up and throw them in jail, they won't learn! Look, I'm not…"

"Chief!" A security team member had a strange expression on his face.

Having been interrupted, the security chief was not happy. "Speak!" This was definitely not him being grouchy from being woken up.

The security team member used his fingers to bring up a screen. "From the nurse's information of the person's position, I have already adjusted the surveillance cameras to target that area. However, Chief, the person captured on camera seems a little familiar. Is there some sort of misunderstanding here?"

"Misunderstanding?"

The security chief took large strides over and glanced at the image displayed on the screen.

"Isn't this, this, this… This is Fang Zhao!"

"I thought so too," the security team member agreed.

Just at that moment, Fang Zhao seemed to sense something and looked up toward the camera, letting the entire security team see his face.

"It really is him!" The security chief's inner rage was completely extinguished.

After looking straight at the surveillance camera, Fang Zhao dropped his head back down and continued writing at a tremendous speed.

"Cough, inform that nurse not to go and disturb Fang Zhao. I reckon that little fella is composing tunes." The security chief scratched his head and decided to return to his nap.

They all knew that Fang Zhao could spread out his notebook and write song scores in a weird code that nobody understood anytime and anywhere. When they saw this behavior, they found it odd but understandable. After all, he dabbled in art.

All of them knew about Fang Zhao's quirks and had been informed by the top that should they encounter this sort of situation, unless it was an urgent matter, they should not disturb Fang Zhao. After all, Fang Zhao could also be considered a benefactor to all the stationed troops on Baiji base and they should not disrupt this composer's flow of inspiration.

Over at the hospital, that nurse who had kept watching vigilantly from a distance did not see any security team coming over to catch the suspect, but she did receive a call from the security team asking her and her colleagues not to disturb that person.

What the hell?

Normally, the security team were efficient. Why were they terrified this time?

The young security team member patiently explained, "You are new and might not

know him, so it's fine."

The nurse was curious. "Who is he?"

"That is Fang Zhao."

“…Which Fang Zhao?'

"Which other Fang Zhao is there in our military district—no, I should say 'on planet Baiji'."

"Oh, oh, oh… oh it's him, huh… Sorry, I didn't see his face. I didn't know that was Fang Zhao." The rookie nurse was red in the face and felt ashamed. "But why is he seated there, and what is he writing?"

"You wouldn't believe me, but he is composing."

Nurse: "…”

# Chapter 252
# Ear Value Rising Again

Due to the security team's verification and reminders, nobody went over to disturb Fang Zhao after that.

Only in the evening, when the sun was starting to set, did Fang Zhao's attention finally leave his music scores. Looking at the progress he had made today, he finally shut the notebook.

Fang Zhao felt rather satisfied with this piece of work and decided to place it among his concert pieces.

A little growl from his stomach indicated that he was hungry. Fang Zhao looked at the time; it had been so long since he had sat down. His inspiration had been overflowing, and he had composed nonstop and lost track of time. Getting up, he stretched his arms and prepared to leave. He had only walked a few steps when he heard footsteps approaching him.

"Please wait!"

Fang Zhao turned toward the source of the sound and saw a nurse briskly walking over.

Fang Zhao remembered that it had been this nurse who had kept a wary eye on him, although it had not been long before her gaze had vanished.

That nurse's face was bright red, and she was so nervous her tongue was in a knot. "H-h-h-hello! Are you… Fang Zhao?"

In the security team office, the security person watching the surveillance feed rolled his eyes. Why must she ask the obvious when she is just giving a greeting?

Fang Zhao was a little surprised. "That's me." At the moment, the young nurse in front of him did not have the slightest bit of wariness in her eyes. Instead, they were filled with excitement and admiration. Any more and her eyes would be shining brightly.

"Could I trou-trou-trou-trouble you for an autograph!" As she spoke, the young nurse fished out a card.

This was a Memorial Day greeting card that she had not used and had kept in her locker. Now she had taken it out.

Fang Zhao smiled and didn't reject it. The nurse had forgotten to bring her pen, so Fang Zhao took out his own pen that he took notes with, signed his name on the card, and added "Happy Memorial Day."

"Thank… thank you!"

The young nurse had not requested Fang Zhao write anything else. After thanking him, she quickly returned to the hospital building and then posted a photograph of the greeting card with the autograph in the military district hospital's internal chat group.

"I saw Fang Zhao in the little garden behind the hospital a while back!!!"

Previously, she had not mentioned in the chat group that she had seen Fang Zhao in the little garden behind the hospital, as she had been afraid that there would be too many curious people and it would disturb Fang Zhao's composing. But now that Fang Zhao was already done and she had successfully managed to obtain the idol's autograph, of course she had to show off a little.

In the evening, there were off-duty staff that normally did not say a thing, but when this message appeared, the chat group buzzed to life as many lurkers appeared.

"Fang Zhao? That famous Fang Zhao from our military district?"

"Where is he? Can I still make it to get his autograph?"

"I want to go too! Ever since I arrived at the military district, I have never gotten to see him in person!"

"I'm busy on duty. Anyone going to get his autograph, please me get one too!"

…

Two senior nurses shook their heads as they saw the discussions in the chat group and sighed while laughing. "These bunch of young ladies are just…"

"Don't you frequently praise Fang Zhao? Don't you want his autograph?" someone else asked.

"Cough, how can I stop other people at the hospital and ask for their autograph?"

"I also think…"

"I dropped by his place in the family district and even took a photograph together!'

"…"

Little did Fang Zhao know that the bunch of nurses were passionately talking about him. After he returned to his residence in the family district, he received an incoming call from Shanta.

Shanta told Fang Zhao that for this incident, those that deserved to be punished had been punished and those that deserved to be rewarded would not be excluded. Fang Zhao's service had already been reported to the higher ups and news would be released.

This incident could not be kept under wraps. Many people in the internal loop already knew about this. The rumors flying about concerning Fang Zhao's ears were becoming even more and more divine. This could not be helped, though. As planet Baiji lacked entertainment facilities and gossip, how could the people miss out on such a chance? Furthermore, many people felt that Fang Zhao's ears were really mystical, and they could not stop discussing his ears.

Shanta's intention was this: since it couldn't be covered up, then it just had to be publicly commended!

"Why should we cover up a good deed?"

What Shanta meant was that as long as there were merits, they deserved to be publicly commended. Also, it didn't have anything to do with terrorists, just the arrest of a gang of thieves, so why should the person who had actually rendered service be hidden? For what reason? Shouldn't those people who harbored errant thoughts be the ones hiding instead?

Thus, during the official annoucement where Fang Zhao's service in this matter was commended, Shanta also had some words to say. Anyone who dares to try and take

revenge against Fang Zhao over this matter, us at Baiji military district will never let them off!

Not only Fang Zhao, from now on, in similar situations, anyone's meritorious deeds would be publically commended, and if anyone dared to retaliate, Shanta would return the favor with added interest!

Thus, in no time, more people on Earth got to know about the matter of Fang Zhao relieving duty on Memorial Day and foiling a criminal gang's ore-theft plans. Furthermore, in the news that planet Baiji officially released where an account of incident was described, there was a line that epecially emphasized "Fang Zhao heard that something was not right." This line gave rise to a round of heated discussion.

"He can even hear that?"

"How far is the range of his hearing?"

"Really, Diting!"

"Although the previous rumors were slightly overexaggerated, there was indeed reasoning behind the online circulation about those 'divine ears'."

"Am I the only one that is focusing on the mecha-troops being deployed? If I was one of those thieves, I would have crumbled. To actually be faced with mecha-troops just from stealing some ore, they probably didn't even have the courage to resist. Hahahaha!"

"Those thieves never expected that Shanta would be so ruthless. He simply did not waste any time with them."

"I have pondered deeply and analyzed this quite a bit. Shanta's decision was the right one. By making such a ruthless move, he sent out a statement. I believe there will be less people who try to steal ore in the future."

"Rubbish. Anyone can tell this from one glance—do you still have to ponder deeply and analyze it?'

"I just received news that a firm that manufactures protective ear equipment has decided to look for Fang Zhao for an endorsement deal!"

"Why did I hear that it was a company that sells sound equipment that is looking for Fang Zhao to be an ambassador?"

"I don't know about others, but till now, Fiery Bird is the only one confirmed. The new model of ear pieces that is going to hit the market in May is set to be endorsed by Fang Zhao. I heard the contract was signed some time back. This is internal information, so it should be true."

"Only Fiery Bird has such foresight. Hasn't the value of Fang Zhao's ears appreciated once again? The fees for approaching him as an ambassador are surely at a premium."

Fiery Bird were indeed rejoicing. They had already discussed the contract for endorsing the new model earpieces, and the fees had already been fixed. If they were to negotiate a contract now, they estimated the fees would be 30% higher.

Originally, the plan had been to wait till Fang Zhao had completed his military service. If his popularity fell, they would roll out some PR operations to hype it up. Unexpectedly, there had never been any need for them to make a move. Fang Zhao's ears had once again become a hot discussion topic, and their value had risen once more!

Watching the value of Fang Zhao's ears sore, Fiery Bird wondered whether they should get Fang Zhao to endorse the company's many other sound and stereo equipment.

At the same time, having found out about the incident's entire timeline, Kevin Lin sighed in his heart. He had known that letting Fang Zhao go out would cause him to miss big news. If he had followed Fang Zhao to the guard post on that day, perhaps he might have gotten to film quite a bit of big news!

During this time, Kevin Lin had followed the Memorial Day program planned out by the column's editor in chief, and there had been nothing really spectacular. Channels S1–S5 were all virtually the same. It was not that they were bad, just that the special programs were all in the same style of stirring up emotion, and audiences did not pay them much mind to them when they were over. Furthermore, military service was not something new and had been around for many years. There had been many such videos filmed in the past for special programs, so online audiences were already immune to such scenes.

Naturally, there was one person whose heart felt really uneasy as he watched the piece

of news officially released by Baiji military district.

Wang Tie, who was currently at the Wai Filmed Entertainment Culture Base, was secretly taking snapshots of a certain big-name celebrity. When he saw that piece of news, his first reaction was this: Perhaps the reason Fang Zhao was able to see through my disguises is because he heard through them!

Wang Tie searched the internet for related information and legends of the mythical creature Diting's hearing ability and found out that the Diting was said to be able to hear truths and lies. When considering his own circumstances, the more Wang Tie thought about it, the more he felt that this was the case.

Regardless of what other people thought, Wang Tie had a mental "Diting" label stuck to Fang Zhao.

Fang Zhao did not read online evaluations of himself, but he found out about them from Kevin Lin. The value of his own ears had risen, so much so that people suggested insuring his ears. From his earlobe to his eardrum, his ossicles, and his cochlea, every bit of his ear should be insured.

Fang Zhao himself had no idea that his ears would actually be raised to a divine status, but he had no explanation for it. Besides, if he explained it, he would have to give many other reasons, and there were some things that Fang Zhao could not disclose. The more he said, the more doubts would appear. His body had too many secrets that others could not know about.

In the days that followed, Fang Zhao continued with his military service. Regardless of how others went about their lives, Fang Zhao's daily routine was roughly the same. The only difference was that planet Baiji had started publicly annoucing the merits of soldiers and specifically started a topic about the meritorious services of this bunch of youngsters that were undergoing military service. From this, Fang Zhao's name often appeared in front of people's eyes.

And when people saw news relating to Fang Zhao, their evaluations also changed.

"Fang Zhao has rendered a meritorious service!"

"So impressive? It's simply hard to believe, is it exaggerated? Don't the media just love to blow things out of proportion and create things out of nothing? Even if it is true, it's surely overexaggerated. It's probably to set a benchmark. This is probably to complete

their political duty."

…

"Fang Zhao has rendered a meritorious service again!"

"What? Another one? Are you sure it's real? Are there videos? This little fella is really hardy. This time it really isn't exaggerated."

…

"Fang Zhao has rendered a meritorious service yet again!"

"Impressive! There are so many opportunities on planet Baiji. Now that Fang Zhao has once again received a merit, given his record, he can probably get promoted, right? Im so envious! Fang Zhao will be my idol from now on!"

…

"Fang Zhao has rendered meritorious service once more!"

"As expected of my idol!"

…

"Fang Zhao has garnered yet another meritorious deed!"

"Has he been promoted yet? Don't call me if he hasn't been! I'm gaming!"

…

"Fang Zhao has garnered meritorious deeds once again!"

"Oh."

Afterward, whenever Fang Zhao rendering meritorious service or deeds was mentioned by Baiji military district, unless it was third-class merits or the like, it rarely even created a splash. Only some idle audiences would lament about it.

Furthermore, Fang Zhao's fans were rather unperturbed. They had already classified

Fang Zhao under the category of "an abnormal person." The image that "my idol is a mythical creature" was already firmly etched in their hearts. Thus, small matters like this would not excite them. For a mythical creature, these kind of small matters were nothing more than simple effort. Was there a need to be amazed?

The number of Fang Zhao fans was also continuing to increase.

However, there were also many people who could not understand Fang Zhao's actions. What was a conscript who was only undergoing temporary military service striving so hard for? You aren't even a career soldier! Yes, you can strive for merits over at Baiji military service and rise up the ranks, but even if you reach an officer rank, the bonus you will get after ending your military service is not even a tenth of the revenue you earn just from composing one tune!

It was said that those who could use their brains didn't need to use their hands. Why did Fang Zhao have to use his brains and also use his hands? That just wasn't worth it!

What was he trying to prove?

# Chapter 253
# Who to Play the Role of "Fang Zhao"

For Fang Zhao, military service was a really special experience. This was the first time he had gone into outer space and the first time he had personally seen the large strides humanity had taken in space travel.

Battlefields would not just be limited to a single planet. In the future, even if planets with immigrants had conflicts or disputes, humanity and civilization would continue moving forward and expanding even farther into space. Should a catastrophe occur on a planet, there were other planets that could provide refuge for humans. There was no need to worry about a calamity like humankind being nearly wiped out during the Period of Destruction ever happening again.

And during the course of his military service, Fang Zhao had gained even more inspiration for his compositions.

In short, Fang Zhao was very satisfied with his own military service experience. Many people advised him to stay on in the military, including Shanta, who had mentioned it multiple times. As long as Fang Zhao chose to remain at Baiji military district, he might even rise to the rank of general in the future.

But Fang Zhao still rejected this notion. In his previous life, it could be said that he sacrificed a lot for the great cause of surviving, so much so that he was unable to endure until the Founding Era. In this lifetime, Fang Zhao just wished to enjoy as much as he could, although many people would not be able to comprehend his sort of "enjoying."

After Memorial Day passed, the batch of conscripts who had started their military service together with Fang Zhao all started to get restless. Whether they wished to remain on planet Baiji or return home after military service, these people all started making plans.

Given planet Baiji's development, they no longer had to suffer what Baiji conscripts of the past had gone through—that is, being isolated from the world. Now, the amount of time they could go online had increased, and on days off, they could still head to the

newly constructed places of entertainment and have fun, even if those weren't all open yet.

After Memorial Day, the entertainment circles were also shaken up.

News of the revolutionary film project being rebooted broke out. Media firms, reporters, and paparazzi from every single continent felt that their own springtime had come!

How many topics could be generated just from this revolutionary film project? How many livelihoods could it feed?

The chance to strike it rich was right before their eyes!

A short while back, it had been reported that a certain paparazzo had dirt on a certain film superstar. That superstar had spent tens of millions to purchase the incriminating information from the paparazzo to protect his reputation.

Therefore, promotions, pay raises, and perhaps an overnight fortune were not out of the question. It all depended on who had the ability to seize such big news!

However, well-informed parties had already started their preparations a few months earlier. Now all they were waiting for was the official announcement and the information that would be laid out for the public.

For the sake of snagging a satisfactory role in the revolutionary film project, big-name film superstars from every continent had started to move. The teams behind them had already prepared a series of publicity-boosting plans and campaigns.

Over at Silver Wing's side, Duan Qianji had already used the historical dramas shot on real physical sets to give a popularity boost to the company's few big-name superstar actors and actresses. They still could not afford to relax, though—this was not a competition within Yanzhou alone. This was a competition between all the entertainment circles on a global scale!

There were only so few roles, and there were so many actors and actresses. Anyone who studied history knew what sort of characters there were. At this sort of time, superstars of every continent saw their value depreciating. Only each continent's first-rate megastars with global appeal would be able to vie for the lead roles.

Normally, Fang Zhao would also have paid attention to entertainment news and any trending news regarding this revolutionary film project. The script was still being discussed and the consultant team and screenwriters were exchanging thoughts and views, but it was approaching the end stage and was close to being finalized.

Fang Zhao's military service was also coming to an end soon, and Shanta had informed him beforehand.

"Before your batch is decommissioned, there will be one more large commendation ceremony, and you will be among the recipients. When the time comes, you will be promoted one rank and the bonus when your service ends will increase as well. However, have you really decided not to stay on?"

"I have already made plans for a concert performance at a music hall," Fang Zhao replied.

"All right. Then I shall wish you all the best with your concert. You are welcome back any time." Shanta really wished he could retain the services of Fang Zhao. Not even mentioning Fang Zhao's rumored divine ears, he didn't want to let go of Fang Zhao's combat ability. What a pity that Fang Zhao had actually chosen to be an artistic youth!

After speaking with Shanta, Fang Zhao discovered that an entertainment news company had set up a survey through a voting system to see which superstars the masses thought should play the roles of the important leaders during the Period of Destruction.

Below every Founding Era leader's character, there were over 10 listed big-name film stars from every continent.

What attracted Fang Zhao's attention was the role of that "Fang Zhao," where there were also more than 10 film stars listed.

What was interesting was that for the role of "Founding Era Leader Fang Zhao," there was a lot of discussion.

Fang Zhao saw some of the comments of netizens:

"For sure, the roles of the Founding Era great generals will surely be played by members of their own families. If not, those roles will be selected by them. However, for this sort of revolutionary film project, playing a minor role in it is enough for

someone to brag for half his lifetime."

"I just took out my secondary school history e-textbook for a read. This character 'Fang Zhao' had a rather important role during that period but was unfortunate enough to pass on a little early. Now there aren't even any aristocratic families with the family name Fang. Since this is the case, I feel that the film emperors of every continent will be vying for this role."

"The ill-fated leader of Yanzhou was actually called 'Fang Zhao'! Why don't they let Fang Zhao play the role? Yeah, the one I'm talking about is that 'mythical beast' with the pair of really expensive ears."

"Hahahaha, that sounds feasible. Let Fang Zhao play the role of Fang Zhao!"

"They should try it out!"

"Stop joking! Fang Zhao's gaming in 'Battle of the Century' is rather impressive, sure. His actual combat ability is legit too—after all, he has garnered so many military merits—but he might not necessarily be able to act. He isn't an actor, after all."

The online voting activity was little more than a means of generating discussion and conveniently obtaining statistics of the masses' opinions and which stars they felt were most appropriate for which role. The final results would also give the investors of the revolutionary film project some data to consider.

Of course, there were huge profits to be made for this voting activity, because for the voting, there were two choices. For every role, everyone had a free chance to vote, and besides that, they could also place a wager.

The latter choice added an element of fun to the voting, and the market was huge. After all, every one of these listed stars had a large following of fans. Even if only one percent of these fans placed a wager, it would still be a massive figure.

The number of people who had placed a wager and how much they had placed were not displayed. After voting, one could only see a bar chart showing the support that each star had.

Fang Zhao looked at the comments and the bar chart. Online audiences that did not know anything and were purely joining in on the fun had made him the most voted option.

"Let Fang Zhao play the role of Fang Zhao" also became a topic for laughs.

Sometimes, people would say one thing, but in their hearts, they would be thinking something else. For example, some people said this: That person might not necessarily be able to act. But in their hearts, what they were thinking was this: If not him, who else can do so?

And now, although these people were saying to just "Let Fang Zhao play the role of Fang Zhao! He has the exact same name and can even fight beasts!" in fact, their hearts were laughing. If Fang Zhao can act for such an important role, then even pigs can fly!

While Fang Zhao was viewing the voting activity, there were also many people paying attention to it on planet Wai.

Zaro was currently filming the third season of "Vampire Duke." With technological advancements, as long as filming was smooth, the time taken to manufacture an episode had been greatly shortened. Since he had seen that the sets were really good, Zaro's agent had suggested Zaro continue filming. After the first season was complete, the second season had followed immediately after. Reception for season two had not been bad, so they had taken advantage of it and filmed a third season.

During idle times while filming, Zaro had come across the online voting activity. Naturally, his attention went to the role of Leizhou's Great General Renault and the possible candidates for this role. Sweeping through the list of over 10 actors in the voting options, Zaro found out that he was among the candidates on the voting list for the role of General Renault.

Zaro was elated. This was the delight of being acknowledged. However, this joy only lasted for a short while. When Zaro went through the discussions, his face became one shade darker.

Especially after reading the top few comments that had obtained the most likes, Zaro was no longer able to maintain his good mood.

"Why is Zaro in the choices for the role of General Renault?"

"Zaro can act?"

"There's no choice; who asked him to be born with the Renault family name? Furthermore, he acted in a really popular TV series. That cannot be denied."

"This 'Leizhou's Smiling Angel' should just go do some charity! Don't act anymore!"

"Sha-ro? He wants to vie for leading role in that revolutionary film project with his sort of acting skills? I have watched the highly popular series 'Vampire duke,' and it was rather ordinary. All he did was pull a long face and act cool to trick some young ladies. It's better for him not to disgrace himself in this sort of revolutionary film project!"

"Honestly speaking, Zaro does have the status and basis. If he doesn't open his mouth, his acting can be considered decent, but when he talks, everything just falls apart. Under the performances of those kings of the silver screen, he will experience being crushed by a tank! Letting him play the role of General Renault would just be letting people from other continents laugh their heads off!"

…

Reading these few pages of comments, at the start, Zaro was filled with a burning rage, but it slowly turned into self-doubt, as there were just too many such comments—over 10 pages worth.

Zaro tilted his head toward his agent beside him and asked, "Is my acting really that bad?"

Zaro's agent fell silent for a few seconds as he considered the question, then replied, "There is room for improvement." Then his agent added, "It has improved greatly!"

Zaro's expression changed. He seemed pleased and, following that, brought up his own performances in "Vampire Duke" seasons 1 and 2 and the currently airing season 3 and watched them. The more he watched, the more pleased he was. "Where can you find this sort of acting? How can this even be called acting cool? No, acting cool also requires skill! Those people online are just blind!"

Zaro then checked the views and profits of this drama series. "It's impossible not to be popular!"

Returning to the slew of vicious comments directed toward him, Zaro silently pondered for a bit. Combining facts and theory, he came to a conclusion: "Mmhm, these people are definitely blind!"

Zaro's agent shrugged, indicating he didn't wish to say anything

Zaro did not even look at his manager's expression. He voted for himself and placed a wager. This was how much faith the great Zaro of Leizhou had in himself.

After voting for himself, Zaro was feeling contented and went to check on the other roles to vote for candidates that satisfied him.

"Fang Zhao? There was a leader during the Period of Destruction called Fang Zhao? Oh, seems like there was one."

Zaro clicked to enter this page and read through the introduction of this Period of Destruction leader.

After reading through this character's introduction Zaro clicked his tongue. "Weak, this person was really weak."

However, he was not really interested in all this. He quickly went to check the list of candidates in the voting pool.

The first option was actually more good looking than himself. Not pleasing to look at, not voting for him.

The second option had too many awards. The photo of him even had a close-up of those awards he had won! Are you afraid that nobody will know that you have won awards? So pretentious, I can't stand looking at him. No votes.

Third option. Didn't this b*stard already appear on the voting list for another role? Who placed him here? The editor must be retarded! No votes!

Fourth option. More than 2 meters tall? What did he grow so tall for? To snatch rebounds in basketball?! No votes!

Fifth option…

Sixth option…

…

Zaro went through them one by one right till the last option.

"Fang Zhao? That Fang Zhao from Yanzhou? The one undergoing military service on

planet Baiji? Why is his name here? Isn't he a composer who plays games? Which idiot nominated him? He can't just be added to this list because his name is Fang Zhao. This bunch of editors are really no good!"

After browsing through all of them, Zaro looked through the voting options in the list once again. Zaro then placed a vote for Fang Zhao and conveniently wagered a little on him too. This was a totally an instinctive reaction, and the agent beside him could not have stopped Zaro in time if he had wanted to.

After placing the wager, Zaro realized what he had done. He had not really intended to place a wager on anyone other than himself, but he could not bring himself to admit his mistake and reluctantly said, "Cough, just a little investment in Fang Zhao. Take it as me supporting that fella. After all, he did help us out, didn't he? He was the one who introduced the projects at the film entertainment complex to us. As people, we should know how to be grateful."

Zaro's agent felt that from his understanding of Zaro, given Zaro's "idiotic" IQ and pettiness, his choice of voting for Fang Zhao was definitely not "being grateful" but a load of hogwash. Faced with the list of those actors displayed on the screen, perhaps Zaro had only found Fang Zhao a little more pleasing to his eyes than the rest.

Why was this so?

Because among all the superstars on this list, only Fang Zhao's status in the film entertainment circles was lower than Zaro's. When it came to a person who was beneath himself, Zaro would definitely find him more pleasing to the eyes!

# Chapter 254
# Transferring Duty

Being a hot topic online, people on Baiji were frequently heard discussing it. Whether they were conscripts undergoing military service or workers from construction teams, even seasoned soldiers from the military district spoke about it with their comrades in their free time. In the past, they might have been cut off from the world and would only receive limited military news, but now they could access the internet and their surroundings were much more lively, so people would participate in idle chatting.

Not all people belonged to the category of star chasers, but they would still have actors and actresses they liked or who seemed pleasant to them, so they would also cast a vote. However, when the majority of garrisoned troops on planet Baiji saw the option for Fang Zhao, they immediately voted for him.

If it hadn't been for Fang Zhao, planet Baiji would still be a poor and destitute place. Perhaps they might still be racking their brains to try and get others to lend some assistance even now. Therefore, if they didn't vote for Fang Zhao, who else could they vote for?

Not an actor?

They didn't care. In any case, when they saw the option of "Fang Zhao," they just had to cast their votes.

A year's military service was coming to an end and the military district had allocated a time for the large commendation ceremony.

In the past, planet Baiji would definitely not have set up this sort of thing They did not have the money or inclination to host farewell parties, commendation ceremonies, or any such events.

This year, they were making it especially formal and were even preparing an extravagant farewell party. Why?

In light of Fang Zhao's contributions to planet Baiji, the military district also had to show their appreciation. Of course, Baiji military district would also use this opportunity to reveal to the public how the military district saw this bunch of youths who had undergone military service, and they would conveniently answer the call from the top brass to promote these exemplary models so that even more youngsters would not choose to avoid military service.

During the large commendation ceremony, over 100 conscripts with exceptional performances were conferred medals, which were handed out personally by the military district's highest-ranking officer, Shanta.

As the first official commendation ceremony, Shanta attached a great deal of importance to it. Besides inviting a few reporters and media, the entire ceremony would be broadcasted live.

There were too many people to commend, so it was impossible to list out every contribution belonging to every single person. During the awards presentation, the majority would only have their biggest meritorious deed mentioned.

Fang Zhao was the last recipient. This time, Shanta listed over 10 meritorious deeds in one breath. These deeds were the more typical cases. There were some that were confidential and could not be released publicly, such as the deeds during the terrorist attack. Saying so much was to show off Fang Zhao as a role model.

Last year, when Fang Zhao had first discovered Baiji ore, it had caused a large commotion. Not long after, he had rendered meritorious service during the terrorist attack and had even shot two important terrorists. Exceptions had been made for him to be promoted, and he had obtained lawful gun ownership rights for after his military service ended.

Half a year after that, at a mobilization meeting in front of the new batch of conscripts that had arrived in October last year, Fang Zhao had been promoted from the rank of second lieutenant to first lieutenant.

Now, when his one year of military service was reaching its end, at the military district's general assembly hall, in front of online audiences watching the live broadcast, Fang Zhao's military achievements once again resulted in him getting a promotion. Fang Zhao was promoted from the rank of first lieutenant to captain.

Although there were other outstanding individuals from the same batch, the only one to rise up the ranks so quickly was Fang Zhao.

However, nobody had any objections, including netizens that were watching the live broadcast.

In this one year, all the meritorious deeds publicly announced by Baiji military district were real and true, to the point that even Fang Zhao's fans had already become immune to hearing about them. Although there might have been some political agenda here where they needed a role model and benchmark, if that person was Fang Zhao, everyone had no qualms.

Tears streamed down Great-Grandfather Fang's face as he watched his great-grandson on stage. He was very gratified. Beside him, others once again told the two elder Fangs to advise Fang Zhao to stay on with the military. However, the two of them only returned faint smiles. They also hoped that Fang Zhao would stay in the military, but they also respected Fang Zhao's own aspirations.

"If he doesn't want to stay on, then he won't stay on. Whatever Fang Zhao wants to do, he should just go ahead and do. All that matters is that he is happy. Being an artist is also rather great too."

This was what the two elder Fangs had decided when they had discussed the matter in private. All the meritorious services and deeds were a result of Fang Zhao's own striving. Whatever he wished to do, however he went about it, the two elder Fangs would not interfere.

Audiences watching the live broadcast of the commendation ceremony also felt somewhat rueful.

"He underwent military service for a year yet could obtain an officer rank. After he is discharged, he can still carry arms. How great is that!"

With Fang Zhao and the others as examples, there were even more people who wished to apply for their military service on planet Baiji. Furthermore, it was predicted that as time passed, it would get more difficult to apply for planet Baiji.

"Fang Zhao was actually promoted to captain. If it were me, I would surely stay on at Baiji military district. Such a great opportunity, what can he achieve by leaving?"

"The person above, do you know how much Fang Zhao earns from his compositions?"

"The person before me, do you know how much Fang Zhao earns playing games? Do you know how much the 10th-generation console he owns is worth now? A sky-high premium! Reselling it would bring one an overnight fortune! How envious!"

"The brother above, do you know much Fang Zhao earns from endorsements? Can he earn so much in the military?"

"The few above who posted seem like they are quite young, shortsighted, and lack any understanding! If Fang Zhao stays on at Baiji military district, that is where there will be unlimited possibilities for future prospects! Those are things that cannot be calculated in terms of money. Returning is the worst possible choice!"

In one hour, the comments section went from admiring Fang Zhao's promotion to discussing whether Fang Zhao should stay on with the military.

Kevin Lin looked at the comments online and could not help but take delight in this. "When the person involved is quiet, these people will defend his interests."

As one of the reporters present, Kevin Lin had been allocated to a good spot and had managed to capture many photographs and videos of the commendation ceremony.

While browsing through the online comments, Kevin Lin sent a message. He wanted to interview Fang Zhao on his thoughts about his promotion and pending discharge. However, he never got a reply from Fang Zhao. After the ceremony ended, Fang Zhao was nowhere to be seen.

"Where did he go?"

Kevin Lin asked a few people he recognized over at the military district and found out that Fang Zhao had been called over by Shanta for a talk. He guessed that Shanta was surely trying to persuade Fang Zhao to stay on with the military.

However, Kevin Lin had only gotten it half right.

Shanta did try to persuade Fang Zhao, but he'd had another reason for summoning Fang Zhao.

"It is certain that you will be transferred to reserve duty, but I have already submitted

an application for you as a reserve duty officer. According to regulations, for people with outstanding contributions during their active military service, when they are transferred to reserve duty, their rank can still rise by one grade. That means to say, if the application is successful, after you have been discharged and transferred to reserve duty, your reserve duty rank will rise to major."

The position of a reserve duty officer had already been brought up, and the military district needed time to discuss this matter. As it had not yet been confirmed, this information had not been revealed during the commendation ceremony.

For people like Fang Zhao, Yan Biao, and other discharged soldiers who had lawful gun ownership rights, they were all transferred to reserve duty. Normally, people in reserve duty did not do anything, but should a war break out, these people would receive an enlistment notice and could be speedily converted to active duty to participate.

Reserve duty personnel were registered under the continent they were from as well as the place they had served. In most cases, the system generally listed the home continent in front. Shanta had pulled some tricks, though. During the registration, he had moved the place Fang Zhao had served to the top. That was to say that if there were any wars or special circumstances that required reserve personnel be activated and both Yanzhou Military district and Baiji military district tried to draft Fang Zhao at the same time, Baiji military district would have priority.

Two days later, the position of a reserve duty officer was fixed and his rank was confirmed.

Shanta called up Fang Zhao. "Reserve duty major. Although you don't have any real authority or power, that rank isn't just for show. The higher the rank, the more responsibility you bear on your shoulders. In the future, if you receive an enlistment notice, regardless of any other reasons, make sure to report promptly to the appointed location.

When one was given the right to wield guns, they would have to fulfill their obligations. Although he may never be called up, the moment he received an enlistment notice, unless there was really no way of responding, he would have to rush to the designated location as soon as possible. Otherwise, would it have been so easy to obtain a gun permit?

Fang Zhao took a look at the military uniform that was sent to him. The reserve duty uniform's buttons, rank, and design were similar to the active duty one—only the color was different.

On the day that they were officially discharged, people from the same batch were wearing all sorts of clothing. However, Fang Zhao and others that had been transferred to reserve duty were still wearing military uniforms.

Kevin Lin swept his eyes over Fang Zhao's epaulet. "The heck? It's only been a few days, how have you gotten promoted again? Baiji military district is really generous to you."

Kevin Lin was only joking lightheartedly. He knew about the regulations when transferring to reserve duty.

Fang Zhao bade farewell to his comrades and the construction teams and researchers of Outpost 23 and carried the water tank with the "rabbit" as he left.

Great-Grandfather Fang and Great-Grandmother Fang also said their goodbyes to the people in the family district they had grown close to. Together with Fang Zhao and the batch of conscripts who had completed their military service, they boarded a transport ship headed back home.

After the space flight, the transport ship arrived at a space station orbiting Earth. Here, all conscripts who had completed a year of military service would ride a shuttle back to their respective continents.

Here, Fang Zhao, the two elder Fangs, and the other Yanzhou conscripts would board shuttles back to Yanzhou, but the two elder Fangs would be on a shuttle for civilians, while Fang Zhao and the other conscripts who had completed a year of military service would board a military shuttle. The destinations of the two shuttles were also different.

Online, news of returning conscripts after their year of military service had been announced.

"Look at Fang Zhao. After completing his military service, his reputation has gotten even higher."

"Have you ever seen a celebrity who was even more famous after military service?"

"If military service could raise one's fame, would any celebrity try to skip military service?"

Before his military service had started, at most, Fang Zhao could have been said to have some fame in the entertainment circles and had banked on gaming to gain a temporary boost in popularity. Many people had seen Fang Zhao choosing to enlist in the military at the time his popularity was soaring as a huge mistake. Now, the Fang Zhao who was even more popular than ever had returned back to Earth!

After all, there were limitations in the gaming circles. Furthermore, during Fang Zhao's military service duration, he had appeared in both entertainment news and political news, with Baiji military district's official news being the main driving force. How could he not be popular?

With reports from many angles, this was not something limited to just the gaming circles. There were lots of people who did not pay attention to gaming or even the entire entertainment industry who had now heard of Fang Zhao. Of course, Fang Zhao's ears were another popular discussion topic among people.

There was also the online voting activity. Not even mentioning those film emperors, even these younger generations of aristocratic families who filmed movies and TV series just for fun had representative works. In the lists of stars, only Fang Zhao did not have any prior films.

Therefore, every entertainment media outlet wished to interview Fang Zhao on his thoughts regarding the revolutionary film project's voting activity and ask him about his thoughts and feelings from his time undergoing military service.

Although netizens were only light-heartedly joking about voting for Fang Zhao, they were also very curious as to Fang Zhao's own thoughts. Why did this person who was able to brave storms and hardships during his military service give up the chance to remain at Baiji military district and instead come back? And what are his future life plans for after this?

"Kevin Lin did talk about it in a live broadcast, but he never talked about the main points. Forget about military reporters, they won't even touch anything related to entertainment."

"Then which entertainment reporter should interview him?"

"Speaking of that, we rarely get to see secret snapshots of Fang Zhao in the news."

"In the past, it was because Fang Zhao was not popular enough. Besides that, entertainment reporters and paparazzi pay less attention to the private lives of celebrities in gaming circles. However, now that he has returned, the amount of entertainment reporters eyeing him should increase."

"I believe that secret snapshots will appear soon."

"We have to leave it up to Yanzhou's paparazzi and entertainment reporters."

"Fang Zhao has already returned from his military service. Yanzhou's entertainment reporters and paparazzi, hurry up and get your *sses over to the airfield!"

"Who is Yanzhou's paparazzi king?"

"I heard it was someone called Wang Tie."

"Wang Tie, you piece of trash! Where are you!"

Wang Tie, who was far away on planet Wai: "…" Why am I being abused again? I will never go even if I get scolded! Whoever wants to can go ahead!

# Chapter 255
# Blackmail

Wang Tie was afraid of Fang Zhao, but given his reputation as the "top paparazzo" and the "king of paparazzi" in Yanzhou, he couldn't state the obvious. That would be the equivalent of career suicide.

He had been planning to play dead, but given the amount of discussion online, Wang Tie decided to respond directly instead.

So Wang Tie posted a long spiel on his social media account, more than 100 words. In summary, the message was this: "This mofo is onto a big scoop at the Wai Filmed Entertainment Culture Base. Who cares what's going on on Earth? There are so many paparazzi journalists out there. Let them have the story. Stop bugging me!"

The Wai Filmed Entertainment Culture Base was now the focal point of most entertainment news outlets. After news had broken of the reboot of the revolutionary film project, paparazzi photographers and entertainment journalists started infiltrating the Wai base. They had discovered a construction site that they suspected was where the revolutionary project would be shooting.

Given that it was a blockbuster project, considering how things were developing, an elaborate set was likely. Geologists and historians also pointed out that the geological makeup of the construction site was quite similar to the terrain of many places during the Period of Destruction.

This prompted a deluge of A-list actors setting up camp on Wai so they could get used to the climate. What if they were cast in the revolutionary project? It would be an utter disaster if they couldn't acclimate then.

If they couldn't even get used to the weather and local diet, what were they good for?

So being prepared was the way to go. They couldn't go wrong with renting a spot to shoot another project on Wai and acclimating at the same time.

That was also why, after the brief respite during Memorial Day, the Wai Filmed

Entertainment Culture Base became bustling again. With the revolutionary film project as a major attraction, the number of visitors skyrocketed. Real-estate and rental prices doubled. Rents at the film studio complex were spiraling out of control. And yet, despite the crazy rent, there was a waiting list.

The early investors in the film studio complex made a major killing.

Now that Wang Tie had announced that he was chasing a scoop on Wai, entertainment news junkies had nothing to say. They started turning their sights to other famed entertainment journalists and companies.

That was why it was a busy day at Yanzhou's spaceport.

This was the time of the year when conscripts who had completed their military service returned home. The spaceport typically dedicated a special passage for the soldiers where their parents could pick them up in person.

But the Yanzhou spaceport was exceptionally crowded.

There were parents picking up their kids, people greeting their friends, local journalists, entertainment reporters, and fans.

A student from a neighboring university wanted to get Fang Zhao's autograph. Little had he expected the arrival hall to be so crowded. After surveying his surroundings, he asked the folks next to him why they were there.

"I'm a gamer. Fang Zhao is the perennial champion in my mind," one person said.

"I'm a soldier. He's my idol," another answered, pointing to the sky.

"I'm a musician. I attend Fang Zhao's alma mater. He's our senior alum," a young fellow said enthusiastically.

"I'm… I'm here to check out the spectacle."

Suddenly, someone started screaming.

"Look, look! They're here!"

Two flying transports landed, but they descended into different areas. One landed on

the civilian airfield and the second on a military airstrip. The jam-packed arrival hall was near the military airfield.

The crowds gathering in the arrival hall craned their necks. Soon, passengers started emerging.

After a year of military service, many conscripts had gone from pale to thoroughly tanned and had bulked up. They still smelled like their barracks. Thankfully, the conscripts frequently stayed in touch via videoconference, so their parents were at least able to recognize them.

The long-awaited reunion gave rise to cheers and laughter. Many parents felt that military service was a rite of passage and that their children had come out the other end more mature.

Meanwhile, the journalists were scrambling.

"Where's Fang Zhao? Anyone see Fang Zhao?"

"Kid, did Fang Zhao come out with your batch?" a journalist asked a young man who was greeting his family. Most of the conscripts were university students, so "kid" was an appropriate way to address him.

The young man laughed. "You're not going to catch him. He boarded a transfer flight for Yanzhou's military headquarters."

Fang Zhao was grouped together with about a dozen other conscripts, all exemplary soldiers from the same batch of conscripts. They wore the insignias of majors-in-waiting. After landing in Yanzhou, they had boarded another military transport bound for Yanzhou's military HQ right away so they could get straight to the paperwork for transitioning to reserve duty.

The computer software for switching service status was available online, but there were certain procedures that had to be handled in person.

The journalists from Yanzhou's military newspaper were already on the transfer flight. They would continue filming Fang Zhao and company as they traveled to HQ, where they would conduct a short interview with the soldiers. The questions were perfunctory and had been given to them in advance. The soldiers knew the kinds of answers the top brass was looking for.

Word spread quickly among journalists that Fang Zhao and company had headed to Yanzhou's military headquarters.

"We're not going to get him here. Let's move on."

"Are we really going to stake out military HQ?"

"Military HQ is not somewhere you can just waltz into. Before you know it you'll be shot dead on account of being suspected criminals."

"Then what should we do next? Set up near military HQ?"

"No, I have a better idea. Let's send someone to Silver Wing and we'll go to the retirement home for former officials in Yanbei."

Conversations like this also happened elsewhere. Yanzhou's military HQ being off-limits, the entertainment press corps started thinking on their feet. They were experts at stakeouts—if one place didn't work, they would move on.

The entertainment journalists had missed Fang Zhao and company, but the group was tailed by reporters from Yanzhou's military newspaper who posted quite a few photos and videos online.

Readers glued to their devices weren't happy.

"The journalists didn't catch Fang Zhao."

"He actually left straight for military HQ."

"I don't want to watch the coverage from the military newspaper. The returning conscripts say the same thing every year. This year there's Fang Zhao, so they have to make a big deal out of him, but he himself is going to give the same politically correct spiel again. Lord knows how many times he has made the same comments on Baiji. I'm so sick of them."

"I only want to watch the interviews conducted by the entertainment journalists, not the bullsh*t that the military reporters generate."

What they wanted to hear wasn't effusive praise about the conscripts and their performance and hard work but, rather, interesting anecdotes—details that had never

been reported.

"Wait, didn't you notice the insignia on Fang Zhao's shoulders?"

"F*ck! Is that the insignia of a major? Isn't he a captain? I could've sworn he was promoted to captain at the commendation ceremony."

"If you take a closer look, the color is a bit different than a typical major's insignia. That's the insignia for a major-in-waiting, not a serving major. It's not just Fang Zhao. The others were promoted one rank too. The previous batch of conscripts from Yanzhou didn't produce this many officers. There's also a distinction between active and reserve officers."

"You can get promoted even when you become a reserve soldier?"

"This rule was among the latest revisions to the military code during the New Era. The top brass decided to allow conscripts to be promoted when they become reserve soldiers to encourage military service."

Folks hadn't paid attention to the new provision because they resented having to serve in the military. In addition, there were so many conscripts who served every year, and only a minority were promoted to officer rank upon completing their service period. The provision hadn't been widely promoted either, so many members of the public were clueless.

Meanwhile, after signing in at military HQ and completing his media interviews, Fang Zhao headed to the retirement home for former officials in Yanbei. His pet "rabbit" had already been delivered to his home in Qi'an by courier post, so he was traveling light, carrying a single backpack that contained his notebook and gun, his two most treasured items.

When Fang Zhao arrived at the retirement home, it was still business as usual, but shortly after he arrived, he got word that journalists were en route to stake him out.

Great-Grandfather Fang asked a security guard to send him surveillance footage of the press pack gathering outside, and he lectured Fang Zhao, "You have name recognition now. There are people who admire you and want you to do well, but there are also those who curse at you and will tear you down, especially your competitors in the entertainment industry. So many of them are just waiting for you to stumble, so pay attention to your behavior and language when you're in public. Don't give your

enemies any ammunition."

"I know." Fang Zhao made sure his two great-grandparents had returned from Baiji in one piece and were in good health, then got ready to leave.

Great-Grandfather Fang asked him to hang on. "Wait. There are quite a few journalists out there. Some of them have even tried to sneak into the retirement home. They won't be able to make it to the residential wing, but there's a considerable distance between the residential compound and the parking lot. There have got to be reporters staked out there. Even if you lose them, you'll be trailed by cameras, so I suggest you steer clear of both the front and side entrances. Let me show you an obscure detour that will bypass the journalists. You'll see a door and an outpost at the end of the path. The door is typically closed, but the outpost is usually staffed. I'll give the guard stationed there a heads up to open the door for you."

Great-Grandfather Fang pulled out a map of the retirement home and circled a spot. "There it is. There's a small path here that cuts through the woods."

Fang Zhao nodded, memorized the route, changed into plain clothes, and left the residential wing where the two elders lived.

He followed the route Great-Grandfather Fang had traced. Soon he saw a small cluster of trees. The path was buried among the woods beneath the thick foliage, which made it hard to detect.

But Fang Zhao noticed that he had company.

Two men were hiding behind a bush by the sheltered path, one a cunning-looking middle-aged man and the other a young man who struck Fang Zhao as a fresh university graduate.

"Shifu, you were spot on. There's Fang Zhao!" the young man hiding behind the bush blurted out in a whisper after spotting Fang Zhao through his binoculars.

"At the end of the day, us locals have an advantage. We know the layout of the retirement home better," the middle-aged man said, flashing a conceited grin.

He had consulted a few former classmates who covered finance and politics. They frequently interviewed former officials at the retirement home, so they knew the layout of the compound. The classmates told him that the old geezers loved to avoid

journalists by using this detour.

The other journalists were staking out the hallway leading to the parking lot. The entrance and side doors were also covered. What a shame they were clueless about the existence of this obscure path.

It wasn't visible from the air because it was covered by a thick layer of leaves and branches. The retirement home compound was also huge, and this was a far-flung location. The detour was impossible to discover unless you were an insider.

The middle-aged man was quite upset. "How come he's all alone?" What he wanted was to shoot Fang Zhao with a few other companions, regardless of whether he could recognize them or not, be they kids or elderly folks. As long as there was a second person in the frame, he could make up a story. Some dirt would be ideal, like a family feud, some form of hypocrisy, or a messy personal life. He could spin a tale out of nothing by extrapolating from a shady-looking picture. Let the image speak for itself.

"I want you to ambush him with those questions we prepared when he passes our spot," the middle-aged man mumbled.

The young man was reluctant. "Shifu, is that a good idea? He's a major, after all." The questions his senior colleague had prepared were quite pointed and touched on Fang Zhao's personal life.

"You're still green. He's a major-in-waiting, which doesn't mean jacksh*t. He might as well be a civilian. He doesn't have any real authority. We have nothing to be afraid of."

The young man was shivering. "But he's a military officer, after all. He's authorized to carry a gun. What if shoots us both in a fit of fury? Word is he's a decent fighter. What if he drags us to a corner and executes us?"

"Have you been watching those lame-ass TV shows again? How many times have I told you? Those shows make you dumb. Cut down on those silly shows and use your brain. Think about it, he's been touted as such a positive role model and he's a major-in-waiting fresh from his military service. Would he dare use lethal force with this much public attention focused on him?"

After peeking into his binoculars again, the middle-aged man continued, "I figure he'll pass us in about two minutes. When he does, go confront him. Don't forget the questions we prepared. If he tries to blow you off, do your best to cut him off and

pester him. If there's a scuffle, drop to the ground and yell, 'he's hitting me!'"

The young man was a bit embarrassed by the questionable tactics. "Uhm, isn't that kinda fake?"

"Then drop dead once he makes a move and hurt yourself somehow, pretend that you're injured."

"Soldiers who have earned merits like him, they could paralyze me with a single blow, no?"

"Don't worry, he won't attack you for real. Just confront him."

"What if he attacks me for real?"

"That's even better. That would be big news!"

"How considerate of you, Shifu."

"Look at you. And you call yourself a man? You're even more timid than your female cohort. I should have brought her instead. 'Fang Zhao attacks woman'—that's an even better headline!"

"Don't underestimate me. It's just that this is my first time doing something like this. I'm not used to it."

The middle-aged man didn't mind at all. "You'll get used to it." People who were too generous and honest were destined to fail as journalists.

"You know what, Shifu, I'm still not comfortable with this. The stars should be aligned for such a confrontational approach. We don't have a strategic advantage here. Look around you—there's nobody. No one will see the fight. Even if someone is drawn to the ruckus, this is a retirement home for former officials where Fang Zhao's elders live. They're all on his side. They will close ranks against us. The retired officials will definitely side with Fang Zhao. We're outnumbered."

"Tsk, you've been watching too many period dramas, haven't you? This is the New Era, the high-tech era. Everything will be recorded. As long as we have video evidence, we have nothing to fear. We'll adjust our camera settings to upload the video to an online drive and make 10 copies. He won't be able to wipe out all my copies. If he attacks you,

even better. Let's con him with a huge medical bill and we'll offer to sell him the video of the attack. Let's blackmail the hell out of him."

Engrossed in their exchange, the two journalists failed to notice that the silhouette they had spotted in their binoculars had disappeared. When they felt that it was time and stopped chatting, they realized their target had gone missing.

"Where is he?"

"Did he spot us?"

The young man was incredulous. "That's impossible."

"It's all your fault. You were talking too much. He must have overheard us."

The two men felt a sudden breeze sweep their backs, and they shivered. It was as if someone had hovered over them briefly.

Alarmed, the middle-aged man looked around. As a veteran entertainment journalist, his senses were well honed, but all he noticed was the wind and the resulting rustling of leaves.

Nothing out of the ordinary.

The middle-aged man thought to himself, I'm probably just too nervous.

A minute later.

Still no sign of Fang Zhao.

Five minutes.

Ten minutes.

Half an hour had passed.

The young man was ready to give up. "Shifu, there's no sign of him."

The middle-aged entertainment journalist frowned. That's impossible. Did Fang Zhao really spot us? Are his "godly ears" for real? It isn't a load of bullsh*t after all?

He went online and didn't find any updates from the other journalists staking out the retirement home.

The middle-aged man remained unconvinced that he had let his mark slip. He gritted his teeth and said, "Let's stick around."

Five hours passed.

Dusk loomed.

The two journalists got a message from their colleague: "Get online. Fang Zhao was photographed entering Silver Wing Tower."

Silver Wing Tower was located in Qi'an. The retirement home was in Yanbei.

The two journalists examined the pictures and videos posted online and were dumbfounded.

When on earth did Fang Zhao leave?

# Chapter 256
# Brother Zhao

Qi'an City.

At Silver Wing tower's ground floor car park, Ji Polun emerged from an inconspicuous car. He was wearing a baseball cap and very ordinary clothes. He was having a short vacation that was very hard to come by. The previous day, he had secretly gone out with a few friends to have fun all night and had only returned home at dawn to sleep until now. Today, he had not taken a company car but had borrowed a friend's car instead. He had driven to the company's public car park in an inconspicuous fashion so as to not attract any attention. In a bit, he would take the elevator straight to the film department.

Headed toward the elevator were two others who had gotten out of another car. They were two newcomers that had been signed by the company's film department.

The two newcomers were talking in hushed tones. When they looked up and saw Ji Polun, they wiped the smiles off their faces and greeted Ji Polun. "Greetings, senior!"

"Mmhm." Ji Polun gave a faint smile and nodded his head. His expression was a little aloof with a slight hint of haughtiness, and he didn't say anything else.

Now, although Ji Polun was still a second-tier actor on a B-grade contract with the company, "Beauties" and "Warring States" had let him show his face on a global scale.

During the promotional activities back on Earth, Ji Polun had visited all the different continents. Although he still couldn't be compared to the company's other top-tier stars, compared to other second-tier actors, his popularity was way greater. He finally knew why everyone wished to develop on the global scene. Just Yanzhou alone was too small. If at any time there was a revolutionary film project or something similar, stars that were only famous within Yanzhou would simply have no chance to land any good roles.

People in the film department all knew that Ji Polun was on the right path. Although his roles in the two popular drama series were slightly awkward, at least they let

people remember him. How many people regretted not fighting for that role?

Ji Polun's slightly cold attitude did not bother the two newcomers. In their minds, stars with fame and ability were just like that.

The three of them stepped into the elevator. The two newcomers also did not have the nerve to continue chit-chatting in front of Ji Polun and fell silent. Ji Polun was thinking about some information his manager had sent him. Now, his manager was working hard to help him fight for an opportunity to show his face in the revolutionary film project. He wasn't qualified to snag an important role, but he was willing to be a minor character as long as he got a chance to participate in it!

Just as the elevator doors were about to close, Ji Polun's eyes lit up.

The two newcomer watched as Ji Polun's hand shot out to press a button and reopen the closing elevator doors. Ji Polun voluntarily took a step back to create space.

Yet another person entered the lift.

Ji Polun's attitude did a big 360. "Brother Zhao!" His previously cold and indifferent manner was no longer anywhere to be seen. Now a bright and warm smile was all over his face.

This sudden change in attitude stunned the two newcomers. When they saw Fang Zhao, they could recognize him right away. After all, they had seen him frequently in news reports, and their own company was putting lots of effort into giving him publicity.

But what astonished them even more was that Ji Polun, a second-tier actor whose stock was on the uprise, actually had this sort of attitude toward Fang Zhao?

They had still been wondering which top-tier superstar had come over.

Fang Zhao had not expected to run into someone he recognized immediately after entering either. He had driven over from Yanbei City in a publicly shared car and had parked at the public car park below the company's tower. As it was a publicly shared car, it would not be nice of him to park it on the 50th floor, so he had left the vehicle at the public car park and was going to take the elevator up.

"Ji Polun?" When Fang Zhao stepped into the lift, he noticed the two newcomers and

nodded his head toward them. He did not have the sort of cold indifference Ji Polun had had, but he made the two newcomers feel even more nervous. The aura that Fang Zhao emitted gave them a sort of constricting feeling, making them afraid to even speak.

"Ay, it's me. Brother Zhao, you have returned back to Qi'an City so quickly! I watched the news in the afternoon and heard that many reporters were camped out in Yanbei City for you." Ji Polun had really not expected that Fang Zhao would be back at the company at this time.

"I just arrived from Yanbei City."

As Fang Zhao chatted with Ji Polun, the two newcomers stood to the side without so much as letting out a squeak.

The elevator arrived at the 50th floor virtual projects department. Fang Zhao left, while Ji Polun and the other two continued on their way up.

The moment Fang Zhao left, Ji Polun returned to his cold and aloof manner. The two newcomers watching were extremely curious and were waiting for Ji Polun to dispel their doubts, but when they reached the film department's floor, Ji Polun stepped out and left. He simply had no intention of explaining anything to them.

He had no choice. When someone was popular, they had to be a little careful. Toward these newcomers, before he understood their characters, Ji Polun would not say much.

After Ji Polun had left, the two newcomers exhaled sharply.

"That's my first time coming close to Fang Zhao in person. His aura is really strong! But isn't Ji Polun older than Fang Zhao? Why did he call Fang Zhao 'Brother Zhao'?"

"In our entertainment company, age doesn't equate seniority."

"Makes sense."

At the other side, when Fang Zhao entered the virtual projects department, Zu Wen and the others were already waiting to welcome him. All of them had been keeping their eyes peeled to the internet. Someone had taken a photo of Fang Zhao at the car park below when he had arrived, but looking at the angle the photograph was taken from and then further considering the security measures the company had improved

over the last half a year, the photograph of Fang Zhao entering Silver Wing tower had probably been intentionally leaked by the company itself.

However, whether it was the company's own publicity operation or not, the moment Zu Wen and the others saw the news, they immediately moved to welcome Fang Zhao on his return.

The virtual projects department and gaming department had both recruited some newcomers. The gaming team had also recruited a few team members. First, Fang Zhao got to know the newcomers and spoke to the department staff before heading to the top-floor office to speak with Duan Qianji about acting.

At night, the staff of the virtual projects and gaming departments gathered for a meal to welcome Fang Zhao back. After that, Zu Wen gave Fang Zhao a ride to his Qi'an City residence before leaving.

First, Fang Zhao went to the luggage depositary to collect his "rabbit" and bring it up. Looking at the data being displayed on the water tank's monitoring system, the water tank's vitality readings were still strong, and there were no signs of any abnormalities. It seemed like its endurance for long-haul space travel was decent and it was adapting very well.

After Fang Zhao return to his residence, he received messages from Yan Biao and Zuo Yu. The two of them were on their way back from planet Wai and had already arrived at the space station.

The film studio complex had seen an increase in traffic flow. Fang Zhao had recruited two additional men, so when Zuo Yu and Yan Biao were not at the filmed entertainment culture base, there would still be 10 people to guard the sets.

At the space station, Zuo Yu received a new message from Fang Zhao and raised an eyebrow.

Noticing Zuo Yu's reaction, Yan Biao asked, "What are the instruction from Boss?"

Zuo Yu laughed. "We are to head to Muzhou first to fetch a dog."

Muzhou's annual sheep-herding championship was already underway. However, this year, Curly Hair was not taking part.

Since the year Curly Hair had represented Dongshan Farm as a competition dog, lead Dongshan Farm to the championship, and clinched the title of "most valuable dog," he had repeated both successes once more in the previous year.

It was said that over at Muzhou, Curly Hair's value had swelled up once more.

However, at the start of the year, Muzhou's sheep-herding championships had changed their rules to only permit registered Muzhou competition dogs taking part. As Curly Hair was considered Fang Zhao's pet and was registered under his name, he did not belong to Su Hou's Dongshan Farm.

Fang Zhao was a Yanzhou person. Curly Hair followed his master and was considered a Yanzhou dog.

This change of rules had given rise to heated debates. Medium- and small-farm owners' thoughts were that they finally did not need to compete against that curly-haired dog. On the other hand, large farm owners were wondering whether or not they should purchase that curly-haired dog. If they managed to purchase it, wouldn't it become a Muzhou competition dog?

And outside Muzhou, when people from other continents saw this new system, all they had were laughs.

"There is even a register for dogs?"

"Does it add to the population? Then does my family's pet fish have to be registered?"

"Muzhou is slightly special. Dogs have a high status over there. Only in Muzhou are dogs able to set a high value for themselves. For example, that dog said to be worth over 100 million. If it was placed anywhere other than Muzhou, would it be worth that much?"

"But what's with changing the rules? Is this to prevent foreign competition dogs from competing?"

"Could it be that after having the final's Most Valuable Dog Award stolen by a Yanzhou dog two years in a row, they were not able to stand it and came up with a solution to bar that curly-haired dog from participating?"

"I fell like that is the case."

"This is Muzhou people not having enough faith in their own Muzhou dogs! This is just called being a sore loser!"

There were many people online ridiculing Muzhou's new competition rules. In actual fact, the reform of Muzhou sheep-herding competition rules had been raised a few years back, but it had never been implemented. Now, because of Curly Hair as the trigger that had caused some large Muzhou farm owners to sustain losses, they had pushed for the competition rules to be chance. Otherwise, that curly-haired dog would still be participating this year.

Thus, Dongshan's lineup this year was missing Curly Hair. However, given the progress in the last two years, Dongshan Farm's competition dogs had all been trained up, and there wouldn't be a situation where they had no competition dogs.

Fang Zhao had seen this year's competition. Without Curly Hair in Dongshan Farm's sheep-herding team, although their performance was a little worse, on the whole, it was still considered an outstanding sheep-herding team.

Previously, Dongshan Farm had been hot favorites to be the champion. Now, Dongshan Farm's sheep-herding team was merely considered a contender. Although they were now "just contenders," at least their strength was still being acknowledged.

Many people thought that Curly Hair would surely be dejected and in low spirits.

Many netizens complained about the injustice toward Curly Hair. "Dog's also have self-respect and feelings!"

But when Yan Biao and Zuo Yu went over to pick up Curly Hair, that little thing had just caught a wild rabbit close to its own size. He had not even stopped to catch his breath and was preparing to hunt a second one.

The wild rabbits of Muzhou in the New Era originated from domestic breeding and rearing. After that, a bunch of them had escaped into the wild. Given the impressive breeding ability of those rabbits that had escaped, their numbers had expanded exponentially and they had slowly come to be known as what people called "wild rabbits."

And these wild rabbits in the New Era were even bigger than those of the Old Era. Their hind legs were much more powerful and they could run rather fast. In places with fertile soil and lush vegetation, wild rabbits grew especially large.

Now, Curly Hair had caught a similarly sized rabbit and was in good spirits. Hearing Zuo Yu's calls, it came bounding back.

Zuo Yu laughed as he watched Curly Hair's joyous enthusiasm. "Oh, he seems to be in a rather good state, unlike what the internet says."

Su Hou shrugged. "Ever since the competition rules were changed, he can only catch all these other creatures. However, he doesn't run off too far, at most around the boundaries of the farm. Currently, there are many people in Muzhou eyeing him. I also feel that sending him back to Yanzhou is the best option."

Over at Muzhou's side, some people thought this way. Can't afford, can't purchase, then how about stealing! Even if it can't be used as a competition dog after stealing it, he can still be used as a breeding dog! Any dog with championship-winning blood in its veins surely can't be bad. Perhaps it can produce a batch of outstanding puppies every two years.

Su Hou knew about these people's thoughts, and that was why he was worried. If a championship-winning dog like Curly Hair was stolen, there was a high possibility it would never appear in the eyes of the public ever again. Currently, he was busy with the competition and could not always bring along Curly Hair when he was participating. There were surely times when Curly Hair was neglected. Having been worrying and on the edge, Su Hou had kept waiting when Fang Zhao had told him that he had arranged for someone to pick Curly Hair up. Only after he had seen Zuo Yu arrive had he felt more at ease.

This was Yan Biao's first time coming close to the dog worth over 100 million. He could not see anything really special about this small little thing. There were many such dogs in cities outside of Muzhou—how on earth had its price risen to over 100 million? Not just Curly Hair, even other star competition dogs were worth tens of millions. Yan Biao could not understand it. All he could say was that Muzhou people were crazy.

After Yan Biao and Zuo Yu picked up Curly Hair from Dongshan Farm, they flew to Fang Zhao's Qi'an City residence.

Having not seen Fang Zhao in a year, Curly Hair was especially excited and was whimpering like a spoiled child… until he saw the "rabbit" in the house and his attention was drawn away.

"Woof!"

Curly Hair looked at the "rabbit" in the water tank, then glanced at Fang Zhao before turning to face the "rabbit."

"Woof Woof Woof!"

# Chapter 257
# Stealing the Show

Regarding a strange creature that had suddenly appeared in his territory, Curly Hair was very angry. During his time at Muzhou's Dongshan Farm, whenever any field mice, wild rabbits, or large wild animals entered the farm, He ate them up right away. Now that he saw that a strange creature had appeared in his domain, he wasn't pleased at all.

Although the thing inside the water tank looked similar to the wild rabbits it had eaten before, it had a strange, foreign smell.

However, his IQ was higher than a normal animal's, so he sounded out Fang Zhao's bearing. As long as Fang Zhao said that he could eat it, Curly Hair wouldn't show any mercy,

Fang Zhao's short sentence made Curly Hair give up all hope: "No eating."

Fang Zhao was indifferent to the matter of Muzhou's sheep-herding competition barring foreign competition dogs from participating. Even if the rules had not been changed this year, Fang Zhao had previously made up his mind not to let Curly Hair participate this year.

There was no meaning.

Curly Hair's IQ was continuously rising. Furthermore, his body had secrets and could not be compared with normal dogs. There had been no choice but to let him take part in the first year and the second year had just been for fun, but there was really no need for him to take part in a third consecutive year. It was just like an adult taking part in a children's competition; wasn't it meaningless?

He had gotten enough of the limelight already. When it was time to withdraw, it was best to do it decisively. If Curly Hair continued to remain in Muzhou, he would just become a target for more and more people, and many things might be revealed. Fortunately, Muzhou's sheep-herding rules had been changed, so Fang Zhao could borrow this excuse to bring Curly Hair back with him.

Patting Curly Hair, Fang Zhao said, "Take a look at your new kennel."

The previous kennel had been given by the advertising company when he had filmed an advertisement, but Curly Hair had torn it down. Afterward, he had been sent to Muzhou, so a new kennel hadn't been bought. After returning, Fang Zhao had once more ordered a kennel manufactured in Muzhou made from natural materials. This one was the same model as the one Curly Hair had had in Muzhou.

This time, it wasn't torn down.

Returning to his study, Fang Zhao received a call from Duan Qianji asking him whether his pieces for the concert had been prepared. Following that, she told him the recent tasks that had been scheduled for him.

"Don't forget about the two talk shows I mentioned. One is 'Prairie Fire,' the other is 'Star of Tomorrow.' Both are interview formats, so be sure to make preparations. Taking the opportunity to boost your popularity now would be beneficial for your concert," Duan Qianji said.

"Prairie Fire," which had a very strong presence in Yanzhou's entertainment circles, had had a good relationship with Silver Wing in the past year and had not publicized much negative news about Silver Wing celebrities. This was probably due to the fact that there was already an imbalance in power among the big three entertainment companies. Silver Wing had momentum that had already surpassed the other two. Thus, a few Silver Wing celebrity's interview sessions had already been scheduled. As long as Silver Wing was informed of the private questions they wished to ask, there would not be any awkward questions that would stump the interviewee during filming.

However, the "Prairie Fire" talk show was not the important point. What Duan Qianji regarded as important was the interview session with "Star of Tomorrow."

"Star of Tomorrow" interviewed mainly youngsters below the age of 30, and according to statistical data, 80% of Galaxy Supernova Award winners had appeared on the "Star of Tomorrow" talk show.

In other words, people who were invited on "Star of Tomorrow" were people they fancied and viewed as potential Galaxy Supernova Award winners. Inviting Fang Zhao meant they felt Fang Zhao had the ability to vie for a Galaxy Supernova Award!

This was also a rather good opportunity for Silver Wing.

Furthermore, the headquarters of "Star of Tomorrow" were not in Yanzhou but in Huangzhou. It was a program that had a global reach. They had had two forms: live broadcasts and delayed broadcasts, but in most situations, they chose live broadcasts.

"This time around, the program hopes that you can have a live broadcast interview. We have yet to give a reply and are waiting for you to make a choice," Duan Qianji continued.

"Then let's go with a live broadcast." Fang Zhao also knew which choice would have a larger impact, and he made preparations for any questions he might be asked.

Audiences were not stupid. Having watched so many delayed telecast programs, they knew that delayed telecasts filtered out some crucial points, so audiences were more inclined toward live broadcasts. Even if the program was longer and there was a long intermission midway through for a break and some advertisements, audiences were willing to wait.

An hour later, Duan Qianji came back with news.

"I have spoken with that side. They wish to select your study as the location for the broadcast. The other side's intention is this: generally, places like studies and offices seem private yet formal and serious. If you decide this is all right, you can make preparations first."

What Duan Qianji meant was for Fang Zhao to tidy up and remove any items that should not be seen by the public at the live broadcast location. Also, if there were any awards or medals he wished to show off, he could bring them out and display them in the background.

"Besides making preparations for 'Star of Tomorrow,' during the live interview, don't forget to mention your concert." Duan Qianji reminded him.

Fang Zhao was signed on with Silver Wing as a composer. He could work on other aspects on his own, but for the concert, he still had to discuss it with Silver Wing. However, Fang Zhao had spoken to Duan Qianji about this some time ago. The operations team had suggested striking while the iron was hot: taking the opportunity before his popularity faded to give an official announcement of his concert and start advanced ticket sales.

The planned date for Fang Zhao's concert was in August. Although it was only April now, once three or four months passed, there was no guarantee that Fang Zhao would still be fresh in everyone's mind.

By talking about the concert and announcing advanced ticket sales, it would at least help mitigate people losing interest in Fang Zhao and deciding not to purchase tickets.

On the night that the interview was arranged, Silver Wing and the "Star of Tomorrow" program team officially announced news of Fang Zhao being invited on "Star of Tomorrow" as well as the details of when the interview would take place.

"'Star of Tomorrow'? Isn't that the program that invites people who have the ability to vie for the Galaxy Supernova Award, that interview talk show?"

"It's just vying for an art award—does Fang Zhao have that ability? I feel that his works are just so-so and are not as good as everyone says they are."

"It's not for you to decide how good they are. The market does that!"

"Speaking of the market, anything too commercialized has no rights to be compared to art."

"Cough, given your salty tone, I guess you haven't been doing too well yourself?"

"Fang Zhao still doesn't really have the qualifications when it comes to artistic music. He hasn't even held a proper concert yet."

This new piece of news gave rise to a lot of discussion, but regardless of their different points of view, everyone set aside their time.

On the day of the "Star of Tomorrow" interview, Fang Zhao sat beside a round wooden table in his newly arranged study. There was another chair on the other side.

A program team staff member had already set up the equipment. Looking at Fang Zhao and seeing him nod his head, the staff member made a hand gesture and started counting down. "3… 2… 1… Action!

A projection of a youthful lady appeared on the originally empty chair beside Fang Zhao: the "Star of Tomorrow" host, Grace Qian.

Grace Qian might have seemed young and beautiful, but she was much more mature than most recent graduates. From her attire and her words and actions, she seemed like someone of class and poise. After all, she was a highly popular host of a globally broadcasted talk show and wasn't just a nice-looking flower vase.

The projection seemed very realistic. During the live broadcast, it seemed like Grace Qian, who was in Huangzhou's "Star of Tomorrow" headquarters, had suddenly arrived in the study,

Right at the start of the program, Grace Qian expertly set the mood with a lively ambiance, dispelling the originally overly serious atmosphere. The number of online viewers was increasing at an extremely rapid pace.

People in the music world and gaming circles, and other people who were interested in Fang Zhao, all came online quickly.

Grace Qian first asked Fang Zhao about his experiences in his one year of military service.

"Fang Zhao, having just returned from military service, can you briefly share with us your thoughts on your past year of military service?" Grace Qian asked with a smile.

Fang Zhao replied, "I gained a lot. It was worth it!"

Grace Qian's smiling expression did not change. She only blinked when she heard Fang Zhao's reply. People who knew her well knew that this was the reaction Grace Qian gave when she was surprised. She had not expected that Fang Zhao would really "briefly" reply. Mmhm, seven words, that was indeed brief.

Following that, Grace Qian talked about "Project Starlight." Probably because she had received instructions from the top, she praised "Project Starlight" in the interview to make it convenient for next year's second batch.

However, Grace Qian also acted appropriately and managed the time well, not making it too deliberate. She did not separate the important from the trivial. After talking about Project Starlight, Grace Qian then said, "Because of Project Starlight, we were able to see the arduous conditions of military service. I believe that everyone has seen some of the videos Kevin Lin filmed back then. Although you were taking refuge when those beasts were on the other side of the door and were extremely close…"

As Grace Qian spoke, a window appeared to the side and displayed a snippet of a video. It was a part of the video Kevin Lin had filmed during the terrorist attack.

"According to some of the videos recorded then, we know that the outpost you were at suffered numerous bombings and was then invaded by terrorists. At that time, when you knew about the terrorist attack, were you afraid?" the host asked.

"No."

Grace Qian laughed but did not ask whether Fang Zhao was speaking the truth. "When you saw those savage beasts in the game become reality, what were you thinking about at that moment?"

"Killing them," Fang Zhao replied.

“…In more detail, perhaps?"

"Completely obliterate them."

"…” Grace Qian blinked once again, her face still displaying a slight smile, indicating she understood and was still in control. "Faced with those savage beasts and battling them and facing terrorists, this is something many youngsters around your age would have a tough time imagining. When faced with that sort of situation, they would most likely be at a loss. So, Fang Zhao, how were you feeling at that moment? Would you be so kind as to share with us what happened then? After all, in the videos that Mr. Kevin Lin recorded, we have no way of knowing what happened outside."

Fang Zhao was aware that his previous words had created an awkward silence and gave off a pretentious image. However, after adjusting, he knew how to reply already. This was not a Silver Wing internal project and there were no scripted answers prepared beforehand, but he could still tackle it calmly.

Fang Zhao said whatever he could. For stuff he was not allowed to disclose, he did not say a single word.

Grace Qian also knew that the military had confidentiality agreements and she did not probe too much into certain things.

As the interview was in progress, Curly Hair, who had been sleeping in the corner of the study, awoke. In a familiar environment with familiar people, he wasn't bothered

by the surrounding sounds. Now that he'd had his fill of sleep, he got up to move about.

Stretching his body, Curly Hair circled around Fang Zhao, whimpering around Fang Zhao to tell his master that he had woken up and to make his presence felt.

Probably noticing that Fang Zhao was busy with something, Curly Hair walked away after a round. he didn't leave the study but instead watched the water tank on top of the cabinet.

However, Curly Hair's round after waking up had caught the attention of audiences watching the live broadcast.

"Isn't that dog we just saw the 'golden competition dog' that compelled Muzhou to change its sheep-herding competition rules?"

"That is the golden competition dog said to be worth over 100 million? It isn't even gold in color!"

"The 'golden' in 'golden competition dog' refers to its worth, not the color of its fur!"

"The f*ck, that dog is Fang Zhao's?"

"To the brother above, isn't this old news? Does your household pay their internet bills?"

"I have seen news reports concerning it, but I didn't remember the owner's name back then. I only realized it now."

Fang Zhao's popularity on the global scale was really high right now. People who had never paid attention to this matter in the past remembered Fang Zhao's name now. They had not expected that Muzhou's rule change a while back that had been discussed passionately had been caused by Fang Zhao's dog.

During the interview, Grace Qian had already stopped asking Fang Zhao about his military service and was now talking about stuff that many people in the gaming circles wished to know.

"You have already been away from gaming for a year. Now that you have returned from military service, are you still going to return to gaming?"

"I will still play the game, but only in my leisure time. I won't be a professional gamer." Fang Zhao had just finished his sentence when a series of barks resounded.

"Woof, woof, woof!"

Separated by their screens, online audiences also heard the dog barking.

The cameraman in charge of filming slightly changed the angle of the camera so the scene at the cabinet entered the frame.

When they heard Fang Zhao say "I won't be a professional gamer," many gaming fans were feeling sorry and regretful.

"That means to say that Fang Zhao won't rush up the global individual leaderboards once again?"

"That means we will not get to see the crazy point-sweeping demon ever again?"

"If Fang Zhao gives up on the individual leaderboards, that means that Ma Xier will surely not return either. Without those two, what meaning is there to the individual leaderboards?"

But there were also other people jubilantly celebrating. Luckily, Fang Zhao wasn't playing anymore!

However, whether it was despair or delight, everyone's attention was drawn to the sound of barking. Watching the image shown on the screen, Curly hair was facing the water tank and barking.

Yet another series of barks. "Woof, woof, woof!"

Fang Zhao did not turn his head back. His gaze not deviating, he tapped his fingers on the study table.

Curly Hair no longer barked, but as before, he still bared his teeth at the water tank and paced around. Following that, he stopped. From his manner, it seemed as if he had decided to leap up.

When online audiences saw this scene, they lamented.

"Eh, that dog is so obedient. Just a tap on the table and it no longer barks?"

"I just tried the same thing on my dog at home. It continued barking even more excitedly."

"Wait a minute, your focus is all wrong. That dog looks like it is going to leap up onto the cabinet!"

"It's fine. This sort of dog cannot leap that high…”

This comment had just been posted when online audiences saw the dog in the live broadcast easily leap up a 1.2-meter-tall cabinet without even a running start.

Online audiences: "…”

Everything went haywire in the talk show's comments section.

"Brother Zhao, look behind you! Your 'rabbit' and your dog are about to fight!"

"Aren't many sea slugs venomous?"

"Some sea slugs sold as pets have their toxin glands removed. However, many wild ones are venomous. The foods they normally eat usually have toxins. These sea slugs can store these toxins for their own use. Fang Zhao got his from planet Baiji, so it probably has toxins."

"Does that mean it's not poisonous?"

"It's rumored that the poison from this sea slug caused one of Zaro's bodyguards to collapse."

"Only idiots believe in rumors!"

"Those above, that isn't the main issue right now!"

"Obviously I'm very interested in what Fang Zhao has to say, but I just cannot keep my eyes from watching the top right corner of the screen!"

"Is this dog… a scene stealer?"

"This is totally stealing the show!"

# Chapter 258
# Golden Paws

Upon hearing the commotion and to prevent Curly Hair and the "rabbit" in the water tank from fighting, Fang Zhao flashed an apologetic look to the host before getting up and lifting Curly Hair, who was about to put his paw into the tank.

The cameraman felt a little disappointed. Actually, he had also wished to see the golden competition dog worth more than 100 million go head to head with the extraterrestrial hybrid sea slug. He wondered who would win in a fight. Would the golden competition dog bite the extraterrestrial hybrid sea slug, or would the extraterrestrial sea slug poison the golden competition dog?

How unfortunate. Why had Fang Zhao interfered at the moment this exciting battle had been about to start?

Not only was the cameraman disappointed, online audiences were also feeling regretful. When Fang Zhao had not turned around, all the viewers had been spamming the comments section asking Fang Zhao to get up, and when he had done so, they were all regretting not getting to see the "Rabbit and Dog Battle."

Outside the study.

Zuo Yu and Yan Biao were chatting.

The study was soundproof, so their chatter would not affect what was going on inside. At the same time, they wouldn't be able to hear anything from the inside.

Yan Biao was complaining about how his personal terminal bracelet wasn't good to use and he wished to change it.

Bracelets functioned as a computer, mobile phone, and storage for credentials, and they had identification purposes. In the New Era, bracelets had already become a basic item for everyone. It was only natural for Yan Biao to want to switch to one that was easier to use.

"Are there any bulletproof ones?" Yan Biao asked.

"Of course, but it all depends on how much you pay. Different grades of bulletproof ones have different prices."

Zuo Yu showed Yan Biao a few models. The better the quality, the higher the price. Smacking his lips, Yan Biao said, "When I have saved enough wages, I will buy one that is easy to use."

"Recently, to publicize their new products, Fiery Bird is hosting a bunch of activities. Among them is a lucky spin. Old members get three chances, and newly registered members get five chances. I guess you haven't registered as a member with Fiery Bird, right? Since I don't see you use many Fiery Bird items and you don't play games."

"Yeah, I haven't registered yet. There is a lucky spin? What prizes are there?"

Yan Biao leaned over to look at the screen Zuo Yu had opened. Of the prizes displayed on the lucky spin wheel, there were points, game equipment, physical prizes, earpieces, stereo equipment, game consoles… and a personal terminal?

"Since when does Fiery Bird manufacture personal terminals? Don't they manufacture game consoles?" Yan Biao asked.

"They even manufacture mechas!" Zuo Yu joked.

Indeed, the 10th-generation console had been used as a mecha in Muzhou some time back to save Su Hou at Dongshan Farm. After that, it had been coined by netizens as a "game console inbuilt in a mecha, and a fighting machine inbuilt in a game console." During crucial moments, it could be used as a suit of machine armor to protect oneself.

"This personal terminal is being manufactured as a collaboration between Fiery Bird and another company. From what I hear, it is not bad. However, in this sort of lucky spin, don't bother dreaming about drawing those high-quality items. My expectations aren't high. I just wish to draw a red packet. The 10,000 one will do."

As they were speaking, the door of the study opened and Fang Zhao carried Curly Hair out before pointing at Curly Hair, indicating Zuo Yu and Yan Biao were to keep an eye on him and make sure he didn't cause trouble around the house.

Zuo Yu nodded his head and silently mouthed, "Understood."

After placing Curly Hair outside, Fang Zhao shut the door, and the study was once again isolated from the outside.

However, Curly Hair was a little moody, and he whimpered and scratched the study room door.

Observing his mood, Zuo Yu brought Curly Hair further away. "Master Curly, don't scratch the door. It's just a 'rabbit' in the water tank. You can go back in after boss is done. If you keep scratching the door now, you might not get anything to eat."

Curly Hair stopped at once and laid down and kept his silence.

Zuo Yu picked up where he had left off with Yan Biao. "I spun the wheel once and got some points. What's your situation like?"

"I'm still registering. I say 100 would be good enough, forget about 10,000. As for my personal terminal bracelet, I think it's better for me to save up. However, thinking about it, our wages aren't low either, but we don't have a lot of things to do. Since we returned, all we have done is head to Muzhou to fetch a dog. Us bodyguards really have too much idle time," Yan Biao said.

"As Fang Zhao's bodyguards, after some time, you will realize that bodyguards are nannies," Zuo Yu lamented. "In the past, I was basically just a driver and a sparring partner."

"Sparring partner?" Yan Biao could understand the part about being a driver, but a sparring partner? "What sort of sparring? Fighting? Marksmanship? Or something else?" Yan Biao was curious now. As he had seen Fang Zhao's performance during the terrorist attack, his curiosity was piqued. How exactly had Zuo Yu sparred with Fang Zhao? Yan Biao himself had exchanged pointers with Fang Zhao before, but he felt that he wasn't on the same level as Fang Zhao. Even his marksmanship could not be compared to Fang Zhao's.

"Others," Zuo Yu explained. "In-game sparring. Let me tell you something. Silver Wing's current game department was established by Boss."

The moment he heard in-game sparring, Yan Biao wanted to laugh. However, when he recalled what Fang Zhao had been like during the terrorist attack, he couldn't bring himself to laugh. He swallowed the words he had wanted to say. "When I saw Fang Zhao instantly killing those mutated beasts, I felt my 20 years of life in the military had

been fed to the dogs."

Noticing Curly Hair raise his head and look at him, Yan Bao immediately said, "I wasn't referring to you."

Curly Hair returned to lying down.

Under Zuo Yu's guidance, Yan Biao opened Fiery Bird's lucky spin web page and saw a "5" displayed beside the spin wheel. Without wasting any time, he clicked on "Spin."

On the first try, he received a 10-dollar red packet. Yan Biao was satisfied. Wasn't 10 dollars still money? Receiving a red packet was already not bad. A good beginning and a good omen!

Second try, in-game equipment. A gun that wasn't considered exceptionally good or terrible in "Battle of the Century." Yan Biao felt it was all right. He had already made plans to try out the game in his free time.

Third try, discount coupon. Worthless.

Fourth try, points. Sh*t.

Yan Biao laughed helplessly. "Typical. All typical unscrupulous business tactics."

"Duh, what else did you expect?" On Zuo Yu's second spin, he had also received a discount coupon.

Just one chance remaining. Zuo Yu raised his hands when he spotted Curly Hair spread out on the ground out of the corner of his eye. He squatted down and waved for Curly Hair to come over. "Come, Master Curly, let's play a lucky spin game."

Curly Hair's sensitive ears pricked up when he heard the words "play" and "game."

"Come, let's win a large red packet!"

Zuo Yu enlarged the spin wheel, took Curly Hair's paws in his hands, and used it to click on the "Spin" button.

Yan Biao raised an eyebrow and thought to himself, Idiot! Dogs playing games? And even helping you win a prize? Are dog paws more valuable than human fingers?

But in a moment, Yan Biao realized that Zuo Yu's eyes had widened, and his gaze was fixated on the screen. Taking a second look…"What the!"

On the screen at the webpage Zuo Yu was on, a large opened red packet was displayed. Below was a notification: "Transferred to account."

Zuo Yu checked his bank account and his widened eyes became slits as he laughed. "Hahaha! First time getting a cash prize! And it's a large red packet! Master Curly, you have golden paws indeed."

As he spoke, Zuo Yu even stroked Curly Hair's front paw, which he had used to spin, like a crazed person.

Yan Biao sneered in his heart. It's just luck. What has it got to do with the dog!?

Lucky b*stard!

Yan Biao returned to his own screen and was prepared to click on his own spin button. However, when his fingers were almost touching the screen, he paused.

This isn't right.

Lucky Bastard?

Dog?

Turning to look at Curly Hair, who had laid down once again at the side, Yan Biao was at a loss. Finally, he decided to learn from Zuo Yu and said, "Cough, Master Curly, let's play a lucky spin game?"

Curly Hair raised his head but didn't move. He remembered that this person's attitude toward him had not been that great. Even if his IQ wasn't yet up to the level of a human's, he could still clearly feel how fond people were of him.

Zuo Yu happily breathed at the side. "You haven't even cleared his sh*t before, yet you wish to get the same treatment as me? This little thing… cough, Master Curly bears grudges. You have to show some sincerity! Genuine sincerity, understand? Dogs are animals with souls."

Yan Biao was a rational person and stared at Curly Hair.

Man and dog stared at each other for half a minute. Yan Biao surrendered and rubbed his face, putting in effort to make his expression seem as apologetic as possible. "Please, Master Curly!"

He walked over, squatted down, hung his head, and raised an arm. Yan Biao then enlarged the wheel and pointed to the personal terminal.

Kneeling was not possible. He had his own dignity!

Zuo Yu curled the corner of his lips. It was just a lucky spin, but Yan Biao was really taking it seriously?

Actually, in his heart, Zuo Yu felt that he had gotten lucky himself. He had just coincidentally used Curly Hair's front paw to click on it. Was what Yan Biao was doing necessary? In the Old Era, this was what people then had known as superstition.

At the other end, perhaps because he felt Yan Biao's attitude was not too bad or perhaps because he himself was curious, Curly Hair raised his paw and pressed the "Spin" button.

After that, Yan Biao kept his eyes peeled to the needle on the spinning wheel.

Zuo Yu also wished to see what good stuff Yan Biao would win by using the dog's paw.

Watching the spinning wheel slow down, Yan Biao and Zuo Yu got more and more tense as they watched the needle inch over toward the large prize.

Personal terminal… terminal… terminal… Yan Biao mouthed the words silently in his heart and prayed that the needle would not be too quick or too slow.

Beside the column for the personal terminal bracelet, on one side was a discount voucher for purchases, while on the other side were member points. Forget about discount vouchers—Yan Biao did not have anything he wanted to buy. As for member points, why would he have any need for them?

As the pointer got slower and slower, the two men held their breaths and watched as the needle passed "member points" and finally stopped on "personal terminal."

Watching the results of the spin land on "Fiery Bird's newest personal terminal," alongside the special effects with confetti and celebratory pops, Zuo Yu could only say

this: "WHAT THE F*CKITY F*CK!"

This time, Yan Biao nearly knelt down. Staring at the prize for a while, he finally said, "I finally know why he has such a high value. These paws of his are really gold!"

Inside the study.

The interview progressed as the host and Fang Zhao talked about interesting incidents during his military service, his own experiences, his professional plans, life goals, and many other things. Fang Zhao also did not forget to mention his concert at Golden Age Concert Hall in August.

For composers, their concerts were different from a singer's or performer's. A composer's concert would exhibit one's own personal works. Fang Zhao's plans were to invite a symphony orchestra to perform. These sorts of orchestra performances had more feeling when heard live.

Silver Wing had considered the possibility of Fang Zhao's popularity dropping by August and the venue not being filled. Thus, they had let Fang Zhao take the opportunity while his popularity was fresh on everybody's minds to announce information about his concert and advance ticket sales so there would be more people who purchased them.

However, Fang Zhao also knew how to show restraint. After mentioning his concert, he did not say much else. Just two lines were enough for audiences to clearly comprehend it. Too much would cause audiences to be put off.

After the interview ended, Grace Qian let Fang Zhao show off his merit medals and the gun he had brought back with him. Following that, the camera shot a close-up of the water tank on the cabinet, which contained the only extraterrestrial hybrid sea slug in the world, to satiate the curiosity of the audience.

Although the size of sea slugs had increased after the Period of Destruction and some large varieties had been specially bred for the ornamental aquatic pets market, they were not the same as the one in Fang Zhao's study. If it could be placed on a hand, it was rather large, about the size of a real rabbit.

After the interview concluded and the live broadcast was cut, Fang Zhao opened his study room door.

Stepping out, he saw Zuo Yu and Yan Biao. One was combing the dog's fur and the other was shopping for dog food online.

Fang Zhao was puzzled. When had these two people become so proactive?

# Chapter 259
# Unspeakable Secret

After sending off the staffer from "Star of Tomorrow," Fang Zhao listened to Zuo Yu and Yan Biao recount their good fortune.

Zuo Yu couldn't wait to relate it all to Fang Zhao. "Boss, you have no idea. I actually thought my luck was good enough, but a 10,000-dollar red packet! I have taken part in this sort of draw since I was young, but this is the first time I have ever won this sort of large red packet! But Yan Biao's luck is even better! He actually won a big prize! Fiery Bird's personal terminal bracelet, even though it's just the normal version and not the luxurious one, is still worth at least five figures?"

"Actually, that's wrong. It wasn't our luck that was good; it was Curly Hair who was the lucky one. We let Curly Hair spin the wheel on our last tries. He is really worthy of being a golden competition dog worth over 100 million!" Yan Biao's face was glowing. For this sort of draw, forget about big prizes, he had rarely even hit any small prizes, and this sort of special prize had been even more impossible. He had never expected to actually win it! Right now, he could not help but be all smiles.

This simply a change in fortune!

However, the last draw had been with the help of Curly Hair's paw. Even if Yan Biao felt that he had experienced a change in fortune, in front of his boss, he still had to give merit to Curly Hair.

Whether it was really because of Curly Hair, having won the large prize, Yan Biao was in a good mood. This time, he had saved quite a bit of money and time, so he had bought some high-quality dog food online. In the past, he definitely would not have bought such high-quality food just for a dog.

"Did the interview go smoothly?" Zuo Yu asked.

"It was all right."

Fang Zhao felt it had gone rather smoothly. At the start, he might not have adapted and

might have made it a little awkward. Having just returned from military service, he still had some lingering habits from his time with the forces. His first reaction had been to give the most crucial information in the shortest time possible. During the years of the Period of Destruction, because of the fighting that could have occurred at any time, whenever he had spoken or given instructions, most of the time he had spoken briefly and concisely.

However, when he had realized this problem, Fang Zhao had also quickly adjusted and had not continued to let the host feel stumped. This way, there wouldn't be an awkward pause.

"Were you guys playing the Fiery Bird Lucky Spin game?" Fang Zhao asked.

"Yeah, every time Fiery Bird releases a new product, they have this sort of giveaway, but new and old members have a different number of chances. Boss, you have already registered as a Fiery Bird member, so you will only have three chances. How about you try it?" Zuo Yu was also anticipating this and wished to know what Fang Zhao's luck would be like.

Yan Biao had also stopped what he was doing. He was also curious and full of anticipation, so he energetically urged Fang Zhao on. "Boss, you can let Curly Hair help you do the spin. His paws are really 'golden'! It's very effective! Lucky without a doubt!"

Fang Zhao had opened the lucky spin page, and after confirming this was the page, he was in no rush to spin it. He instead talked to Zuo Yu and Yan Biao about the upcoming arrangements and sent them back to rest.

Zuo Yu and Yan Biao met each other's gaze and smiled as a tacit understanding came to their minds. They felt that Fang Zhao surely cared about his image and wasn't willing to do the lucky spin in front of his two bodyguards. He would lose face if his luck wasn't good and he got a lousy prize. Curly Hair's golden paws were not verified, and there were only two chances. Who knew if he was originally lucky or whether it had been coincidence? Or was he really that effective?

After Zuo Yu and Yan Biao left and there was nobody else around, Fang Zhao checked around the house and made sure the program staffer had not left any monitoring or recording devices behind before he called Curly Hair over and pointed to the gaming room. "Let's go in and talk."

When Curly Hair saw the gaming room, he became more energetic, as he thought Fang Zhao was bringing him to play games again. After Curly Hair had returned, he had not been inside the gaming room yet.

The 10th-generation console had been brought to the office before Fang Zhao had left for military service. Placing it aside was a waste, so he had lent it to the gaming team. Most of the time, it had been the current gaming team captain, Jinro, who had used it.

After military service, Fang Zhao had also inspected it once. The console had been maintained well and was in good shape. There were no problems, so he had not brought it back. When he got busy, he would not have much time to use it.

Thus, at present, there were only a few simple pieces of gaming equipment, along with a gaming helmet, in the gaming room. However, for Curly Hair, it was more than enough.

Curly Hair excitedly rushed into the gaming room and was about to bury his head in the gaming helmet when he spotted Fang Zhao's grave face, and his ears drooped instantly. Curly Hair did not know where he had gone wrong, but every time this sort of expression appeared on Fang Zhao's face, it meant that Curly Hair had definitely done something wrong.

Curly Hair no longer cared about the gaming console and his wagging tail drooped down. He looked up at Fang Zhao nervously.

Fang Zhao looked at Curly Hair but did not say anything. Instead, he downloaded a spin wheel minigame. This was the sort that everyone in a household would play. Prizes and points could be set by the user.

In the options, Fang Zhao set up 10 columns. He decided to use this as an experiment, so he did not need to make it complicated. The prize columns only displayed a number from 1 to 10. After he had set this up, he disconnected the apartment's internet and waved for Curly Hair. "Come over."

Curly Hair looked at the similar-looking spin wheel displayed on the screen, and his eyes had a blank look, but he still came over obediently.

"Did you help Zuo Yu and Yan Biao spin the wheel today?"

"Woof." It wasn't a loud bark, as though he was just replying.

"You spun it twice?" Fang Zhao asked again.

"Woof."

Fang Zhao stared straight at Curly Hair. "Did you influence the spin wheel results?"

Curly Hair no longer made any noise. He probably knew which matter had made Fang Zhao, but he could not understand why Fang Zhao was angry. Wasn't it just a lucky spin? Weren't Zuo Yu and Yan Biao very happy?

Faced with Fang Zhao's stare, Curly Hair let out a low whimper. This meant that it was just as Fang Zhao had said.

Fang Zhao let out a low sigh. "So that was the case." He just knew that both Zuo Yu and Yan Biao striking a prize could not have been so coincidental. It wasn't impossible, but the probability of them both having a burst such of great luck was really low.

Anybody not in the know would surely think that these two were overflowing with luck and had experienced a change in fortunes, or if they saw it from a fun way, it was as Yan Biao had said about having "dog-sh*t luck," "golden paws," or whatever just for a laugh. But the moment Fang Zhao had heard that Curly hair was involved, he had realized something. He just hadn't shown it on his face.

Now, there was nobody else in the house. Fang Zhao had already disconnected the internet, and he pointed to the spin wheel displayed on the screen and told Curly Hair, "Spin a 9."

Curly Hair had a look of suspicion, but he still listened to Fang Zhao's instructions. He lifted his paw and hit the "spin" button.

The spin wheel started spinning rapidly but then slowed down, and the pointer needle came to a stop in the middle of the "9" column.

Fang Zhao did not say much but continued, "Now spin an 8."

Curly Hair complied.

Just like the previous time, when the wheel came to a stop, the pointer needle was right in the middle of the "8" column.

Following that, Fang Zhao continued letting Curly hair continue to spin the wheel. Whatever number Fang Zhao called out, Curly Hair was able to accurate land on that column.

Ten times, 20 times…

After 30 times, Fang Zhao finally let Curly Hair stop.

After 30 rounds of tests, there was no doubt about whether Curly Hair could influence the spin's results.

Fang Zhao walked in front of Curly Hair and said to him seriously, "In the future, be more prudent when it comes to this sort of thing."

Fang Zhao wasn't trying to scare Curly Hair, but this sort of thing required some sort of caution, and it was better not to have a next time. Fang Zhao also didn't want to let Curly Hair win him a large prize, just to be safe.

There were always shenanigans of some sort involved in these sorts of online giveaway activities. Large prizes were not that easy to hit.

Once or twice could be reasoned as chance or perhaps a problem with the system, but if it occurred too many times, it would attract unwanted attention. And Fang Zhao knew that he and Curly Hair were different from others.

Curly Hair's IQ was still increasing, but he was still just like a human child, unable to properly and prudently determine what things he should go about. Without proper guidance when he made a mistake, the consequences were still unknown.

Fang Zhao did not know what sort of level Curly Hair's IQ would increase to, but he felt he needed to watch Curly Hair a little more.

After making Curly Hair aware of his mistakes, Fang Zhao then explained to Curly Hair why he shouldn't do such things. He knew that Curly Hair could understand him now.

The moment people found out that a dog was behind the lucky spin's prize anomaly, it would surely blow up, and Curly Hair would surely be taken away to be experimented on.

After five minutes of lecturing, Fang Zhao saw that Curly Hair was getting listless, so

he pointed to the gaming helmet to the side. "Go play some games, but no going online."

"Woof!"

Fang Zhao looked on as the listless Curly Hair immediately livened up, expertly buried his head into the gaming helmet, changed the displayed image on the screen, and started playing his whack-a-mole game.

The entire screen was filled with the special effects of fireworks from adding points. Looking at the points on the side rapidly rising, it was very hard to imagine that it was actually a dog playing. Even if a highly skilled gamer were the one playing this game, he might not be able to achieve this level. If one was to just look at the screen and the rapid speed the points were increasing at, their first thought would be that the computer was playing by itself. Probably only a computer was able to achieve this sort of standard.

Fang Zhao recalled back to when he had received the surveillance footage from the black street. In the video, there had been a point where almost every internet connection and all the surveillance footage had been disrupted at exactly the same time!

Something that nobody knew about had to have happened at that instant.

Curly Hair was a native dog, that was certain. When he had just been reborn, Fang Zhao had brought Curly Hair to the drug store, and the boss of the drug store, Ai Wan, had run some blood tests and genetic analysis on Curly Hair and had even speculated what sort of breed Curly Hair's ancestors were.

This dog was odd.

That had been Fang Zhao's guess. Fang Zhao had even pondered whether his rebirth had something to do with Curly Hair. Otherwise, why had it only been him who had gotten a chance at a second life?

"What exactly are you?"

Fang Zhao watched Curly Hair immersed in the game over to the side, and a doubt appeared in his heart. However, he had no way of getting answers now. Whatever the facts were, one thing was for certain—this couldn't be made known to anybody else!

He had an unspeakable secret, and other people could not find out about Curly Hair's secret even more so.

Both of them had secrets that they absolutely could not let others know about.

Making notes on this matter, Fang Zhao started making preparations for his concert. The concert venue and advanced ticket sales were being handled by Silver Wing's side. All Fang Zhao needed to do now was complete the pieces that would be played at the concert and to instruct the symphony orchestra on how to perform each piece perfectly.

However, unbeknownst to Fang Zhao, he had once again become a trending topic on the internet.

# Chapter 260
# Concert Tickets Advance Sales (1)

Fang Zhao's answers to the questions in the interview had caused quite a lot of reactions, especially within the gaming circles.

For the gaming circles, a person like this who had such absolute strength that he could dominate the leaderboards actually deciding not to return as a professional e-sports athlete elicited lots of sighs, and some secret satisfaction, from lots of people.

There were also people discussing the incidents during his military service and the "golden competition dog" that had appeared midway through the program.

Some people reckoned that after Fang Zhao had accepted the interview, he had intentionally revealed the "golden competition dog" on-screen to generate more buzz and discussion.

"How devious, using this interview to show off the dog that was driven out of Muzhou!"

"That dog isn't considered a big deal after leaving Muzhou—of course he wishes to get rid of it. If he sells it now, there are many nouveau riche Muzhou farm owners willing to spend big bucks to buy it. As time passes and the dog ages, it's competing ability will deteriorate and its value will drop."

"That's so funny. If Fang Zhao wanted to sell the dog, he would have sold it long ago. Why would he have dragged it out till now? And even to generate buzz? Does the person who said this have a low IQ?"

"Fang Zhao's dog forced Muzhou to change their rules. Saying 'driven out' is just inappropriate."

"Even if he wasn't trying to hype up that dog, perhaps his motive was to show off that hybrid extraterrestrial sea slug."

"Whether he is generating buzz intentionally or not, we just have to wait a few days

for the answer, right? If he really has the intention of hyping them up to sell, he will surely reveal some intent to do some transactions in the news. If he doesn't have that intention, all of you are just making baseless claims."

"Hahaha, my focus was different from all you people. I thought I was the only one, but it turns out there are also many others just like me! To all those who say that Fang Zhao is just generating hype, let me send you a sticker: [completely obliterate them]!"

The "[completely obliterate them]" sticker at the end of the comment had been taken from a portion of Fang Zhao's replies during the program.

Someone had taken two of Fang Zhao's replies from when he had been asked about the terrorist attack and mutated beasts at the start of the interview and had cut them off to create audiovisual stickers.

One was "kill them" and the other was "completely obliterate them."

For example, when that netizen had posted the [completely obliterate them] sticker, in addition to seeing Fang Zhao's face, everyone had heard Fang Zhao's reply that was 30% domineering and 70% laced with killing intent: "Completely obliterate them!"

Fans just loved to take their idol's videos and turn them into stickers that they would use every day and at any time to let more people see them. If they went a day without using this stickers, they would feel uncomfortable.

Generally, these did not directly involve commercial benefits, so it was fine to use them.

When other people saw it, they felt that it was rather interesting and saved it right away.

Thus, very quickly, in all sorts of discussion forums and comments sections, this sticker appeared. Especially in the gaming community, it was like a virus that had an extremely rapid infection rate.

"Have you completed your homework? How dare you play games before completing your homework? [Completely obliterate them]!"

…

"F*ck! Somebody stole our medpack. Brothers, follow me and attack, [completely obliterate them]!"

…

"This territory belongs to us! Anybody who dares to come, [completely obliterate them]!"

…

"Hurry, hurry, hurry! Another wave of monsters is coming again, [completely obliterate them]."

…

Even if one didn't see the sticker just hearing that audio would jolt the person's memory into replaying the expression of Fang Zhao when he had said that line.

Fang Zhao had just stepped out of his study when he received Zu Wen's call.

"Boss, do you know that your interview video has been made into an sticker pack?!" Zu Wen exclaimed excitedly.

Fang Zhao was stunned. "Sticker pack?"

"It's true, let me send it to you!"

Zu Wen sent the two most widely used stickers created by netizens to Fang Zhao, [kill them] and [completely obliterate them], as well as some screenshots of discussions and entertainment news regarding this topic.

One of these was entertainment news concerning the gaming circles and gave an analysis on why these two stickers of Fang Zhao's were trending.

If it had been any other star, it might not have been to this extent, but in the gaming circles, Fang Zhao had once held a stranglehold on the throne for first place, and some of his in-game videos had been called scriptures and were frequently taken out by people to study.

Fang Zhao's spot in many gamer's hearts was also different. According to certain

gamers, every time they used Fang Zhao's stickers, it was as if were energized by a holy ring of light.

Fang Zhao was somewhat astonished. Everyone had created an sticker pack from his cold and awkward replies at the start but had not taken any from the latter half where he had replied to the interview questions normally.

However, seeing netizens creating stickers of himself, Fang Zhao found it novel. As long as it did not result in a negative impact, Fang Zhao saw it all in good fun and would not put a halt to it.

"Oh right, Boss, about your concert, publicity has already started. Our department has also been allocated tickets, so we will be there to root for you when the time comes!" Zu Wen said.

Technical staff like them rarely went to live concerts, especially this kind that was held at a music hall. They always felt it didn't suit their tastes, and tickets were expensive, so even if they were interested, they could only watch videos online after the concert. This way was much cheaper.

Zu Wen had checked ticket prices for Golden Age Music Hall, and if it had been two years ago, they wouldn't even have been able to afford the cheapest tickets. Although they were able to afford it now, there still wasn't much interest. However, because it was Fang Zhao's concert this time around, even if the company had not given them tickets, they would still have personally bought tickets to show their support.

After ending the call with Zu Wen, Fang Zhao headed online. Indeed, the direction online had changed. It was rather obvious that the publicity team had started their campaigns to direct everyone's eyes over to the concert.

Fang Zhao might have had lots of fans, but there were not many people who were willing to purchase concert tickets. For example, people in the gaming circles or those interested in military affairs tended not to have much interest toward music, and people who could appreciate music might not necessarily be willing to spend money to purchase tickets.

Now, the staff of the publicity team wanted to divert people's attention to the concert. Regardless of whether it was for a concert, television series, film, or game, the work of the publicity team was very important.

Advertising, public relations, even the gaming team under the flag of Silver Wing all came out to lend a hand.

"Yanzhou's Golden Age Music Hall? If I didn't check it out, I wouldn't have known. The tickets for this sort of concert hall are too expensive!"

"Purchase tickets online. Streaming passes are even cheaper."

"How are streaming passes cheap? It's still at least a few hundred!"

"Compared to live tickets, they are way cheaper. After all, it's one of Yanzhou's three big concert halls. The sound quality is really good."

"I think I'll forget about it. This money can be spent to purchase enough gaming equipment for someone to last for a long time."

Tickets for concerts at music halls were divided into live tickets and streaming passess. Live tickets were unequal. The prices depended on the position, and ticket holders would experience the concert life.

On the other hand, streaming passes were not really that much different from live broadcasts, since ticket holders could tune into the music hall's frequency to appreciate concert at the same time as people who were physically there. However, for a music hall with the status of "Golden Age" to guarantee the best sound quality, streaming passes were also limited.

Generally speaking, for musicians that were not famous globally, during their live performances, they would not reach full capacity, and streaming passes would have even more blanks. Such concerts were different from the concerts of singers. For concerts of this nature, it was not within the mainstream tastes, just like Zu Wen and the others who might suddenly have a little interest and just search for videos online to satisfy themselves.

But Fang Zhao was an exceptional case because this person's steps had been just too huge!

The publicity department had taken the opportunity while Fang Zhao's popularity had not dipped to do a round of promotions. If originally only 100 people would have wished to purchase tickets, after a round of publicity campaigns, perhaps there would be 200 or 300 people wishing to buy tickets.

Looking at things, the operating costs would be too much. Whether it was publicity expenditures, booking of the music hall, or internal ticket purchases, all of this added up to a lot. As a business-minded company, since Silver Wing had invested this much, they naturally expected a larger return.

A concert at a music hall was not just a stepping stone for a composer, it was also a platform to display a composer's own works. Letting more people listen to their works would provide a chance at selling the copyrights at a high price.

Selling the copyrights, this was Silver Wing's final goal!

As a deputy chairman of Yanzhou Music Associate, Ming Cang would naturally receive tickets from Silver Wing. Every time people held a concert at a music hall, people of his standing would normally be given tickets. Whether they chose to go or not, the decision lay firmly in their hands.

This time, after Ming Cang received his ticket, he did not ask Silver Wing for two additional tickets, instead personally wanting to fork out cash to purchase tickets for his wife and son to accompany him to Fang Zhao's concert.

After successive days of publicity and promotion, the day of advance ticket sales arrived.

Fang Zhao had applied for Hall No.1 in Golden Age Music Hall. Hall No.1 had a seating capacity of 2000. Besides Silver Wing's own internal purchase of 500 tickets, there were still 1500 more tickets for sale.

Silver Wing Tower 50th floor, inside the virtual projects department.

Today, nobody had other matters to attend to, and they were staying in the department to watch the sales situation of concert tickets. Although it was not their own concert, they were even more anxious than Fang Zhao.

"Quick, take a look. How many have been sold?"

"More than 600. Besides the 500 internally purchased, an additional 100 have been sold."

"That's also too little."

"Too little? Sales have only just started. Besides, this sort of concert would not normally sell a lot."

"It's only April now, and the concert is in August. When the time comes, as long as it exceeds 1500, everything will be fine. The venue will also seem more filled," Pang Pusong said. He was the only one in the department that actually went to live concerts.

Before he had been contracted to Silver Wing, Pang Pusong had always wanted to enjoy concerts at those celebrated concert halls, but he had been embarrassingly short of money during those times. Now, his bank account was in much better shape, and he had been to quite a few concerts, so he knew a bit about those sorts of places.

Even if the venue was unable to hit 1500 people, Silver Wing would fork out some money to purchase the tickets and make the venue more "abundant."

"How about we buy some tickets too," a newly signed newcomer in the department suggested.

However, his voice wasn't too loud, and he spoke a little half-heartedly. As a newcomer, his finances were still a little tight, but when he had seen everyone displaying their support, he had felt that he needed to follow the team closely or he might get the feeling of being excluded. Besides, this was a chance for some *ss-kissing. After all, this was Fang Zhao, the boss of the virtual projects department.

The gaming team's main members would be going, and the core members of the virtual projects department had all been allocated internal tickets. However, these new hires did not enjoy such good treatment and had not received any tickets from Silver Wing, as they were not qualified enough.

Zu Wen palmed his forehead. "I nearly forgot. You guys don't have to buy them. Boss has said that anyone in our department who wishes to go just has to leave your name and he will submit an expense claim. Are you guys going?"

"Yes, yes, yes!" Even if they had no interest in music, this sort of opportunity was too good to give up.

Zu Wen added up the number who were going and submitted the list of names to Fang Zhao. Although the department had new staff, the total figure did not even add up to 20.

After sending the names to Fang Zhao, Zu Wen once more refreshed the webpage. "Whoa, live tickets sales are already reaching 900? Not bad, it's going steady. We don't have to worry too much. On the day of the concert, it will surely exceed 1500."

# Chapter 261
# Concert Tickets Advance Sales (2)

Pang Pusong cried out in surprise as he was browsing the web. "Hey, Qi'an Academy of Music just announced that they have purchased 100 live tickets!"

"Lemme see… It's true, not only have they purchased 100 live tickets, they bought an additional 100 online streaming passes, saying it's a reward for outstanding students," Zu Wen said as he scrolled through the web.

Actually, they could have guessed what Qi'an Academy of Music's motive was. As an exceptional graduate of Qi'an Academy of Music, the school naturally had to show their support and let their students know a bit more about their senior Fang Zhao, who was doing really well. At the same time, they were also telling Fang Zhao, "We are supporting you this time and helping you out. Make sure that when you climb even higher, you don't forget about the support your school, teachers, and juniors have shown you."

Indeed, 100 tickets when considered against the total capacity of the music hall was a number that could not be ignored, and no one could deny this fact. Qi'an Academy of Music's actions were praised by many people in the industry.

"Take a look at the Qi'an Academy of Music, buying 100 tickets in a short while. Why doesn't our school do such things to support us?" a graduate of a certain music school grumbled.

"Other people's school."

"Think about it. On a global scale, the 'QiMu' posse is comprised of a tight-knit group of graduates. Even at Huangzhou, where competition is so great, QiMu's members are able to carve a niche for themselves. That is no coincidence."

"Fang Zhao is still but a newcomer in the music circles. Does Qi'an Academy of Music have to support him so vigorously? Fang Zhao isn't the only capable one."

"Among QiMu graduates in the last few years, Fang Zhao's reputation is the greatest.

Regardless of what means Fang Zhao used, his fame and reputation are genuine. Now, he might lack qualifications in the musical aspect, but for this music hall concert, he has an institute backing him and a large commercial company vigorously running publicity campaigns. This first step that he is about to take is really solid!"

"Look at how much publicity there has been over the past few days. How much money has been spent? However, as long as his works are of a certain quality, they won't have to worry about selling the copyrights. Once the copyrights of the pieces performed during the concert are sold, their investment will have been recouped."

People within the industry analyzed this from a professional viewpoint, while those outside of the music circles watched on for the excitement.

"How many tickets have been sold?"

"Nearly a thousand!"

"With this momentum, will the advance ticket sales be sold out within a day?"

"The heck, I see celebrities showing off their e-tickets!"

"Maqiyaduo, Wen Shengyi, He Lisi, and the others are sharing screenshots of their e-tickets!"

"Don't tell me they are also fans of Fang Zhao?"

After the two globally popular drama serials "Beauties" and "Warring States" had been broadcasted, those first-rate and super-first-rate stars of Silver Wing had seen an increase in reputation on the global scale. Now, their activities and social platforms were watched by even more people.

However, there were some fans who "saw through everything."

"They are all contracted to Silver Wing and are just helping advertise."

"One look and you will know it is a company assignment. Everyone, just take a look, but don't fall for it."

"It's rare for my idol to help advertise for others."

"After all, Fang Zhao is in the music industry and not the film industry, so there is no competitive relationship between them, hahaha."

However, this time, fans were mistaken.

Silver Wing had prepared some internal tickets but had not forced these first-rate and super-first-rate stars to help advertise for Fang Zhao. These stars had personally asked for these tickets, and the publicity had been done by them voluntarily.

From what He Lisi and the others saw, Fang Zhao owned such a large piece of land in the filmed entertainment culture base. In the future, even if they left the company to start their own studios, it would be unavoidable to have dealings with Fang Zhao. Over at planet Wai, Fang Zhao was on good terms with the people of Wai base. If they were on his good side, that could pave the way for future development.

Besides these film stars, Silver Wing's Jinro and other gaming stars also helped advertise. Compared to others, the gaming team members efforts were much more heartfelt.

On social platforms, Ming Cang also vigorously show his support for Fang Zhao's concert and posted a screenshot of three e-tickets for the live concert.

Dina, who was also a deputy chairman of the Yanzhou Music Association, and others also expressed that they would be attending the concert.

Xue Jing, who was doing an academic exchange in Huangzhou, had forked out his own money to purchase 10 live tickets. Silver Wing had actually sent him tickets, but to support Fang Zhao, he had gotten 10 tickets and sent them to a few old friends, inviting them to join him for Fang Zhao's concert in August and root for Fang Zhao.

Very quickly, news of another two bulk purchases spread.

Wai military district had purchased 100 online streaming passes.

After all, Fang Zhao was among the first batch of investors in the Wai film entertainment complex, and Fang Zhao had played a large role in the development of the Wai Filmed Entertainment Culture Base. If it had only been him and Woo Tianhao, the base request might not even have been approved. Thus, as a way to show his thanks and support Fang Zhao as well as publicize their own Wai Filmed Entertainment Culture Base and make people remember their presence, Wai base

commanding officer Huo Yi had sanctioned the purchase of 100 online streaming passes.

Online streaming passes also depended on distance. Prices of streaming passes for people not on the same planet were more expensive. Streaming passes with high sound quality were not cheaper than live tickets. The cost of long-distance network communications was already high, and it was even higher for high-sound-quality transmissions. These sorts of long-distance online streaming passes were much more expensive than streaming passes on the same planet. One streaming passes was the most that Huo Yi could approve.

Wai base's large spending gave rise to a lot of discussion, but this news was quickly engulfed by even bigger news.

Baiji military district had made a bulk purchase of 1000 long-distance online streaming passes and a "hall-grade" streaming pass.

"Hall-grade" streaming passes were even more expensive than live VIP tickets.

Baiji military district's large spending led to much more discussion, and on a larger scale. However, Baiji military district released an official statement saying that many of the pieces that would be performed for Fang Zhao's concert had been composed during his military service, and given his deep sentiments and close relationship with planet Baiji, supporting him was what they ought to do.

Whether "deep sentiments" was true or false, the purchase of these streaming passes was real.

People tended to have a nosey nature, especially people who paid close attention to military affairs. When they saw a party buy so many tickets, they could not remain calm.

"Even a military district bought tickets? Should we buy online streaming passes too?"

"Let's just buy one to support Fang Zhao."

A certain film company.

"Fang Zhao? The fella who has recently been all the rage?"

"Having just ended his military service, the company managing him hyping it up is understandable, but Fang Zhao is even holding a concert? He isn't a soldier anymore?"

"Having listened to his previous pieces, Fang Zhao's style actually fits our requirements. Let's purchase a streaming pass. When the time comes, we can consider selecting a piece to purchase and place it in the new movie we are investing in."

Given Fang Zhao's influence in the music world, he was still not big enough to be worth traveling all the way to Yanzhou's Qi'an City for a live concert.

Over at MaErsizhou, professional shooter Ma Xier had gotten his assistant to book a live ticket. He was not taking part in any competitions in August and would go over to Fang Zhao's concert for a listen.

As the second-ranked person on the game's individual leaderboards back then, Ma Xier felt a little regrettable that he could no longer compete with Fang Zhao in game, but they could still have some friendly competitions in reality. Ma Xier also rather admired the younger Fang Zhao.

"He rendered so many meritorious deeds during his military service, and his marksmanship has surely seen some improvement. I'll head to Yanzhou in August to support that little fellow and at the same time have some friendly competition with him," Ma Xier said.

Ma Xier's assistant immediately booked the tickets and noted down the time and place. He would arrange it closer to the date.

Despite having the same role, Zaro's assistant had a very different life. At this moment, he was making his own presence even less conspicuous.

"Senior master, I have helped you book a ticket for Fang Zhao's concert in April. When the time comes, you should go over for a listen," Zaro's agent said.

"A concert? Not interested, it isn't as fun as playing games!"

"It helps cultivate one's mind. Besides, given our friendship with Fang Zhao, we ought to go and support him," Zaro's agent continued.

Zaro considered it for a bit and his eyes glimmered. Clapping his hands, together he said, "You are right, I ought to go! Book a ticket immediately. I want a VIP seat!"

When he finished talking, Zaro picked up his communications device and contacted someone.

Lazhou.

Barbara was letting someone painting her fingernails while listening to soothing tunes. She had shut her eyes to ponder over some matters.

Currently, she had gotten addicted to filming shows. Not only could she make money and increase her fame and reputation, she could also satisfy her craving to be a princess or empress in the shows.

As she was thinking about what movie to shoot next, the sound of ringing startled her, ruining the fingernail that was being painted.

Everyone nearby watched as Barbara's face rapidly turned frosty, and they kept quiet out of fear.

Looking at the name of the caller, Barbara impatiently accepted the call.

"Barbie!" Zaro said excitedly.

"Talk," Barbara said coldly.

"…"

Zaro nearly smashed his communications device.

In the past, Barbara would still have said, "If you have anything to say, get on with it." Now, one line had been shortened to a single word!

Simply arrogant!

Zaro cursed silently in his heart. However, in order for Barbara not to reveal the black mark of Zaro chasing a debt everywhere just for 5 million, Zaro sighed deeply. How had he gotten involved with such an unreasonable idiot?

That's right, from what Zaro saw, the point where he lacked money and had to chase his debts was a dark stain in his history. How could the great Zaro of Leizhou face anyone if this sort of thing were leaked?

Zaro had already warned everyone else and was only left with Barbara. Back in planet Wai's film entertainment complex, if Zaro had not reacted quickly to cut Barbara's words off, Barbara would have already said it!

Zaro wasn't sure who had said it, but he had heard that the people of Lazhou loved concerts, so when his agent had mentioned it, he had thought that if he invited Barbara to listen to a concert, the matter could be written off and would never be brought up ever again.

Taking another deep breath, Zaro said, "I'm inviting you to a concert in August. Yanzhou's Qi'an City's Golden Age Music Hall."

Barbara reacted very quickly. "Fang Zhao?"

"Yeap, it's him. The one who asked us to planet Wai to invest in the film entertainment complex."

"Sure." However, Barbara was thinking to herself, Does an idiot like Zaro even know how to appreciate music and art?

"All right, I will contact you when the time comes. But Barbara, there is something we need to talk about…"

Zaro and Barbara discussed the conditions so that Barabara would never reveal Zaro's black mark.

Zaro's agent took a step backward from Zaro. Idiotism was contagious. He had to stay further away from Zaro.

As for the reason why he had suggested that Zaro attend Fang Zhao's concert, it had not been because of "our friendship with Fang Zhao."

Friendship my *ss.

He saw this as a chance to hype up Zaro. He wanted to increase Zaro's fame and reputation by letting Zaro use the concert as a means of visiting Yanzhou and generating buzz for himself.

Although Zaro was very famous in Leizhou and had some reputation worldwide, in Yanzhou, his reputation and fame right now could not be compared to Fang Zhao's.

His motive was to let Zaro freeload off of Fang Zhao's popularity. If his global fame went up, only then would he be more confident in securing a role in the revolutionary film project for Zaro.

At this time, Fang Zhao did not yet know that his concert was being eyed by people with all sorts of motives.

# Chapter 262
# "Diting" Series

With the aggressive publicity campaigns, many people knew about Fang Zhao's concert. However, as it wasn't a mainstream concert and Fang Zhao could only be considered a rookie in the music circles, naturally, he could not be compared to those singers with lots of experience and fans.

However, as someone involved with military affairs, gaming, and music, Fang Zhao had quite a lot of fans as well. On the first day of advanced ticket sales, live tickets were completely sold out and 70% of streaming passes were sold.

Previously, the problem of the venue not filling up that many had worried about would no longer occur. At the current rate, even streaming passes would be sold out within a few days.

As one of the three main music halls, "Golden Age" had a limit to its streaming passes. Regardless of what methods other business-minded concert halls used, "Golden Age" would only release a maximum of 10,000 streaming passes.

Thus, for many people who had adopted a wait and see approach, the moment they saw that live tickets could no longer be purchased and streaming tickets seemed to be selling out fast, they quickly went and booked a streaming pass, thinking that even if they didn't wish to go when the time came, they could still resell it to others. After all, it was better to get it first and decide later, thus preventing future regrets.

It was also at this time that Fang Zhao went for an interview with the other media organization that had arranged for an interview.

Previously, Silver Wing had helped arrange for Fang Zhao to appear on two interview talk shows. One was Huangzhou's "Star of Tomorrow," which had already concluded, and the other was Yanzhou's reputable media outlet "Prairie Fire."

The location of the interview was set at Prairie Fire's headquarters in the heart of Qi'an City and was not too far from where Fang Zhao stayed.

Fang Zhao's two bodyguards, Zuo Yu and Yan Biao, displayed their usefulness this time around and obstructed a few entertainment reporters that were already camping in the area.

This interview was different from the live broadcast of "Star of Tomorrow." This time, it would be a recorded interview. After filming, Silver Wing personnel would go through it once, and if there were no problems, it would then be broadcasted.

Having experience from the previous interview, this time, Fang Zhao no longer made the interview awkward at the start. Furthermore, this time around, the interview's atmosphere was more relaxed, as the style of "Prairie Fire" was different from that of "Star of Tomorrow." It was more entertainment oriented. The important points to be covered in the interview had already been set by Silver Wing, and they centered around the concert that would be held in August.

Matters about his military service and gaming had already been talked about in detail during the "Star of Tomorrow" interview. Thus, for today's interview, while these topics were briefly touched upon, but there was no need to ask about them again.

The host laughed and asked, "What will the duration of your concert in August be like? Will it be similar to other concerts, between 90 minutes and 2 hours?"

Fang Zhao nodded. "More or less."

"I would have thought it would be slightly longer. After all, it's all your own works. A symphony orchestra will perform the pieces—you don't have to perform them personally, right? It shouldn't be as tiring as those singers' concerts."

"I won't be tired, but the orchestra members will. A live performance isn't prerecorded. Furthermore, I have only set 10 songs, and there will be time for breaks, introducing the backgrounds behind my compositions, and other information. So, adding all this up, the time won't be too long."

"I hear that the pieces prepared for the concert are all related to your military service? I have also seen a year of channel S5 live broadcasts and heard Kevin Lin mentioned many times that you spent a portion of time composing at night?"

"All of them are pieces composed during my military service. Every song is related to my experience during military service."

The host faced the camera and made a sighing expression. "Taking a look at others' military service and then remembering my own military service experiences makes me feel like I have wasted away some years of my life." The host again asked, "That means to say that these 10 songs are pieces that have never been made public before?"

"Yes."

Actually, he had said 10 songs, but he would surely have prepared a few extra songs beforehand in the event of unforeseen circumstances. This was something everyone in the industry knew. Not just for orchestra concerts at music halls, even at those singers' large-scale concerts, if they were set to perform 15 songs, they would prepare at least 18 to 20, and sometimes even more.

Inside Fang Zhao's notebook, there were not just 10 completed songs, and for uncompleted songs, there were even more.

The symphony orchestra had 12 songs to practice, but the 10 songs that Fang Zhao had chosen were works he felt were most representative of him, and they were the 10 songs that he was most satisfied with.

The interview progressed according to how Silver Wing had planned it. After the recording was done, more stuff would be added during postproduction. For example, special effects and inserting certain videos. Of course, there was also a raffle where a barcode would be displayed. Viewers could use their personal bracelets to scan the barcode to see whether they won a prize.

For this interview, Silver Wing had provided one live concert ticket, 10 online streaming passes, 20 small ornaments that had been made from Baiji ore, and a few cards with Fang Zhao's autograph as prizes for the raffle. Therefore, even people who had no interest in this interview also had a chance to test their luck.

Generally speaking, for these sorts of Yanzhou interview talk shows, the audience was mainly people from Yanzhou. Foreigners generally would not watch them. However, when this interview was broadcast, in a certain senior management office in Fiery Bird's Huangzhou headquarters, there were a few people watching this interview.

"We have only signed Fang Zhao for the endorsement of the new model of earpieces?" the person seated at the head of the table asked.

"Yes, it's the model of earpiece dubbed the 'Diting.' Aren't Fang Zhao's ears called

'divine ears'? Back then, shortly after the discovery of Baiji ore, we approached him for a contract."

The person seated at the head of the table fell silent, and the entire room became quiet.

Several minutes later, the person at the head of the table drummed his fingers on it, making everyone turn their attention to him. "Increase the endorsement."

The other people in the room had astonished faces. "This… shouldn't we exercise more prudence and consider this some more? After all, Fang Zhao is still considered a rookie in the music circles."

The person at the head of the table did not get angry. "Voice your opinions."

"Fang Zhao is, after all, a newcomer in the composing circles. Although his first concert seems amusing and he has accumulated popularity from his military service days and the publicity of the company behind him, if the concert doesn't turn out well, won't we experience the repercussions as well?"

"Even if his concert results aren't up to scratch, as long as his ears are good, we can still continue to generate buzz. From what I know, a few reality singing shows were already considering looking up Fang Zhao even before he discovered the grade A power ore on planet Baiji. The deals probably have not been sealed yet, since Fang Zhao is putting all his effort into preparing for the concert. Furthermore, behind Fang Zhao stands Silver Wing. Given what Silver Wing's publicity has shown, they surely won't give up on Fang Zhao."

Although it was not known how Fang Zhao's concert would turn out, they had selected Fang Zhao mainly because of his ears.

"Divine ears," "Diting," and other sorts of nicknames given to his ears, which were much more effective than a normal human's, were things that everyone would still acknowledge in times to come, regardless of how his concert turned out.

With planet Baiji's development now, some science books had already published new editions crediting planet Baiji's grade A ore's discovery to Fang Zhao. Also, the new element "Zh," or Zhaoium, had already been recorded down and was timeless.

This was something that other global stars did not have. This was the advantage that Fang Zhao had!

Back then, wasn't this the reason they had picked Fang Zhao out of so many other candidates?

There were no idiots sitting here, and their minds started pondering. From the things that the head of the table had pointed out, everyone here now understood.

They were letting Fang Zhao endorse earpieces and other sound and stereo equipment. With the primary focus on "listening," there was nobody more suitable than Fang Zhao!

"So what you mean is?"

"Just an earpiece endorsement is being wasteful. We should create a series!" The person at the head of the table had a burning gaze and stared at the blueprints displayed in front of him. On the blueprints was an abstract drawing of the mythical beast Diting. Originally, the plan had been to use it as the decorative design on the model of earpieces that Fang Zhao endorsed. Every series rolled out by Fiery Bird had an individual characteristic; this had been Fiery Bird's style all along.

After the meeting ended and everyone else in the room left, the person who was seated at the head of the table picked up his internal comms device and contacted the deputy head of the sound effects department, Hua Li. He remembered that Hua Li had talked about Fang Zhao before. A more important scene in "Battle of the Century" had made use of a piece composed by Fang Zhao.

"Hua Li, do you still remember Fang Zhao?"

"I remember him, all right. As a matter of fact, I still keep in contact with him. I even received live tickets for his concert from him. When the time comes, I will surely be there. Why, do you also want to attend the concert?" Hua Li was curious. Besides people from their sound effects department, other people in the company did not have this sort of interest toward music, and among those in their department that often went to concerts, only a few truly enjoyed it. Most of them only went to raise their artistic style and as a way to package themselves better by being pretentious.

"I don't have much interest in concerts. Even if I wished to listen to it, I would purchase a streaming pass. I called to ask you something. According to what you have seen, do you reckon Fang Zhao's concert will be a success?"

Hua Li paused and did not give an immediate reply. Instead, he asked, "Tell me what

you mean by your concept of 'success'? An evaluation from an academic? Or the points of view of fans and the masses?"

"We are a business-oriented company."

With this sentence, Hua Li understood.

What the other part meant was Fang Zhao's commercial value!

Viewing it in terms of pure commercial value, the most simple and straightforward way to judge whether the concert would be a success was whether the copyrights of the pieces brought out by Fang Zhao to be performed could be completely sold out and whether they would fetch high prices!

Pondering for a bit, Hua Li replied, "I have only listened to Fang Zhao's previous pieces. Whether his style has seen any changes in his one year of military service or what the quality of his pieces will be like, I have no idea and can make no assumptions. However, making a guess from what I know about that little fellow and taking reference from his older works, I feel that his concert will be a success."

"That should be enough." The tone of the person in the office sounded more relaxed. He did not understand Fang Zhao, but he understood his old colleague Hua Li.

Since Hua Li had say this much, it verified that the probability of Fang Zhao's concert being a success was really high.

This was more than enough!

After ending the call with Hua Li, he instructed his subordinates, "Contact the Yanzhou branch, get them to contact Fang Zhao regarding increasing his endorsements."

Although there was some risk in deciding now, if they waited till after the concert ended and commenced talks in August, that would be too late. He still wished to borrow the traction of Fang Zhao's concert to promote some specialized earpieces for listening to concerts and for other stereo equipment. Even when watching recorded videos of Fang Zhao's concert, specialized earpieces would sound much better than normal ones.

His plan was to create a series!

The "Diting" series!

# Chapter 263
# He Is My Older Bro

Headquarters' decision was conveyed to the Yanzhou branch, and the staff at the Yanzhou branch contacted Fang Zhao to discuss matters about the endorsement.

When Fang Zhao received the news, he was surprised. He had not expected that Fiery Bird would actually want to increase the endorsement deal.

When Fang Zhao visited Fiery Bird's Yanzhou branch, he got a detailed grasp of the situation and understood Fiery Bird's intention.

"Diting series? That means to say you want me to endorse an entire series?"

Fang Zhao looked at the information the other person had given him. He knew that what Fiery Bird viewed as important was not his musical talent but rather his ears. Now, Fiery Bird headquarters had had a new notion because of Fang Zhao's upcoming concert and wanted to increase the endorsement deal.

However, this notion of Fiery Bird's, which had suddenly been proposed by Fiery Bird headquarters, was not something that Fang Zhao would reject. An increase in endorsements was also a good thing, and it was also something he needed at the moment.

Previously, he had only signed an endorsement deal for the new model of earpieces, but now, the endorsement deal would be improved on and would include the endorsement of stereo equipment. Furthermore, Fiery Bird was very detailed on this aspect.

Solely talking about earpieces, they were divided into gentle and rough uses.

Gentle use was mainly used to appreciate art. They were used when one needed calm or when sitting down, walking, around or even when sleeping.

Rough use was generally used for competitions and the like. Various aspects, such as being shockproof and waterproof, were emphasized.

And for these, they were further divided into ordinary and specialized grades.

Besides earpieces for this series, there were speakers, vehicle-mounted stereo equipment, and acoustics systems for home use, office use, bedrooms, and many others.

Qualitywise, even though the words "Fiery Bird" on the earpieces, speakers, and stereo equipment were a stamp of quality assurance, Fang Zhao still wished to inspect them personally.

After negotiating the contract and signing it, Fang Zhao freed up two days of his schedule to stay at Fiery Bird's Yanzhou branch to shoot a commercial.

Among all these products, a gaming sound equipment series was coined the "Diting·Infernal Flames" series and was relevant to "Battle of the Century."

On the packaged box was an image of Fang Zhao's AliveAfter500Years avatar with a "Battle of the Century" backdrop, but instead of the original emblem on his team uniform, it had been replaced with the logo of the series: a blazing red mythical beast—the Diting. Although the background was the Period of Destruction's chaos and ruins, there was an additional ball of fire blazing upwards. Under the dark, gloomy backdrop, the brilliant red luster appeared to be blazing up from the infernal depths of hell—a purifying fire that seemed to be frantically extending outward. It was as if anybody looking at it could hear a bellow laced with killing intent.

Fiery Bird valued Fang Zhao's ears, but because Fang Zhao had once held a stranglehold on the number one spot on the global leaderboards, even though Fang Zhao had retired from the professional e-sports circles, he still held considerable influence there.

The Diting series was mainly targeted at youngsters and had an even bolder style. The design had been meticulously planned out as well, and the abstract design of the mythical beast Diting was this series's logo.

With a customized logo, it meant that the series would be the focus of Fiery Bird's promotions this year!

Everytime Fiery Bird promoted a series, the advertising would be omnipresent!

This was also the reason many celebrities spent time wishfully dreaming about

obtaining a Fiery Bird endorsement deal. Fiery Bird always chose their ambassadors carefully, and most of the time, nobody understood Fiery Bird's selection process.

Thus, since the hype about Fang Zhao's concert's advanced ticket sales was over and there was some time till August, many people thought that the buzz about Fang Zhao would die down and fade into obscurity, but they realized that they were seeing Fang Zhao's image appearing frequently on tall buildings or on advertisements on vehicles when they were on their way to work, school, or even traveling abroad.

"Why is he appearing everywhere?"

"Something strange is going on!"

"I just saw his advertisement on a billboard at the previous station. Why do I see his image at this station too?"

"The Diting series earpiece was being advertised at the previous station. The advertisement here is for the Diting series speakers."

"Earpieces and speakers, how does he have so many endorsements?"

After another station.

"Why is it still him?! Billboards at stations shouldn't repeat so frequently, right?"

"This time it's an inbuilt sound system for vehicles…"

"The f*ck! How many things is he even endorsing?"

Online.

"What the f*ck, Fang Zhao is endorsing a Fiery Bird series! An entire series!"

"For real?"

"It has already been rolled out, so how can it be false?"

"One person monopolizing an entire series? There isn't a second person?"

"Just look at the name of the series and you will know that Fang Zhao is endorsing it

on his own."

"Diting? Oh right, even since the start of the Founding Era, I think Fang Zhao is the only person who has been coined 'Diting'."

This was not the first instance where somebody had completely monopolized the endorsements of an entire series. However, in the past, every single person who had endorsed an entire series had been a superstar with very high global acclaim. Although Fang Zhao could be considered to be known throughout the world, he had only made a name for himself in the last two years and was being hyped up at the moment. Who knew whether all of this would die down next year? Given the rate of entertainment news being refreshed daily, at that time, Fang Zhao might not even be as popular as he was now.

"What exactly is the reason for this? Isn't it reasonable to say that he doesn't have the qualifications to endorse an entire Fiery Bird series?"

"To the previous commenter, open up your dog eyes and take a look at the series's name!"

"According to my analysis, Fiery Bird probably values Fang Zhao's ears highly."

"Whew, Fang Zhao's ears are really valuable."

Yet another group of people had their focus elsewhere. When they saw Fiery Bird selecting Fang Zhao to endorse an entire series and then thought back to Fang Zhao's upcoming concert that had been all the rage the past couple of days, even if they had previously decided not to attend, after spotting these advertisements, their hearts were tempted.

If they didn't believe in Fang Zhao, they ought to believe in Fiery Bird, right?

But when they went online to check, these people were dumbfounded.

"Live tickets have already been sold out!"

"What about steaming passes?"

"Streaming passes are actually all sold out as well!"

There were too many people who'd had the same intention, and those that had been a step slower could no longer obtain tickets.

Ticket scalpers with keen noses that had reacted quickly had already swept the tickets and resold them at a higher price.

Some people were unwilling to purchase tickets from ticket scalpers, so they visited Golden Age Music Hall's official website to suggest increasing the number of streaming passes.

However, as one of the three major music halls in Yanzhuo, Golden Age also had their own attitude. When faced with many suggestions by the public to increase the number of tickets, all they gave was a cold reply: "Not possible!"

Their music hall's online live broadcasts were not the same as those normal live broadcasts that were just playing around. Sound quality had to be maintained!

Furthermore, even if they were able to maintain the sound quality and open up additional broadcast channels, they still wouldn't do so. In order to uphold their high-end and prestigious image, they had to set themselves apart from all those random subpar concert halls that only cared about profits.

Silver Wing virtual projects department. Zu Wen felt secretly pleased as he read some of the discussions online.

Fiery Bird's global ambassador selection had already changed. Over the past year, Fiery Bird had gradually removed virtual idol endorsements and added in more real celebrities. In the past, real celebrities had only endorsed hardware equipment, but according to reliable statistics, in the past one year, under the Fiery Bird banner, the amount of endorsements by real celebrities had increased.

"2S e-Sports Club and those other people who can't stand it are probably going mad with rage."

Zu Wen still remembered what those others had said when their Polar Light team had snagged the endorsement deal to get the tree-man Polar Light to be an ambassador for "Battle of the Century."

Back then, what those people had meant was that Fiery Bird's strategy had been changing and they would be adopting a new approach in selecting ambassadors, so

virtual idols would gradually be phased out and they would select new ambassadors from gaming stars.

However, now, not only had Fang Zhao snagged a Fiery Bird endorsement, he was endorsing an entire series!

Zu Wen really wished to sneer at those people who had ridiculed them back them. Even if there are no more virtual idols, you people still won't get the chance!

At a certain university in Yanzhou.

Fang Yu was browsing the internet in his dormitory and discussing Fang Zhao's endorsement of the entire Diting series with his roommates.

Fang Yu was the elder son of Fang Zhao's second uncle. For his military service, Fang Zhao had been the one who had helped him arrange his military posting.

Back then, when people had mentioned enlisting in the military, everyone had wanted to take the easy path, but places that were more comfortable had limited spots. People with money would spend large sums to get a posting, and those who had connections would try to use them. Fang Zhao had helped Fang Yu obtain a posting then. To not attract the attention of others, Fang Yu and his family had kept a low profile and had not divulged too much about their relationship with Fang Zhao.

After Fang Yu had returned from his year of military service, Fang Zhao had had an even higher reputation. His mum and dad had exhorted numerous times not to use his cousin Fang Zhao's name to cause trouble outside, so Fang Yu had never told his roommates about his relationship with Fang Zhao.

Thus, all the roommates knew was that Fang Yu's idol was Fang Zhao, and on the wall of the dormitory was a large poster of Fang Zhao's "Virtual vs Reality" image, which had been trending in the gaming and political circles back then. The image was comprised of two halves of Fang Zhao. In one half, he wore planet Baiji's military uniform, and the other featured his in-game avatar.

All four in this dorm were gaming fans and worshiped Fang Zhao, especially because of the incidents that had happened during his military service. From time to time, the four of them would discuss this stuff.

"If only I had enlisted a little later, it would have been great if I could have headed over

to planet Baiji with Fang Zhao."

This was what they all had thought after the matters on planet Baiji.

In the past, they had all followed the crowd and thought of ways and methods to get posted to a more safe and comfortable place, but then they had seen Fang Zhao, who had straightaway applied to undergo his military service at an arduous place. What was even more unexpected was that he had discovered grade A power ore there and propelled planet Baiji's spot in the development sequence toward the front!

That was just too awesome!

When they had found out about Fang Zhao's concert, they had wanted to attend, but live tickets had just been too expensive, so they had only purchased an ordinary streaming pass to support their idol.

The four members of the dormitory had pooled their money together to purchase one pass and would watch it together. Their equipment here was limited and definitely could not compare to that of a rich family's. The four also weren't that crazy about music and weren't in the music industry, so just listening to it was good enough.

"Luckily we were quick enough. Otherwise, we wouldn't have been able to get the ticket!"

"Ticket scalpers have increased the prices by quite a lot. Many people have raised the issue with Golden Age, asking them to increase the amount of streaming passes, but unfortunately, Golden Age is unwilling to do so."

"Hey, Fang Yu, what are you looking at? Why are your eyes on the verge of popping out?"

At the moment Fang Yu wanted to hide it, the image displayed on the screen was spotted by the person beside him.

That person's eyes widened as he asked, "What is this?!"

“…Concert tickets." Fang Yu had just received a message. He had also not imagined that Fang Zhao would send him a ticket. This was a pleasant surprise to him, but he had not been quick enough at hiding it, so one of his roommates had seen it.

"Live tickets!!!" that roommate exclaimed.

With a whoosh, the other two roommates gathered over and looked at the message displayed on the screen, then simultaneously looked toward Fang Yu, their eyes green with envy as they asked, "Is there something you aren't telling us?"

"Cough, Fang Zhao, is my older bro. The kind where we share the same grandparents."

# Chapter 264
# "Intrusion"

The dorm room went silent for a split second after Fang Yu's response. What followed was an explosive roar that scared the living daylights out of the students next door.

The neighbors opened their door and glanced sideways. They were just getting ready to head over and investigate when the door to the room in question slammed shut.

"What went down next door?"

"My vast experience tells me that odds are they lost as a team in an online game."

The others nodded in agreement. That sounded like a plausible reason.

They listened carefully. Nothing. It wasn't a fight, so they didn't probe further and instead went back to what they had been doing.

Meanwhile, in Fang Yu's room, Fang Yu had scrambled to shut the door after his roommates' exaggerated response.

"Hush!" Fang Yu signaled his roommates to quiet down. "Please keep this a secret."

Before he could finish his sentence, he was already being lifted by his three roommates.

"You sly bastard!"

"Fang Zhao, it's really Fang Zhao! Where is his autograph? Where is the picture of the two of you?"

"Boy can you keep a secret. If it were me, the whole campus would know by now."

Fang Yu's roommates finally put him down after an extensive interrogation. He caught his breath and said, "I'm under strict orders from my mom and dad not to be a burden to him. I never planned on telling anyone. You're the only people who know. Please

keep it to yourselves."

"No problem, but you'll have to buy our silence. I'm not greedy. Oh, just a dozen or so signed photos will do," one of the roommates said with a sinister smile.

"Concert tickets!"

"Right, right. We'll keep this a secret, but as our roommate, you gotta help us out too. Deliver the goods!"

Fang Yu gave a resigned smile. "OK. I'll do my best."

The concert was completely sold out. Fang Yu couldn't possibly ask Fang Zhao to produce a few tickets. His three roommates were just posturing. Even if Fang Yu agreed, they would be too embarrassed to accept such expensive tickets from Fang Zhao. The three roommates weren't even related to Fang Zhao; they weren't that thick skinned.

But in terms of autographs and pictures, they would undoubtedly badger Fang Yu for a healthy supply, and if they could tag along when Fang Yu gamed with Fang Zhao, that would be even better.

Yanbei, the retirement home for former officials.

After dinner, Great-Grandfather Fang made his rounds, showing off the concert tickets Fang Zhao had sent him. It just didn't feel right if he didn't brag a bit.

When he was in his room, he repeatedly watched the TV commercials Fang Zhao had starred in every day. TV commercials had never looked better. He'd brag about those too.

There were video billboards inside the retirement home compound as well. After his evening stroll, Great-Grandfather Fang would sit down in the pavilion closest to the billboard and jabber away at someone. Whenever Fang Zhao's ad came on, he would start boasting, "Look, that's my great-grandkid Fang Zhao. He gave up a military career for the arts. He quit the army just to become a professional musician. There was no stopping him. P*ssed the hell out of me. He's about to hold a concert at that Golden… Golden Age concert hall. Don't leave, let me show you the concert tickets I just received. They're completely sold out. Let me show you his emoji pack too."

Great-Grandfather Fang's fellow residents at the retirement home were mighty jealous about his extended stay on Baiji. Several of them also had a grandkid or great-grandkid assigned to Baiji for military service, but those kids weren't yet of a high enough rank to be allocated family quarters. They still had to pay their dues. Not everyone could enjoy the perks Fang Zhao had. He was the discoverer of the grade A power ore, after all. But if Fang Zhao had chosen to remain on Baiji, his military rank would have been sufficient for him to receive family members as guests.

When they had learned that Fang Zhao was about to stage his first concert, Great-Grandfather Fang and Great-Grandmother Fang had wanted to do their part too. They had bought a bunch of online streaming passes with their savings. They had bought two for themselves and had given away the others to their friends in the retirement home. Lo and behold, Fang Zhao had sent them tickets to the live show. The two elders planned to attend with Fang Yu's family.

So the two elders also gave away the two online streaming passes they had saved for themselves.

Silver Wing had allocated to Fang Zhao a portion of the tickets it had reserved for internal use. Besides his immediate family, Fang Zhao also invited close friends like Su Hou and Su Feng from Muzhou.

After completing the media interviews and shooting the TV commercials, Fang Zhao shifted his full attention to preparations for the upcoming concert.

Fang Zhao was scheduled to work with an orchestra owned by Silver Wing. This was a professional orchestra, not a ragtag army. It was the same orchestra that had performed on Polar Light's debut "Period of Destruction" series.

Pang Pusong had been part of the backup vocals for the "Period of Destruction" series, but this time, he was excluded. The orchestra did everything in-house. The priority back then had been to promote Polar Light, but this gig was different.

But just as Fang Zhao was busy rehearsing with the orchestra, he was approached by the Silver Wing executive in charge of the concert with a suggestion.

Silver Wing was taking Fang Zhao's debut concert seriously. There were many details that needed to be attended to, but at the end of the day, Silver Wing was a diversified entertainment company that did not specialize in live concerts. They could bring in

paid consultants, but what if those consultants weren't good enough? So the Silver Wing executive suggested that, as much backup as the company could offer, Fang Zhao had to take matters into his own hands and perhaps consult a veteran performer or two.

This was an issue that Fang Zhao had thought of too. The first person he thought of was Xue Jing, but Xue Jing was stuck in Huangzhou and had a few important conferences to attend. When they had last spoken on the phone, Xue Jing had said that he wouldn't be able to return to Yanzhou for another 10 days or so. He would answer any questions that Fang Zhao had then. If it was urgent, he could be reached by phone.

But Fang Zhao didn't end up bothering Xue Jing. Xue Jing was quite old, after all, and the conferences kept him busy. Ten days wasn't a long time to wait.

Now that Silver Wing had brought up the issue again, Fang Zhao reconsidered the matter. If Xue Jing was still out of town, he could consult another veteran performer first.

He couldn't necessarily trust a senior musician that didn't know him well, but apart from Xue Jing, there was another respected elder in Yanzhou he could turn to—Ming Cang.

So, that afternoon, after leaving rehearsal, Fang Zhao checked the course schedule at Qi'an Academy of Music to see if Ming Cang was teaching or attending any conferences these next few days. He followed up with a phone call.

Ming Cang was at home chatting with Ming Ye. The doctor had said that frequent interaction with Ming Ye would facilitate recovery, so whenever Ming Cang was free, he stayed home with Ming Ye.

When his bracelet sounded and he checked the caller ID, Ming Cang immediately answered with a smile. "Fang Zhao?"

"Teacher Ming, are you at home right now? Are you free? Do you mind if I intrude?"

Even though Ming Cang was no longer president of the music academy, he still lectured there from time to time, so the "teacher" honorific was appropriate considering Fang Zhao's current status.

The smile on Ming Cang's face grew. "Of course, of course. No need to be so polite. It's

no intrusion at all. You're close by? Come over now."

Ming Cang's wife entered the room with a plate of fruit. She picked a piece and handed it to Ming Ye before, in a rather impatient tone, asking Ming Cang who was on the phone.

The couple had been receiving an increasing number of calls the past year. People who had never kept in close touch had started reaching out.

Who knew what the future held? Ming Ye's condition was improving, and he might fully recover soon. When Ming Cang and his wife returned to their careers, they were bound to scale new heights. They would wield even greater influence than before.

Take Ming Cang, for example. He had resigned from the presidency of the Qi'an Academy of Music because of Ming Ye. Now that Ming Ye was better, he might assume the presidency again when the incumbent's term ended. Plus, considering Ming Cang's seniority, it was simply a matter of time before he became chairman of the Yanzhou Music Association.

When they had been struggling, some people had stayed away. Now that they were back in the game, the same folks shamelessly befriended them again. That was why Su Tong was upset.

Ming Cang responded to his wife with a broad smile. "Fang Zhao is coming over. I think he wants some advice for his concert."

When she heard it was Fang Zhao, Su Tong's furrowed brows immediately relaxed. She enthusiastically said, "Terrific, terrific! He has a driver… or rather, a bodyguard, no? Forget it, I'll just prepare more dishes. It's not early. Why don't we keep them for dinner? Oh, what are some of Fang Zhao's favorite dishes?"

"I have no idea."

"You don't know? And you consider yourself his teacher?"

Ming Cang responded with a resigned expression, "That's not fair. What does being a teacher have to do with it? I've only had limited contact with Fang Zhao. We usually just speak via videoconference. I've only visited him at home once since he returned from military service. His schedule was so tight I only stayed half an hour so as to not be in his way. These are a young man's most productive years. We can't let him waste

his time on unnecessary social calls. If we do, we would just be dragging him down, not repaying the debt we owe him."

"Full of excuses." Su Tong ended the conversation with her husband and started ordering groceries online.

Fang Zhao arrived half an hour later carrying a box full of fresh produce from Muzhou recently harvested from Dongshan Farm. He had just received them yesterday, just in time to bring Ming Cang's share over today.

Ming Cang didn't offer any pleasantries like "No, you shouldn't have," but after accepting the gift, he said, "No need to bring this much stuff next time." Wasn't Fang Zhao tired from hauling such a heavy box over? He had trouble just handling the box when he took it from Fang Zhao.

Fang Zhao responded with a laugh. His gaze bypassed Ming Cang and his wife and landed on Ming Ye, who was standing not far away. The young man knew who Fang Zhao was, and his expression suggested surprise and curiosity.

Ming Ye was 15 years old, but the Hull virus had stunted his growth, so he was smaller than his peers. However, Ming Ye's physical development would resume once his condition had receded. He had already grown significantly taller during the past two years of treatment. He had looked even more petite two years ago.

Ming Ye appeared to be in better spirits than before, but he was still a quiet boy. While not completely expressionless, his face was hard to read. That was normal, considering the fact that he had not fully recuperated and he still had to recover from all those years of being in a vegetative state. He never cried or laughed, but sometimes he grinned and wore other subtle expressions, which was already a major improvement.

# Chapter 265
# Advice

"Looks like he's almost fully recovered," Fang Zhao said.

"Almost. There are still some challenges we haven't resolved, but the doctor said he will get over the hump in about half a year and fully recover in the next three to five years."

Ming Cang and his wife now beamed when they spoke of their son's prospects. The huge weight that had nearly crushed them had been lifted.

Both Fang Zhao and the Mings had been busy, so Fang Zhao had never had the chance to learn about Ming Ye's treatment in detail. This visit was the perfect opportunity to catch up. He was personally very curious about the treatment process as well. Ming Ye's treatment plan had never been made public, and Fang Zhao had only read updates in medical journals. Now he could hear firsthand from Ming Cang and his wife.

After an extended chat, it was dinner time.

"Xiao Fang, did you bring your driver? Ask them to join us. It's just a casual meal," Su Tong said eagerly. "You can ask Teacher Ming for advice about your concert afterward."

After being summoned upstairs, Yan Biao and Zuo Yu did their best to keep a low profile, especially Yan Biao. Zuo Yu had joked that Yan Biao projected the aura of a gangster and might spook young children. If this had been any other occasion, Yan Biao would have blown him off, but now he reined himself in.

After dinner, Yan Biao and Zuo Yu rested in the living room, their faces tired from all the smiling in response to Su Tong's generous hospitality.

"Tea? Or juice?" Su Tong asked.

"No need, no need. We'll just have some water. We'll help ourselves. Why don't you go about your business? We'll just wait here," Zuo Yu said.

Noticing that Yan Biao and Zuo Yu were a bit stiff, Su Tong didn't insist on serving them. She led Ming Ye to his bedroom for a chat.

Yan Biao and Zuo Yu finally relaxed when they were alone in the living room.

The two bodyguards could put themselves at ease in front of thugs and businessmen, but they were at a loss as to how to behave before such a cultured family. They didn't even feel comfortable speaking up.

"Hey, Zuo Yu, let me ask you a question," Yan Biao whispered, wearing a curious expression.

"What?"

"What kind of illness did that Ming Ye, Professor Ming's son, contract? Did Boss's music really cure him?"

"Yes and no."

Yan Biao didn't like the answer he had gotten. "Either yes or no. What do you mean?"

"To draw an analogy, Boss's 'Period of Destruction' series was like the key to a crucial door. It pointed researchers in the right direction. The rest was up to the researchers. It was a matter of finding the right direction and making a critical breakthrough. Ming Ye didn't necessarily have to listen to the series repeatedly."

"Sounds like a straightforward matter, but without a clear direction, any amount of time, manpower, and resources would simply go to waste." Yan Biao finally understood why this couple treated Fang Zhao so well. Ming Cang and his wife had not stopped smiling since the moment they had entered the apartment. Putting himself in the couple's shoes, Yan Biao thought he would do the same.

While Yan Biao and Zuo Yu were gossiping in the living room, Ming Cang was in his study, giving Fang Zhao pointers about the upcoming concert.

Ming Cang was rather conflicted when it came to live concerts. The most respected figures in the music industry despised big money and crassness, but they also wanted performers to put on classy shows. They seemed to prefer venues that were super expensive but had limited seating capacity, thinking that only concert halls of that category were a match for their level of artistry.

In short, the senior figures in the music industry only respected the three main venues in Yanzhou. Even though they looked down on venues like Golden Age that were open to the highest bidder, saying these venues reeked of gaudiness, they still acknowledged the status of these concert halls.

This was a major contradiction in the music industry these days, a big shortcoming. But as a single person, Ming Cang had limited influence. Even though he took issue with the trend, all he could do was play by the rules.

That was the message Ming Cang delivered to Fang Zhao—if you couldn't change the status quo, you had to conform first.

Ming Cang also zoomed in on details regarding the lead-up and aftermath of the concert that were often neglected.

He pondered some more and added: "Why don't we do this. You've never been to a concert at one of the three major venues. Let me check their schedules. No amount of advice I give you is can substitute for the actual experience. I get quite a few complimentary tickets. Let's pick a show and check it out."

Ming Cang was a former president of the Qi'an Academy of Music, after all, and the current deputy head of the Yanzhou Music Association. Folks like him were regularly invited to concerts of all sorts.

Typically, both Ming Cang and his wife were invited, but because of Ming Ye's illness, the couple skipped most of these concerts except the more important ones, and when they went, only one of them attended. The other stayed home to take care of Ming Ye. The tickets arrived in a steady stream. It was up to them whether or not to attend the concerts.

Fang Zhao watched Ming Cang sift through the electronic tickets on his tablet. He had already passed on the upcoming shows of several up-and-coming musicians in Yanzhou.

Noticing Fang Zhao's puzzled expression, Ming Cang explained, "You can't trust what you read online. You know how it works at big companies like Silver Wing. Even the weakest performer can be packaged as a master with the right backup."

What he meant was that performers like these seemed competent, but in reality, they were being inflated by their promoters. There was no point in watching their shows.

It was a waste of time.

"Too many people view their concerts at one of the three major venues as a mere stepping stone. Not to say that there's anything wrong with that, but it's quite disappointing to me if they don't even bother putting together proper pieces or if they offload composing duties to others. The whole thing becomes a career move and the purity of the show is lost," Ming Cang lamented. Veteran musicians like himself could tell instantly if the performers put any thought into their pieces.

"Oh, here we go! Ha Wen. This student is quite competent. He's a talented arranger, too. His concert should be decent." Ming Cang pointed at the two e-tickets and told Fang Zhao, "He's one of my former students, and Auntie Su's as well. An arrangement major. He may not be that talented of a composer, but he's a very strong arranger."

The date of the concert was the day after tomorrow.

"Are you free?" Ming Cang asked.

"Yes," Fang Zhao responded. He had no conflicting engagements. He could definitely spare the night after the next to check out a concert picked by Ming Cang.

Once they had confirmed their plans, Ming Cang asked Su Tong to join them so she could send Fang Zhao her e-ticket.

"Ming Ye's medical team will be visiting him for a checkup the day after tomorrow, so Su Tong is going to stay home for that. I'll join you for the concert," Ming Cang said with a smile. "It's just a routine weekly checkup, it's OK. Last week, Su Tong had to attend a conference for a few days and I was the one who stayed home with Ming Ye. This time, it's her turn to stick around. We can go to the concert together."

Su Tong didn't take issue with the plan. She even asked Fang Zhao if she should send him more tickets.

Ming Cang cut her off. "There are quite a few concerts that you can pass on. Watching them will actually affect your performance. When I have time, I'll sift through them again and send him a few more."

Su Tong pondered her husband's response and agreed. She only forwarded the ticket to the Ha Wen concert.

The day of Ha Wen's concert.

Ming Cang briefed Fang Zhao on his former student's background in the car en route to Golden Age.

"This concert at Golden Age is a big step forward for Ha Wen's music career. It's in concert hall no. 1. He's been preparing for this concert for some two decades."

Ha Wen was in his 50s. His debut concert was happening much later than those of fellow Qi'an Academy of Music alums who were even younger. Ha Wen had started preparing for his concert soon after graduation. If things had gone smoothly, he would have staged his first concert in Golden Age's concert hall no. 1 five years after graduation. Alas, that was not what had happened.

Ha Wen's family business had had a major crisis, so he hadn't had the time or money to spare for his concert. Those had been his toughest times, but thankfully, he had survived the dark days and could finally stage his debut concert.

"Ha Wen's musical style is completely different to yours. His music is mellower, the underlying emotions a bit more subtle. He's charted a different course, so just use him as a reference and draw from his experience where you can," Ming Cang said.

Ming Cang started giving Fang Zhao pointers from the moment they arrived at Golden Age, from the entrance all the way to concert hall No. 1.

Fang Zhao had plenty of help from Silver Wing for his first concert. There were many details that he didn't have to worry about this time, but what about next time? What if Fang Zhao decided to leave Silver Wing and go solo? The more knowledgeable he was, the easier it would be for him.

So Ming Cang left no stone unturned.

Fang Zhao also paid close attention, remembering every single point. A minor slipup could sour audience perception.

This was not the occasion to behave like a know-it-all and offend all the veteran musicians who would attend his concert.

Ming Cang and Fang Zhao found their seats. A program the size of a piece of A5 paper was placed on each chair. It looked like a paper bill, but in fact, it was a tablet stored

with the full rundown and Ha Wen's biography.

Fang Zhao also noticed each of the 10 songs in the program was tagged with an empty circle at the end. He knew what the symbols meant—that the songs had not be sold yet. A song that had been sold was indicated by a solid circle.

There was still some hushed chitchat among the audience, but it died down when the concert started.

Ha Wen didn't seem that old. Someone in their 50s in the New Era was the equivalent of a young man in his 30s in the Old Era. He was a bit chubby and had a kind face. Perhaps he was more easygoing because of the adversity he had overcome. He gave a good first impression.

After a brief opening speech for acknowledgments, it was time for the first piece, which was a new version of a folk song for children from the Founding Era and was performed by harmonica.

The harmonica was truly an out-of-fashion instrument in the New Era, but it was a good fit for this newly arranged children's folk song. The melody was mellifluous and tinged with innocence and purity and the warmth of emotion.

The first song was followed by pieces that featured rearranged scores performed by the violin, the flute, the classical guitar, and other instruments, either in solo or in combination.

For professionals, music was the best way to vent emotion. Concerts were an opportunity not only to showcase your work but also to convey personal feelings.

And veteran musicians could tease out the emotion in every piece without reading the program notes.

Each piece was followed by a break during which Ha Wen introduced the next piece and briefly explained what the composer was trying to convey. Fang Zhao noted the structure of the rundown.

The 10th song and also the final piece of the concert.

The backdrop turned deep blue, and small spotlights meandered. The projection complemented the mood of the concert nicely.

The 10th song was a piano piece performed by Ha Wen himself that was adapted from a piece written by a famous composer some 200 years ago. Fang Zhao had heard Natiwuzi perform the piece on an electric guitar.

The original was fast and light-hearted, while the electric guitar version was wild and unkempt. Ha Wen's rendition was neither.

Ha Wen was in the zone. The melody progressed slowly, filled with tortured emotion.

The original was about 4 minutes long. Ha Wen's version was 8 minutes, about double the length, yet it didn't feel protracted. Instead, it conveyed the full extent of the composer's sorrow beautifully.

It was as if time had stopped, like a dead pool of water. A gentle breeze swept by, and the human heart fluttered, the occasional bubble marking the passage of time.

With everything that had gone down, it was important to remember one's initial dream. Honor the past by preserving one's purity of purpose.

This was not the best version of the song Fang Zhao had heard, but it was definitely among the top three. Stunning. It was undoubtedly a high-quality rearrangement.

No wonder Ming Cang had suggested this concert.

Someone who could rearrange a classic from 200 years ago in this way was an indisputable talent. His love for music also shined through.

As Ming Cang had pointed out, Ha Wen remained passionate about life and music despite having been dealt a cruel twist of fate. He had endured the kind of adversity that few had overcome, weathering major ups and major downs as he had gone from wealthy to poor to wealthy again. Such purity of purpose was hard to come by.

An epiphany struck Fang Zhao, and he smiled.

He realized why Ming Cang had picked Ha Wen's concert.

Ha Wen was undoubtedly talented. People who performed at the Golden Age weren't all pretenders. There were actual talents too, but out of all the shows, Ming Cang had picked Ha Wen's.

Ming Cang's choice was a subtle message to Fang Zhao not to be blinded by his current fame and fortune. The entertainment industry was too unpredictable and ever-changing. No one knew what would follow after a moment of glory—more glory, or a slump.

There were no guarantees.

It would be great if Fang Zhao's August concert was a big success, but if it wasn't, he shouldn't get too down on himself either. Look at Ha Wen, this senior musician in his 50s—didn't he make it after all?

As Fang Zhao had figured, Ming Cang was worried that the pressure was too much for Fang Zhao. Silver Wing was a business, after all. All they cared about was making money. Everything else fell by the wayside.

The media scrutiny, the pressure to turn a profit for Silver Wing, the public reaction—all these factors could work against Fang Zhao's development as an artist.

Ming Cang wanted to tell Fang Zhao that even if his concert failed or didn't meet expectations, he shouldn't give up, he should stay mentally strong and not back down. He was still young and had plenty of chances ahead of him.

# Chapter 266
# Paving the Way

After the concert ended, Ming Cang did not immediately leave. He wanted to introduce Fang Zhao to Ha Wen. This would be beneficial to both Fang Zhao and Ha Wen.

Ha Wen strode over quickly. "Teacher Ming?!"

Ming Cang and his wife had both taught him before. After Ha Wen had sent out the invites, he had found out that Ming Ye would be having his weekly medical examination. His concert had coincidentally fallen on the same day, so he had expected Ming Cang to stay home and look after Ming Ye. He had never expected that Ming Cang would actually come over.

Ha Wen knew about the hardships Ming Cang had been through over the past 10-plus years. He had also helped Ming Cang, but back then, he had been at a low point in his career and the help he had been able to provide was limited. After he had finally overcome his own difficulties, when he wished to help Ming Cang more, he had heard that a treatment had been discovered and had felt happy for Ming Cang.

For this concert, Ha Wen had guessed that Ming Cang might not show up due to the matters with Ming Ye. Although he had felt a little regretful, as the father of two children himself, he could understand where Ming Cang was coming from and had no complaints.

During his time at the Qi'an Academy of Music, besides Ha Wen's own talent, Ming Cang's teachings had been very important as well. Even after Ming Cang no longer taught, they still kept in touch and maintained their student-teacher relationship. Every time they spoke would end up being beneficial to Ha Wen. The reason Ha Wen was able to sit in front of a piano once again was also because of Ming Cang's encouragement.

When he had found out that Ming Cang was here, Ha Wen had been moved, placed other matters aside, and rushed over.

After Ming Cang had introduced Fang Zhao, Ha Wen smiled at Fang Zhao and said, "I

know you, a really impressive junior indeed!"

As graduates of the Qi'an Academy of Music, calling one a junior displayed a sense of closeness, and the praise he had given was not because Ming Cang was there but rather because of genuine admiration.

Although they specialized in different styles, they could still hear the skills from other composer's works. From what Ha Wen saw, despite Fang Zhao being only 20-odd years old and having come from a family without a musical background, his accomplishments were already extremely impressive.

"Are you done with all your stuff? Go settle all your own matters first. We will just wait for you here and have a chat later." Ming Cang waved Ha Wen off, letting him sort out his own matters first.

Hearing Ming Cang say this, Ha Wen nodded. Although his concert had ended, there were a couple of things he still needed to see to.

"All right, then please have some tea over here first, Teacher Ming and Junior Fang." Ha Wen got somebody to bring Ming Cang and Fang Zhao to a lounge. He couldn't let his guests stand there and wait for him.

After Ha Wen left, Ming Cang explained to Fang Zhao, "After a concert, he must send off old classmates, teachers, and friends who came to cheer him on as well as parties interested in purchasing song rights. That might take a while longer, but it won't be more than an hour. Let's have a chat over there first." Seating himself down in the lounge, Ming Cang continued, "You did well signing with Silver Wing and having their teams help you out with the social niceties, but you still can't leave everything to the teams behind you. There are always some social interactions that you ought to attend in person."

Ming Cang was reminding Fang Zhao that although he might seem on fire now, if his powerful backer Silver Wing left the picture, he could not even be compared to others who were from influential families. There were some things that couldn't be completely left to others.

Some people were arrogant and haughty but had the capital and resources to back it up—Fang Zhao was still a long way from that level.

A student had once told Ming Cang that, having come from a basic background, the

pressure he had felt was much more than what others felt. There were times when he had wanted to escape a predicament but had not been able to rely on contacts, so he had only been able to struggle as if his life depended on it.

Although Fang Zhao did not have an influential background, he had ability and luck, and the path he had traveled was smooth, so he had not needed to struggle and strive to survive.

Thinking about the series of experiences Fang Zhao had had after graduating, in his heart, Ming Cang sighed at Fang Zhao's good fortune. But he did not know that Fang Zhao had experienced a period where he'd had to struggle just to live, and Fang Zhao had spent close to a hundred years in that sort of hell.

Sure, Fang Zhao's current body had been strengthened during the mysterious process of his rebirth, but having the experience from his past life of living through the Period of Destruction had given rise to the current Fang Zhao in everyone's eyes. Otherwise, if it had been any other person who had been reborn, even if they'd had golden fingers, they might not necessarily have accomplished what Fang Zhao had.

The experience from his past life was cast inside the current Fang Zhao. What others saw as luck was actually his experiences that could not be revealed to the world.

As for Ming Cang's worry, there wasn't really any need for it. When it came to his mental state and character, Fang Zhao was really strong. Furthermore, Fang Zhao also wasn't a person with a low IQ or EQ.

After around 40 minutes had passed, Ha Wen hurriedly returned with a beaming smile on his face. He was clearing excited. His selling of song rights had probably gone really well, and evaluations from people within the circles were quite high. He had truly completed his first concert, a major stepping stone in his life.

Ming Cang chuckled. "Looks like the results were not bad." He had already gotten some evaluations of Ha Wen's concert from some people in a group chat, and most of them were full of praise.

Ha Wen's eyes had turned to slits on his slightly round face. "Hahaha, not bad, not too bad!"

Ming Cang once again introduced the two of them to each other, this time a little more formally. Then he said to Fang Zhao, "If you have any queries or doubts about

arranging, you can look for Ha Wen."

"Right, I might not be as impressive in other areas as Junior Fang, but arrangement is my specialty. Although I can't compare with the teachers at QiMu, if you have any questions, feel free to ask me. Oh, I nearly forgot, let's exchange contact information. Your concert is coming soon. If you need help in any areas, don't be afraid to ask," Ha Wen said.

In his heart, Ha Wen knew that although Fang Zhao was still considered a newcomer and junior in the music circles, no one took him lightly. Ha Wen had also seen from recent news that there was a lot of attention being placed on Fang Zhao's concert even though there was still some time before it.

Interacting more would be beneficial to the both of them.

The three of them spent an hour chatting in the music hall's lounge. Ming Cang had not performed here in a long time and his suggestions were only from his point of view, while Ha Wen, who had just completed his concert, provided suggestions that were more applicable to Fang Zhao.

That night, after Fang Zhao had returned home from Golden Age Music Hall, Fang Zhao tidied up and recorded down all the knowledge, suggestions, and insights he had gained from Ming Cang and Ha Wen in his notebook.

The concert was in April, but time would pass very quickly. Fang Zhao regarded his first concert as quite important. Just as Ming Cang had said, if he was not satisfied with the status quo in the circles, he could only adapt to it until he had sufficient capability to change it.

In the New Era, for people who were in this industry, holding their first concert at one of the three major venues was like an extremely important examination in one's life.

When Old Xue Jing returned back from Huangzhou, he started helping Fang Zhao prepare for his concert. He was an old man and his energy was limited, so he could not help out too much, but from the attitude he showed, he was telling people in the circles this: "I regard this little fellow really highly. Do not deliberately nitpick!"

As for Ming Cang, there was no need for him to say anything. Everyone in Yanzhou's music circles knew that Ming Cang was standing on Fang Zhao's side. Every since Fang Zhao's "100-Year Period of Destruction" series had been released, everyone had been

able to see Ming Cang's stance. Also, Ming Cang had not hidden the fact that he had brought along Fang Zhao to Ha Wen's concert.

Thus, people within the circles knew that for the newcomer Fang Zhao's first concert, there were two old hands paving the way. As long as the quality of the pieces produced wasn't too bad, on account of these two, nobody would give too poor an evaluation.

Can't stand it? Jealous of Fang Zhao?

Of course there were such people.

But what could be done even if they were jealous? Before finding out the quality of Fang Zhao's pieces that would be showcased at the concert, people could only keep their opinions to themselves. If they said too much, besides offending others, it would only show that they were petty, and it was not beneficial for them.

Thus, when critics in the industry were interviewed, when Fang Zhao, a little junior within the industry, was mentioned, their evaluations of him were guarded. They might have wanted to grumble about Fang Zhao in their hearts, but they could only wait. The moment Fang Zhao failed, they would bring out their grievances without the slightest hesitation!

Everything was judged in terms of quality. Even with Xue Jing and Ming Cang's support, if the quality wasn't there, they couldn't blame others for not showing mercy.

Actually, there were many people doubting the quality of the pieces Fang Zhao would be putting up. After all, he had been undergoing military service for the past year, and all 10 songs of his ha been composed during that time. Fang Zhao had also frequently gone out on missions during his military service days, and there hadn't really been a lot of time to spend on composing. And that wasn't even taking into account his mental and physical exhaustion after missions.

In that limited amount of time, had he been able to create quality 10 works?

There were also people who had bought tickets for Fang Zhao's concert off other people at high prices in order to get firsthand news at the earliest possible time.

As days passed, August drew closer.

Fang Zhao did not participate in any activities, did not play games, did not accept

interviews, and did not do any livestreams, but Fiery Bird's advertisements were still there. Online, his sticker packs were still in circulation, and Silver Wing's publicity teams were not being idle. Thus, even though Fang Zhao did not participate in any activities, his image never went out of sight, and people were instead reminded of Fang Zhao's concert from time to time.

The concert was arranged for the first Saturday of August.

On the eve of the concert, Fang Zhao was brushing Curly Hair's fur as he talked with Xue Jing through a video call.

Xue Jing was worried that Fang Zhao would be too nervous. He had not expected that, when the call went through, he would see Fang Zhao brushing Curly Hair.

"Seems like you are in a decent state. That's good, keep it that way. Rest early today and make sure your energy levels are up. Don't concern yourself with me tomorrow. I'll be heading there with a few old friends." Xue Jing was very satisfied with Fang Zhao's current state. Seeing that Fang Zhao did not need counsel, Xue Jing did not bore him with incessant chatter and just exhorted once or twice before ending the call.

After the call, Fang Zhao removed a thick layer of curly fur from the brush and placed it in a box. The box was filled with Curly Hair's dropped fur.

In May, someone had looked up Fang Zhao, asking him to endorse a household cleaning robot. Especially for households with pets, the focus was on cleaning the furs and hairs of pets while not damaging the floorboards.

That person had said a lot, but Fang Zhao had ultimately rejected them.

Why?

Even though Curly Hair shed excessively, it wasn't that serious and there was no need for a cleaning robot.

Fang Zhao patted Curly Hair's head. "Go and play."

As soon as he had said it, Curly Hair flew into the gaming room like the wind.

Turning off the lights, Fang Zhao stood in front of the windows as he gazed out at Qi'an City's bright nightscape.

To say that Fang Zhao did not even have any feelings at this point would be a lie, but Fang Zhao was not anxious like Xue Jing and the others were, nor was he worried. Instead, he had a sort of excitement, like he was impatient to get on with it.

As a composer, Fang Zhao was definitely willing to let his pieces be heard by even more people. In his past life, he had not had the qualifications. And forget about a concert. Back in the Old Era, there hadn't been anything like this.

This was something wonderful. Fang Zhao could not bring himself to be worried at all.

# Chapter 267
# Gathering Together

August 5, the first Saturday of the month.

At 6 p.m., there were already many reporters stationed in the vicinity of Golden Age.

Their target wasn't Fang Zhao, nor were there truly concerned with the quality of Fang Zhao's pieces. Today, they were stationed here with the motive of catching any celebrities attending the concert!

Silver Wing was not a reputed entertainment company for nothing and had done everything to reap the most benefits. For example. Silver Wing had gotten their well-known celebrities to generate buzz for the concert today, using the concert as an excuse to stir up news and let their celebrities show their faces.

There was a red carpet covering the twenty or so meters of road at the entrance. It could be said that before the concert started, this would be their showcase.

Outside the concert hall, the place was glistening with stars. Even if only a portion of Silver Wing's stars were here, it was enough to send those entertainment reporters into a frenzy. There were also other celebrities—first-, second-, and third-rate celebrities, and even celebrities who were not much better than the average person—with all sorts of reasons and purposes for attending. Nearby, there were fan groups of certain stars making themselves heard as layers and layers of security personnel watched on.

The concert had not yet started, but pieces of entertainment news erupted in succession.

There were Silver Wing's official announcements, which were more reserved:

"On the red carpet in front of Golden Age's main doors!"

"He Lisi and other Silver Wing celebrities strike a pose!"

There were others, such as "XXX's stunning red carpet attire" and "XXX beauties on the red carpet." One look and it was obvious that the companies behind them were taking the opportunity to hype up their own artists.

Besides the film stars, there were also members of the gaming team. Silver Wing's side had already made preparations for Jinro and the others.

There were also people from other continents who had no intention of stirring up anything themselves. For example, Ma Xier, who, not wanting to run into any reporters, had entered Golden Age through another entrance. His purpose was the concert, not to generate news about himself.

However, those wanting to keep a low profile were but a small minority. Zaro belonged to the category that loved the attention and limelight everywhere he went.

Dressed in a suit of the same style that nobility of the Old Era wore and with his air of haughtiness, he still seemed rather intimidating. On the twenty-meter red carpet, which would take 30 seconds to cross, Zaro stopped after every two or three steps to strike a pose and let reporters snap till their heart's content.

After finally entering the doors, Zaro's haughty and intimidating air dispersed in a flash. Impatience showing on his face, he asked his agent, "Why hasn't that idiot arrived?"

Zaro's agent calmly answered, "I just checked. She has arrived in Qi'an City and is currently changing her outfit."

"Her and her trifles!" Bored, Zaro went online and watched Silver Wing's live broadcast of the red carpet outside.

Noticing there were still many people talking about him in the comments section, his gaze skipped through those negative comments about him and focused on the comments that praised him, making him feel pleased. Who cares about those celebrities? Look, this is the charm of the great Zaro of Leizhou!

After Zaro had entered, the reporters outside could no longer take photos of him, so they discussed in private. "This Zaro is indeed really pretentious. If I did not know what he is normally like, perhaps I would have been fooled by that image he projects."

But before everyone could continue discussing Zaro, an even more pretentious person

than Zaro appeared.

A pumpkin car full of individuality, a gorgeous princess skirt, and the gait of a noblewoman. She was even toting an umbrella.

The moment the silhouette of this person appeared, immediately, reporters diverted their attention away from other celebrities and all focused on her.

"Barbara?!"

"The one from the Lakalina family?"

"She's also here!"

This was simply an unexpected surprise!

Entertainment reporters got even more excited and frantically snapped away.

But when Zaro saw the comments section being flooded with comments about Barbara, he fell into a bad mood and grumbled, "It's already dark, what's she doing with an umbrella? Idiot!"

Indeed, many reporters had misgivings about this. The weather over the past few days had been fine. There was no rain and it was night now, so what was the point of an umbrella?

But in the next moment, everyone knew the answer.

Click. Woosh.

Barbara lifted her hand, and the umbrella automatically opened. On the umbrella were a bunch of glittering gemstones that were blinding.

The mass of reporters: "…"

So it was an umbrella spotlight!

Indeed, it was dazzling enough. Nobody would sparkle brighter than her tonight. Perhaps she would be on the headlines of news being published later on.

Zaro was discontented and groused, "She's cheating! She actually brought equipment!"

His agent stood to the side and kept his silence.

After Barbara stepped into the main doors, Zaro grumbled, "Did you not have dinner tonight? You are walking too slowly!"

This time, because Zaro had invited Barbara to the concert, he had booked a VIP booth and so went in together with Barbara.

There was still a distance to go from the main doors to hall no. 1, and a short distance away from Zaro and Barbara, an entertainment reporter who had purchased live tickets was waiting to secretly snap some shots. When he spotted Zaro and Barbara walking together and they apparently seemed to be talking, his eyes lit up in a flash.

Look! What have I managed to catch!?

Indeed, a costly live ticket was indeed worth its price.

Over at that side, Zaro had found the VIP booth he had booked. Before a concert began, every VIP booth was in a sealed mode, providing an even more private space, making it convenient for guests to talk before the concert started.

Zaro was mulling over how to talk to Barbara about the black mark in his history, while Barbara was being fussy and looking through the song list and information about the composer. All she knew about Fang Zhao was that he was really impressive at playing games and creating waves during his military service. She did not know much about Fang Zhao's achievements in the music world.

Zaro's agent sat in the corner browsing the internet, looking at who else might show up today. Some people were already present but had not given any notice that they would be coming. He had seen a few special people entering through another entrance and was wondering if his eyes had been playing tricks on him.

As he refreshed, more news appeared. As he looked at the contents at the top, his hands trembled.

"Shock! Lei, La families to be joined by marriage?"

"Zaro and Barbara appear at Golden Age Music Hall, seemingly intimate!"

"New romance? Zaro with industry beauty, yet he does this…"

Zaro's agent looked up toward Zaro and saw Zaro's facial expression change as he was browsing the news. In his heart, he thought, It's over. He is going to explode.

Indeed, in the next instant, Zaro shot up as quick as lightning. "My *ss! Seemingly intimate? Are their eyes full of sh*t!? And even joined by marriage? Who said all this? Investigate! Daddy will sue them till their pants fall off!"

Barbara had also seen the news—her assistant had forwarded it to her—and she looked as though she had just stepped in poop.

Zaro no longer wished to talk to Barbara about the black mark in his history. He had not yet resolved that black mark when even worse news had appeared and now he had flown into a rage.

Now he no longer wanted to sit with Barbara and listen to the concert anymore. The thought made him angry. Thinking back, surely he had walked too close with Barbara when they had entered, and they had been photographed by those idiot reporters who were making up stuff.

"Go book another booth!" Zaro shouted at his agent.

Zaro's agent felt his head ache. "Live tickets were already all sold out early on. There aren't any surplus VIP booths either."

Zaro raged on. "I don't care! Spend a little more and get the neighboring booth to scram!"

Zaro's agent wasn't willing to do so. Would people who were able to book a VIP booth care about that little bit of money? Furthermore, there might be people of influence in Yanzhou. As an agent, an employee, would he dare to smash money in another's face to get them to leave?

Besides, this was in Yanzhou. They were not in control over here. It wouldn't be good if news of this broke.

But a red mist had descended on Zaro as he read through the news. Seeing his agent using all sorts of excuses, he waved his hand. "Stand aside, I will do it personally!"

Zaro took large strides over to the neighboring VIP booth and pressed the bell.

His agent advised against this. "Senior master, this isn't appropriate!"

Zaro once more brushed his agent aside. "How is it not appropriate? I know you don't have much guts, so stand aside!" Seeing someone open the door of the VIP booth, he no longer bothered about his agent. With a confrontational tone, he said to the bodyguard that had opened the door. "You all…"

Just two words had come out from his mouth when Zaro stopped as if somebody had suddenly tied a noose around his neck and strangled him. He had seen the crest displayed on the breast pocket of that person.

It was the crest of the Interplanetary Fund, and it was not just a general crest. It belonged to the internal department of the Interplanetary Fund, which held an even higher status.

Zaro was a spoiled brat and normally did not act reasonably, but he could actually discern clearly which sort of people he could afford to offend and which he could not. Furthermore, he was very clear that his family had beneficial ties with the Interplanetary Fund. Now, under this sort of circumstance, stomping on the face of the Interplanetary Fund was no different from sabotaging his family's business. If he returned, he would definitely be in trouble, and even a severe beating would be considered a light sentence.

At the present situation, Zaro knew to be prudent.

Thus, when Zaro saw the crest, even using the little IQ that he had to weigh the pros and cons, he was terrified.

"You all… good evening. I hope you enjoy the concert, hahaha!"

After a few awkward laughs, Zaro turned around and returned back to his room, no longer possessing the brashness he'd had a few moments ago. Compared to offending people he couldn't afford to offend, Zaro decided to endure the humiliation and share a VIP booth with that idiot Barbara. What was the worst that could happen? He could just pretend she wasn't there!

Zaro's agent's face had turned ghastly white at that instant. He had been worried that Zaro would have met the Interplanetary Fund's personnel head on. Luckily, Zaro's

brain wasn't entirely mush, and Zaro had stopped in time.

Wiping off the cold sweat on his forehead, Zaro's agent thought to himself, Indeed, those special people I saw before were from the Interplanetary Fund. I didn't see wrongly. However, if the higher levels of the Interplanetary Fund are actually here, Fang Zhao is really an impressive person!

Fang Zhao had no idea what was going through the minds of those people present in the audience. At the moment, he was replying to messages.

"We have already arrived. Don't bother about us. Concentrate on your preparations." This was what Great-Grandfather Fang had sent.

Zuo Yu and Yan Biao were fetching them, so Fang Zhao was at ease.

There were also other people he was familiar with who had sent him messages, including Ji Polun who had just graced the red carpet and had sent a message to Fang Zhao after entering hall no. 1.

"Brother Zhao, you can do it!"

"Best of luck. Hope everything goes smoothly!"

Before the concert, there were Silver Wing personnel to receive the guests. Fang Zhao did not need to do anything.

Old Xue Jing had also arrived with some of his old friends. He even specifically came backstage to see Fang Zhao. He only left after he saw that everything was going smoothly and there were no abnormal situations.

The Silver Wing personnel in charge of backstage arrangements saw Fang Zhao sitting over there in silence and came over. "Everything is in order. Just follow the plan and everything will be fine. Don't worry."

Although there was no need for Fang Zhao to perform, he still needed to give a thank you speech during the opening sequence of the concert. The Silver Wing personnel was worried that Fang Zhao would freeze up when he went on stage. That would be quite awkward.

Fang Zhao replied to a message and looked up and smiled. "I'm really not nervous."

# Chapter 268
# Concert (1)

As the timezones at various places were different, even though it was night at Qi'an City, other places were not necessarily the same.

On planet Baiji, in the military district area, it was noon.

Shanta and other high-ranking officials sat in the screening room. The sound and projection equipment here was of the highest quality, and the "hall-grade" online streaming pass Shanta had purchased would be relayed here.

"Everyone can take the opportunity to relax. The chance to get to watch a concert is hard to come by. How many years has it been since we've had one? It brings back memories."

Shanta had been to music halls when he was younger, but back then, he had only tagged along to join in the on the fun and act a little pretentious. Later on, after he had joined the military, he had no longer gone to such concerts. After he had been transferred to planet Baiji, there had been no places for entertainment, let alone any music halls. Although they weren't able to attend the concert venue, listening to it live was still a decent experience.

Previously, Shanta had sent a few videos and images to Fang Zhao for him to select some background scenes to play while the concert was officially in effect to set the mood.

Besides Fang Zhao's contributions toward planet Baiji, Shanta also had other motives for showing so much support for Fang Zhao. Although he might not have a great eye for business, when he had seen Silver Wing stirring up news about Fang Zhao's concert and Fiery Bird seizing the opportunity to promote a bunch of sound equipment, Shanta had also wished to take the chance and have a round of publicity.

For the masses, the style of official military publicity might not be what they liked. After Project Starlight had ended, there had been a noticeable drop in attention placed on planet Baiji.

Now, planet Baiji no longer lacked investors, but Shanta also wished to have the attention from more of the normal masses. After considering for a bit, he had decided it was best to borrow Fang Zhao's matter to let their presence be known once more.

Back then, the bulk purchase of tickets had caused quite a commotion, and Shanta had been rather satisfied. Today, on the date of the concert, Shanta had specifically let news be released to let people know that today, in the military district, many areas would be focused on the concert.

Back when news about the military district buying so many online streaming passes had come out, they had received criticism saying that they were spending wantonly and wasting military funds. Those that had criticized them had even included some military officials of a similar rank from various military districts.

But Shanta had not been bothered. Only later on, when he had taken part in a high-ranking official meeting between various military districts, had he directly met these criticisms head-on.

"How can this be considered spending money wantonly? Us old soldiers on planet Baiji are overworked all year, and how many of us have never gotten the chance to return home in decades? In the past, when communications were poor, it was so hard to find time to even see our family through videos. Now that conditions are better, we can't just have a small entertainment activity? Just because they are my own soldiers, I can't care for them a little?"

"Military districts back on earth frequently invite stars over to perform. For us at remote and faraway locations, so what if we watch a concert through the internet? The money spent this time might not even be comparable to the money you people spend every year to invite celebrities!"

"Besides, the concert is Fang Zhao's. Do I need to remind you people who Fang Zhao is? The discoverer of grade A power on planet Baiji and a reserve-duty major! He isn't anybody with a suspicious identity!"

Shanta was mocking certain military districts that had invited celebrities to perform in the past. It had been revealed that there were certain organizations at work behind this, which had nearly caused a big stir.

"Before you talk about our Baiji military district, please wipe your own buttocks clean

first!"

After Shanta had spouted this during the videoconference, he had snorted in his heart. Comparing these, all we did was just sparingly spend a bit to watch an online concert. Why do we have to endure criticism? Furthermore, what we are doing is gaining some publicity. How can this be wrong?!

After seeing Shanta flip out during the videoconference, not many others dared to press this matter any further.

Actually, for people of their rank, attending a concert was just considered a small matter. This time, their criticism was because they were unable to stomach the recent limelight Shanta had been getting.

Speaking about the concert, actually, Shanta had another idea.

Planet Baiji wanted to film a documentary, different from those short films and publicity films of the past. This time, it would be even more formal. Other than it being broadcast, it was to be stored in records. In the future, in Shanta's own personal record of achievements, this documentary would be placed as a realistic account.

Filming for the documentary had been started a while back and was already in production, but Shanta had not officially announced it yet. Every year, they produced a few episodes to record the changes on planet Baiji.

For the documentary, there naturally was a need for accompaniment music. The military district had recommended a few people, but they were all masters who specialized in creating background music for military documentaries. Shanta had not yet rejected the notion. For this sort of important documentary, every production personnel, including composers, had to go through a thorough identity screening.

However, whenever Shanta saw a piece that might be suitable for the documentary, if there were no problems with the composer, he would also purchase it.

Thus, Shanta felt that if there were any pieces among the 10 songs showcased at Fang Zhao's concert that satisfied him, he would select a few of them for purchase. Shanta had the authority to use some of the funds on hand. Compared to the amount of military funds he had available, an accompaniment piece wouldn't cost much. When the time came, he could just consider it as a publicity or production expense.

Qi'an City, 7.30 p.m.

The atmosphere outside the concert hall had already quieted down. Reporters stationed outside were starting to regret not purchasing live tickets at this point. How great would it be if they could be inside? Perhaps they could have managed to take photographs of those people who had kept a lower profile and had not graced the red carpet.

Now, it was those reporters that had tickets and were inside who released some on-site news from time to time, such as which certain great master or celebrity had been spotted.

In hall no. 1, the concert formally began.

As the composer of this concert, Fang Zhao went on stage to give his thank you address.

Faced with the completely filled hall, Fang Zhao smiled. "A very warm welcome to everyone who is in attendance at my concert. This is the very first concert that I have held in my life…"

Many people who held their concert for the first time looked exhausted, as if they had been unable to sleep, as they stood here and pretended to be calm. However, Fang Zhao was not like that. At this time and place, he looked particularly refreshed and had an expression of excitement. He seemed to be emotionally moved, as if he had accomplished a cherished dream.

In both his past life and his current life, this was the first time he had held his own concert. He was not a singer, nor was he specifically performing, but as a composer, just like many other creators, he liked to use this method to let even more people hear his sounds.

Fang Zhao expressed some of his thoughts and thanks and gave a brief introduction on the background of the 10 pieces that were to be performed tonight. Before, Ming Cang had told him that the people who came were here to listen to Fang Zhao's songs, not his stories. Even if he wanted to say more, he should also wait till after the concert had ended. Also, he had been told that the opening address for the concert should not be too long. Nowadays, people did not have too much patience.

After the opening address, Fang Zhao returned backstage. The white-haired conductor

of the orchestra about to perform gave a nod to Fang Zhao, telling Fang Zhao that there was no need to be worried.

The conductor was only 80-plus years old and wasn't considered particularly old for a conductor, and he did not have too many white hairs. He had dyed his hair himself, as he felt that he would appear even more imposing with a full head of white hair.

The lights dimmed and the audience fell silent.

The sealed modes of the VIP booths were also raised, but there was still a special curtain in between the booths. Only the silhouettes of their neighbours could be seen.

Zaro turned his head over to look and made out four or five figures in the room next door. That was all he could discern.

Who exactly was in the next room?

Zaro was preoccupied with making guesses.

Barbara was chatting with a friend from Lazhou. It was inconvenient for voice calls, so she was using only text messages.

"Hahaha, since when have you been together with Zaro?" People from Lazhou had also seen the news from Yanzhou's entertainment magazines, and it had caused quite a ruckus over at Lazhou.

Barbara didn't even want to talk about this matter. She sent a swift reply: "Bad luck!"

Her friend also knew that entertainment reporters loved to create news of this sort, and she understood what Barbara was like. She had just mentioned this as a passing joke and would not talk about it further, as Barbara's temper was not something to trifle with. Thus, Barbara's friend stopped herself from going too far and instead asked, "Aren't you at the concert? How are you still free to chat?"

"It hasn't started yet," Barbara replied.

"Will you be purchasing anything? Your future drama serials still require accompaniment pieces, right? Purchase one if you like it. Generally, most pieces that are showcased at concerts are of high quality."

"We'll see how it goes." When Barbara had been reading through Fang Zhao's information a while ago, she had listened to the "100-Year Period of Destruction" series and felt that Fang Zhao's style wasn't really too suitable to her own dramas.

Barbara had come because that idiot Zaro had said there were matters they needed to discuss. Barbara herself had never come to Yanzhou before to attend a concert and was a little curious, so she had accepted. She had decided to give it a listen, and if the quality wasn't up to scratch or if it was something not suited to her tastes, she would head online to look for others.

Just as she was chatting, an exquisite and slow piano melody began to flow, accompanied by a layer of cushioned string tones. This brought about an indescribable mood, as if there was some frustration and longing, yet there was some calm gratification.

Barbara subconsciously sat a little straighter and put on a look of seriousness.

The few old folks sitting together with Xue Jing scrunched up their eyebrows at practically the same time.

Eh?

In their hearts, they were astonished.

On the song list, the first piece was titled "Empty."

The backdrop displayed on stage was an azure blue planet in the boundless cosmos. In the introduction of this piece in the song sheet they were holding, this piece was created from Fang Zhao's thoughts and feelings as he left earth and headed for his military service destination.

Evidently, "Empty" was very different from what they had expected, especially for people who had listened to the "100-Year Period of Destruction" series and had seen the background for the creation of this piece.

For the first song, "Empty," the first half was mainly led by a piano and supplemented by a string ensemble. The simplistic melody had hints of peacefulness and an ethereal vibe.

Following that, the string tones sounded like flowing spring water and the slow piano

melody became quicker. A series of continuous chord changes was like the many different moods and feelings within the heart changing.

Toward the middle, woodwind tones gently slipped in alongside drumbeats that got progressively heavier.

An amalgamation of different sounds converged to form an interweaving and modulating melody, as if people were watching attentively but, in their hearts, a frantic upheaval was occuring. Restrained feelings bubbled and struggled to be contained before erupting like dazzling fireworks, surging with passion. Soon after the outburst, it changed back to the calm gentleness of the boundless cosmos, splendid yet mystifying.

Appearing as if there was nothing, yet at the same time, possessing everything.

An old friend seated beside Xue Jing stared, fixated, at the image displayed in the background where azure blue collided with obsidian black.

Looking at the azure blue planet, he apparently saw hope and romance.

As the last note faded, his originally constricted brows unfolded, and a faint smile appeared on his face.

This was totally different from the epic styles of Fang Zhao's representative work, the "100-Year Period of Destruction" series. The "100-Year Period of Destruction" series embodied an obvious narrative style in each of the movements and carried a grand and stunning epic saga. As for this song…

It could be said that this song was less forceful, like incorporating warmth into an epic.

# Chapter 269
# Concert (2)

After the first song was over, Xue Jing glanced at his friends beside him. When he saw their expressions, his slightly anxious heart eased.

Although he had seen the scoresheet of the first song before and had faith in Fang Zhao's ability, he had still been a little worried about the quality of Fang Zhao's official concert. But now, it seemed that it differed from his expectations.

Very good.

The few old folks that had come along with Xue Jing had also started some muted discussions.

One of them laughed as he said to Xue Jing, "If the coming songs are as good as this, your apprentice will be all settled!"

Xue Jing immediately put his hands up. "He's not an apprentice, really! He can at most be considered a student." When it came to composing, he had not taught Fang Zhao much, only giving a few pointers from time to time. He had given Fang Zhao support and helped push him forward so Fang Zhao's development could proceed even more smoothly. The term "master" was still a long way off.

For people like them, "apprentice" and "student" had very different characteristics. Anyone that had been taught before could be considered a student, even people who had just listened to one of their lectures, but an "apprentice" was kept close and would personally receive their knowledge, ideology, theories, and much more. Having an apprentice meant one intended to produce a successor.

Therefore, Fang Zhao could only be considered a student, not an apprentice.

However, even if he was just a student, there were different categories. Everyone in the circle knew about Xue Jing's attitude toward Fang Zhao. It was even better than the attitude one would have toward an apprentice!

Xue Jing sounded pleased as he talked to the old man sitting beside him. "How's this, Old Lin? This student of mine ain't half bad."

The old man beside Xue Jing was a few years younger and had once been Huangzhou Music Academy's president. He was a Huangzhou person over 150 years of age and was Xue Jing's apprentice. This time, he had been dragged by Xue Jing to attend this little junior Fang Zhao's concert.

Lin Xun drew his gaze away from the backdrop on stage and pondered for a bit before saying, "This little fellow is not what I expected. After stepping into outer space for the first time, many young composers love to use woodwind and string to continuously change and raise the key while composing, expanding to fit the scale of the performance and increasing in volume to express the vastness and mysticism of the cosmos. At first, when I read the background inspiration behind this composition, I expected that he would use this sort of method to express it. I never expected that he would not do so, instead placing an emphasis on the evolving feelings inside of him."

It was not that it was impossible, but rather, it wasn't easy. Many newcomers might not be able to bring out this aspect, but what came to their minds when listening to Fang Zhao's piece was one word: seasoned !

Totally not like something a newcomer to the industry could produce on his first official concert.

"Fang Zhao's piece gives a very strong story-like feeling. Listeners might not be able to discern the meanings inside the piece, but it will give them such a feeling. A really impressive little fella!" Lin Xun exclaimed.

Originally, Lin Xun had been thinking about the review he would write after attending the concert. On account of Xue Jing, he had been planning to be a little tactful, but now, Lin Xun actually felt that… there wasn't really much to criticize!

People with the sort of status they had in the industry generally did not incessantly praise younger generations for their concerts. Normally, reviews would be written without any bias, from an objective point of view. Strong and weak points would both be pointed out, whether good or bad, but the emphasis would be on pointers.

What a headache!

Besides the song list in Lin Xun's hands, there was a notebook used for recording down

his thoughts while listening to the concert. After the concert ended, he would arrange the notes and send it out as a review.

During the concert, there were brief intermissions between every song. This was also to make it convenient for seniors within the music circles to evaluate and jot down their notes.

But at the moment, the notebook in Lin Xun's hands only had a pitiful handful of words. He felt like he wanted to write a lot, yet he didn't know what to write.

Next song, then, I'll write more for the next song , Lin Xun thought to himself.

Over at Barbara's side, after the first song ended, she realized she had flashing alerts signifying new messages. As she had set her bracelet to silent mode, it was only notifying her of messages but had not produced any sound.

Checking it out, there were over 10 messages.

Three minutes ago:

"Hey, Barbara, I will probably head over to planet Wai for a leisure trip next month. When I get there, I'm going to find a few celebrities to visit the Peach Blossom gardens and have fun."

Three minutes ago:

"What do you think of the suggestion I just gave?"

Two minutes ago:

"Barbie?"

Two minutes ago:

"Is it inconvenient for you right now??"

…

Scanning through her messages briefly, Barbara closed her chat window and beckoned for her assistant with her hands.

Her assistant, who had been waiting at the side, hurriedly scurried over and handed Barbara a notebook. This was a special notebook Barbara used when she listened to concerts.

Although Barbara loved being pretentious, she was more serious toward concerts. As long as it wasn't a genre she disliked and the concert's quality wasn't really bad, she would make a record at every concert she attended. What she did was different from Xue Jing and those other artists; she would analyze it both based on her own preferences and from a commercial viewpoint.

This concert of Fang Zhao's had exceeded her expectations.

Although this musical style was different from what she normally listened to, she still found it acceptable. It did not have the thick bloodthirsty aura or the heavy historical flavor that the "100-Year Period of Destruction" series had.

Barbara did not really like music that was overly thick and serious. She preferred bright, upbeat music, or music that was expressive, emotional, and refreshing, the sort that made people feel happy. Whether it was classical or modern, whether the tempo was fast or slow, as long as it wasn't too poor, she would find it acceptable.

As for the song "Empty," it fell within her acceptable range.

Perhaps she would really purchase a song at this concert?

Just as she was preparing to write something down, she spotted something from the corner of her eye. Raising her head to look over, She saw Zaro extending his neck to look over.

Zaro wanted to see what Barbara wanted to write purely out of curiosity, but he did not get to see anything except Barbara rolling her eyes.

His mouth twitching, Zaro sat back down and said to his agent, "Taking down notes while at a concert? Lunatic!"

He was someone who had not even taken notes during his student days. Listening to a concert was for enjoyment as a pastime; what need was there to take notes?!

Disappointing!

Zaro's tastes differed from the style that Barbara liked. Zaro just loved the sort of grand and stunning music from the "100-Year Period of Destruction" series, the sort that made it seem like there were bloody battles and killing intent, the sort that made one energized just listening to it.

It was fine if there was some emotion as long as it was not too overly emotional.

Zaro wasn't an industry professional and could not evaluate from a professional viewpoint, nor did he have any intention of looking at it that way. His opinion was that if he found it nice to listen to, that was enough. Who cared how others saw it? As long as he liked it, even if industry insiders criticized and roasted it, he would still buy it all the same. For songs, he didn't like, even if it was praised to the high heavens, Zaro wouldn't give it a passing glance.

At today's concert, the first piece was still within his acceptable scope.

"Hey, I feel that this piece isn't too bad. After the concert ends, purchase it," Zaro said.

Zaro's agent replied, "It just started. Continue listening. Perhaps there will be pieces you like even more."

Zaro thought about it for a moment. "Makes sense."

Looking at the song list, the second song was titled "Zh."

"What does 'Zh' mean?" Zaro asked bemusedly. "Why is it that artists just love being so deliberately mystifying? Why can't they just give it a simple name that is easy to understand?"

Zaro's agent lowered his voice and answered, "It is written in the information about the composing process for this song. 'Zh' is the chemical symbol of an element, the one found in the grade A power ore discovered on planet Baiji. The element is named 'Zhaoium'."

Listening to the exchange between Zaro and his agent, Barbara snorted in her heart. Idiot! Not only are you artistically illiterate, but you are blind as well!

The lighting changed, signifying that the second song was about to begin. Barbara no longer bothered with chiding Zaro.

The venue once again quieted.

The moment the prelude started, Barbara's face changed. "Interesting."

A woodwind tune picked up, seemingly like a gust of wind from the outside entering the interior of a cave.

A series of slow striking piano notes sounded. At the end of every short period, the piano notes repeated, sounding like an echo. Inside the music hall, it gave listeners a surreal and dream-like feeling of echoes bouncing off the walls.

Listening to it abruptly brought about a sense of trepidation, as if the body was being chilled by a blowing wind, but as one continued listening, the rhythm gained a sort of implicit charm.

Midway through, the tempo changed to a pure and lively clarinet tune paired with a string melody, it was as though a crescendo had risen from the beginning to the end. The rhythm control was highly accurate, just like that of a pulse or the rise and fall of one's breathing. It brought with it a classical feel with some sense of mysteriousness to it, like an uncrackable puzzle of many layers, just like the background image of a deep crevasse leading to an otherworldly abyss where no light shone through.

A passionate yet romantic female voice cried out softly, as if calling to the birth of a sparkling star from the mysterious world beneath the surface of the rock.

Seated beside Xue Jing, Lin Xun stared attentively at the huge image displayed in the backdrop of the stage, his face rigid with concentration, and maintaining his listening posture like he was trying his hardest to hear even more. All the way till the song ended, he did not even give the notebook in his hands a passing glance. When it ended, he sighed. "How spiritual."

It was not known whether he was talking about "Zh," the song that had just concluded, or Fang Zhao, the composer.

Another old person among the group appeared to have thought of something as he laughingly asked Lin Xun, "Old Lin, doesn't that song have a style akin to a spiritual journey?"

Someone else shook his head. "No, I don't think it does. The song that just played lacked an elegant feel, but it had a sort of penetrating force."

The other old folks also joined in the discussion.

"At the 20-second mark, where the clarinet provided the impetus for the sudden change in tempo, I just felt like giving him high marks."

An old man who had a preference toward strings instruments and especially loved the violin disagreed. "Unlike you, I suddenly felt a rousing feeling at the 45-second mark. The sounds of the violin really enhanced this piece greatly."

Hearing the discussions of his old friends, the smile on Xue Jing's face deepened. He wished to let his old friends understand more about Fang Zhao and hoped that Fang Zhao would gain the acknowledgment of these people. This would greatly aid Fang Zhao's development.

Previously, when people in the music circles mentioned Fang Zhao, they would bring up the "100-Year Period of Destruction" series, but Xue Jing wanted others in the industry to know that Fang Zhao was capable of even more. Fang Zhao could produce hot-blooded fiery pieces, but he could also create gentle and exquisite melodies.

However, after Lin Xun had said two sentences, he fell silent, as if pondering an important matter.

Roughly half a minute later, Lin Xun sent a message.

Recently, he had been invited by a Huangzhou geography channel to produce accompaniment music for an educational science documentary. Among the series, there were more than 10 episodes that focused on mining, and Lin Xun had not composed anything satisfactory yet. Previously, he had not been able to find anything suitable, but now, he felt that he could recommend Fang Zhao's "Zh" song. Coincidentally, this song of Fang Zhao's had been composed with the discovery of the new ore and element as inspiration, and it complemented the main focus of those episodes.

Lin Xun felt that this was an excellent piece of work and that if a commercial company purchased it, that would be too much of a waste. If it were to be placed inside a commercial film or television series, it might appear for a while but it would not be heard again after the second year.

But an educational science documentary was different. This sort had a later expiration date and would be recorded in high-quality cultural archives. Various science and

educational channels throughout the world would broadcast it every year. Schools would also use excerpts as teaching material where the piece would be heard.

Just like how scholars hoped their own literary works could withstand the test of time and circulate for all eternity, every single composer also wished for their own compositions to exist for the longest possible time and not fade into oblivion the year after they appeared. In the New Era, where news and information refreshed at such a rapid rate, these sorts of chances were few and far between.

The more he thought about it, the more he felt it was a pity. Thus, Lin Xun immediately sent the production team a message of recommendation.

Seeing the notification that the message had been successfully sent, Lin Xun felt a little more at ease.

# Chapter 270
# Concert (3)

Elsewhere, Zaro also told his agent, "Hey, this song isn't bad either. It's rather meaningful. Make a note. Perhaps I can use it in a future film and television series!"

Zaro's agent didn't say a single word.

This was only the second song. Was Zaro going to change his mind again later on? In any case, Zaro's agent wasn't going to let Zaro squander money.

Zaro's agent could see the quality of the concert from the first two songs. Just as Xue Jing and the other seniors of the industry had said, as long as his following pieces were not too far off from the first two songs, this concert would be settled!

Following that was the third song, titled "The Power of Life." Fang Zhao had gained inspiration for composing this piece when he had witnessed the germination process of the arrow sunflowers at the experimental plot at planet Baiji's Outpost 23.

The start had a monotonous repetitive rhythm, yet there was a hushed, murmured beauty about it, as though something was unfolding as the song progressed, carrying with it some tension that drew in listeners to the artistic concept being created.

Amidst the unfurling harmony, an impetus started to slowly push its way forward. The silence, the struggles of life as it muddled along a track, the explosiveness of breaking through the soil, a rallying cry, and finally, emergence!

This was a piece with a powerful finale able to invoke intense feelings and cause listeners to resonate with these emotions.

Then was the fourth song, "Enemy Attack," the fifth song, "Counteroffensive," and then the sixth song, "Legion."

When it got to this point, many fans who had listened to the "100-Year Period of Destruction" series slowly smiled as they reminisced.

Still the same old familiar recipe and that same fond flavor.

Similar to the styles of the four movements of "Period of Destruction," "Enemy Attack" had layer upon layer of the keyed-up tension of a crisis. It made listeners feel as if their nerves were frayed.

"Counteroffensive" showcased the power and grandeur of strings and woodwinds, creating a thick and heroic feel. Just by solely listening to the sounds produced from the stereo equipment, one was able to feel the mind-numbing killer intent hitting them straight in the face.

And "Legion" was an ever-fashionable march advancing step by step, an upbeat tune that stirred up the will of the people.

…

Listening to these songs brought about a really pleasant feeling, like having a steam hot pot on a cold winter day.

Satisfying!

Although these three pieces had completely different tunes than the movements of the "100-Year Period of Destruction" series, people listening could tell right away that the songs had been created by the same composer!

If these three songs had played at the start, many seniors in the music industry would surely have thought, Fang Zhao is still relying on his old methods and only has this style. However, after listening to the first three songs and then appreciating the ones that followed, all they could do was sigh ruefully. "This little fella is really remarkable indeed!"

But the piece that totally changed people's opinion of Fang Zhao was the ninth song, the second-to-last piece for the concert: " Encore/An Ke 1."

"Encore? An additional song?" Zaro bemusedly looked at the title of the ninth song shown on the list. Noticing Barbara looking over, he hurriedly said, "Oh right, I think it has something to do with the significance of life?"

After he spoke, Zaro thought that he had been intellectually profound and felt particularly pleased with himself. In the end, all he saw was a look of disdain from

Barbara.

Could he have been wrong?

Unconvinced, Zaro flipped through the electronic song list and read the information on the inspiration behind this piece.

"A name? Encore is a person's name?" Zaro mumbled to himself as he wore a befuddled expression.

Behind him, Zaro's agent sighed soundlessly. This is the result of opening one's mouth without knowing anything, you big idiot! In hushed tones, Zaro's agent explained, "Senior Master, the title on the song list and the representative person's name are written differently."

Zaro flipped the song list back to check the title of the ninth song. Indeed, the words used were different from the song title.

However, Zaro was thick skinned and did not feel embarrassed at all. On the contrary, he acted as though he had just discovered a big secret. "That means to say this song was written for a newborn baby girl?"

"Er… According to the background description, that seems like the case," Zaro's agent replied.

Stage lights alternated. This time, there was no concrete image that appeared. Yellowish-orange ripple-like patterns appeared in the background.

The strumming of a zither could be heard.

The prelude was gentle. Simple, crisp piano notes leaped around in the hearts of listeners.

A violin created an auspicious and peaceful vibe, like the first ray of sunlight emerging from the clouds in the early morning after a night full of heavy showers and warming the depths of one's heart.

From the tranquil concerto of violin and piano, a billowing surge emerged.

Continuous string tones were like a gust of wind flitting across a stream at dawn,

rushing through the forests and gradually clambering up. With some bumps, it finally steered clear of the mountain tops and flew over the wilderness, finally soaring in the boundless sky. This was a tune of majestic freedom!

It felt as if something was passing very quickly, but it wasn't time.

It wasn't very fierce, nor was it heavy. It embodied warmth and radiance, like anticipating an answer that had been brewing over time.

To explain it generally, this song was like an unseen spring water, carefully and continuously permeating into the heart, and when one regained their senses, the heart was already crammed full.

The music contained too many emotions, yet when these emotions seemed to be on the verge of overflowing, they were suppressed.

Even Xue Jing had a flabbergasted look on his face after listening to it.

"This… was composed by Fang Zhao?"

"Listening to the other songs and then listening to this makes me… very surprised."

"It sounds a little similar to the style of that Ha Wen we heard a few months ago, that student of Ming Cang's."

"No, it is different from Ha Wen's."

Ha Wen's music style was like a thin never-ending stream: warm, gentle, and exquisite. On the other hand, Fang Zhao's diverged from this sort of tranquility with a splendid halo. It was seemingly clear and simple, yet it had a stunning effect that could not be described in words!

As soon as the song ended, Ha Wen clapped vigorously, laughing while shaking his head as if he had seen something unimaginable. Turning to his wife beside him, he praised Fang Zhao. "A really impressive junior! He really is remarkable!"

Over in the VIP booths, Zaro was also sighing emotionally. When my own children are born, I will also get him to compose a song. As he thought about it, he felt wronged. Why hadn't his own father gotten someone to compose a song for him when he had been born?

After lamenting, Zaro habitually glanced over to see the situation in the room next door, but he realized that the people there were pacing about. This puzzled Zaro.

Before, the room had been slightly quieter, and even when there had been movement, it had only been one person walking about, probably a bodyguard or assistant serving tea or something. But now, it seemed as if they had something they needed to do.

Could it be they can't hold it in any longer and want to head to the washroom? Zaro thought to himself with his warped sense of humor.

As for Barbara, after listening to the ninth song, she had a blank expression on her face. Afterward, she picked up her notebook and wrote down two lines before stopping, as though she was hesitating. Finally, she resolved herself.

She had decided to purchase this song!

Beckoning her assistant over, Barbara issued her instructions. "Contact…"

She had only said the first word in the sentence when she broke off.

Barbara stared at the electronic song list. On it, behind the title of the ninth song, "Encore," the originally hollow circle had become solid.

A hollow circle was a mark that meant the copyrights of that particular song had not yet been sold, while a solid circle meant that the rights had already been sold.

How long has it been since the ninth song concluded?

Has it even been a minute?!

Who?

Who was it that stole my target!?

If not for the fact that she had to uphold her elegant aristocratic image, Barbara would have flipped the table in front of her right now!

Preposterous! To dare steal my goods!

However, right now, the matter had already reached this point. Barbara forcibly

quelled the raging fire in her heart and put on an icy-cold face as she continued sitting there. After the concert ended, she would check it out. She wanted to see who exactly it was that had such quick fingers!

The concert's 10th and final piece was titled "Expedition." The image in the backdrop was of Baiji military district's airfield. This was one of the images that had been carefully handpicked by Shanta and sent over.

The opening three notes of "Expedition" were like the low-frequency warnings of a fog horn. It was as if the entire music hall was engulfed and jolted thrice. This established the song's main key.

Domineering, shocking!

That sort of warning sound was actually being simulated by instruments in the performance and was slightly different from an actual warning horn, yet every person who had served on Baiji knew that it signified that large numbers of transport ships or spacecraft nearby or within planet Baiji's airspace were prepared to take off or descend and that all unrelated personnel should clear the area.

The drum beats, nimble vibrations of the zither, and imposing blares of the trombone that were rousing up the audience's spirits converged to form music and, together with the image in the backdrop, made listeners feel as if they could see the countless flying crafts, both big and small, ascending and descending in planet Baiji's airspace. It was if the audience could see the massive expeditionary force on the faraway planet of Baiji!

With the music provoking the senses, each nerve seemed to be abnormally agitated, creating a rush of blood that seemed to boil over and turn to steam, spurting out from the open pores throughout the body. Even when one shut their eyes, they could still feel that majestic spectacle!

It was like an icebreaker, a combination of hard work and science charging straight ahead and smashing through layer upon layer of thick ice as it broke through and took a foray into space!

From one planet to another, from one galaxy to another.

Our military, fiery and passionate, advancing bravely, conquering the unknown sea of stars!

At Baiji military district base headquarters.

Bang!

Shanta slapped his palm forcefully onto the coffee table beside. Laughing heartily, he said, "This is it! Get it!"

Actually, when the three instrument-simulated warning horns had sounded, Shanta had already wanted to slap his hand on the table. However, he had felt that, as the grand commanding officer, he could not act too impulsively and had held himself until the end of the song before bringing his hand down.

"Contact Fang Zhao…" Considering it again, Shanta said, "Contact Silver Wing… Forget it, Hong Lou, you go speak to your wife!"

Hong Lou, who was seated beside Shanta: "…"

Silver Wing was the managing company for Fang Zhao's concert and was handling the operations and sales of copyrights. Anybody wishing to purchase the songs would have to contact Silver Wing for negotiations. Thus, Shanta wanted Hong Lou to contact Duan Qianji. Directly liaising with the big boss was much more efficient, and they might be able to get a preferential rate.

Hong Lou sighed. He didn't have a choice, so he returned to his own office, picked up the communications device, and called Duan Qianji. Of course, he knew roughly how much Fang Zhao's works were worth on the market and also knew that if Baiji military district wanted a song copyright, Duan Qianji would surely give a discounted price, mainly because he, Hong Lou, was here. It wouldn't be good to offend Shanta. It was better to go along with Shanta's wishes. It wasn't that they were afraid of Shanta but rather that there wasn't any need to cause tension. On a larger scale of things, one song score was just a small matter.

This time, Duan Qianji would have to earn less of a profit.

At present, Duan Qianji was looking at the evaluations industry insiders were giving for Fang Zhao's concert. Seeing their acknowledgment of the concert, she was glad. She was happy for Fang Zhao and delighted at the pieces that would be sold off at decent prices.

After this, Fang Zhao's status within the industry would once again swell.

It was at this moment that Duan Qianji received the incoming call from Hong Lou. She wondered why Hong Lou was contacting her at this time; could it be to congratulate her?

Accepting the call, Duan Qianji saw Hong Lou's guilt-ridden face.

Hong Lou said, "Dear wife, I'm sorry!"

Duan Qianji's hands trembled slightly, and the smile nearly fell off her face.

The moment she heard the end of his sentence, Duan Qianji knew that he was talking about the last song in Fang Zhao's concert tonight: "Expedition."

Silently exhaling, Duan Qianji cursed in her heart. I thought you'd had an extramarital affair!

"Your Baiji military district wishes to purchase it?" Duan Qianji asked.

"Mmhm. Shanta has said he wants to get the last song."

"All right, got it. The price will be negotiated later on. Let me first make a note." As she spoke, Duan Qianji changed the hollow circle behind "Expedition" to a solid one.

At the same time, people in the music hall holding the electronic song list realized that even before the curtain call, yet another song had been reserved.

# Chapter 271
# "Idiot" Companies

After completing the final piece, Fang Zhao and the orchestra stood for a curtain call.

Fang Zhao took a deep bow toward the audience.

The concert was finally over.

He hoped that his first "report card" had pleased his audience.

It was his first concert and comprised 10 original compositions—10 of his own stories. What the audience had heard were stories that came from his heart.

Many fans might have first come across Fang Zhao through the four movements in the "Period of Destruction" series, but those weren't Fang Zhao's own stories. They were built around the virtual idol Polar Light. The feelings and thoughts he had conveyed through music and visuals were part of Polar Light's journey, not his.

Any outstanding work of art was based on a compelling story. Now, whether they had watched in person or tuned in via live webcast, people knew the background that informed these 10 pieces and the stories they represented.

It was a dream come true. Fang Zhao hoped it was just the beginning.

He was delighted.

Shortly after retreating backstage following the curtain call, Fang Zhao got a call from Duan Qianji.

"Did you see the updates on the rights on your song list?" Duan Qianji asked.

"Yes." Fang Zhao was carrying a copy of his electronic program. Three—no, now four—songs were tagged with solid circles.

Another circle had been filled while Fang Zhao was on the phone.

In other words, four of his songs had been sold. Maybe not sold per se, but potential buyers had already placed their orders.

"Four of your 10 songs have been reserved," Duan Qianji said.

Fang Zhao was signed to Silver Wing as a composer, so Silver Wing was his agent in charge of handling copyright issues for his works. Duan Qianji didn't have to call in person to notify Fang Zhao of the sale of the four songs.

Fang Zhao's contract with Silver Wing included a supplementary clause that allowed him to sign off on all sales of his songs, including the 10 pieces performed at the concert. He had the right to veto any sale if he took issue with a potential buyer.

Barring exceptional circumstances, if a potential buyer was eyeing one of Fang Zhao's songs, they had to get in touch with Silver Wing and get Fang Zhao to sign off before the sale would be official.

But in this case, four of Fang Zhao's songs had been sold without his final approval. Fang Zhao knew Duan Qianji was someone who kept her word. There had to be a reason behind her decision to proceed without consulting him, hence the phone call.

So Fang Zhao wasn't mad. He just wanted to hear what Duan Qianji had to say.

"Shanta wants to buy 'Expedition'," Duan Qianji said.

Fang Zhao could figure out from that comment alone why Duan Qianji had changed the status of "Expedition" before getting his OK.

In fact, that was what Fang Zhao had expected. He had figured that Shanta would express interest in "Expedition," and he did not object. Even if Duan Qianji decided to sell the rights of the song to the Baiji military district at a low price, he was OK with it. At least the Baiji military district was bothering to pay this time. When the Yanzhou military district had wanted to use songs from the "Period of Destruction" series, they had just gone ahead.

Seeing that Fang Zhao was not objecting, Duan Qianji continued with her spiel.

"The Interplanetary Fund bought 'Encore.' It was the first song that was ordered. They approached us during the concert before the song had even finished. They made an offer too good to refuse. The price they offered was higher than we expected. They

also said the song would be used for charity, so as a result of their strong lobbying, I changed the status of 'Encore' as well."

The Interplanetary Fund worked with social welfare organizations, local governments, orphanages, and so on. They shot a series of public interest announcements for these partners every year—twice a year, once in each half. The senior managers at the Interplanetary Fund wanted to use 'Encore' as the score for their first public interest ad next year.

Fang Zhao nodded. "Understood."

Fang Zhao couldn't find fault with the Interplanetary Fund's offer either. He even would have agreed to a heavy discount, but the Interplanetary Fund wasn't poor and had no intention of lowballing him.

"'Zh' was the third song sold. We were approached by Huangzhou Geography Channel. They want to use 'Zh' in a documentary about minerals. Their offer was fair too. This is a good thing for you, good for your career. As I understand it, the documentary they are making is quite meticulous. It will be widely distributed and archived. It will have a long shelf life. Chances like this are hard to come by."

This was also an offer that Fang Zhao couldn't refuse, but he was still curious as to why Huangzhou Geography Channel had reached out so quickly.

He remembered that Xue Jing had mentioned bringing a few old friends to the concert, so he made a mental note to ask Xue Jing if one of his master-musician friends had suggested the song to the channel. Why else would the snobs there pick his piece?

"As for the third song, 'The Power of Life,' it was bought by the Huangzhou Life Sciences Research Institute. I think they were referred by Professor Fan Lin at the Academy of Science HQ. This year marks the 400th anniversary of the institute. The song might figure prominently in their celebrations."

The Huangzhou Life Sciences Research Institute was a spin-off of the Academy of Science HQ. It was also an important research body.

Fang Zhao couldn't find any reason to oppose the four sales Duan Qianji had just mentioned. These four buyers weren't for-profit businesses, so they would make sure the four songs were used in a meaningful way.

"Oh, that's right. Hua Li, the team leader of Fiery Bird's sound effects team, expressed interest in the first song. Are you OK with that?" Duan Qianji said with a chuckle.

"Yeah." Fang Zhao received a text from Hua Li while Duan Qianji was completing her sentence. Hua Li just wanted to give Fang Zhao a heads up that he was interested in the first song, 'Empty,' and was in negotiations with Silver Wing about the sale.

Having received Fang Zhao's consent, Duan Qianji changed the empty circle after "Empty" to a solid one, indicating to everyone browsing the program that the song was taken.

Many folks who attended the concert noticed before they even left hall no. 1 that half the 10 songs in their electronic program had already been sold.

Such efficiency!

That level of interest in the works of a composer in the early days of his career was indeed unexpected.

Perhaps spurred on by the speed with which the five songs had been sold, the remaining five didn't go unclaimed for long. Soon, all the empty circles became solid.

A furious Zaro stormed out of the venue as soon as the concert ended. His companion, Barbara, wasn't in a great mood either.

Why?

They hadn't managed to snag a single song.

Zaro had been paralyzed by indecision. His agent had told him that their funds were limited and that there was no need to pick several songs. One was enough.

Zaro was interested in the music itself, but his agent was different. His agent had been performing a cost-benefit analysis. Zaro's agent considered the cost of one song as money spent on a publicity push for his client, which was his goal for the trip to Yanzhou.

Zaro had lingered and taken his time, so by the time he had decided, all the songs were gone.

As for Barbara, she hadn't face the same dilemma. She had only gone for the song she liked, "Encore," but someone had beaten her to it. She hadn't even had the chance to place a call to Silver Wing.

She had tried to outbid the original buyer of "Encore" only to find her offer politely rejected by Silver Wing.

Barbara came from a well-connected family, so to avoid ending up on her sh*t list, Silver Wing had revealed the identity of the buyer. That was also why Barbara couldn't vent her frustration.

The Interplanetary Fund.

The Interplanetary Fund had important business dealings with the Lakalina family. Even an idiot like Zaro knew when to back down—naturally, Barbara knew what the smart thing to do was.

All that pent-up anger!

Barbara hadn't felt this way in a long time.

They kept a lower profile when they left the concert, avoiding the press pack.

If the entertainment journos snapped Zaro and Barbara together, they would be revitalized enough to concoct another 800-word bullsh*t story.

But their main concern was that they were in a bad mood. They didn't want to deal with the media in a bad mood.

The couple exchanged glances. They both looked like they had stepped in dog poop.

"Let's go, let's go! Let's get out of here. I don't want to say in Yanzhou any longer," Zaro said as he sped up to a trot.

Barbara waved her hand for some time, as if fighting a bad smell, before gesturing with her chin to the assistants and bodyguards by her side. "Let's head back."

Like Ha Wen, Fang Zhao couldn't leave the venue immediately after his concert. He had to stick around while Silver Wing negotiated with potential buyers of his songs.

Only one official remained from the Interplanetary Fund party to discuss the fine print of their contract. The others had already left. Negotiations went smoothly.

Duan Qianji would take charge of the negotiations with the Baiji military district. Fang Zhao didn't have to worry about that.

The negotiations with Fiery Bird also proceeded quickly. Again, the fine print in the contract could be handled by their relevant staffers. Hua Li and Fang Zhao discussed the composer's creative process, the former expressing interest in collaborating with the latter again in the future.

Fiery Bird had acted decisively. Even if they didn't use the song now, it might come in handy later. Fiery Bird was in the video-game business, but even if they didn't use the song in a game, it could be placed in an ad.

With their wide range of products and their corresponding ad campaigns, Fiery Bird made a point of building a substantial song library. Hua Li maintained the practice of buying whatever he fancied.

In contrast, Fang Zhao spent quite a bit of time entertaining Xue Jing and Xue Jing's friends. Ming Cang wanted to grab Fang Zhao for a chat, but when he approached, he noticed Xue Jing introducing a bunch of veteran musicians to the young composer, so he decided not to intrude. He said a quick hello and offered his congratulations instead.

"Fang Zhao, this is Lin Xun. Professor Lin is an old friend from Huangzhou. He's the one who recommended 'Zh' to the Huangzhou Geography Channel. You should thank him properly," Xue Jing said while pointing toward his companion.

"Quality is my only criterion. I only recommend works that are worthy. Good job, young man!" Lin Xun broke his serious demeanor with a grin.

Fang Zhao's concert program was quite diverse. There were tender pieces, subtle ones, and epics. There were dark, roundabout expressions of regret and explosive displays of passion. Fang Zhao had managed to strike a balance between raw energy and attention to detail. Every single piece was of good quality. You could tell that Fang Zhao was a serious composer. The combination of the aforementioned factors was why industry elders like Lin Xun were so impressed.

Lin Xun and others were quite willing to give a promising junior musician like Fang

Zhao a helping hand.

Xue Jing and his close friends might have had different personalities, but they shared the same approach to and values about music. They wanted to see even more outstanding young composers emerge. So what if they themselves were eclipsed? This was a good thing for the industry as a whole. It proved that the composers of the current generation were an improvement from the previous lot.

The other professional critics who had attended the concert started to issue their reviews as well.

The consensus was that this was a high-quality concert. Even Lin Xun, who was typically a harsh critic, gave a positive review, even though his praise was restrained.

Xue Jing was happy with the outcome. He was happy for Fang Zhao, happy that the young composer had taken this critical step in his career.

On Baiji, Shanta was pleased to see Silver Wing's response.

Not only had he gotten free advertising from Fang Zhao's concert, he had managed to snag a song at a discount.

Still, he wasn't an *sshole who milked his advantage for everything it was worth. Considering the fact that Fang Zhao had taken a loss on this song, he made a mental note to offer the young composer a discount on power ore in the future.

Elsewhere, folks who had been holding their breath and trying to catch flaws in the concert weren't in a very good mood.

After listening to the first song, they had felt there wasn't much to take issue with.

Even if the song didn't belong to a genre that such critics preferred or specialized in, the pundits were still competent enough to appraise the piece.

So after listening to the song, even if they didn't like the style, they couldn't trash it. If they criticized for the sake of criticizing, they would only lose face.

Next song, then. We'll scrutinize the next song.

And then the next, and the next, and the next.

Before they knew it, all 10 pieces had been performed.

Critics who were paid to write negative reviews got together to brainstorm. "OK, let's discuss what we can start our critique with and what position to take."

How could they write their reviews so that they didn't come off as paid hacks? As hard as they tried, they couldn't find any major flaws in the concert, but they had to go through the motions at the very least. After all, they were professionals. They had to satisfy their clients.

Yanzhou, the offices of a film production company whose staff had just finished watching Fang Zhao's concert online.

"OK, let's have a brief meeting to discuss which songs to buy. I think there are a few that fit in the movie we are making."

"I think quite a few are decent, especially the ones that resemble the style of the 'Period of Destruction' series. They would fit in nicely in our movie."

"We have to single one out, then rearrange it into three versions so we can use them both as the score and in the trailers."

"When we've decided, let's negotiate a good price. We might even get some free publicity for our movie out of the concert, some early marketing. Check out all the hype before the concert. It's a pity none of it touched on our production, but judging from the entertainment headlines in Yanzhou right now, the hype around the concert hasn't ended yet. Who knows, maybe we can catch this train in the nick of time."

The meeting ended half an hour later. A song was agreed on.

"Xiao Li, get ready to reach out to Silver Wing."

Xiao Li was staring at his tablet screen. "Uhm…"

"What's up?"

"They're… they're all gone."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, none of the songs are available anymore."

He passed his tablet to the others.

All the circles at the end of the 10 songs in the program had turned solid. In other words, all 10 songs had been sold.

The staffer nicknamed "Xiao Li" scratched his head. "Half of the songs were sold before you started your meeting. The other half were sold during the meeting."

The others were incredulous. "That fast?"

"This isn't Silver Wing's doing, is it?"

"Have they announced the buyers yet?"

Xiao Li browsed several news websites and checked Silver Wing's official website. He couldn't find any announcements. He shook his head and answered in the negative.

He noticed an update right after he finished his sentence.

"Wait, here we go," Xiao Li blurted out. "Silver Wing just issued an official statement saying all 10 songs have been sold."

It wasn't just the potential buyers who were blown away. Fans who were following developments online were even more surprised.

Just half an hour after Fang Zhao's concert had ended, Silver Wing issued an official notice saying all 10 songs performed during the concert had been sold.

There were all sorts of thanks and pleasantries at the end of Silver Wing's statement, but that was of no interest to the fans. Their focus was whether Silver Wing was telling the truth about the sale of the 10 songs.

"My classmates are Fang Zhao fans. They bought online passes to the live broadcast of the concert. I just finished watching with them. It was OK, but was it that good? I heard that newcomers at most sell one or two songs after their first concert and that selling the whole program takes months."

"Fang Zhao is different. He has a foot in various industries and has lots of fans. It's

possible his songs were snapped up by nouveau riche tycoons. Hasn't that happened in the past quite frequently?"

"I just want to know how much the songs sold for."

For most curious onlookers, the most straightforward way to judge the quality of Fang Zhao's songs was by their selling price.

"The prices won't be disclosed, but word has it that all the songs fetched high prices."

"You can't trust rumors."

"It's all hype! Definitely hype!"

"It's just rigging. They bought their own songs so they could brag about the sales. It's not like Silver Wing hasn't done it before."

"I've seen these kinds of underhanded tactics before—pushing up prices and then conning idiot companies into buying the songs."

"I wonder which idiot companies were conned."

Another 20 minutes passed.

"Here come the idiot companies." A photo came with the status update.

The picture the fan posted was an update Silver Wing had just issued via its social media account announcing the buyers of the 10 songs.

"F*ck! The Interplanetary Fund, Baiji military district, Fiery Bird, Huangzhou Geography Channel, and the Huangzhou Life Sciences Research Institute?"

"My dad is asking why I'm reading the news on my knees."

"Shit—these 'idiot' companies are quite high class."

"If these companies are considered 'idiot' companies, then what about the others? Are they parasites then?"

"I can understand why the Interplanetary Fund, Baiji military district, and Fiery Bird

might be interested in the songs, but what's with Huangzhou Geography Channel and the Huangzhou Life Sciences Research Institute?"

"This makes me want to watch his concert."

"D*mn—if only I had bought tickets."

Among the buyers were also several production and gaming companies that had global reputations, even if they weren't as famous as Fiery Bird. They were capable of generating plenty of discussion on their strength alone, but all eyes now were on the first five song buyers.

Just like Barbara's appearance on the red carpet before the concert had stolen the limelight, it was a level of attention that others could only dream of.

The first five buyers were such prestigious brand names that readers ignored the rest of the pack.

But say what they may, the other five buyers weren't "idiot" companies by any measure.

Soon the tides turned in online sentiment.

Most professional critics gave good reviews, but for the masses who were clueless about music, all they cared about was whether the reviews were positive or negative. Then they would move onto the gossip and spectacle.

Footage of the concert wouldn't be available online right away, so folks who had missed the concert could only rely on online news reports.

In Yanzhou, many reporters were working through the night editing their copies.

There were also journalists still out in the field reporting.

It was already past 10 p.m. in Yanzhou, quite late, but the night was still young in many hotspots.

One reporter was lingering near a cluster of university campuses. He was responsible for interviewing university students in the area.

"Did you catch Fang Zhao's concert?"

"No, I just woke up after crashing following three days of group gaming. I need to grab a bite."

…

"Have you heard of Fang Zhao?"

"Yeah, we used to listen to his 'Period of Destruction' series before exams."

…

After conducting several interviews, the journalist overheard a few students discussing Fang Zhao's concert. Further questioning revealed that the group had watched Fang Zhao's concert online, followed by a bit of web browsing in their dorm rooms. They had gotten hungry and had decided to venture out for a late-night snack.

The reporter asked the students for their thoughts on the concert.

"I was still in secondary school when I listened to the 'Period of Destruction' series. It was right before my university entrance exams. I listened to the songs while working on mock exams. The concert tonight was great too. I enjoyed 'Expedition' the best," one student said.

"I liked 'Encore.' Who knew Fang Zhao could produce a song of that style," another student said.

The reporter shifted his recorder to a third student, who was a bit shy, probably because it was his first time being interviewed.

"Me? I liked 'Enemy Attack,' 'Counteroffensive,' 'Legion,' and 'Expedition.' They make for great background music while working on mock papers. I got quite excited listening to them."

The reporter thought to himself that the kid sounded interesting, and the reporter followed up. "Excited? What exactly did you feel when you listened to the songs? Or to put the question in other terms, what thoughts and feelings did the music provoke?"

"Thoughts and feelings? It's hard to say. I don't know how to describe them. I'm not

good with words. I don't know how to organize my thoughts."

"Just in simple terms, in your own words."

"Uhm, in simple terms, listening to the songs felt like…"

The reporter threw the student an encouraging glance. "Keep going!"

"…the high you get when you wake up after a super-long nap!"

"…"

# Chapter 272
# Pet Archives

The next day, many entertainment media outlets reported on Fang Zhao's concert.

Yanzhou's most authoritative music media, "Voice of Yanzhou," and the global authoritative periodical "Worldwide Music" had lengthy features introducing Fang Zhao, the young composer who had finally taken his first step.

When people like Xue Jing and Lin Xun wrote their reviews, those reviews would appear in "Worldwide Music." As for reviews written by Ming Cang and others, those would be shared on "Voice of Yanzhou."

Other entertainment media outlets had commercial objectives, but "Worldwide Music" and "Voice of Yanzhou" focused more on artistic aspects. Many artists within the industry, both new and old, paid attention to them.

"Voice of Yanzhou" and "Worldwide Music" were not really in touch with the needs of the masses. Most audiences naturally preferred reading reports that were more interesting and understandable—reports with a larger focus on entertainment.

Whether it was the matter of all 10 of Fang Zhao's songs being sold off within an hour of the end of the concert or the identities of the buyers, these became topics that were discussed by everyone.

"Sss—this Fang Zhao really seems like a capable person!"

"To be able to get those parties to fancy his pieces, surely the quality is decent."

"He's rich, he's rich! Fang Zhao is earning big bucks this time!"

This was what many people were thinking.

High-quality professional undertakings like the Huangzhou Geography Channel and Huangzhou Life Sciences Research Institute, which sounded like prestigious scientific branches, gave people a stronger sense of novelty regardless of how much had been

spent. Commercial companies were a dime a dozen, so these sorts of organizations interested the masses much more.

For these sorts of high-level professional organizations and research institutions, even if someone was a great master, these organizations still might not approach that person. Even if the works were of an excellent quality, the works still had be in line with their intentions. Furthermore, it was only through recommendations and combining various factors that these organizations would consider purchasing something.

Thus this was the reason why Duan Qianji had said that Fang Zhao was very lucky this time. Normally, these sorts of chances were hard to come by, but Fang Zhao had gotten two in one go.

After the concert ended and Fang Zhao returned home, he made time to contact Fan Lin, who was still cultivating arrow sunflowers at Outpost 23's experimental plot on planet Baiji, to thank Fan Lin for recommending his song to Huangzhou's Life Sciences Research Institute.

"They really bought it? I only mentioned it once to get them to take a look at the quality of your work. Getting them to select it is all thanks to your own ability."

Fan Lin did not feel that he had done a lot. When he had been watching the concert online with the other people in the outpost, he had felt thought that the song "The Power of Life" was not bad and that the inspiration was from when the arrow sunflowers he had been cultivating germinated. Coincidentally, he had been invited by Huangzhou Life Sciences Research Institute to participate in the end-of-year celebrations for their 400-year anniversary, so he had mentioned it to them.

Every 100 years, the Huangzhou Life Sciences Research Institute would produce a large-scale documentary to be saved in the archives as a record of the important achievements and research results of the last 100 years. It was a grand affair, and they wanted to find a great master to compose an accompaniment piece for them.

As this song had been selected, Fan Lin was also delighted. Although it had been composed by Fang Zhao, the inspiration behind this had been his arrow sunflowers! How glorious!

The documentary would surely not just contain one song, but Fang Zhao's song being

picked was a stroke of luck.

Fan Lin chuckled. "My experiments here are concluding soon. I'll return back at the end of the year and won't be leaving Earth for the next couple of years. When the time comes, let's have a good chat!"

Without Fang Zhao at the outpost, Fan Lin had felt like he had lost a good listening ear. Although Fang Zhao had not spoken much, his words had always pointed out the important parts. Furthermore, Fang Zhao's insights weren't narrow-minded, and Fan Lin was very happy discussing matters with him.

Since Fang Zhao had been discharged, Fan Lin had felt rather lonely.

After ending the call, Fang Zhao looked through a few reviews from various authoritative music e-magazines and browsed a few of the comments online. Fang Zhao could roughly tell what sort of evaluations he would get from within the industry just from his conversations with those old people Xue Jing had brought along. As for others, Silver Wing teams would steer the direction of online audiences. Currently, the overall evaluations were not too bad.

After disconnecting from the internet, Fang Zhao received a call from Duan Qianji's top secretary, Zhu Zhen.

"You can take a nice little break now. Contracts have already been signed for the song copyrights and the buyers have paid up already. Currently, it's all being processing internally. It'll be transferred to your account next month together with your wages. Oh, right, will you be attending Fiery Bird's event on the 18th of August?"

While Fang Zhao had been undergoing military service, Duan Qianji had assigned Zhu Zhen to the virtual projects department to handle things. Now that Zu Wen had been promoted to take over the virtual projects department, Zhu Zhen had been transferred back to Duan Qianji's side to manage other matters.

"Jinro told me that Fiery Bird's Yanzhou branch has sent me an invitation letter. At that time, I will be attending as a special invitee," Fang Zhao replied.

Zhu Zhen had wanted to let Fang Zhao attend it alongside the gaming team, but she had not expected that Fiery Bird would send out a special invitation just to Fang Zhao. But after considering matters, it made sense. Fang Zhao endorsed an entire series of products and had collaborated with them in the past. Receiving a special invitation

was perfectly reasonable.

"All right, that's good. I don't have to inform you about the details then." Zhu Zhen's objective had been to remind Fang Zhao about Fiery Bird's event on the 18th and inform him of the progress of the copyright sales. Now that she had said her piece, Zhu Zhen did not have anything else to bring up.

Actually, in Fang Zhao's composing notebook, there were still two completed songs that had not been taken out. The first was "Peach Blossom Garden," and the other was "Ark." The sources of inspiration had been obtained when he had been sent on assignment to planet Wai, which could not be publicly announced. It would be hard to explain why he had been to planet Wai during his military service duration. Thus, those two songs had been not featured in the concert. Duan Qianji's intention was for the company to purchase them and use them for serials shot in Wai's film entertainment complex.

Although it was an internal purchase, pricewise, not only were they not cheaper, they were actually slightly more expensive to compensate for "Expedition" being sold at a lower price. These two would be settled together with other works that were sold.

After finding out that all of Fang Zhao's copyrights this time around had been sold and he was going to earn a fortune, the members of the virtual projects department and gaming team and a few close friends and family members were going to let Fang Zhao treat them.

Fang Zhao continued to reply to messages from friends and family before resting.

As for the virtual projects department, Fang Zhao had decided not to hold any position there, as he had other plans and did not wish to just occupy the post and collect wages. He also did not want to deny those youngsters with the capability the chance of getting promoted. Zu Wen had grasped this opportunity for himself.

He believed they would bring the virtual projects to even greater heights.

Early in the morning of the second day, Fang Zhao had just finished breakfast when he received a personal message.

The sender's information was "The World's Most Authoritative Pet Magazine, 'PET'." It was a corporate account.

The contents of the personal message mentioned establishing a record in the archives for the pet that Fang Zhao had reared, Curly Hair.

"PET" had its own pet archives set up by their specialized teams. Pets that could establish a record in the PET archives were considered special.

Some people would think up all sorts of methods to get a record in the PET archives, because any pet in the PET archives would not have a low price and its reputation would increase. However, to reduce commercial hyping, PET had very strict requirements when selecting pets for their archives.

But while there were people willing to establish records in the archives for their pets, there were also people who were unwilling to do so. For example, people like Fang Zhao.

Previously, PET had contacted Fang Zhao numerous times. Not mentioning the contact they had made two years ago, just this April, when Fang Zhao had just returned, he had been contacted by them. However, then, Fang Zhao had given the excuse that he was preparing for his concert and had rejected them. Now, the moment after the concert had ended, PET had immediately sent their request.

Fang Zhao could also choose to reject them once again, but Curly Hair still had some reputation in the pet circles. Furthermore, the competitions in Muzhou had increased his status considerably. Continuing to hide and conceal it might have negative consequences. Looking at PET's modus operandi, if Fang Zhao continued to drag it on, they would persist in sending request after request.

Continued rejections would cause people to suspect that Fang Zhao was hiding something.

However, Fang Zhao did not agree to it immediately. He instead asked, "Are blood samples required for the archive records?"

Previously, Fang Zhao had asked some people and found out from that when a record was established for PET's archives, the PET staff would come and run some tests on the pets. However, Curly Hair was too special, and Fang Zhao needed to be somewhat prudent here.

The other party apparently seemed to have been waiting. After Fang Zhao sent the message out, he received an immediate reply.

"No, no, no! Please believe me, we have the reputation of being the world's most authoritative pet magazine. We wouldn't secretly take blood samples of any pet without their owner's permission! We won't even touch a strand of hair without explicit permission!"

Blood samples, hair, and other such things might contain too much information, and many pet owners were unwilling to let this information be divulged, especially certain high-value pets with gene defects. Owners absolutely did not want this information to be known to outsiders.

Even if the pet was healthy, owners were still unwilling to allow such samples. Therefore, when Fang Zhao had asked this question, the person over at PET had hurriedly guaranteed that they never ever did such things that infringed on the owner and pet's privacy and secrets. The checkups they did on pets were just for better records and an estimation of the value of the pet.

That's right, PET would make an estimation of a pet's value for its archives. These records would not remained unchanged either. Every year, PET would provide at most three free inspections for pets in the archives and then update a new record in the archives based on the pet's condition. A pet's value might also see changes.

When Curly Hair had won the championship in Muzhou for the first time, PET had already wanted to make a record, but Fang Zhao had been difficult to contact. When they had finally managed to reach out to Fang Zhao, he had rejected them. During that time, Fang Zhao had been investigating the videos taken from the black street and had discovered the strange circumstances surrounding their rebirth. He had not wanted Curly Hair's abnormalities to be known by even more people. Su Hou and the team could be considered insiders, but it would be difficult to say the same for PET. If PET investigated and found some issues, Fang Zhao would not be able to hide it.

When PET asked again in the second year, Fang Zhao had rejected them using military service as an excuse.

This year, PET still had not given up. This time, having gotten Fang Zhao's approval, people at PET were extremely excited.

"All right! Mr. Fang, thank you so much for giving us such an opportunity. During the checkup, you can supervise from the sides. May I ask when you will have time?"

"Today and the next two days are fine," Fang Zhao replied.

"You can choose a place to conduct the checkup, it can be at your home or you can bring your pet over to our Yanzhou branch. It's not too far away, just in Qi'an City."

"At home." Fang Zhao did not wish to send Curly Hair to PET's Yanzhou branch. They had to be more passive in another's domain, so choosing his own place would be better.

"Great. May I trouble you for your address? We will send someone down today. Please do not worry; PET was established 200 years ago and we have an excellent reputation. Under no circumstances will we take your pet's genetic information without permission."

After arranging matters, Fang Zhao was preparing to disconnect when he heard the other person say, "Please wait! Mr. Fang, we still want to ask you something. For your other pet, is it possible to establish a record for it in our PET archives?"

"The sea slug?" Fang Zhao asked.

"Yes, yes! That hybrid sea slug that you brought back from a foreign planet. May I ask whether you would permit our staff to make a record? Don't worry, our evaluating staff were transferred over from headquarters and are very professional. They have veterinary backgrounds and definitely will not harm it!"

In the past, these sorts of creatures carrying extraterrestrial genes could only be brought back to Earth after obtaining approval from research institutions. In recent years, these restrictions had been relaxed, but all sorts of certifications were required and there were many procedures that had to be cleared. Thus, even with the lessened restrictions, there were still very few people that raised pets with extraterrestrial genes.

PET also had their eyes on it because it was special due to its extraterrestrial genes.

Fang Zhao mulled it over and then replied, "Sure."

"Thank you so much for your trust in us! Our evaluating team will be immediately dispatched towards Yanzhou's Qi'an City. I will forward his information to you in a bit."

Two minutes later.

PET had decided on the team to be dispatched to Yanzhou.

Five people.

Two veterinarians, one specializing in handling dogs and the other in sea slugs, two professional archivists, and a cameraman. To guard against imposters, PET sent images of the five members, along with their work IDs and their contact details, to Fang Zhao.

PET headquarters were in MaErsizhou. The five of them boarded a flying transport in Mazhou and headed straight over.

Knowing that people would be coming over in the afternoon to make a record for Curly Hair, Zuo Yu and Yan Biao were very curious. They did not really know much about this field. Searching the internet, they had expected that Curly Hair's value would also be placed in the top three. However, when they saw the PET charts, the top 10 most valuable pets on the list had values above 100 million.

Placed first was a lion. It was rumored that, way back when, a laboratory had been trying to resurrect animals from the Old Era, this was among the five lions that had been successfully bred. The other four were all in a zoo over at Huangzhou. Only this one had been bought as a pet.

A person who could own a lion as a pet would definitely not be ordinary.

"Estimated value… 300 million? Just an Old Era lion is worth 300 million?!" Yan Biao found this inconceivable. Curly Hair could still take part in competitions, and his value was genuinely a result of his efforts in Muzhou. What about this first place? What could it do? How could it be worth 300 million just like that?

On the contrary, Zuo Yu did not find it hard to accept. "The rarer something is, the greater its value. There are only five in the entire world. Furthermore, there are regulations regarding the resurrection of Old Era animals, and there are quantity restrictions on these sorts of large wild beasts. Furthermore, from a commercial perspective, in order for it not to devalue, after the estimation, it can't undergo more appraisals. Meanwhile, Curly Hair is a dog. Regardless of how many championships he has won, he is still a dog, and dogs are not uncommon at all."

Yan Biao pointed at the water tank in Fang Zhao's study. "Then what about that? The 'rabbit' inside carries extraterrestrial genes, and its the only one of its kind in the

entire world! According to your criteria for evaluation, shouldn't it be five times that 300 million?"

Zuo Yu choked up. "This, I have no idea. These evaluators have their own criteria. How would I know how much they will estimate its worth?

# Chapter 273
# Extremely Fierce

In the afternoon, the five-member team arranged by PET arrived.

After displaying their ID cards and the verification information, the five had looks of eager anticipation on their face as they prepared to enter.

However, they were stopped by Zuo Yu and Yan Biao as soon as they stepped through the doorway.

Zuo Yu wore a polite and formal smile as he looked at the five who had just entered. "Sorry, can everybody open up their suitcases for a brief check?"

Yan Biao also had a solemn expression. Finally, they had some use as bodyguards. When strangers came to their boss's place, checking inventory was a must. Most people with status or fame would require the same.

Zuo Yu and Yan Biao had expected the five to show some dissatisfaction, yet the person in front did not show even a hint of hesitation and handed over the suitcase in his hands. "The passcode is 666!"

As soon as he handed over the suitcase, he did not even look at the two bodyguards and entered, throwing a radar-like gaze all around as if searching for something. "Little cutie, where are you, ahh~~."

Just like someone hoping to see their treasured darlings, his final syllable was dragged out.

Zuo Yu and Yan Biao both felt a chill across their back as goosebumps appeared on their arms. Especially at the floating "ahh~~" at the end. Yan Biao felt like hitting someone when he heard it.

If anyone in the outpost had dared to talk like that, he would have communicated with their faces using his fists. However, since this was not the military, he had to get used to it.

Twitching his mouth, Yan Biao cursed in his heart as he checked through the equipment that these people had brought and made sure they had not hidden any hidden cameras or any such items. However, he still placed 30% of his attention on the five people as they entered the house. Being cautious at every moment, maintaining their alertness, and guarding against people other than their boss were their duties as bodyguards.

Although the other four were slightly slower, they voluntarily put down and opened their suitcases. They had encountered these sorts of situations too often and had long ago gotten used to it.

The few of them curiously looked at Curly Hair, who had just run out from the study.

"This is that golden competition dog? Indeed, it isn't ordinary at all!"

One of them clicked her tongue in admiration. "Look at this fur! Look at those lively eyes, they are so pretty!"

Zuo Yu and Yan Biao, who were going through the contents of the suitcases, were bewildered. They had been with Fang Zhao for a long time and had seen Curly Hair for so long, even though he had the hallowed title of "Golden Competition Dog," it shouldn't be that exaggerated, right? These few were praising him straight in his face, but they also shouldn't do so blindly!

However, Curly Hair was not on friendly terms with these strangers and stood three steps away, baring his teeth and growling. This was a warning to the people who had come.

This was also not the first time these people had come into contact with dogs. They could tell the intentions of a dog from its actions, so they stood three steps away from Curly Hair and observed him from there.

Noticing that Fang Zhao had come out, the youth at the front put on a warm and amiable smile. "Good day, Mr. Fang. I'm Wa Kaning, the person in charge of the team here to help establish a record for the two pets at your home. You can also call me Wa Wa. This here is my partner, Muto. The rest are…"

Wa Kaning introduced his partner, who was also a vet, and the cameraman to Fang Zhao. After exchanging pleasantries, they wasted no time and immediately went straight to the main issue. To these people, nothing had more appeal than pets, even if

the person standing before them was a Yanzhou teen idol who was a hotly discussed topic and had been hogging the recent limelight.

"May I ask if we can start the recording?" Wa Kaning asked.

Fang Zhao did not know that Wa Kaning's assessment of him was "teen idol." Hearing the question, he nodded. "Sure."

"Can we get closer to examine him?" Wa Kaning meant that they needed to come into contact with the pet's body and hoped that the owner, Fang Zhao, would cooperate.

Fang Zhao made eye contact with Curly Hair, who was crouching, and said, "All right, he won't bite anyone now."

Not biting anyone now didn't mean that Curly Hair wouldn't bite humans any other time.

Wa Kaning and the others were considered old hands and could understand what Fang Zhao meant. Furthermore, they could judge from experience whether a dog would bite or not.

However, when they saw Curly Hair standing there obediently to cooperate with the examination, Wa Kaning and the others could not be bothered to think about anything else. Eyes gleaming, they carried the equipment case over and put on thin gloves.

Muto had already turned on an electronic board and had started recording information.

"Name, Curly Hair?" Wa Kaning looked at Fang Zhao. "Certain?"

Seeing Fang Zhao nod his head, Muto filled in that section of the form.

In their hearts, Wa Kaning and the few others did not approve of such an ordinary name. However, the person who decided a pet's name was its owner. Even if the few of them had any objections, they could only keep those objections to themselves.

Wa Kaning studied Curly Hair attentively while reporting the information that needed to be recorded. "Build, small."

Curly Hair's height, which slightly exceeded 40 centimeters, would barely have been

enough to be considered a medium-sized dog in the Old Era. However, in the New Era where the average height of dogs was over 80 centimeters, he could only be considered a small-sized dog. This was also the reason why people had not considered Curly Hair a sheep-herding dog when they had first seen him. In Muzhou, there were no fully grown sheep-herding dogs that were this small!

One of the reasons many Muzhou people felt ashamed was because, despite having so many sheep-herding dogs, they had all been crushed by this little thing.

Wa Kaning continued reporting the information. Some of the information was furnished by Fang Zhao. "Sex, male. Date of birth, unknown. Age, 3–5 years. Occupation, dog…"

After all, Curly Hair was a stray picked up from the black street, and there was a lot of information that was unknown. Although his age was unclear, test results taken in Muzhou back then could be used to give a rough estimate of his age, which did not exceed five. Human lifespans had increased in the New Era, as had the lifespans of dogs. A five-year-old dog was not considered middle-aged. Curly Hair was still considered young.

"Hobbies?" Wa Kaning asked Fang Zhao.

"Games," Fang Zhao replied.

Wa Kaning looked at the toy ball for dogs lying in the corner and understood. This was indeed a dog that loved to exercise. If this dog could not be herding sheep on the pastures, he could only play games with his owner every day. Perhaps frisbee, fetch, or other such small games?

Wa Kaning carefully extended his hand to touch the fur on Curly Hair's back while observing Curly Hair's mood and reaction. "Fur color…"

"Fur color? Gray. Unevenly distributed gray," Yan Biao answered. He thought to himself, Fur color ain't simple, and I can't see any regular patterns. It has a sort of a messy feel, but the wording I just used should sound quite refined, eh?

However, the five people from PET glanced at Yan Biao as though they were looking at a country bumpkin before minding their own business and continuing with the recording.

"Gradual layers of gray. The base layers are ash gray to silver. Back, ears, tail are covered by a darker shade of gray fur…"

Wa Kaning continued reporting the information for recording and Muto keyed the information into the electronic board. From the nose to the tip of the tail right down to the claws, everything was recorded down in detail.

Curly Hair was very cooperative. He stood up when he was required to and laid down when told to do so.

During this process, Wa Kaning's own evaluation was this: Considerably docile.

After a round of simple tests, Wa Kaning said, "Let's measure his bite strength."

Before setting out from headquarters, they had sent a chart to Fang Zhao. On it had been information and examination options that Fang Zhao could choose from according to what he approved and the equipment and instruments they could bring along. Now, the examination was in line with Fang Zhao's choices.

"The vet has checked his teeth already, but the bite-strength test will show the functionality and health of the mouth," Wa Kaning said as he brought took an instrument for testing bite strength out of his suitcase.

It looked like a little toy stick with a bone-shaped sensor at its head. The instrument also had a smell that made dogs excited.

Given the level of technology now, it was actually possible to get a rough estimate of a dog's bite strength just by examining the teeth. However, people from PET just lived to use these primitive methods—baiting the dog into biting so they could obtain data from the instrument's sensor.

When Wa Kaning was not looking, Fang Zhao made a "slow down" gesture, hinting that Curly Hair should show restraint.

Indeed, the sensor smell got Curly Hair all excited and he bit down on it immediately.

"Six hundred one kilograms!" Wa Kaning exclaimed in astonishment when he saw the figure.

There was shock on the others' faces as well.

A small pet dog with a bite strength of 601 kilograms?

Humans only had a bite strength of a few tens of kilograms. Larger pet dogs in the Old Era had had bite strengths roughly at or above 100 kilograms. However, during the Period of Destruction, because dog species had mutated and there had been changes to the environment, survival conditions had been much harsher and there had been dogs with bite strengths of 500 to 600, and sometimes even higher.

But 500 years had already passed since the end of the Period of Destruction. Even if the gene and lineage had continued, the environment had become peaceful and easy. Also, their sources of food had changed, and after 500 years, the average bite strength of dogs had already dropped to 200 to 300 kilograms. Other than dogs with certain occupational uses, it was very rare to see a dog that had a 600-kilogram bite strength.

And it was the first time such figures had been seen from a small domestic pet dog ever since PET had been established.

"Could it be that… there was an error in the test?" Muto asked.

Wa Kaning had a puzzled look on his face. "Wait a minute. Let me calibrate it first before testing once more." He remembered that he had calibrated the equipment before heading over, and the instruments did not have any problems. How could such a figure have appeared?

After calibrating, Wa Kaning chuckled as he faced Curly Hair. "Come, cutie, let's try it out once more."

Yan Biao, who was standing beside him, thought, Didn't he call Curly Hair "little cutie" when he first entered? What happened to the "little"?

When the instrument was raised up to Curly Hair's mouth, Curly Hair bit down on it. At the moment he bit down, an ominous glint flashed through his eyes.

Krrack!

A cracking sound came from the instrument, but it did not break. However, the display had been rendered unable to record any figures. The instrument had been broken by that bite.

The apartment was filled with the sound of exhaling.

The five of them were very clear on the quality of equipment their own company provided. Even though they had only brought over a low-level bite-strength instrument, "low level" did not mean its quality was poor. How much bite strength could it have taken to break the instrument?

Unless the instrument had already been broken to begin with?

But was that possible?

Saying that their PET equipment was defective was just like saying that Fiery Bird's game consoles were of poor quality!

Muto's face was rigid. He did not know how to record this. With this sort of bite strength that could damage the instrument, regardless of whether Curly Hair's teeth or muscles could withstand it, this strength alone made them feel terrified!

Wa Kaning wiped off the cold sweat on his forehead. At the moment when Curly Hair had bit down on the instrument, he had felt a chill across his body and hadn't been able to help but gulp. He had suddenly felt that he was too close to the dog.

As for the vet who had helped checked Curly Hair's mouth and teeth a moment ago, he felt goose bumps appear all over his arm as he shivered. His back felt clammy and he wriggled his fingers. Just now, when he had been examining Curly Hair's mouth, his fingers had even touched Curly Hair's teeth.

Although the instrument had been broken on the second test, in that short moment beforehand, Wa Kaning had seen the figure exceed 1000. However, before the figure had stabilized, the instrument had broken. With this sort of bite strength, if he were to bite down viciously, even placed in a group of sheep-herding dogs from Muzhou, he would be able to crush seven or eight large dogs as if they were playthings.

When they thought about Curly Hair taking part in two iterations of sheep-herding competitions, they could not help but sweat a little for those sheep and dogs of Muzhou. There had not been any news of bloody affairs over there, but had this dog really never bitten anybody before? Forget about sheep and dogs, even biting a person to death would be an easy feat. A human bone would be crushed in one mouthful. Luckily, Curly Hair was small. If he was larger, that would be even more dangerous!

"Then… are we still going to test again? I still have a spare sensor instrument in my case, but it is an old model and isn't for dogs, so it might not be that accurate," one of

the veterinarians said. Instruments not meant for dogs might not produce reliable figures and did not have the bite-inducing smell, so it was not known whether the dog would use so much force to bite it.

"He seems a little impatient," Wa Kaning said. He realized that Curly Hair seemed to really not like instruments, and the dog seemed to be a little moody. Could it be that Curly Hair did not like the smell? The people who had manufactured this equipment had even said that all dogs loved it. That was a lie!

Yan Biao and Zuo Yu exchanged glances and thought to themselves, Now he isn't even using "cutie." Has he been scared shitless?

Not just Wa Kaning and the people from PET—actually, Yan Biao and Zuo Yu had also gotten a scare today. They had also never known that Curly Hair could bite like that.

As for whether or not they should continue the test, the decision was in the hands of the owner, Fang Zhao. Wa Kaning and the others looked toward him.

The apartment fell silent.

Fang Zhao broke the silence. "Record the first test result. The figures from the second time were inconclusive."

"All right," Wa Kaning said.

Their objective was not clear-cut figures. As long as the first test's figures were real and the equipment had not been defective, that was more than enough. They wouldn't investigate further. They at PET had come across all sorts of strange, bizarre pets that could shock people. Thus, although Curly Hair did have shocking bite strength, thinking back to other occasions, it really wasn't a big deal.

If he wasn't special, how could he have caused waves in Muzhou and forced them to change the rules? How would he have gotten the nickname "Golden Competition Dog"?

Being extraordinary was expected.

Wa Kaning sighed deeply and made a gesture to Muto with his hands.

Muto gave a light sigh, shook his head and recorded ">600 kilograms" in the file and

typed "Extremely fierce!" in the remarks column.

# Chapter 274
# Ferocious Beasts Inside

After sorting out Curly Hair's file, Wa Kaning excitedly said, "Let's go see the other one!"

Although they had been a little intimidated by Curly Hair, they still had one other purpose for this trip, and it was something their compiling department considered important. This was the first case of a sea slug with extraterrestrial genes, so they would have to spend more time to carefully study it.

"Beautiful! It's so pretty!" Wa Kaning looked at the pure white "rabbit." It's external appearance actually seems quite different from the choppy-hair variety.

"After all, it has half choppy-hair genes. It is only natural for there to be some differences," Muto said.

Wa Kaning took out a pair of gloves from his case. "Begin." There were sensors on these gloves that would transmit all sorts of data when it came into contact with the sea slug.

Of course, there were other methods of examining it, but Wa Kaning's reason for choosing to use gloves to examine it was actually because he wanted to touch it personally.

Fang Zhao had already given them a copy of this sea slug's record, and the information on it was even more detailed. There was no need to ask much, but…

"What's its name?" Muto asked Fang Zhao when he saw the blank space there.

"Not yet named," Fang Zhao replied.

Fang Zhao's reply made Wa Kaning and the others dazed for a second. Generally, it was alright for owners of ornamental fishes or other ornamental aquatic pets to not give a name for their pets, but this sea slug before their eyes was the only one in the entire world. To the people from PET, this sea slug had a much higher value than Curly Hair

and it could even glow. How could it even be considered an ordinary ornamental pet?

"How about giving it a name? After all, it's the only one in the world," Wa Kaning suggested.

Fang thought about it. That made sense. This sea slug was actually rather smart, so giving it a name was not a bad idea.

"Call it Big White," Fang Zhao said.

Muto wasn't in favor of it. "It's so small—calling it Big White? A few days back, we went to make a record of a great white shark that had been successfully bred. The owner named that great white shark 'Big White'."

"Than how about Little White," Fang Zhao offered.

Now it was Wa Kaning who didn't approve. "It's so big yet you are calling it Little White? Although there are other such sea slugs this size, for the choppy-hair variety, it is already considered large. Even if it is an extraterrestrial variant of the choppy-hair variety, it is very big already."

Yan Biao's lips curled. Too much b*llshit! If you talk about size, the one in the water tank can be taken out and made into stew, unlike those native choppy-hair varieties that would barely be a morsel. However, Yan Biao was also very certain that if that actually happened, because this little thing was poisonous, he wouldn't even dare to eat it.

Actually, Wa Kaning wasn't finding fault. He was trying to get Fang Zhao to think about it more and give it a more classy name—not like Curly Hair, whose name sounded like it had been picked randomly!

A dog with a value more than 100 million being called "Curly Hair"? Just hearing it made their hearts ache.

Looking at the pure white ball of fluff that was the "rabbit," Wa Kaning felt his heart aching again. Rabbity is so cute, how can it have such a vulgar name?

But even if his heart ached, he did not have any other complaints. This was somebody else's pet, and the final decision was in the hands of the owner. Wa Kaning could only keep his objections to himself.

"Than call it Spiky Hare," Fang Zhao said.

Wa Kaning wanted to advise Fang Zhao to change the name again. This name sounded awkward, and people who did not know much would think that it came from the crossbreeding of a hedgehog and a hare. However, they had already denied two names previously, and if they were going to reject yet another name given by the owner, that would really be impolite.

Immediately, the room became quiet again.

"Wasn't there some sort of animal called a Spiky Hare in ancient stories?" Zuo Yu suddenly asked.

"That was Red Hare. 1 It was the name of a horse," Fang Zhao corrected.

"Right, the horse named Red Hare. Since a horse can be called 'hare,' then so can a sea slug! I feel that the name boss came up with is really great," Zuo Yu said.

Fang Zhao had originally wanted to explain, but after considering it, he felt there wasn't a need to waste his breath. He would let Zuo Yu read up on it himself after this matter was settled.

Yan Biao, who had been standing to the side, secretly thought to himself, Zuo Yu, this *ss-kisser!

Yan Biao thought back to his first day on the job as a bodyguard. On that day, Zuo Yu had spoken to him. "A qualified bodyguard need not be smart, but he definitely needs to be devoted. It's simple, really: whatever the boss says is absolutely right!"

Thinking back, Yan Biao shuddered internally. He immediately seconded what Zuo Yu had said. "Well said! The 'hare' in its name doesn't have to mean it is a hare. The 'spiky' in its name doesn't have to mean it is a hedgehog. Calling it Spiky Hare gives it a really profound image. I also feel that it is really great!" If the boss called it a hare, then it shall be called a hare. Furthermore, it looked like a hare anyway.

Wa Kaning looked at them disdainfully. These two bodyguards are just lackeys!

Noticing Muto looking over, Wa Kaning bit down and nodded. So be it. Spiky Hare it shall be. What else could they do?

Watching the name being recorded down, Wa Kaning stared at the water tank, sighing in his heart. Oh darling, this is all I can help you with. At least you don't have to share a name with a great white shark.

"What hobbies does it have?" Muto asked Fang Zhao.

"Eating," Fang Zhao replied.

Muto asked again. "Er… do you have any additional things to add?"

"It can eat a lot."

“…Got it."

Having settled on a name, Muto looked through the information Fang Zhao had furnished and proceeded to update the record. As for Wa Kaning, he was preparing to touch the sea slug and have the sensors on his gloves obtain some data.

Putting on the gloves and checking there were no problems and they were not leaking, he extended his hands into the water tank. In a bit, he would be touching the first ever hybrid sea slug with extraterrestrial genes in the entire world. Wa Kaning was overwhelmed with emotions as he kept his gaze firmly fixed on that sea slug.

Fang Zhao warned him once more. "It is very poisonous. You have to be careful."

"Trust us, we are professionals. This time, I'm even wearing extra-thick gloves, and the sensors have been upgraded. Our preparations are sufficient, don't worry…”

Wa Kaning had not even finished speaking when he felt a sharp pain in his palm.

"Ahhh!" Wa Kaning shouted.

A series of beeping warnings sounded from the gloves, but everything had happened too quickly. Wa Kaning hadn't even had time to react before he had been affected by the venom.

Wa Kaning quickly withdrew his hand out of the water tank before removing his gloves, and he found his entire palm was swollen like a bear's paw.

Muto couldn't be bothered recording down the information. Watching Wa Kaning's

hand that had rapidly swelled up before his very eyes, he nearly screamed like a chicken.

"Doctor! I've been poisoned!" Wa Kaning wailed.

The other vet in the party, who was a sea slug specialist and was meant to provide treatment for anyone stung by one, had already reacted quickly and taken out all sorts of antidotes and diagnostic equipment.

When Wa Kaning had just taken off the gloves, only his palm had been swollen. Now, it had extended to his entire arm.

Wa Kaning's entire body was trembling uncontrollably. "I… I don't need… an amputation, do I?" Every word that came out of his mouth seemed like it was falling apart. All he felt was a painful burning sensation in his entire arm, and his palm had gone completely numb.

As the vet was checking on Wa Kaning's arm, Yan Biao calmly answered, "No need, it's not life-threatening. Spraying some medicine on it will cure the swelling after a while."

"After a while?" Wa Kaning was ashen faced. Whether it was from the poison or because he was scared sh*tless, nobody knew.

Muto and the others wore looks of surprise as well. They knew that the medicine used to counteract the toxins from the choppy-hair variety would normally reduce the swelling immediately. Now, they were told that it would need a while?

How long was "after a while"?

How many minutes? How many hours?

Wa Kaning was apprehensive. "Is it really… really alright?"

The vet spoke. "It's fine." Although it was unknown how long Wa Kaning would take to recover, they could at least confirm that it wasn't serious. It just looked terrifying.

Muto was puzzled. "Didn't you wear extra-thick gloves? How was it still able to pierce through? Furthermore, the toxicity is too high. Is it normally fed with venomous feed?"

"Mr. Fang, can we see what this sea slug eats?" the vet asked.

"Sure." Fang Zhao took out the box of feed from the cupboard below and handed it over. "It doesn't contain toxins."

The Vet's smile seemed a little awkward. "I know, I'm not suspecting you." Actually, he also knew that there wouldn't be a problem with the feed and that the reason was most likely because of its extraterrestrial genes. Its toxicity would not be the same as the choppy-hair variety they were familiar with.

As if he had realized something, the vet asked, "According to the rumors, when it was still on planet Baiji, a bodyguard of Leizhou's senior master Zaro was stung by it?"

"That happened," Fang Zhao replied.

The vet nodded his head. Looking at things today, it seemed like they had lucked out. If he had not worn such thick gloves or if Fang Zhao had not been feeding it this sort of mild feed but something more toxic, he reckoned that Wa Kaning would not only have a swollen arm, his life might even be in danger!

Wa Kaning opened his mouth to say something but decided to swallow his words. He made a gesture to Muto with his healthy arm. Muto added a remark to the file: "HD."

In their archives, "HD" was an abbreviation for "Highly Dangerous."

As for the vet, he held up the pair of gloves that had been pierced, his heart filled with layers of doubts.

How had these gloves meant for specialized use been so easily pierced? Watching from the side, the "hairs" of the sea slug in the water tank looked rather soft. Only at the moment when Wa Kaning had touched it had the hairs stood up. And at the point where it had triggered its defense mechanism, it had expressed some offensive intent.

But still, it shouldn't have pierced through the gloves. Why exactly had that happened?

"Mr. Fang, normally, when you interact with it, what sort of gloves do you wear?" the vet asked.

Fang Zhao took out a pair of gloves from the cupboard below. These were the sort of ordinary gloves sold at ornamental aquatic pet stores. Fang Zhao had asked Spiky Hare's breeder, Professor Denzel, before and been told that these gloves were usable, but only limited to him. Fang Zhao had also mentioned this to Wa Kaning.

Wa Kaning felt wronged. He had dropped some of his vigilance after seeing those gloves of Fang Zhao's. Fang Zhao's gloves were so thin, while theirs were especially thick and should have provided 100% protection. Unfortunately, they had still been pierced!

The vet examined the pair of gloves that Wa Kaning had taken off, examined the fine and tiny holes in it that were hard to detect, and did not understand at all. Finally, all he could conclude was that it probably had something to do with the sea slug's extraterrestrial genes.

No wonder many extraterrestrial breeds were so tightly regulated. They were really dangerous!

On the file of Spiky Hare, Muto added an "Extremely Dangerous" behind the "HD."

Ten minutes later.

Wa Kaning could feel sensations in his palm again, but his entire arm still remained swollen. As before, the burning pain remained. All they could do was increase the speed of the recording process and not ask too many unnecessary questions.

After the cameraman had snapped a few photos, the five of them bade their farewells. They still had to rush to the hospital. Wa Kaning's arm still needed thorough medical aid and other sorts of medicine. Delaying it for too long would not end well.

"In our next edition of PET, we will have an estimation of the two pets you own. Do remember to look out for it, Mr. Fang."

Before leaving, Wa Kaning stopped as he was stepping out and turned to talk to Fang Zhao. "Mr. Fang, I suggest you put a sign outside your door to warn others. Generally, for houses that contain pets that are extremely dangerous, it's best to remind your surrounding neighbors or visitors so as to avoid any unnecessary incidents. When you bring Curly Hair out, you must remember to leash him, and the leash must be the most sturdy kind."

Fang Zhao accepted Wa Kaning's suggestions.

After the few of them left, Fang Zhao pasted a sign outside his door that read: "Ferocious beasts inside, please keep away unless invited!"

# Chapter 275
# Global Pet Value Chart

The warning sign had been put up. As for whether people believed it or not, Fang Zhao wasn't too bothered.

Back in Muzhou, the veterinarians there had only examined the health and condition of the sheep-herding dogs, not bite strength, so all along, nobody had known about it. This time, PET had measured it, and this was within Fang Zhao's plans.

Fang Zhao had seen the option of measuring bite strength and, after consideration, had selected it. In the future, when he brought Curly Hair out, Curly Hair's strong bite would be revealed one day, so instead of hiding, he would use PET to put it out in the open.

In normal daily life, most of the time, Curly Hair did not exhibit a biting strength too different from a normal dog's, a far cry from the readings PET had taken. During the examination, Fang Zhao had specifically spoken to Curly Hair about it and gestured with hands just before the test. Unfortunately, the smell on PET's instrument had been too stimulating, and when Curly Hair got excited, he couldn't control his bite well.

But 600 kilograms was already a restrained result.

This result was good enough.

After sending Wa Kaning and the others out, Fang Zhao let Yan Biao and Zuo Yu return to rest. Fang Zhao called Curly Hair over to his study for lessons. Curly Hair still had a lot to improve on—such as not being able to restrain himself well enough today.

Elsewhere, Wa Kaning and the others who had just gotten out of hospital flew straight back to PET headquarters.

Midjourney, Wa Kaning received a call from his superior.

"Did it go smoothly?" the person on the other end asked.

"I… guess you could say so," Wa Kaning replied.

"Don't 'I guess' me. Sounds like you people encountered some difficulty? Was Fang Zhao not cooperative? He didn't let you examine too much? Tell me you at least managed to get the most basic tests? The records for the archive can't be too simple."

"Fang Zhao was very helpful with our work, but those two pets of his…"

"Hmmm?"

"Extremely fierce."

There was a short period of silence from the other end.

How fierce could they get?

In the pet community, many times, "extremely fierce" and "extremely adorable" meant the same thing.

When recalling what those two pets Fang Zhao owned looked like, after the momentary silence, the other party laughed and said, "Understood."

Wa Kaning was stirred up. "No, Boss, you don't understand!" His arm that had just had medicine reapplied started hurting again. It hurt so much that his face twisted in pain. "Boss, what I said, I meant it literally! They really are super ferocious! Especially scary! If you don't believe me, you can see for yourself in the files I'm going to send over. If you read them, you will understand."

To not infringe on the privacy of the owner's home, they were not permitted to have any hidden cameras and they had to show the owner all their recording equipment. Every video and photo they took had been shown to Fang Zhao for vetting. Thus, they did not have a lot of photographic evidence. However, the record for the archives was there. Wa Kaning immediately sent the files over to his superior. He also took and sent a photograph of his pig-foot-like arm.

A short while later, the other party finally replied with just a "You have worked hard!"

"This time, I put my life on the line for the archive records. I was just discharged from the hospital after receiving a huge scare. Only a salary raise can console me!" Wa Kaning said seriously.

The other party pretended to be dead.

PET headquarters. Having received the files Wa Kaning sent over, the team of experts started to work on the valuation of the two pets newly added to the archives.

When they saw the copies of the two records, all the experts simultaneously raised an eyebrow.

"Seems like these two are both really extraordinary!"

"The charts are going to change," a specialist from the team said as he looked through Curly Hair's record and came up with a preliminary valuation using his own wealth of experience.

"This sea slug's value will not be low either. After all, it carries some extraterrestrial genes. Considering this, it will be superior, but it is still disadvantaged."

Pets with extraterrestrial genes were not valued lowly, as they were rare and people were curious about these sorts of things.

But the valuation also wouldn't be excessively high. This was a silent rule within the industry. There were policies restricting this so as to prevent commercial organizations from promoting extraterrestrial genes, which would cause a lot of trouble. Thus, even if their speculated commercial value was very high, they would try their best to lower it.

"What a strong bite Curly Hair has…"

Someone joked, "Could it be that it had plenty of rich experiences in the black street, causing it to revert back to the manner of its ancestors?"

What he meant was that this dog had reverted to the form of its ancestors from the Period of Destruction. Many dogs during that period had had bite strengths of 400 to 500 kilograms, and there had also been some with bite strengths exceeding 600 kilograms.

However, they did not spend time speculating this. All they needed to do was make use of the data and information and analyze different aspects before giving it a final valuation.

"We have to properly analyze this Fang Zhao too," someone else said.

What had that got to do with pets?

Only with a "person" would there be "pets."

In the end, they still had to look at the owner.

The people of PET loved this saying from the Old Era: " When a man achieves the Dao, his poultry and dogs rise to Heaven." 1

A owners background, status, value, and operations would all influence the valuation of a pet.

As of now, Fang Zhao's status had been on the uprise, especially after the concert. Not only had his reputation increased, his concert pieces copyrights had all been sold for high prices. These caused everyone to see Fang Zhao in a new light.

Besides this, their estimations would also depend on the pet's own commercial ability. Being named a "golden competition dog," Curly Hair's nickname spoke for itself.

Thus, Curly Hair's valuation would surely be even higher than the previous year.

"All right, everyone take three days to finalize the valuations for these two. We will post them up next week."

One week later.

The new issue of PET e-magazine was published.

There were many people subscribed to PET across the world. Some pet stores would also subscribe to it and display the publications on screens within their shops for customers to see. Those that were more scheming would place these screens outside the door to make even more people halt.

"Eh? Isn't that youngster on the cover someone who was talked about a lot on the internet a while back?"

On receiving the new issue of PET e-magazine, many people realized that the person on the cover seemed a little familiar. When they took a look at the name, they came to

an understanding.

"That Fang Zhao from Yanzhou?"

"Right, I remember now. That little fella that sold quite a number of rights from his concert. That dog is his."

"Isn't the dog on the cover the one that won the Most Valuable Dog award for the sheep-herding competition in Muzhou two years straight?"

"Isn't that rabbit the sea slug rumored to carry extraterrestrial genes?"

On the cover of the new issue, Fang Zhao sat leisurely on his sofa in his home clothes. A Diting series earpiece was hanging loosely around his neck. Curly Hair was lying down to the side and a special water tank was placed on the table in front of him. Inside the tank was a pure-white sea slug that looked like a rabbit.

The sunlight shining in through the windows and his home clothes gave off a warm hue, making Fang Zhao seem much softer.

In that pose, Curly Hair had curbed any form of fierceness and was sitting obediently looking at the camera lens. Those eyes of his looked pure and innocent. His combed curly fur seemed to have a metallic glow under the sunlight, displaying an air of nobility.

The "rabbit" inside the water tank looked like a spongy peach suspended in the water. Anyone looking at it would feel like giving it a pinch.

The entire photograph seemed peaceful and vibrant.

In the words of Yan Biao, the cameraman and other production staff had worked overtime to package it. Even disheveled fur could project an air of nobility.

People who subscribed to PET focused on the two pets newly added to the archives.

Everyone looking at the cover felt that "These are two really cute pets!"

And when they turned the page and saw the files of these two pets, everyone's reaction was "Impossible!"

The records provided were just brief and simple ones that only furnished the most basic information. Other information such as bite strength and toxicity were not published.

But the "Extremely Fierce" in the remarks was especially conspicuous.

"Extremely Fierce?"

Looking at the photograph of Curly Hair attached to it before returning to look at the cover page, everyone understood.

"Hahahaha!"

"In the pet community, many times it has the same meaning as 'extremely cute'!"

"How fierce can this dog even be? If he were really fierce, he wouldn't have herded sheep. Did the people at PET make a mistake? In any case, I don't believe this!"

"Surely the people at PET did it intentionally."

"That rabbit sea slug's remarks are 'extremely fierce' and 'highly dangerous.' What does that mean?"

But in no time, everyone's attention shifted.

"Curly Hair is estimated to be worth 210 million?!"

"The sea slug Spiky Hare is valued at 80 million?!"

"This valuation is really high, right?"

"The estimated valuation by PET's team of experts shouldn't result in an overestimation."

"Forget about that hybrid sea slug with extraterrestrial genes—after all, it is the only one of its kind here on Earth—but how did Curly Hair's valuation swell again? Wasn't his value only 100-plus million back then?"

"I thought that Curly Hair's value would drop when he left Muzhou. I didn't expect it to rise again!"

"We humans can't even compare with that dog!"

"Could the reason be because of Fang Zhao?"

"Whatever the case, the team of experts from PET surely have their own reasoning."

"The chart has changed!"

When the chart was mentioned, subscribers of PET immediately turned straight to the last page. On it was the new value rankings of pets from all over the world. It was different from before. Curly Hair's value of 210 million had vaulted him to fifth place!

This issue also talked about the story of Curly Hair, from the start when Curly Hair had been picked up in the black streets to when he had joined Dongshan Farm to participate in the sheep-herding competition. These had all been taken from an account by Fang Zhao and worked on by the editing team to embellish it and make the story more interesting so that readers would be more captivated.

"To think it really came from the black streets! I thought that everyone was joking about it!"

"This Fang Zhao is just too lucky. He picked up 200 million just like that!"

As this involved Fang Zhao, Yanzhou's media outlets were stirred up and reported it vigorously. In any case, Curly Hair was a Yanzhou dog and had charged straight into the top 10 of PET's value chart. There was only one animal in the top 10 from Yanzhou—of course it had to be reported!

Thus, in news notifications that were sent out, Fang Zhao appeared in the headlines again. Although the focus was on Fang Zhao's two pets, as the owner, Fang Zhao was noticed by everyone.

People who lived in the black street where Fang Zhao had once stayed always had the same feelings when they saw news about Curly Hair: regret!

In the New Era, even if a dog did not look good or if its fur color was unappealing, as long as it was a large or miniature, there would be people willing to take it in. But Curly Hair's height of 40 centimeters was larger than miniature and far off from being large. He could not even be compared to a medium-sized dog, so nobody had been willing to take him in. In the state he had been in back then, even after washing and tidying him

up, there would still have been no takers.

Back then, when many people had seen Fang Zhao pick up the dog, behind his back, they had even said, "He can't even fend for himself and he wants to keep a dog?"

What had happened in the end?

After Fang Zhao had left the black street, these people had seen that stray dog's value rise to 100 million in a year. It was as if a rocket had been strapped to the dog's back. Last year, he had achieved a value of over 100 million, and this year, it had risen to 210 million! Curly Hair had vaulted straight into the top five of the global pet value chart!

For most people, 210 million was just a fabled figure!

Furthermore, according to the expert analysis in the latest issue of PET, if Fang Zhao's status rose in the future, perhaps Curly Hair's value would follow as well and rise further.

Comparing this, the sea slug Spiky Hare's value of 80 million was less prolific, but it was also being discussed by quite a number of people.

Currently, Spiky Hare's breeder Denzel was cultivating krill on planet Wai's polar ocean. When he saw the news, his vision faded and he clutched his chest, pain written all over his face.

The assistant beside him saw this and immediately asked, "What's wrong?!"

"I wanna jump into the ocean!" Denzel was filled with immeasurable regret, and he pulled his hair in frustration. Why had he sold that precious bunny back then!

Denzel's expression had changed. A few assistants nervously watched this boss of theirs, afraid that he would not think things through and would really jump into the ocean.

"Do you guys think I should start a new project and continue breeding sea slugs?" Denzel asked.

"You are earning quite a lot from cultivating krill."

"Yes, Boss, our krill cultivation is doing rather well."

"Teacher, are you talking about breeding that sort of sea slug that you sold to Fang Zhao? Let's not talk about the difficulty about breeding it first, and let's put aside the some of the unsolved technical problems. Even if we are able to breed them on a large scale, the policies for pets with extraterrestrial genes are always changing. Right now, the rules are gradually being relaxed, but what if? What if, in the future, the regulations tighten? Wouldn't we lose out big time?"

Denzel could understand where his assistant was coming from. Back then, he had given up on breeding sea slugs with extraterrestrial genes, as the technical difficulty had just been too hard, the rate of success had been extremely low, and lots of money had been spent without results. Also, policies had been in place back then preventing people who were not researchers from owning pets with extraterrestrial genes, so it had been really difficult to sell them.

Furthermore, as his assistants had said, planet Wai's conditions for krill breeding were very good. His company was also making huge profits, and it just wasn't worthwhile for them to take the risk and dabble in other stuff. Whether other people would research this, he shouldn't get involved.

Although, deep down, he felt something wasn't right when he saw this news, Denzel quickly accepted the facts. In any case, Fang Zhao had also helped him pull some strings and obtain a suitable body of water for cultivating krill in planet Wai's oceans.

"Forget it, it's been sold off already. Just take it that the little fella got lucky!"

The subscriptions for PET's latest issue increased, and the entire editorial department was happy, all except for Wa Kaning.

Despite one week of rest, the swelling in Wa Kaning's arm had not yet completely subsided, and he still felt pain just from moving it slightly. Today, he went to the office, enlarged the current issue's cover page and printed a copy before pasting it on the wall in his own office. After that, he picked up a pen and wrote a large word beneath Curly Hair. "Scary." Then, he went over to the 'rabbit' and also wrote "Scary" below it.

Wa Kaning wanted to constantly remind himself and his colleagues that these two pets really belonged to the extremely dangerous category! Extreme caution was needed if anyone should encounter these two! Appearances could be deceiving!

After finishing, Wa Kaning had intended to keep the pen when his gaze paused on the

image of Fang Zhao.

The warm hues brought about a soft and gentle vibe to the photograph. This Fang Zhao person also looked like a gentle artistic youth with a harmless character.

However, in this photo, there was actually great danger all around!

The dog with the devastating bite, Curly Hair, and the extremely toxic sea slug that would assault without a moment's notice, was Fang Zhao really as harmless as he looked?

Thinking back to what he had seen when he had recently searched for information pertaining to Fang Zhao, Wa Kaning hesitated. To be able to garner meritorious deeds on planet Baiji, shoot terrorists dead, and get promoted to a reserve duty major, how harmless could he be?

Considering it further, Wa Kaning picked up his pen and wrote two large words under Fang Zhao's image: "Extremely Scary"!

# Chapter 276
# We Meet Again

While people outside were discussing Fang Zhao's insanely valued pets, Fang Zhao wasn't really paying attention to this matter. Instead, he was asking around for news about the revolutionary film project.

However, this morning, he received a call. Someone was coming to visit.

The Interplanetary Fund's film department liaison Joseph had called on Fang Zhao's Yanzhou residence using the address Fang Zhao had given him.

Standing in front of the door, Joseph stared at the sign that read "Ferocious beasts inside, please keep away unless invited!" He recalled a piece of news about pets he had seen recently and wondered whether the sign was being serious or meant as a joke.

Having spent more than 10 seconds yet not understanding, Joseph decided to not think about it further. After all, the focus of his visit wasn't Fang Zhao's pets. Furthermore, he had informed Fang Zhao beforehand, so he didn't count as "uninvited."

Putting on a smile to fit the occasion, Joseph pressed the doorbell.

The door opened.

"We meet again, Mr. Fang." Joseph still had the manners of an elite, but compared to the previous time they had met, his inner haughtiness had dissipated rather considerably.

The previous time, at planet Baiji's outpost, Joseph had suffered a blow. After that, taking into account the matter of the consultant team, the news from the concert a short while back, and the purpose of today's visit, Joseph naturally did not appear too arrogant.

"This must be little Curly Hair, who has a value of over 200 million?" Joseph looked at the curly-haired dog that had run out from a room, took its measure, and chuckled.

"He's really cute."

Although that was what he said, Joseph had no intention of getting close to Curly Hair.

Curly Hair's gaze followed the stranger, but because Fang Zhao was here, he also knew that it was a guest and so would not show any obvious hostility. However, in his heart, besides Fang Zhao, Curly Hair would remain vigilant against any other living creature that stepped foot into his territory.

Although the eyes of Curly Hair fixated on Joseph seemed clear and innocuous, Joseph knew that dog's eyes could tell lies too. Their pupils were very large, making people think they were innocuous, but that was a deception.

Joseph didn't particularly like dogs. Therefore, whether this dog was dangerous or not, he would keep his distance. After looking at those eyes, he didn't bother with Curly Hair anymore.

Today, he was here representing the Interplanetary Fund to give Fang Zhao an invitation.

Although Fang Zhao's status within the professional music industry still wasn't that high yet, Fang Zhao's musical style was very suitable for the opening of the revolutionary film project.

"The music team of 'Founding Era' has already been established. We at the Interplanetary Fund think very highly of Mr. Fang's works. Thus, we wish to invite you to the 'Founding Era' music team," Joseph said.

"Founding Era." That was the series name of the revolutionary film project, which would definitely trend sometime in the near future across the world and every single continent.

The "Founding Era" people of the New Era spoke of was the time between the Period of Destruction and the New Era. It referred to the short time period after the Period of Destruction before the New Era had officially come into existence.

The main objective of the revolutionary project was to tell the stories of events and incidents that happened in the later stages of the Period of Destruction, all the way to the founding of the New Era.

As he was a member of the consultant team, Fang Zhao knew which stories were in the script. The plot of the revolutionary film project, "Founding Era," would tell the story up to the conferment of the great generals. Because what came after the great generals had been conferred was the New Era.

The Interplanetary Fund valued Fang Zhao highly and had reasons for inviting him to the music project team. Other than the fact that his musical style was deemed appropriate enough, there was one other reason: Fang Zhao was a member of the consultant team. He knew how the plot would develop and details of the story line and had a deeper understanding of the characters. Thus, it would be easier for him to produce compositions that fit.

Of course Fang Zhao accepted this invitation. He was delighted to receive such a request.

"I will do my utmost," Fang Zhao replied.

Even if he did not receive payment, Fang Zhao would still be willing to compose pieces for this film project. For the stories and people of this time period, Fang Zhao's sentiments were even more profound.

"Since Mr. Fang understands the storyline, you can compose a few pieces first. When the time comes, perhaps some of your works might be selected," Joseph told him.

What these words meant was this: Since you have already seen the script, if you have the inspiration, you can start composing first. As for whether it will be selected then, there are no guarantees.

Fang Zhao understood perfectly what he meant.

This was exactly the same as when Fiery Bird had first looked for him to request a piece for the game. When they had first collected some works, there had been no guarantees that any would be chosen.

Having delivered the invitation and signed the contract, Joseph's assignment this round was completed and he got up to leave. He still had other matters to attend to.

After Joseph left, Fang Zhao sat on the sofa, mulling over stuff.

Naturally, he would grab this opportunity. Whether his works would be selected or

not, as long as he had inspiration, he would compose.

However, Fang Zhao was still pondering another matter.

"The actors for a few important roles in 'Founding Era' have not been decided yet.

Lots of news agencies were chasing the wind and clutching at straws, but news that had actual value were few and far between.

However, until the last moment when the contract was signed, anything could happen. Therefore, as long as an actor had been in the industry for long enough, those experienced ones would remain prudent and not divulge anything at the slightest bit of progress. Otherwise, if ultimately they did not get selected or they were squeezed out by somebody else at the last moment, it would just be a slap in the face.

At this moment, with competition from all parties, among the leading roles, only two had been decided. As for the others, rumors were floating about all day, but nobody could be certain whether they were true or false, just a smokescreen, or perhaps some firm's hype operation. However, looking at the current circumstances as well as what was being talked about in the consultant team's discussion platform, at least half of those remaining lead roles would be decided in October.

Due to technological advancements, the time it took to produce a film series had been shortened, but to ensure quality, after this project was started, there wouldn't be a rush to start filming. The criteria for selecting actors this time around was particularly stringent. There were many candidates for every single leading role, and every candidate had a rather long trial period. Perhaps there was no news yet as the candidates had not completed the trial period. Perhaps after the trial periods were over, there would be an outcome.

He wanted to try out for the role of "Fang Zhao," but unfortunately, for a few important roles, there was absolutely no information about auditions.

The reason why Fang Zhao wanted to try out acting was entirely because of this Fang Zhao role. For this role that was just like the roles for the other founding generals, there was simply no information about auditions. Even if he wanted to fight for the role, he had no idea where to go. However, this time, it all depended on one's own ability.

Over at Silver Wing, the company had limited ability, and each of their respective

actors and actresses had to employ their own methods and capability to fight for roles.

Fang Zhao looked at the month's summary of information in his hands. His fingers tapped on a name. If he wished to get a chance, he would have to start from this individual.

August 18. Fiery Bird's Yanzhou branch organized an event.

Fang Zhao had also spoken with the people from the Yanzhou branch and found out that this distinguished guest had been invited and would even be handing out awards, not just making an appearance.

This time, the Yanzhou branch had organized a half-year award ceremony. That meant to say that from Memorial Day in January till July, according to statistical data, this ceremony was to award outstanding individuals or teams that had performed well in this half-year leaderboard

There were similar activities in each continent to stimulate the enthusiasm of gamers. After all, a year's time was too long. Many amateurs and fans would not have the patience to wait a full year.

Zuo Yu and Yan Biao were also wearing solemn-looking black suits. Looking in the mirror, they felt like they were especially imposing. Further putting on a pair of shades, they seemed to especially have the auras of bodyguards!

"How come I have never felt like I was this cool in the past?"

Yan Biao stared at his reflection in the mirror. When they reached Fiery Bird's Yanzhou branch building, he wiped the smile off his face and put on an icy-cold expression in a flash. He had switched to bodyguard mode.

Since he had become a bodyguard, this was the first time he had experienced such a situation. The concert previously hadn't counted, as he had arrived earlier to make preparations and simply had not needed to undergo the experience of walking through a crowd of media reporters and fans.

The car came to a halt at the drop-off point that Fiery Bird had temporarily set up. There was a pathway here leading to the venue.

Today, Fang Zhao was not wearing the same team uniform as the gaming team but,

rather, an outfit that Fiery Bird had tailored specifically for him. It carried the Diting pattern, but the Polar Light tree emblem was still emblazoned on his breast.

Fiery Bird wanted to let him be the impetus for this series. If results were good, they might possibly expand the Diting series.

At the moment when Fang Zhao stepped out of the car, a loud roar emerged from all directions. There were too many people shouting and screaming and it all converged into a hubbub.

Although he was prepared, Yan Biao was still startled for a second. Isn't Boss no longer gaming professionally? Why are these bunch having such a reaction?

Yan Biao had never experienced that time, so he could not understand the fanatical attitudes of gamers. On the other hand, Zuo Yu found it acceptable.

Until now, among "Battle of the Century" gamers, whether professional or amateur, the only person who could be called a god and still maintained a stable position was Fang Zhao!

Although there might be debates on the global scale, in Yanzhou, for the majority of gamers here, Fang Zhao was just a god-tier player.

Furthermore, the members of SilverWing50PolarLight's team had publicly admitted that without Fang Zhao, they would not have seen this day. As a result, Fang Zhao's status had once more been lifted higher.

Furthermore, given the events in the past two years, most gamers felt that the halo around Fang Zhao's body was even brighter. Even if Fang Zhao was no longer in the professional gaming circles, his legacy still lived on.

This event would be broadcast live online, and the members of SilverWing50PolarLight who were en route were also watching Fang Zhao make his appearance.

There were both veterans and newcomers in the team transport arranged by Silver Wing.

"Boss Fang has already arrived!"

"So many people!"

"It's my first time participating in this sort of event. I'm so nervous!'

Two newcomers that had just signed with Silver this year were talking and sharing their thoughts as budding new talents that had just entered the industry.

"This is just a branch event. Wait till you guys go to the Fiery Bird Annual Gala. Let's see whether you freeze up from head to toe then," Schwarzer said. He was already considered a senior in the team.

Hearing Schwarzer say this, the newcomers started asking about previous Fiery Bird Annual Galas. Schwarzer loved talking and explained all this stuff to the newcomers.

Beside him, Jake abruptly said, "I heard that besides being invited as an honored guest, Boss Fang will be conferring an award."

The atmosphere in the room became silent. Even Schwarzer was keeping his mouth shut.

Dorrian added the finishing blow. "In the last half of the year, I think we haven't received any important awards."

Although the half-year region awards could not be compared to awards from the headquarter's annual gala, an award was still an award. Within Yanzou, it still had a sizeable influence. Anyone could see this just by seeing those fans outside Fiery Bird's Yanzhou branch tower.

But look at them now.

Newcomer award?

Nope.

Other sorts of individual awards?

Probably none either.

There might be a team award, but it was too close for comfort. Speaking about it was embarrassing.

"Later on, during the awards ceremony, do you think Boss Fang will flip out if he sees

that we didn't win an award?" someone asked.

"He wouldn't go that far, right?" Schwarzer said apprehensively.

Back then, it had been Fang Zhao who had brought them over and imparted skills and knowledge to them. Now, though?

Just like a master being invited to a large-scale event and finding out that not a single one of his own apprentices would be among the people to be commended, wouldn't it be very disgraceful?

Thinking about this, everyone in the transport felt their previous enthusiasm dissipating.

"Captain, what should we do?" a newcomer asked Jinro, who was sitting at the front.

Jinro pondered a little before answering, "Just maintaining our lovable selves should do.

# Chapter 277
# Esteemed Guest Award Presentation

Before the event officially began, the people present could roam freely in the reception hall.

When SilverWing50PolarLight, also known as "SilverLight" in the gaming circles, entered, many eyes turned toward them. Generally, they were more flamboyant, partly due to how young they were on average, and were considered to be much more vivacious. In the past two years, the team's reputation had kept rising.

Within the team, Jinro and the other veteran members had been here so many times that they did not feel any unease.

On the contrary, the eyes of those newcomers were shimmering as they looked at the exhibitions all around. However, they still remembered what Jinro had said, and to avoid being lectured, they had to remain lovable.

In the reception hall, other than professional e-sports athletes, there were some lucky fans that had won a chance to be here through a Fiery Bird raffle and some amateur gamers who had performed exceptionally well and had received invitations. These two groups had even more acute reactions, and their eyes were on the verge of popping out as they got to see all the memorabilia and old machines while they were busy looking for their idols to get autographs.

All of Yanzhou's big e-sports teams were present too.

The organizing team had specifically arranged a place for Fang Zhao so as to facilitate him interacting with fans, signing autographs, taking photos, and talking about his gaming experiences.

SilverLight's members did not go over. First, there were too many people over there, and second, they were too ashamed to go over. They were afraid of getting reprimanded. In the past half a year, they had indeed slacked off. This was an undeniable fact that could be easily seen from the statistics.

After the SilverLight team entered the large reception hall, not just the newcomers, even the extreme chatterbox Schwarzer also became much quieter.

Over at the other side, 2S e-Sports Club had also just entered the reception hall, and they saw their old adversary SilverLight immediately. Right away, they switched to combat mode and waited for the SilverLight team members come over to pick a fight!

But as they waited and waited, the SilverLight team did not come over.

"The SilverLight people are acting weird today," someone said.

The others had also realized this. "Indeed."

Normally, when these two sides met, SilverLight members would start calling them out. However, today, when the SilverLight members had seen them, they had only thrown a passing glance, and that was all? Even if the 2S members provoked the other side, there wasn't even a retaliation. Do they finally know their place?

They must be plotting a big move!

These thoughts were not limited to just 2S. When the other Big Five e-sports clubs saw the situation with SilverLight, they came to the same conclusion. They were wary about what big news SilverLight might announce and made their own mental preparations first. There were even people who reacted quickly and went to investigate and try to uncover whether SilverLight was secretly plotting some large operation.

The 2S manager saw a few of his old friends in the same line and chatted with them passionately, mentioning a fresh talent they had signed this year.

When the Silver Wing gaming department manager, Wayne, who was nearby, heard this, the smile he put on his face appeared somewhat forced.

Back then, they had been the ones poaching happily and even pried away a number of young talents from established e-sports clubs by spending money, creating a lot of animosity. This year, Silver Wing had decided to tone it down and focus on reorganizing the team, letting newcomers to the main team improve their teamwork and coordination. However, they had just relented a little and an even more talented newcomer had been signed by 2S!

In the first half of the year, an exceptional newcomer who had just started university had emerged. His name was Wilkinson, and he had placed first on the newcomer leaderboards. He could very well be the newcomer with the highest score this year.

Wayne was full of regret!

He had wanted to sign Wilkinson early on but had hesitated after some thought. This newcomer's style was too incisive, and Wayne had been considering the pros and cons of signing him to the team. However, before he had been able to come to a decision, 2S had snatched Wilkinson away!

Unlike Wayne, who was regretting, the 2S manager's face was glowing. This year, he had wild ambitions, especially after the very satisfying signing of the capable new talent Wilkinson. This year, their team had also appeared in the limelight a number of times, and if everything went smoothly, they might be the highest-scoring team from Yanzhou this year.

The team manager had just flaunted the newly signed talent, but when he turned around, that talent was nowhere to be seen.

"Eh? Where is Wilkinson?" the 2S manager asked.

A 2S member shrugged while pointing in a certain direction of the reception hall. "There."

The manager looked over and the smile on his face faded.

The other members of 2S didn't look too good either.

In a lapse of concentration, they realized the newly signed talent Wilkinson had run over like a kid to where Fang Zhao was!

"Wilkinson! Get back here right now!" the manager shouted.

With so many people around, it wouldn't seem too appropriate to raise his voice too much, so he could only grunt for Wilkinson to come back.

In the past, they'd had some conflicts with the SilverLight team, especially when it came to Fang Zhao. Nowadays, they could still return some verbal attacks when faced with the other members of the SilverLight team, but when they recalled the incidents

with Fang Zhao back then, it was still very embarrassing.

Wilkinson had no idea his new team had these sorts of worries. On the contrary, he was very excited. At the moment, he was getting to see his idol!

Unfortunately, Wilkinson was still dragged back by the combined strength of his teammates.

2S's manager reprimanded him in a hushed tone. "What are you doing over there, joining in the festivities?! If you have that much time, why don't you go and memorize you thank you speech so that you don't forget and freeze up when you collect your award later!"

"Manager, who will be conferring the award for the newcomer half-year leaderboards?" Wilkinson asked.

"No idea. Fiery Bird has yet to reveal it."

"I hope it's going to be Fang Zhao." Wilkinson chirped.

"Shut your mouth!" the manager berated.

Over at the side, after Fang Zhao's interaction session with the fans was over, he headed to the rest lounge that Fiery Bird had arranged. When he entered, he saw someone familiar.

Yanzhou's top-rated actor, Silver Wing S-lister He Lisi, sat on the sofa browsing through a set of game resources.

As he saw Fang Zhao enter, He Lisi smiled and pointed over to a seat beside him. "Little Fang, take a seat and let's have a chat."

When He Lisi had been younger, he had been a professional e-sports athlete for a period of time, but he had shifted his focus to filming. In order to have greater breakthroughs and produce more quality works and strive for the top, he had given up professional gaming. Now he only played occasionally just for fun.

He Lisi also knew some senior employees at Fiery Bird's Yanzhou branch, but over the years, his interaction with the gaming circles had decreased. He had also not attended Fiery Bird's activities for quite a long time, yet he had appeared today.

"I have been invited over today as an honorary guest to hand out the award for the amateur team category. However, Fiery Bird's people have not revealed this information yet." He Lisi was explaining why he was here today and also telling Fang Zhao not to divulge that he was here before the award ceremony officially began.

Actually, Fang Zhao could also partly guess He Lisi's main reason for appearing as well.

He Lisi was currently vying for an important role in "Founding Era." All his competitors were also people with ability. Recently, He Lisi had been in contact with people from the Wu family, and his appearance here was to garner the support of people in the gaming circles as a bargaining chip of his own.

The award ceremony would be broadcast live. With the publicity operations of the team behind him, He Lisi would be able to gain more popularity. Gamers were also an extremely large category, and gaining support from this group was an advantage in the fight for the role.

However, He Lisi would not talk to Fang Zhao about things from an angle of someone in the film industry.

"Are you really not gaming competitively anymore?" He Lisi asked.

"Not gaming. I don't have the time," Fang Zhao replied.

"Right, people in your industry have to keep building up your experience and qualifications. It is difficult to focus on two things at once. When will you be organizing your next concert? Make sure to let me know when it's time."

"It's still early."

He Lisi thought that Fang Zhao's "It's still early" was him being modest. He Lisi had heard through other means that there were still other pieces inside Fang Zhao's notebook. Even if some were not yet complete, within six months to a year, he would probably be able to organize another concert.

If the copyrights had not been completely sold, a few more concerts could have been held on other continents to publicize those pieces. However, since the copyrights had all been sold, there was no need to have concerts on other continents. Instead, he could focus fully on preparing for his next one.

He Lisi had asked about his next concert but had not made any promises to attend. If he managed to snag the role he was vying for in "Founding Era," he definitely wouldn't be attending Fang Zhao's concert.

Although He Lisi was not from the music circles, he had friends there and understood quite a bit. Thus, he gave Fang Zhao some advice as a senior. "Take advantage of the favorable situation now. You are still young and talented. Seize the moment and prepare for your next concert or pursue your studies. Whether you choose to walk the academic path or the popular path, or even if you choose to go entirely commercial, you still cannot avoid these two steps."

He Lisi's own opinion was that Fang Zhao was just a junior worth being friendly with. He thought that Fang Zhao was competent, but that was all. Furthermore, He Lisi had even more important matters to see to, so he naturally could not pay too much attention to Fang Zhao's matters. What he had just said were words others had told him when they had been talking about Fang Zhao.

Fang Zhao chatted with He Lisi for a short while before he received a notification informing him to prepare and head to the main hall. The award ceremony was about to officially begin.

"Oh right, I forgot to ask you. Little Fang, what award are you handing out?" He Lisi asked before they stepped out.

"Newcomer award, to a capable newcomer named Wilkinson," Fang Zhao replied.

He Lisi nodded his head but did not say anything.

Afterward, the awards ceremony began. Awards were handed out in succession, starting in order of least importance with the amateur gamers and then moving to the professional e-sports athletes.

When they saw Fang Zhao standing up as the esteemed guest who would be heading on stage and handing out the newcomer award, the faces of the 2S team members turned green.

As for Wilkinson, after the initial surprise, animated laughter followed.

Seeing the situation, the host asked Wilkinson, "Very excited?"

"Yes! The person I respect most is Fang Zhao!" As he was very excited, Wilkinson had said this so loudly that nobody could pretend not to hear it.

Some snickering broke out among the e-sports clubs off stage, and certain people could not help but burst out laughing.

They all knew that 2S and SilverLight had mutual animosity and could not stand the sight of each other. Now, on stage at this half-year award ceremony, Yanzhou's highly rated top newcomer that 2S had signed had just proclaimed his idol was Fang Zhao!

Given Wilkinson's exuberant manner, it surely wasn't an act.

This was just f*cking embarrassing!

Meanwhile, there were no happy faces at 2S's side. Even forcing a smile was impossible on their currently rigid faces. Now all they could do was rejoice—luckily, the cameras had not been pointing at them.

While on stage, Fang Zhao glanced over at the SilverLight team seated below.

Everyone in the SilverLight team that was taking delight in 2S's disaster simultaneously lowered their heads. Those that didn't maintained their lovable appearance: Boss, I'm not laughing. Really!

Outside the venue.

Zuo Yu and Yan Biao had some rest time.

Zuo Yu had gone off to chat with his comrade who was currently working as security personnel at this Fiery Bird branch. Yan Biao had seen the security personnel here and had originally wanted to talk to a few. However, he did not expect that after some interaction, there was actually someone who had served on planet Baiji, just at a different outpost. Immediately, they had a camaraderie of sorts.

After all, now they were idle, so the two of them went to the side to exchange stories.

"After getting discharged, someone recommended working here. It's much more relaxing. I can spend more time with my family and there aren't any dangerous missions," that veteran ex-Baiji soldier said.

"Me too. My injuries were too severe, so I had to be discharged." Yan Biao sighed as he recalled the reason for his discharge.

The other ex-Baiji veteran pointed at his colleagues that were currently on patrol duty. "The few right at the front of the path were just like me, only that our military districts were different. After being discharged from the forces, signing on as security personnel with Fiery Bird isn't too bad. The salary is good, and normally, all we have to do is prevent fans from charging in, obstruct reporters, and be wary of fires and thieves. Furthermore, we have so many smart systems and so much equipment, so most of the time we don't get too tired. What about you? From your attire, I'm guessing that you are someone's bodyguard?"

Yan Biao hesitated for a bit while considering the two choices in his head: driver or bodyguard. Nodding his head vigorously, he said, "Yeah! Bodyguard!"

# Chapter 278
# A Hazard Has Arrived

The other ex-Baiji veteran told Yan Biao, "For today's event, we won't get to go back before 10."

"That late?" Yan Biao looked at the time. It was only a bit after eight, and the awards ceremony had been under way for some time already and would probably conclude in a bit.

"There are other arrangements," the other person said.

Indeed. After the awards ceremony, there was a banquet dinner and wine reception for everyone to interact and foster better relationships.

After the entire thing ended, Fang Zhao was still brought over to get a brief on the follow-up plans for the Diting series products. When everything ended, it was already after 10 p.m.

There were no longer many people outside Fiery Bird's Yanzhou branch tower. There were still some reporters stationed there, but after the wine reception, most participants at the event had left through other exits.

Fang Zhao checked his surroundings and found that the SilverLight team had already left on the team transport, so he didn't have to wait. However, when he got to the car park, Fang Zhao met He Lisi once more.

He Lisi had just run into an old friend. He had gone for a chat with his friend and had not left yet.

Fang Zhao noticed that He Lisi was grinning much more than when they had met earlier in the day. Something good had probably happened. Today seemed like a very successful day, and he might possibly have made a breakthrough toward the role he was fighting for in "Founding Era." Otherwise, there was nothing much that could make the normally restrained He Lisi be all smiles.

Seeing Fang Zhao, He Lisi beckoned with his hands, asking Fang Zhao over to talk. Perhaps because he was in high spirits and he had drunk quite a bit of alcohol, having caught sight of a capable and nonthreatening junior from the same company, He Lisi put on the airs of an elder passing on his experiences.

"Little Fang, Uncle is going to tell you some stuff that's for your own good. When you are in these circles, at times when your popularity is exploding, you have to pay attention and be more cool headed and prudent. Also, you should have a team supporting you from the back. Don't throw everything over to them, and make sure you know what's going on. Otherwise, if you encounter some blockheads, you might suffer a heavy blow. Just take a look at that person from Leizhou."

He Lisi's "that person from Leizhou" referred to one of the top actors in Leizhou. Even if Fang Zhao had not seen him online, he had heard Ji Polun mention this person.

That day, Ji Polun had called to congratulate Fang Zhao on his concert and for managing to sell out his copyrights. Ji Polun had also grumbled about the highly intensive work he had been doing recently.

Although the pressure was great and it was tiring, Fang Zhao was able to see that Ji Polun was still very happy, as Ji Polun might possibly get a chance to land a role in the film project "Founding Era." Although it would only be a minor role, it was still an extremely rare chance to come by. This would aid Ji Polun's future development in many aspects.

Ji Polun did not mind this minor role and the little screen time. He understood clearly that given his status within the circles, snatching a role like this was already very rare. It was only because Silver Wing had previously churned out a few period dramas that had raised his global reputation. Otherwise, it would be difficult for him to even be an extra in this film project.

It was rumored that the extras and minor roles in "Founding Era" all had professional training or were outstanding students that had yet to graduate from film academies. There were so many film academies throughout the world, and the extras were selected from among the best. A few large investors made the decisions on these selections, so even if these were minor roles, they were also treasured greatly.

The recent two months had been a crucial period, and many second- and third-rate celebrities were continuously trying their best to appear as much as possible and

make their presence felt. Top-tier film stars were engaged in fierce competitions that had many unpredictable changes.

Top-tier film stars were all rushing over for the major roles. The level of "Founding Era" was too high and they needed to exercise prudence. Because, for this project, given their status, a moment of carelessness might scorch them.

The person that He Lisi was talking about was a certain top-tier actor from Leizhou who had been about to sign the contract for the role but had not watched his mouth. This actor had gloated about it on a live broadcast and been flamed by Zaro.

Actually, it was also partly due to the team behind this actor being too brash and feeling that there was nothing wrong in showing off a little on a live broadcast. However, the originally trivial matter had blown up and caused a large stir in Leizhou's entertainment industry news.

Zaro had not been able to get any of the leading roles he had been looking at in "Founding Era" and hadn't been satisfied with the minor roles that his agent had managed to arrange. When he had gone online and seen someone gloating, he hadn't been pleased. Zaro had felt that it was beneath him to flame second- or third-rate celebrities—those were free to do as they pleased—but for first-rate ones, Zaro could not stand it.

Zaro was being sour. "It's just a role in a 10-plus episode series. I don't get why you have to be so proud."

These words were already considered mild coming from Zaro. Over at Leizhou, experienced people all knew that when encountering this sort of situation, all they had to do was treat it as a fart. After all, it would be forgotten really quickly. However, perhaps being complacent and letting their heads swell, the team from that film star's studio rebutted with a few lines of their own and stirred up a hornet's nest.

Others joined in the fray, perhaps fans of the other party or certain people who wanted to take advantage of the situation and criticize Zaro.

"Go ahead if you are so capable! Given your exaggerated acting skills, can you even get into 'Founding Era' just to join in the fun?"

"Look at the Woo family's Woo Tianhao, who has a similar background. He can act as a young Great General Woo Tong. Lazhou's Barbara can even act as a little princess.

But what about you, Zaro?"

"Let's not talk about acting as Great General Renault. Let's talk about roles slightly better than extras. Which can you even take on? Not a single one!"

"Cough, nothing but a tyrannical piece of trash who basks in the glory of his family."

Zaro's thoughts were like this:

Anything else is fine, but don't ever call me the trash of the family!

How dare you compare me to Woo Tianhao and Barbara, those two idiots?

Rage!

Unbearable!

Thus, this meant war.

Zaro and the other party's fans started tearing into each other.

Over at Leizhou, cyber bystanders felt as if they were watching an interesting drama that had new episodes every day, and they were very excited. When they saw a side looking feeble, they would hurriedly rush over and lend their voices to that side. And when the other side's arguments were looking weak, they would lend their support.

Other companies were delighted when they saw this. After all, one less film star that threatened their company meant one more chance for themselves. Even if the cyber bystanders did not do anything, these companies would also add fire to the flames themselves.

According to entertainment reports from Leizhou, after the flame war escalated, that film star who had been on the verge of getting the role ultimately saw it fly out of his grasp.

According to Leizhou entertainment reports, after that film star received news about losing the role, he puked blood in anger and was rushed to the hospital. It was not known whether this was real or not or whether it had been exaggerated, but in any case, losing the role at the last moment, even if he had not puked blood, he would have at least suffered some internal injuries.

This trended in the Leizhou entertainment circles and the news every day was even better than a drama series. Over at Yanzhou, there were also quite a lot of people paying attention to this. Every day, they would go online to see how the story had developed and which side had won the latest round of flaming.

Thus, He Lisi had borrowed the incident at Leizhou to remind Fang Zhao to always take note of his conduct. Stirring up stuff was fine, but there was a need to be thorough and exercise prudence. There were many more people waiting for a chance to drag one down.

He Lisi said all this in good faith. Regardless how much other stuff was mixed in with these kind intentions, Fang Zhao acknowledged it.

Fang Zhao gave his thanks and He Lisi started to leave, but he turned around once more. "Oh, there is one more thing I nearly forgot to say. Be careful of those entertainment reporters. I have a feeling that some people snuck in, and there is probably someone lying in ambush at this car park. Even if you aren't in front of the masses, you still have to pay attention to your image."

"I sense it too," Fang Zhao replied.

"All right then. Don't get complacent thinking that your performance during military service was good. Some entertainment reporters are even more difficult to handle compared to special forces soldiers." He Lisi did not say much else. He returned to his own car and got his driver to set off. His schedule was still rather tight.

Cars were leaving the car park.

"Boss, shall we head back?" Zuo Yu asked.

Fang Zhao went into the car and changed to clothing that was less conspicuous before coming out. "You guys go back first. Return straight to your own homes. I still have matters to attend to, so you don't have to send me."

It was already 11 p.m. The city center was still very bright. Qi'an City was another world at night, not the least bit cold and lifeless.

But at night in this flourishing city, there were also some hidden dangers, especially for celebrities.

Many entertainment paparazzi would catch negative news of celebrities, and a lot of the time, it was at night.

Drinking and driving, personal affairs, or participating in certain illicit activities. What entertainment reporters loved most was catching celebrities when their image wasn't proper.

If it was any other celebrity's bodyguards, they would inevitably advise against it and express worry.

What if someone robbed him? Even in Qi'an City, there were cases of robbery and murder.

Furthermore, in recent times, Fang Zhao's exposure rate on the internet had been really high. With so much news about him, many people would recognize that face of his. Forget about being robbed, if he was recognized in a public location, it would be even more troublesome.

However, in this case, all Zuo Yu and Yan Biao needed to do was obediently reply with a "Got it, Boss."

After the car they were in had left Fiery Bird's Yanzhou branch's internal car park, Zuo Yu asked Yan Biao, "What do you reckon Boss is up to after changing his clothes? Could it be a secret tryst?"

"How would I know." Yan Biao was also curious, but he also understood that this was Fang Zhao's own private business, so they would not pry.

Let it be. It's time to head home and sleep

A gloomy and mellow voice sang from the online radio channel playing on the car's stereo system. "Ahh~~~ salted fish, why are you so idle!"

"Did you hear that?" Yan Biao asked.

"What?"

"The sound of our hearts being pricked."

Zuo Yu's face was stiff as he switched channels.

At the same moment, at the Fiery Bird Yanzhou branch, a figure speedily left the carpark.

An hour later.

A certain old residential block in Qi'an City.

Wang Tie opened the door with a heavy heart. Inside the apartment, there were already two people inside waiting.

"Master, aren't you too slow?"

"We have already been back for half an hour, and you only return now. Did you encounter something along the way?"

Among these two people, one of them was an apprentice that Wang Tie had newly accepted: Xiao Bo. He was someone Wang Tie had met while serving his prison term on a foreign planet, and Wang Tie had even saved his life once. Now that Xiao Bo had returned after his prison term, he was tagging along with Wang Tie.

The other one was Wang Tie's godson, Fu Rui. One of the reasons Wang Tie had acknowledged him as a godson was because his name sounded very auspicious. This child's ability and fortune weren't too bad, and Wang Tie lacked assistants, so he had taken his godson in.

There hadn't been that much stuff going on on planet Wai, so Wang Tie had returned. The two had followed Wang Tie for some time and taken advantage of the attention that "Founding Era" received to complete some jobs, and they had tasted sweet success.

Today, Wang Tie would not have headed over to Fiery Bird's Yanzhou branch but for these two. One was tracking He Lisi, while the other was very interested in e-sports and wanted to join in the fun and gain experience. Wang Tie also couldn't let these two new hands fend for themselves, so he had clenched his teeth and gone too.

At the car park, when they had seen He Lisi talking to Fang Zhao, Wang Tie had forbidden Xiao Bo from continuing to track He Lisi and had immediately given the signal to retreat!

The three had scattered. Although the two hadn't been sure of the reason, they had

still followed Wang Tie's orders and hurried back.

"Master, you are just too worried and overly fearful. It's just that Fang Zhao. I don't see anything special from him. Don't be afraid. If you happen to run into him, I'll help you handle it!"

Having served a prison sentence on a foreign planet and having experienced actual battlefields, Xiao Bo could not understand this reaction from Wang Tie. In all other aspects, he still admired Wang Tie greatly, but he felt that Wang Tie's reactions where Fang Zhao was concerned were excessive.

Fu Rui also chimed in. "Yes, Godfather, we don't have to be afraid. Brother Bo can fight really well. That one time, he even took on five in the black streets!"

Wang Tie sank into the sofa and sighed. "You guys are still too young to understand. In this line of work, although money flows in quickly, there are also hazards too."

As an entertainment reporter with a wealth of experience and an elite in this industry, Wang Tie trusted his own judgment. Ever since he had left Fiery Bird's Yanzhou branch, he had been feeling uneasy, and his eyelids kept twitching. He had an ominous premonition.

Xiao Bo and Fui Rui continued talking, but Wang Tie wasn't in the mood to listen to their chatter. He shut his eyes to ponder over this matter.

Noticing Wang Tie doing so, Xiao Bo and Fu Rui no longer talked about this and instead discussed their recent earnings. This film project "Founding Era" had really stimulated too many celebrities. Some certain people who normally exercised restraint had also made moves and given them opportunities. Within the last week, they had already managed to strike thrice and had earned a considerable sum each time.

Xiao Bo looked at his own bank accord and felt glad in his heart. Turning to Wang Tie beside him, he said, "Master, you keep saying that there are hazards in this line of work, but I feel that it is really meaningful, and the money is good." Xiao Bo just loved seeing those celebrities in exasperated and helpless states.

At this moment, the doorbell rang.

Wang Tie's shot open violently.

Generally, they didn't get any visitors at this sort of place.

The three of them who had been relaxing a moment ago all tensed up. Xiao Bo took out his dagger, got up, and prepared to open the door, but Wang Tie raised his hands to stop Xiao Bo.

"Fu Rui, go check it out," Wang Tie said.

Fu Rui walked to the door but did not open it right away. Instead, he turned on the surveillance system and looked at the situation outside being displayed on the screen. He turned around with a long face and told Wang Tie, "A hazard has arrived."

# Chapter 279
# This Matter, Should We Do It

Wang Tie saw the image displayed on the screen and scratched his head in frustration. After considering for a bit, he said, "Open the door."

Fu Rui was worried. "Godfather, should I really open it? Do we need to check whether there are other people nearby as well?"

"No need, open it." Wang Tie knew that if Fang Zhao really wanted to deal with him, it wouldn't have taken so long. Furthermore, Fang Zhao wouldn't be gently pressing the doorbell.

Fu Rui had no choice, so he listened to Wang Tie and opened to door. Afterward, he rapidly retreated, afraid to get beaten.

If it were any other celebrity, Fu Rui wouldn't have behaved this way, but because he had followed Wang Tie for a while and knew that Wang Tie was afraid of Fang Zhao, Fu Rui kept his guard up.

Actually, before this, Fu Rui had not thought much of Fang Zhao. Surely Fang Zhao wasn't as impressive as what the news reports made him out to be, nor was he as frightening as Wang Tie had said. However, at this point in time, he felt that he needed to reevaluate.

Ever since he had started following Wang Tie as an entertainment reporter and begun secretly filming celebrities, it had always been them stalking and stopping stars. This was really the first time that a star had come and confronted them at home. This feeling was really complicated.

Fang Zhao stepped inside, his gaze lightly sweeping Xiao Bo and Fu Rui before he looked at Wang Tie, who was leaning against the sofa.

The first sentence Fang Zhao said after entering the apartment made Wang Tie feel like kneeling down. "I have been looking for you lately."

Wang Tie howled in his heart: You can start preparing for your next concert. Why do you have to look for me?!

Fu Rui and Xiao Bo stared at Fang Zhao, flabbergasted, then turned to look at Wang Tie. They found Fang Zhao being able to recognize Wang Tie with one glance inconceivable. Normally, if Wang Tie did not voluntarily reveal his identity, even they found it difficult to recognize him.

Today, Wang Tie had put on an identity he had not used before, and the makeup was good. However, Wang Tie had already gotten used to Fang Zhao being able to recognize him, so he didn't think much of it.

As Fang Zhao walked further inside the apartment, Xiao Bo's eyes flashed, and a grim smile appeared on his lips. His entire body seemed liked a crouching leopard as he pounced, darting toward Fang Zhao.

However, the dagger that Xiao Bo clutched in his hand stopped an arm's length away from Fang Zhao.

A gun was pointed toward Xiao Bo's forehead.

The atmosphere in the apartment suddenly turned chilly.

All along, Xiao Bo had always thought that he was a very good fighter, but no matter how well he could fight, he couldn't beat the speed of a bullet!!

Throughout this entire process, Fang Zhao hadn't even looked at Xiao Bo.

Stepping in, Fang Zhao knew right away that this raw young reporter was unlike other entertainment reporters. He had experience and was battle-tested and unruly. Thus, to let this young reporter know his place, Fang Zhao had needed to intimidate him right from the start.

Everything had gone as Fang Zhao had expected. If Fang Zhao had used words instead, Xiao Bo would really not have been afraid of the consequences and would definitely have tested Fang Zhao a few more times. However, right now, Xiao Bo no longer dared to try anything funny.

Yes, both parties might not have shown a genuine intent to kill and might have just been sounding each other out on their first meeting, but… Perhaps it was the cold air

from the air conditioner, or perhaps it was his own imagination, but Xiao Bo felt that even the lights within the apartment seemed to have a terrifying chill.

He had nearly forgotten that this individual had lawful gun ownership rights.

Wang Tie's taut cheek muscles moved, as if a solid piece of rock had finally melted. Laughing, he called out, "Xiao Bo."

Xiao Bo looked Wang Tie in the eye and could see what Wang Tie's expression was indicated. He put the dagger away and backed off.

Fang Zhao also put away his gun before walking to a chair and sitting down. He was clearly calmer than all three of the hosts.

Fu Rui, who was standing stiffly to the side, felt that he needed to liven up the atmosphere. Looking around, he prepared a plate of melon seeds from a cupboard and placed it on the coffee table in front of Fang Zhao. "Big God, do you crack melon seeds?"

Anyone hearing that way of address could tell that this fellow loved games. Now, only gaming fans addressed Fang Zhao this way.

Fu Rui loved playing games, but he wasn't too deeply engrossed and did not go so far as to worship Fang Zhao. He just wanted to liven up the atmosphere and get rid of the awkward silence.

After placing the plate of melon seeds, Fu Rui went to bring a cup of tea over.

"Big God, have some tea."

Fang Zhao smiled. "Thank you."

Fu Rui looked at that warm smiling face and thought to himself that if the situation just before had not happened, he would have thought that Fang Zhao would be really easy to deal with!

Wang Tie mentally filtered out the list of assignments he had accepted recently and confirmed that he had not provoked Fang Zhao. Or could it be that some celebrity had looked up Fang Zhao to help intercede?

That just wouldn't do.

In any case, he was the so-called Paparazzi King of Yanzhou. Didn't he have his own dignity? How could he let stuff that he had worked hard to photograph go to waste? If anyone wished to purchase these photographs back, it was fine. If they wanted to lower the price, it was still doable, but it couldn't be overly excessive!

In that short moment, Wang Tie had already decided on his response should the situation be like that.

Regardless of what his inner thoughts were, he could not show any weakness on the outside, or it would seem as if he had a guilty conscience.

Wang Tie had just decided to not wilt under pressure when he heard Fang Zhao ask, "I have a business deal for you. Do you accept?"

Flabbergasted, Wang Tie's brows scrunched up. He had not expected that Fang Zhao would actually look him up just to discuss business, that Fang Zhao was not here to intercede on behalf of other celebrities.

However, Wang Tie also did not immediately accept. "Let's hear it."

"Nova Roman."

Not long ago, the "Founding Era" film project team had confirmed that Nova Roman would assume the role of lead director of this project, and he would also have the authority to select actors and actresses.

As a top-notch director with worldwide acclaim, Nova Roman had both authority and background. He wasn't afraid of offending any first-rate or top-tier superstars, but he did not like being disturbed. Thus, before the list of names on the directorial team had been announced, Nova Roman had intelligently gone into hiding.

There were frequent claims online about people having seen this lead director of the revolutionary film project somewhere. However, whether these people were deliberately making things up to gain attention or whether it was Nova Roman's own diversionary smokescreens, nobody knew for certain.

This time, Wang Tie was genuinely curious.

"Aren't you in the music scene? What do you need his information for? Could it be that you really want to act? Or are you helping your company's people ask?"

Fang Zhao did not answer, instead asking, "Do you accept?"

Wang Tie considered it for a longer time.

Fang Zhao did not disturb him, waiting quietly.

Two minutes later.

Wang Tie wrote down a figure.

Fang Zhao glanced at it. "Sure."

"I accept!" Wang Tie was straightforward this time around.

His professional work was not just limited to Yanzhou, and his contacts and network were not just limited to one continent. As long as it was within the entertainment circles, unless he did not wish to investigate, there was nothing he felt he could not uncover. All he needed was to put in more effort and resources. Furthermore, all along, he had been studying the trends of this lead director, and he already had some leads.

Wang Tie's plan after obtaining precise information had been to sell it at a premium to certain ambitious stars who were vying for roles. However, since Fang Zhao had already looked him up and been quick to offer him a reasonable price, Wang Tie agreed to sell this information to Fang Zhao.

"How long do you need?" Fang Zhao asked.

"If you only want his range of current movements, I can give you an approximate region for where he is right now. If you want his exact location, I will need two days," Wang Tie replied.

After Wang Tie had told Fang Zhao the region that Director Roman was in, Fang Zhao transferred half the agreed fee to Wang Tie's account. The other half would be transferred after Wang Tie found the exact location and informed Fang Zhao.

After deciding to strive for a role, Fang Zhao had thought of Wang Tie, the Yanzhou Paparazzi King. With regards to the entertainment circles, Wang Tie was much more familiar and had a strong perception of people and trends in this industry. Indeed, Wang Tie was superior in this aspect. Fang Zhao also knew that Wang Tie had already returned back to Yanzhou from planet Wai and had been to Fiery Bird's Yanzhou

branch. Thus, Fang Zhao had followed him back.

Having received satisfactory information, Fang Zhao left quickly and let Wang Tie and his team have some time to work.

After Fang Zhao left, the rigid and forced smile on Wang Tie's face faded away. His eyelids drooped as he stared at the cup of cool tea on the coffee table.

Knocking his fingers on the sides of the cup, Wang Tie studied the ripples that appeared within. Wang Tie's intuition reckoned that this time, the big news would create ripples in the entertainment circles. However, would he follow up? If he really obtained any information, what would he do?

Xiao Bo checked their account immediately after Fang Zhao left. When Fang Zhao had still been here, it had been slightly inconvenient to check on it. After confirming the money was in, a satisfied smile appeared on his face.

Seeing the sum of money that had just been transferred into the account, Xiao Bo sighed. "Master, this isn't a hazard. It's an opportunity!"

Wang Tie stared at him from the corner of his eyes. "You don't know shit!"

"Yes, yes, yes. Whatever Master says is always right!" Xiao Bo giggled, but afterward, he composed himself. "Now I really know why master has said so much about a person like Fang Zhao. It's best we keep some distance from him."

To locate Wang Tie and even track him back home, this was not something anyone could do.

Taking deep breaths, Wang Tie said, "This place is no longer usable. Let's switch to a new place."

There was no longer any sense of security here. He really did not want to see Fang Zhao's face appear when he opened the door. Furthermore, what if Fang Zhao sold his address?

They had too many enemies. The number of celebrities that had paid them off in order to reveal dirt could not be counted even with the fingers on all three pairs of their hands. What would they do if someone found out this address and came looking for revenge?

You might be able to take on five at once, but what would you do if it was 50?

Thus, to be safe, it would be best to switch to a new base of operations.

After all, this was just a temporary dwelling. When they were out on assignment, they might spend days staying at different places, so there wasn't a sense of belonging and there was no reluctance to leave.

A crafty rabbit has three burrows 1. They had many more places they could use.

"What were you thinking about, Godfather? You looked as though you were at a loss," Fu Rui said.

Wang Tie gaze furtively swept the surroundings before he used a hand to beckon the other two over.

Noticing Wang Tie behaving this way, the two immediately check the doors and windows and even brought out some sensor equipment to sweep the apartment to ensure that there were no recording devices. After examining the place, they gathered over at Wang Tie's spot.

"Master/Godfather, what are your instructions?"

Wang Tie paused for a moment, then said, "Given my many years of experience in this line and my acute professional senses, I surmise that a huge piece of news might emerge. Now, I am hesitating, whether or not to get this news scoop? If we really go ahead and get the scoop, there might be danger involved."

Hearing this, Fu Rui and Xiao Bo moved a little closer and asked in muted voices, "How dangerous?"

"The 'Fang Zhao appearing on our doorstep again' kind of dangerous," Wang Tie replied.

"Hisss—" Fu Rui took a deep breath. In his mind, he could still clearly remember the situation where Fang Zhao had pointed the gun at Xiao Bo. Discussing businesses and news scoops were not the same. What would happen if Fang Zhao really opened fire in fury?

Xiao Bo also nodded his head in agreement. "That is very dangerous." Having a gun

pointed at his forehead hadn't been a nice experience.

How rare, a famous entertainment reporter and the elite team under him were actually afraid of a celebrity turning the tables and knocking on their own doors?!

"So… Master, the big news you talked about, how big will it be? What sort of level?" Xiao Bo asked again.

"The 'something that could shock the entire world's entertainment circle' sort of level."

Both of them exhaled simultaneously. "Hissss—"

"What do you guys think about this matter? Should we do it?" Wang Tie asked.

"Do it!"

# Chapter 280
# What Is He up to Again

Just as many people had expected, after Fiery Bird's Yanzhou branch's half-year event concluded, on that very night itself, lots of media outlets joined in the festivities and stirred up news. These outlets edited the part of the segment where the newcomer award was handed out and made it into a video with captions and added special effects.

Wilkinson's voice was clear and resounding: "The person I worship most is Fang Zhao!"

And the "thank you" speech after receiving the award also became a topic that people made fun of.

All Wilkinson had had to do was memorize the thank you speech that his company had prepared for him and recite it on stage, but Fang Zhao just had to be the esteemed guest conferring the award.

After Wilkinson thanked his company, his teammates, his parents, he gave a very emotional thank you to Fang Zhao…

Everyone from 2S wanted to puke blood. What are you thanking him for?! The speech we prepared for you doesn't contain this line!

If words, once spoken, could be swallowed back, 2S e-Sports Club's manager would probably have held Wilkinson down and forced him to eat his words.

A pity that this was not possible.

During the live broadcast, the cameras had not been pointed toward 2S, and their weird and complicated expressions had not been broadcast. Fiery Bird was not an entertainment news outlet and they took 2S's reputation into consideration. After all, 2S was a respectable and well-known e-sports club, so Fiery Bird ought to give them some face.

Of course, Fiery Bird's people knew that even if they did not generate these topics, entertainment reporters on the scene would disseminate this news. These entertainment reporters were just so good at starting a prairie fire from a little spark.

Thus, Fiery Bird just needed to uphold their professionalism and leave the rest to others in the industry.

As they had expected, many reporters took advantage of this opportunity. The live broadcast cameras might not have captured the moment, but these professional reporters had their own equipment!

Not only were these videos high definition, but they were from all sorts of angle and had been captured perfectly. Besides the scenes during the award ceremony, they had even filmed circumstances in the wine reception after the presentation, when Wilkinson had sought out Fang Zhao for an autograph.

These materials from various sources were taken and edited together with portions of the live broadcast and compiled as a news video, and the circulation rate was rising continuously. Now, everyone in the Yanzhou gaming circles knew that the fresh talent that 2S had signed, Wilkinson, this mid-year newcomer king who might very well be the newcomer of the year, was officially a Fang Zhao fan.

"Hahaha, this year's newcomers are really interesting."

"I can imagine 2S's manager's face turning as black as the bottom of a pot."

"However, speaking of this, there are indeed many e-sports athletes that adore Fang Zhao, but the only one willing to say it out loud in this sort of circumstances is Wilkinson."

"Someone please recount the animosity and grudges between SilverLight and 2S. I have almost forgotten it all already."

"Since Wilkinson is a fan of Fang Zhao, why did he sign with 2S instead of going to Silver Wing?"

"He was probably intercepted by 2S."

"Now this situation is just embarrassing. Those SilverLight guys are probably laughing their heads off."

At 2S e-Sports Club. Many of their members and staff had seen this news.

Wilkinson's movements in gameplay might be sharp, but when it came to dealings and handling affairs with other people, he wasn't that smart. It was as if all his IQ and EQ was used for the game and not even a tenth was available for other aspects. When it came to reality, some of the stuff he did was really stupid.

Otherwise, Wilkinson wouldn't have been so easily swayed into signing a contract with 2S, and even a long-term one at that. The contract had especially strict clauses regarding switching teams just to guard against Wilkinson running over to Silver Wing in a moment of madness.

The manager of 2S felt his head hurt as he saw all the reports online. Whatever, others can laugh all they want. SilverLight is not able to get anything for this. After all, at the start, Wilkinson's first choice had been SilverLight, but the Silver Wing gaming department manager didn't grab the chance. In any case, it was 2S that had unearthed a gem.

In the beginning, Wilkinson's first choice had indeed been SilverWing50PolarLight, but Wayne had been considering it from the point of a team and had hesitated for a few days. During this hesitation, 2S had swooped in and grabbed this talented sapling. This was the reason Wayne looked so full of regret whenever Wilkinson was mentioned.

While other e-sports clubs and netizens were watching and joking about this, over at Silver Wing, this wasn't the case. The SilverLight team, from the gaming department manager all the way to the e-sports athletes at the bottom, was not as merry as the outside world thought them to be. Instead, the atmosphere here was rather solemn.

On the morning after the event, Wayne had just arrived at his office and sat down before he made a call to Fang Zhao. "As the event ended too late yesterday, I wasn't able to look for you. I wish to talk with you about the problems regarding the team."

The team had signed a number of people in the last two years. The team's results were decent, and they were the most successful e-sports team ever produced by a Yanzhou mixed entertainment company, which was something to be proud of.

But in the last year, some team members had been negligent in their training and had slightly inflated egos. Wayne himself was not feared by the team members. Previously,

because Fang Zhao had been undergoing military service followed by preparing for his concert, Wayne had not disturbed him, but now, finally, the occasion had arrived.

Wayne spoke continuously for half an hour. All that he said could be summarized in a single sentence: These little fellas have to be put in order.

After he had finished talking, Wayne heard Fang Zhao reply with one line: "Got it."

Although he had only received a two-word reply after talking nonstop for half an hour, Wayne was still very satisfied. He felt much better now compared to the terrible mood he had been in after the Wilkinson situation.

When the staff in the gaming department saw how much Wayne's mood had changed in 30 minutes, they were astonished.

"Did our manager just have something good happen to him? He seems in rather high spirits."

"I keep feeling that his smile seems a little creepy."

Silver Wing tower 50th floor.

A few newcomers were looking at the online comments of videos from yesterday's event.

"Hahahaha, captain, you guys take a look. These netizen's comments are real funny. Those 2S people's expressions really look as though they are suffering from constipation. I reckon that they must be fuming with rage, haha…" The few newcomers were laughing heartily when they suddenly realized that their seniors did not look at all happy. "Captain, you guys, what's wrong?"

Even the normally outspoken hulk of a man, Milo, was silently staring out of the window. His eyes appeared blank, like he was slightly distressed.

Jake leaned back in his chair and coldly said, "Do you think we can run away?"

The newcomers were puzzled. "Run away… from what?"

Ding—

A notification from the chat group.

Team Captain Jinro's face twitched as he opened the message. "It's here."

All the members of the team hurriedly opened the chat group and saw that AliveAfter500Years, who rarely spoke, had sent a message.

In typical Fang Zhao fashion, a set of coordinates and a time—that was all.

Vice Captain Dorrian winced as though his teeth hurt.

Schwarzer wailed in anguish.

The older batch of SilverLight members recalled the experience they'd once had.

These perplexing reactions by their seniors made the newcomers even more nervous.

"Senior Schwarzer, why are you rubbing your chest?" a newcomer asked.

Schwarzer looked as though he was reliving a terrifying nightmare. "It hurts. My innards were all shaken up."

"Actually, Senior Fang Zhao doesn't look all that frightening," a newcomer said.

When the senior members heard this, they all simultaneously replied with a "hehe."

On this day, the members of the SilverLight team did not shirk their duties. Many people realized that in the late morning, the members of the gaming team had been full of vigor, but in the afternoon, every single one of them was listless. Even those few lively ones were very silent.

After that, everyone discovered that the SilverLight team had suddenly begun to be spirited. The cocksure swagger that had been cultivated over the past two years had also dwindled. It was as if the team had returned to when they had first been established.

Wayne was satisfied when he saw the team's current drive. Indeed, he should go looking for Fang Zhao from time to time. This bunch of people needed to be flogged once in a while.

Elsewhere, after Fang Zhao logged off, he passed the gaming helmet to Curly Hair.

As his 10th-gen console had been moved to the office, he only had a Fiery Bird gaming helmet at his residence. Normally, Curly Hair was the one playing it.

Shortly after leaving the gaming room, Fang Zhao received some information from Wang Tie.

Wang Tie had said he would need two days, but not even a day later, he had already found it.

Fang Zhao took down Nova Roman's detailed location before contacting Zuo Yu and Yan Biao. "Pack your stuff. Prepare to head to a faraway place tomorrow.

To a faraway place meant that perhaps an extended stay away might be needed.

"Boss, where are we headed?" Zuo Yu asked.

"Teasandsea."

Teasandsea was the name of a small island affiliated with MaErSizhou.

The next morning, Zuo Yu and Yan Biao both brought travel suitcases.

"Boss, I have applied for a flying transport from the company. We can set off anytime." Zuo Yu said.

Noticing Curly Hair pacing up and down, Yan Biao asked, "Are we bringing Curly Hair?"

"Bring him out to run," Fang Zhao replied. Curly Hair needed to be active. Ever since returning home, Curly Hair had spent a lot of time gaming. This wasn't good, and he still needed to head out to move around.

As he was speaking, Fang Zhao received a call, so he turned and headed into his study.

Watching Fang Zhao enter the study to answer the call, Zuo Yu excitedly told Yan Biao, "It's Teasandsea! That place is a great vacation destination. I have never been there before."

"We are bodyguards. We have to remain responsible and diligent; we cannot covet the

pleasures in life!" Yan Biao replied.

"A benefit of being Fang Zhao's bodyguard is that you can travel everywhere. In my first year being his bodyguard, I traveled to all 12 continents."

"What for?"

"Probably to seek inspiration. At that time, Boss had accepted an assignment to compose an accompaniment piece for a game. I followed him as he visited every continent's Cemetery of Martyrs. However, we still visit each Cemetery of martyrs every year. You will come along next time too," Zuo Yu said.

"This time, what is Boss heading to Teasandsea for?" Yan Biao asked.

"How would I know? Wherever Boss points to, we go to, no questions asked. Furthermore, given my experience, I reckon that the two of us will not get any chances to show off our capabilities during this trip to Teasandsea."

"And why is that?"

"What do you think our assignment is supposed to be when we reach Teasandsea?"

Yan Biao had a puzzled expression. "What are you trying to say?"

Zuo Yu pointed at the excitable Curly Hair. "To walk the dog."

At the moment, in Silver Wing tower.

Duan Qianji opened an application for a vacation in her email inbox.

It was from Fang Zhao.

A vacation? What does "return date undetermined" mean?

If the preparations for the concert a while back had been too tiring, heading out to relax a little was fine, but "return date undetermined" was a little subtle.

If it was because he wanted to prepare for his next concert and wanted to go elsewhere to gain inspiration, that was also understandable.

Whether it was a short vacation to relax or to prepare for his next concert, Duan Qianji would surely approve of it, but she had her doubts. When she called Fang Zhao to inquire, Fang Zhao only replied that he was going on a trip to Teasandsea.

Teasandsea was a tourist destination. Many people loved having holidays there. When she first heard it, she didn't think there was anything special.

But Duan Qianji kept feeling that something wasn't right.

Because every time Fang Zhao went on vacation, he created a stir. How big or small the matter was was directly proportional to the length of his vacation.

So, this time, what exactly was Fang Zhao up to?

Contemplating for half a day, Duna Qianji asked her secretary, "Is there any big news that I am unaware of?"

Duan Qianji's secretary was very clear what Duan Qianji meant by "big news." Thus, she very calmly replied, "All the big news in recent times has already been arranged and sent to you."

"Only these?"

"At present, that's all."

Having received this reply, Duan Qianji still felt rather uneasy.

"Keep an eye on Teasandsea."

# Chapter 281
# Poisoned

Teasandsea was an island that had formed naturally during the Period of Destruction. It was a small area, but the landscape was very beautiful and it was one of the top tourist destinations in the world. The only problem was that expenses here were high.

At Teasandsea, just by taking a stroll, one would get to see many famous people from the sporting world and film industry and other elites from every continent.

Here, if a certain celebrity was spotted, some people might express slight astonishment or perhaps calmly say, "Oh, isn't so and so?"

And that was all.

Aside from the celebrity factor, on Teasandsea island, there were three things that were especially famous, the three things that made up its name: tea, sand, and sea.

Tea leaves offered by hotels here were all produced locally. Inside the rooms, there were hourglasses that had an implicit classical charm to them. The sand used inside was native to the island and was a golden yellow that was more dazzling than sand from other places. The seascape was also beautiful.

Zuo Yu sat beside the window, enjoying life and sipping tea. Afterward, he poured some dog food into Curly Hair's bowl.

A short while later, Yan Biao returned from working out at the gym.

"I saw a number of stars in the gym. Our boss really isn't considered a big deal here," Yan Biao said.

Fang Zhao would not cause too much of a splash here with his status. Furthermore, people here on Teasandsea were already immune to celebrities. At most, if they came across their own idols, they would go over to chat or maybe take a photo. There wouldn't be any crazy fanatical actions. Besides, the police and security allocated here were sufficient, and this lightened the workload of bodyguards.

In the three days that they had been here, besides heading out to walk the dog, they hadn't needed to do anything else. Just as Zuo Yu had predicted, it really seemed like they were here just to walk the dog.

Every day, Fang Zhao would head out, but he would not bring along Zuo Yu or Yan Biao. The two of them did not complain either, because on the first day, Fang Zhao had really brought them along without saying much, just letting the two follow him.

Five hours later, they had lost him.

At first, Fang Zhao appeared as if he was just taking a stroll, but as though he had seen someone, in a flash, the two bodyguards had lost sight of him.

Shameful.

Now, if Fang Zhao did not bring them along, they were too ashamed to say anything. Walking the dog? So be it.

In the afternoon, Fang Zhao returned.

In the three days he had been here, he had been investigating Director Nova Roman's movements and trends as well as the director's recent emotional state.

Wang Tie's information even had the confirmed location of the hotel and the room number, so finding Nova Roman had been easy. Even if Wang Tie had only been able to confirm that Roman was on this island, Fang Zhao had his own ways of locating Roman.

In addition, regarding this matter, Wang Tie was especially proactive, as if he had been afraid that Fang Zhao would not be able to find who he was looking for. Every day, Wang Tie would send new information to Fang Zhao. The reason Wang Tie gave for his proactiveness was that he was a dedicated entertainment reporter. As for what the truth behind his motives was, Fang Zhao was well aware of that.

Fang Zhao told Zuo Yu and Yan Biao, "Tomorrow one of you will be following me out. We will be away for four days and three nights."

The moment an assignment was mentioned, the two perked up. However, only one person could go; it was still rather competitive.

"Where to?" Yan Biao asked. After clarifying the nature of the assignment, only then could they decide who was more suitable.

"Teaseasand's no. 9 cruise ship," Fang Zhao said.

"I'm familiar with cruises. I shall go," Zuo Yu offered without delay.

Yan Biao did not know as much about this as Zuo Yu. In the past, he had lived on an outpost at planet Baiji for too long, He wasn't familiar with cruise ships and the like. However, because he did not understand such things, he wanted to go even more!

"It's your turn to walk the dog tomorrow," Yan Biao reminded Zuo Yu.

"You can take over the duties first."

"Nope."

Noticing that Yan Biao and Zuo Yu could not come to terms, Fang Zhao said, "You guys have 10 seconds to decide."

Upon hearing the 10 seconds, they could not continue to argue. Zuo Yu looked Yan Biao in the eye and said, "Tiebreaker!"

The so-called "tiebreaker" was rock-paper-scissors, best of three. It appeared that these two had used this "tiebreaker" many times before.

The next morning, Fang Zhao brought the rock-paper-scissors victor Zuo Yu as they boarded Teasandsea Cruise Ship No. 9. Yan Biao stayed behind at the hotel. His responsibility was to walk the dog.

Fang Zhao decided to go on the cruise because he knew that Director Nova Roman would be on it. Also, Nova Roman would be auctioning off a beryl gemstone.

Fang Zhao had shown Director Roman's information to Zuo Yu. Zuo Yu also knew his own assignment. Fang Zhao did not need someone to follow beside him, but should Zuo Yu catch sight of Director Roman anywhere, he had to let Fang Zhao know immediately.

Fang Zhao did not watch Zuo Yu closely after boarding the cruise. Zuo Yu could actually go crazy and have fun; there were far too many entertainment activities on board.

However, Zuo Yu felt that he needed to be dedicated to his work. He understood all the different places on cruise ships and arranged a search plan. He also told Fang Zhao, proving that he wouldn't use this as a pretext to enjoy himself.

As for why Fang Zhao was looking for Director Roman, Zuo Yu did not ask. All he needed to do was carry out the search.

Golden sandy beaches gradually got farther away. Ahead lay an azure-blue expanse of ocean. On deck, there were a number of excited tourists shouting.

Fang Zhao watched as the island became a speck in his vision as he pondered over where Roman had the highest possibility of being. Although he had received information that Roman would return to the auction, Fang Zhao felt that Roman might not necessarily show up. Roman's lot at the auction would definitely be his item, but Roman did not have to be present. Thus, Fang Zhao had brought along an extra person. He would let Zuo Yu roam around and inform him if Roman was spotted.

The cruise was huge, and the odds of encountering a specific person was low. If Roman was intentionally hiding himself, he would be practically impossible to find and they would have to track him only when they returned to the island. However, trying was always an option.

There were many other people who had the same intentions as Fang Zhao. Probably having also received news, they had assigned men to keep watch on the theater, casino, and various other places onboard the cruise. However, currently, no one had even gotten a glimpse of Director Roman.

At this time, in a certain high-level double suite on board Teasandsea Cruise Ship No. 9.

A white-haired man clad in inconspicuous pajamas who looked like an old man frowned as he browsed through some resources displayed on screens.

A middle-aged man in leisure clothing walked into the suite. " Arno 1 , I have just returned from the auction venue. There are at least 10 people trying to find you.

"Mmhm." The person staring fixedly at the screens had only replied with a slight grunt, his eyes remaining glued to the screens.

The one lazing on the sofa staring at the screens was indeed Director Nova Roman,

who was being sought after by many film stars and reporters. Director Roman was only 99 this year, and according to the lifespans in the New Era, he couldn't be considered elderly. Furthermore, he loved to exercise and looked fit and full of vigor. However, in order to avoid being sighted, Roman had made himself look a lot older. This way, he would not be easily recognized by others. For this trip, he had changed his hairstyle and even dyed it white.

Only people who knew him well would call him Arno, and because of the current circumstances, the names "Nova" and "Roman" were sensitive. Thus, these friends of his called him Arno.

The one who entered looked at the information on the screens inquisitively and asked Roman, "Are these the few newly recommended actors? How many important roles have yet to be decided? Hey, who is this little fella?"

Numerous screens all displayed different people. Some were images, while others were photographs, but the screen that caught his attention was showing the image of a very young person. The people displayed on the other screens seemed more mature and older. There were even two who seemed of a similar age to Roman.

Roman eyed the screen the other party was pointing at. "That is Fang Zhao."

"Fang Zhao? I remember that the historical character you spent the most time researching during this period has that same name."

"That's right, exact same first and last name."

What Roman had spent most of his time researching was the role of "Fang Zhao." Although this person had not been a great general of the Founding Era, in actual history, he had left behind a legacy that did not lose to any of the great generals.

According to actual history, he actually had much greater presence than Wu Yan, but for the film project "Founding Era," surely much of Yanzhou's stories would be told from Wu Yan's point of view. After all, Wu Yan was a great general of the Founding Era.

Fang Zhao's deeds had mostly been leading the recovery of lost territory, but Wu Yan's capabilities and contributions could not be doubted either. Wu Yan was someone Fang Zhao had trusted and had ultimately taken over the burden of reclaiming their homeland.

When Roman had gone through the historical resources for the first time, he had felt pity.

In history, this person "Fang Zhao" had really been too unlucky. His life had been too short!

Even though the character "Fang Zhao" did not have a leading role in this film project, he had an important supporting role, especially for the story of Yanzhou, and could not be neglected.

When hearing Roman mention this, the other person suddenly recalled something. "Back when there was the online survey, didn't a lot of people vote for him? The one about 'let Fang Zhao play the role of Fang Zhao'?"

"Yes, that's him."

"Then just let him try it out." The other person had just spoken when he saw Roman appear to begin pondering something, so he quickly changed his tune. "Hey, don't take it for real, I was just joking. We can't be sloppy with this project. Everything will be fine as long as you follow your own criteria. Don't listen to me."

Roman shook his head. "I'm not saying that he won't do. Actually, at the start, I still thought well of him."

Back during the voting activity, when netizens had all been joking and many people had voted to "let Fang Zhao play the role of Fang Zhao," Roman had left a comment: "That's a good idea."

However, Roman loved to joke on the internet and had said many similar things, so from everyone's point of view, this had just been a joke from Roman.

Roman was normally very active online, but after he had accepted the lead director role for this project, he had not spoken much online. Thus, nobody knew what his opinions were currently.

"Think well of him? This youngster isn't an actor, right? I have never heard of him winning any awards," the other party said.

"Aside from that, his manner, personality, skill, and other aspects are satisfactory."

Regarding the historical figure "Fang Zhao," Roman had seen the script, read through historical resources, browsed through the character analysis, and viewed actual historical footage from the confidential archives. The more he had seen, the clearer and clearer image in his head had become.

But maybe it was because he had watched Project Starlight's channel S5 and had seen many videos of that minor celebrity Fang Zhao, now, whether Roman's eyes were open or closed, the image he had in his mind concerning the historical figure "Fang Zhao" seemed to be gradually coinciding with the image of Project Starlight's channel S5's Fang Zhao.

For a historical figure, 1000 people would have 1000 different opinions. In Roman's head, gradually engraving itself in his mind was the image of that minor celebrity.

Because of this, Roman had sighed in a certain director's chat group. "My brain has surely been poisoned."

It was not known who had circulated this line, but it had caused lots of misunderstandings. This was also the reason there were many rumors in the outside world saying that Director Roman had been severely poisoned and was receiving treatment in a certain hospital. There were even some rumors that he was critically ill. Roman had also found out from the news that he was close to dying.

The other party swayed his wine glass and continued to study the person displayed on the screen that was clearly much younger than all the others. "In any case, there is no way you are really going to let him act."

Roman sighed lightly. "I have really thought about it before."

The other person's wrist trembled, and some wine spilled out. Casually wiping it up, he said, "You better be kidding! Has showbiz declined? Is there nobody that can act? How can you have this sort of notion?"

Roman shook his head but did not explain. Staying silent for a bit, he finally replied, "It's a pity that Fang Zhao is a little too young."

The actors of lead roles and important supporting roles were all older and had at least 20 to 30 years of acting experience. If there were any mistakes during filming, just pointing out the mistake would result in them rapidly remedying it.

But Fang Zhao was too young and wasn't from the industry. If he did not act well during filming or if he could not adapt to this series, much more time might be needed to remedy it. Furthermore, given his age, he might not be able to manage the latter half of his character's life in the film. If not for these, Roman really wanted to contact Fang Zhao to audition.

When he realized that Roman really did not seem to be joking, the other party hurriedly said, "Don't act hastily. You cannot randomly experiment with this project. If you pick the wrong actor, it might affect the quality of the entire film project. If that happens, even a globally acclaimed director like you might be dragged off the rostrum! Now is not the time if you really want to use a newcomer. If you are really unsatisfied, you can just create a virtual one, like a virtual idol. It's much more convenient."

The latter idea was rejected by Roman. "This sort of project that touches on the leaders of the Period of Destruction is too sensitive, and virtual idol methods cannot be used. Besides, when the project was rebooted, it was stipulated that virtual images were prohibited. Everything must be done by actual actors."

"Then you just have to take your pick slowly. I'm heading out for some fresh air first. Oh, right, will you be heading to the auction venue at night?"

"Not going."

A body double of a similar build would appear at the auction. This double had a side profile that looked like the actual Roman. Roman had simply decided not to attend. He had only used this cruise as a pretext to change his working environment.

The other party walked a few steps toward the door but turned back again. A little worried, he pointed at the screen with Fang Zhao's image and exclaimed, "You mustn't be impulsive! Don't go looking for this especially fresh youngster who isn't even in the industry to act! Many people worldwide are watching!"

Roman impatiently waved his hands to drive the other party out. "Got it, got it. I am just looking for some inspiration from this young fellow." He needed a peaceful environment to do some careful consideration.

After the room had become silent once again, Roman added in a few other screens and played out demo clips of those few actors that had not been filtered out.

These people acted very well, and they were all outstanding film stars. Roman did not

have any qualms about their statuses, but when placed in the role of "Fang Zhao," Roman kept feeling that there was a little something missing, as if they did not fit the image of "Fang Zhao" he had in his heart.

Indeed, he had been too deeply poisoned by the image of channel S5!

# Chapter 282
# Exactly the Same

In the New Era, many innovations in technology and means of transportation had rapidly upgraded, and many older methods had been phased out, but cruises had sentimental value and were a holiday option, so they continued to exist.

The sun gradually disappeared beyond the point where the ocean met the sky, and night descended.

Teasandsea Cruise Ship No. 9 was just like a small city-state traveling on the seas. All sorts of activities could be done on board, ranging from exercise, shopping, leisure, to entertainment and many more. Guests could enjoy to their heart's content for the entire duration of their vacation.

As sunlight completely disappeared, the cruise ship's lights still shone brightly, sparkling in the dark night.

At the back of the ship, a song and dance performance was currently being held in the open-air theater.

Fang Zhao was standing at a high place, carefully scanning the area, but he did not catch a glimpse of Nova Roman at all. Fang Zhao had decided to do a quick scan before moving off. The auction was about to start and Fang Zhao had seen a number of film stars. Competition was intense; they were all probably trying to look for Director Roman too and wanted to win the lot that Roman had put up for the auction. Perhaps Roman himself might be present.

However, just at the moment that Fang Zhao decided to leave the open-air theater area, a large screen on the side displayed a notification that a guest was going to be performing here.

Every performance held at this theater had already been arranged beforehand. The program list was displayed on the large screen at the side, but if a guest wished to go on stage and perform midway, only those who had gone through an audit and had sufficient qualifications could cut the line and go on stage to perform.

"Fay Harmonik?"

Fang Zhao was slightly astonished. He had never expected to encounter this talented musician here.

This person was from Jizhou. In the past, Fang Zhao had only seen news about this individual online, mostly push notifications about entertainment gossip. An example was like this: "Talented performer's number X girlfriend of the year appears," or some gossip about him being intimate with some other celebrities.

Disregarding his personal life, performancewise, Fay Harmonik was indeed talented, and many older generations acknowledged this.

During Fang Zhao's first concert in August, Xue Jing had brought along a few old friends. Among them had been an old man who especially loved violins. He had mentioned this junior Fay Harmonik a lot whenever he had talked. As long as the person in question's private affairs were not too excessive, they would regard talent more highly.

Harmonik had made a name for himself when he had been very young. This was something those old seniors frequently spoke about. Harmonik was one of the few people who had held their first concert when they were only 10+ years of age. When he had been in secondary school, Harmonik had held his first high-level concert, and even now, after more than 30 years, his status in the music circles was still rising year after year. He had also received an invitation to join the "Founding Era" music team.

There were many young and outstanding musicians, so when Fang Zhao saw Fay Harmonik's name, he stopped in his tracks. This was the first time he would get to listen to a live performance by this talented musician that many of the older seniors praised so highly.

A head full of dyed fiery-red shoulder-length hair was Fay Harmonik's trademark. Normally, his words and actions seemed like those of a noble gentleman from the Old Era, but the moment he started performing, he appeared extremely passionate and deranged.

The charm of a violin was undeniable. Some people loved how it could be used as an effective instrument to stir up emotions and transmit exquisite feelings, but there were others who loved the acute aspect of it.

Although the current accompaniment could not be compared to the luxury of a formal concert, it combined classical and rock 'n roll in an upbeat tune. The speed and precision gave listeners a sense of vertigo. As the enthusiastic atmosphere dispersed, the flamboyant movements of the bow created a raging tempest that assaulted the senses, not giving listeners any slight moment to catch their breath as they worried that the bowstring might snap abruptly!

The quivering of the bow displayed the innermost surging feelings of the performer. Even someone not belonging to the industry would find it dazzling, as if the whole stage was on fire.

This was a theatrical performer's method of combat!

It could be said that the majority of people who had seen Fay Harmonik perform praised him to high heavens… except for people from Leizhou.

When most people from Leizhou saw Harmonik's performances, subconsciously, they would think about something else.

Because in Leizhou, there was a Zaro.

When Zaro had been in secondary two, he had already been very famous in Leizhou. Because of his tendency to voice his thoughts and his illustrious family background, he'd had tens of millions of people following his social platforms. From a young age, Zaro had been an internet celebrity, and the citizens of Leizhou were all too familiar with him!

It could be said that any celebrities outside Leizhou, even if they were world-renowned superstars would not be as popular as Zaro in Leizhou.

Even if Fay Harmonik had already made a name for himself and frequently appeared in entertainment and fashion magazines all over the world, his impact in Leizhou wasn't that big.

Once, Zaro had watched a performance of Fay Harmonik and posted a status on his social platform: "He saws really well, but I have a nagging doubt. When he is pulling his bow in that deranged fashion, how does he play while flinging his head back without sawing off his own hair? If there was a person standing beside him, wouldn't that person get hit in the face?"

Fay Harmonik's trademark shoulder-length hair indeed puzzled a lot of people. That's not to say that it wasn't acceptable, but many performers who kept long hair would tie it up or put it in a bun during performances. However, this individual strayed from the norm and loved to be this willful.

Thus, Zaro had spent the entire duration of the performance studying the topic of "How can he safely play the violin in that deranged fashion" and the Leizhou citizens who followed Zaro's trends had also been swayed toward it.

Actually, there were a number of people who'd already had these same doubts, but they had never voiced said doubts. Even if someone had voiced their doubts, as they did not have significant influence, not many people would have agreed. But Zaro had ignited this fuse, and the topic had exploded.

If it had been anybody else who had said this, Fay Harmonik would have stepped out to teach that person a lesson, but it just so happened that this was Zaro of Leizhou's Renault family! A sh*t-stirrer! What else could he do?

From then on, Fay Harmonik had placed Zaro on his blacklist and had never again performed in Leizhou.

Fay Harmonik was a highly sought after person in the music, entertainment, and fashion circles. In the eyes of his many female fans, Fay Harmonik was an attractive and rugged star with flowing long hair. As for Zaro… his level of being vocal had also increased.

If Zaro was here, he would probably have started sharing his thoughts already.

After the song being performed on the stage concluded, the audience erupted into passionate applause and shrieks.

"Fayfay!"

"Fayfay! Fayfay!"

"Look over here!"

"Fayfay, another song!"

Fay Harmonik's fans lovingly called him "Fayfay," as it was easy to remember and was

considerably more intimate.

After his performance ended, Fay Harmonik smiled and waved at the surrounding audiences. When he stepped off the stage, he was immediately surrounded by a bunch of hot and pretty girls.

As he left the venue, Harmonik caught sight of Fang Zhao. He evidently recognized Fang Zhao and paused for a moment, but very quickly, he looked away, so nobody around knew exactly who he had seen.

"Fayfay, saw someone familiar?" somebody asked.

"Not familiar, just a stranger A, 1 " Harmonik said absentmindedly.

There had been a period where there was a lot of news reports pertaining to Fang Zhao. Although now there was all sorts of news replacing it and making news about Fang Zhao appear "forgettable," not too long ago, Harmonik had heard his own teacher mention this up-and-coming youngster, so naturally, he could recognize Fang Zhao.

However, Fang Zhao's status was not to the extent that he needed to go over and exchange greetings. From his point of view, Fang Zhao was just a prominent stranger A he had come across on this vacation and wasn't really any different from other guests.

Throughout Fay Harmonik's musical career, he had seen many stranger A's, stranger B's, C's, D's… and it wasn't worthwhile to pay them any heed. Thus, he quickly shoved this matter to the back of his mind and followed the bevy of beauties to have a pleasant night.

Fang Zhao glanced at the program schedule at the side. Currently, there were no other guests heading up to perform, so he did not stay any longer. Turning around, he started walking to the nearest restaurant. He would have a meal before heading straight to the auction venue.

As he was about to step into the restaurant, the doors opened and someone came out. This unfolded right in front of Fang Zhao's eyes, and his mind immediately went blank.

The person who had emerged from the restaurant seemed middle aged. Perhaps from not having smooth experiences in the past, he looked somewhat beaten. However, with the help of fine clothing and the influence of his mental state, he appeared high

spirited, as though he had overcome the vicissitudes of life.

Of course, what attracted Fang Zhao's interests was not the other party's clothing but that face!

That face that was exactly the same as Fang Zhao's face in his past life.

If Fang Zhao were to make a comparison between his current face and the face from his previous life, it would only be about 70%, but the person in front of him had actually achieved a similarity of more than 90%! With some slight makeup, this person's face would be exactly the same as Fang Zhao's past face!

The other party's gaze fell on Fang Zhao, and he noticed Fang Zhao being flabbergasted. His eyes flickered in understanding and he confidently said, "You are also here for the role."

Ruan Shuang was an actor from Jinzhou. Although he had decades of acting experience, he still did not have a reputation. He had acting chops, but he couldn't be considered top-notch, and appearancewise, he wasn't that attractive either. Having strived for decades, he still hadn't achieved much. Luckily, his managing company had not given up on a poor actor like him. Having grinded for a few decades, Ruan Shuang had given up on the glorious dream of being a star and would just survive on his company's welfare.

Ruan Shuang knew that he looked like Yanzhou's leader during the Period of Destruction. But as there were very strict rules regarding that history, nobody dared to film anything about that subject matter, especially when there were very strict audits when it touched upon actual leaders during that time. Even when other people from his company talked about Ruan Shuang in private, they would say: "Even if you look like him, what can be done?!"

But who would have expected that with the reboot of the revolutionary film project, "Founding Era," a transparent actor like Ruan Shuang would be dredged up by the company! Moreover, the company now prioritized his development!

Nowadays, Ruan Shuang's company was spending huge amounts to groom him. The company's first objective was to fight for the role of "Fang Zhao" in "Founding Era"!

Given Ruan Shuang's influence and status within the industry, snatching the role was very difficult, but who could know how things would turn out without trying?

Even if he could not get that role, what about being a body double? Just getting into the "Founding Era" film project was a gargantuan achievement!

Taking a step back, even if he could not land a role as a body double, with the start of the revolutionary film project, "Founding Era," that signified that the subject of the Period of Destruction and the true history of those leaders were being revised and that restrictions would be relaxed. The policies were changing! In the future, there would be even more such dramas and movies related to this subject. Ruan Shuang would be able to exhibit this face of his!

A special type of actor!

Could any random person be able to do this?

This was also the reason why, on the whole, Ruan Shang's mental state was entirely different now. His value had risen!

Ruan Shuang noticed that Fang Zhao was still staring at him, or to be more precise, at his face, and he could not help but feel somewhat pleased. He might not be high up on the attractiveness index when compared to other popular stars, but who let him be born with a face like a martyr's? It was completely natural—no plastic surgery, no prosthetics, it was just like that! Envious? Jealous?

Back then, during the online voting activity for the role of "Fang Zhao," Ruan Shang had not been on the list of candidates. However, that online vote had only been spontaneous entertainment for netizens and didn't count for anything. Even if the topic "Let Fang Zhao play the role of Fang Zhao" had gained a lot of traction and there had indeed been many votes for Fang Zhao, how many voters had actually felt that Fang Zhao could act?

It had merely been for laughs.

Ruan Shang could not help but compare himself with the Fang Zhao in front of him.

One with the same name and one with the same face. Who had the advantage?

Naturally, it was the face!

Ruan Shuang walked over to the railing and chugged a mouthful of wine. Viewing the open-air theater stage below, Ruan Shuang was seemingly immersed in the

performance. His face appeared slightly intoxicated, but the words that came out of his mouth were cold. "Fang Zhao, I guess? A word of advice from Uncle. Give up on this dream. There is no way you will get selected for the drama. You are too young, and you aren't even an actor. For this sort of high-level project, Director Roman will not use a newcomer for such an important role, let alone a newcomer from a different industry."

Pausing for a bit, he eyed Fang Zhao and continued when Fang Zhao did not appear to have much of a reaction. "I'm not criticizing you. My status isn't high enough, and it will be difficult for me to even snatch the role. But my motive is to be a special type of actor, just playing the role of Fang Zhao. Even if I don't get selected for "Founding Era," there will be other paths. What about you? From what I see, in this fight for the role, you have even fewer advantages than me."

Even Leizhou's Renault family's senior master had been unable to get any good roles inside "Founding Era." For the role of "Fang Zhao" in the series, even the slightest of slipups could not be tolerated.

Or could it be that you have thicker skin than Zaro? Perhaps your backers are even more solid? From Ruan Shang's point of view, although Fang Zhao had had a growing reputation over the last two years and he had raised his global profile, he could only be considered an internet celebrity, and when compared to an internet celebrity like Zaro, who was the son of an aristocratic family, the difference was vast. Even Zaro had been unable to land a satisfactory role. You, Fang Zhao, can only be considered a fart! Don't you even have a f*cking idea whether you can even get selected?

"How much do you know about this 'Fang Zhao' person? If you want to fight for this role, you don't just go about it by having a little online fame and having the exact same name. Do you know about the contributions of 'Fang Zhao,' his battles? How much do you understand about his temperament, the way he thinks, his lifestyle habits? If you want to vie for such a role, you need to put in time and effort, to study meticulously. You have to constantly improve, throw away any ego you originally had! All of these! How much have you prepared!?"

Ruan Shuan drank more wine. He had said quite a lot while Fang Zhao had quietly listened at the side. Ruan Shuang reckoned that his words had had some effect and had influenced Fang Zhao's decision, that this youngster now had the intention of backing off, but in fact, currently, Fang Zhao's emotions were considerably complicated.

He did not know the name or history of the person in front of him who had the exact same face as his past life's, yet here this person was making a solemn vow saying that he wanted to be a special type of actor and play the roles of Fang Zhao, even advising Fang Zhao himself to read more historical resources to understand the character.

There were words Fang Zhao chose not to speak and held back in his heart. Pardon me for being blunt, but whether it's 500 years ago or right now, nobody understands me best but me. I don't have to throw away any ego I had because it is still me.

# Chapter 283
# Making a Casual Police Report

Fang Zhao understood what Ruan Shang had said. Indeed, it made sense.

Fang Zhao was disadvantaged because he wasn't an actor and had never formally acted before. With regard to films, he had not produced any works, nor could he talk about experience. He simply had nothing!

But he still had to take a shot. Even if he was rejected, he had tried his best.

Why was Fang Zhao going to such lengths?

Despite it clearly having nothing to do with his own profession, why did Fang Zhao not understand his own limits and why was he trying to vie for a role in such a series?

The same role performed by different individuals would give people different impressions.

For people of the New Era, when it came to history, among all the similarly ranked leaders of that period, "Fang Zhao" was the one with the least presence. This was partly due to Fang Zhao not having been able to survive to the end. There were videos and photographic resources left behind, but a lot of those were not available to the public. Unlike Fang Zhao, the other generals that had survived to the Founding Era had been able to leave behind more resources that were readily available.

Exactly what sort of person was this historical figure Fang Zhao?

When this question was posed to people from every continent, even Yanzhou natives found it difficult to answer. There were only some insubstantial historical excerpts and a pittance of photographs.

As for unofficial historical excerpts, those could only be viewed as gossip and could not be taken seriously.

Once, Fang Zhao had been curious and had bought a book about unofficial history sold

to the masses; it had been so exasperating it had been funny.

At that time, Zuo Yu had noticed his boss's expression wasn't looking too good and had explained, "Don't take these too seriously. All of these are just groundless claims."

In the past, there had been compilations by authors that had been too excessive and had infuriated descendants of the great generals, who had proceeded to smother them right away. The book that Fang Zhao had read belonged to a category that had a lower degree of fabrication and had not been targeted by the descendants of great generals from the various continents.

"Founding Era" was considered a historical adaptation and would portray the truth as much as possible, but the series would surely have some embellishments and alterations, so it would not be exactly the same as history.

Even so, Fang Zhao still wished to let people 500 years after see a "Fang Zhao" that was as close as possible to the true history.

In the first ever officially approved large-scale film project on the Period of Destruction, he hoped that everyone would get to see the Fang Zhao–edition Fang Zhao!

Fang Zhao had some confidence in his acting abilities. Truthfully speaking, during the Period of Destruction, under those chaotic and complex circumstances, there had also been fighting between people, and as leaders of their caliber, they had all been drama queens.

There had been times when pretending to be weak had been required, and there had been times when one had had to show the four human emotions: happiness, anger, sorrow, and joy. To achieve certain objectives, pretenses had been needed. Sometimes, concealment had been necessary. And the more their statuses had risen, the more impossible it had become to reveal their true thoughts at any given moment. A single moment of carelessness could have resulted in the loss of their own lives as well as those of their comrades.

But acting in front of a camera, and acting well, needed to be learned. After all, he wasn't a professional.

Fang Zhao had started reading some resources on aspects of acting beforehand. He was learning the theory first. He had also enrolled in virtual training classes online

and taken virtual courses. This was all just preparation work.

Fang Zhao did not think that he could compete with those famous film stars after just a short while. All he knew was that he understood the role better. As he understood his own advantages, naturally, he also could see his own shortcomings.

Ruan Shuang's words had mainly been to tell Fang Zhao the difficulties and get him to back out. One less competitor would result in a brighter glimmer of hope. Fang Zhao could see where Ruan Shuang was coming from, but he did not say a word. He was just too flabbergasted seeing someone who looked exactly the same as he used to look. There were many people in the world that looked alike, but this was the first time Fang Zhao had encountered such a situation.

At this moment, a group of youngsters came out from a nearby restaurant and walked passed Fang Zhao and Ruan Shuang. They reeked of alcohol and were happily chatting about heading to the entertainment center to have fun. A very common scene.

Fang Zhao gaze swept over them and lingered on one of the youths. He looked away naturally and said to Ruan Shuang, "Sorry, I have something to attend to."

Ruan Shuang stopped talking upon hearing what Fang Zhao said, and he smiled. "All right, go ahead."

As he watched Fang Zhao's back slowing moving away, Ruan Shuang assumed that his words had been effective. This youngster finally could not bear it and was running off to hide.

Ruan Shuang shook his head and sighed. "He is indeed still too young and inexperienced." What he had said certainly made sense, but his main motive had been to get Fang Zhao to give up on this idea. Being so easily persuaded and changing his mind so quickly, he was indeed still a youngster.

Fang Zhao did not know that Ruan Shuang was thinking. Instead, he was following that boisterous group of youngsters, mainly watching one person from the group. He had smelled the stench of blood on the person's body. Furthermore, although this youngster seemed to be happily conversing with those people around him, he might not have belonged to the same group. This person seemed a little fishy.

Fang Zhao's accumulated experience from his past life might not be enough to completely see through a person, but if his eyes and intuition realized something fishy,

then something was definitely wrong!

Fang Zhao followed behind the group, but he kept his distance and wasn't discovered. Further ahead was a street-like area on the cruise ship. It was much noisier, and the entire street was flanked with shops on both sides selling everything under the sun. There were also places of entertainment, and it was extremely lively here. It was just like a bustling street in a city.

Fang Zhao watched as that youngster separated from the group. The group headed to a casino, whereas this youngster walked over to a chain restaurant on the other side.

Mulling it over for a bit, Fang Zhao dialed the ship's police hotline.

That's right, to ensure the safety of the guests on board, this cruise ship was armed with a police squad. Each of Teasandsea's large-scale cruise ships was equipped with one.

The call was answered in no time.

"Hi, Teasandsea Cruise Ship No. 9's police office duty room."

"There is a person here that should be investigated," Fang Zhao said.

Inside the cruise's duty room, a young police officer looked at a display on the screen as he replied to the call. On it was the information and position of the person reporting.

The screen was split in two. On the left was Fang Zhao's personal information, and on the right side was an image captured by the surveillance system. Fang Zhao appeared in it.

As he read through Fang Zhao's personal information, particularly striking was the column that read "Reserve duty major." When the receiver saw this, he lifted an eyebrow. His original casual expression changed as he became serious and sat a little straighter.

Another police officer noticed this situation and quietly came over and studied the screen.

They frequently received calls from kids who had nothing better to do and were used to encountering such pranks. That was why, when he had heard Fang Zhao's calm and

unhurried tone and saw nothing suspicious on the surveillance system, the police officer had mistaken it for a prank call. However, when he saw "Reserve duty major," he no longer treated it as a joke.

Fang Zhao's current status and online fame did not necessarily mean that the cruise's police squad needed to give him special treatment. The police here encountered too many famous celebrities. They might know of Fang Zhao and know that he had been a hot topic for a bit, but they would not know any detailed information.

But when they saw "Reserve duty major," they got serious. This had a much greater impact, and they were more inclined to believe the judgments of a reserve duty officer. They were willing to believe Fang Zhao's words, just in case.

"We have already determined your location. Please point out the position of the target person as well as any distinctive features," the police officer said.

As he had been speaking, Fang Zhao had walked into that chain restaurant. The place was clamorous and warm, and it had the fragrance of freshly prepared food. There were many people in the restaurant, and it was quite noisy.

Fang Zhao scanned his surroundings, then continued, "Twenty meters ahead of me. A youth, slender, about 173 meters, short brown hair and a dark gray jacket. He just got a glass of wine from the bar counter."

There wasn't a need for a detailed description. Fang Zhao knew that with the current level of the surveillance systems, those in the police duty room could easily detect and lock onto the target person.

Sure enough, Fang Zhao had not yet finished speaking when the system locked onto the target and even let Fang Zhao verify that it was the right person.

On the screen in the police duty room, following the lock on the target, the person's personal information and identity were displayed.

At first glance, there was nothing suspicious about the person's identity, but "nothing suspicious" didn't mean anything. Falsifying documents was still possible.

"Watch him. Bring out previous surveillance footage of this person." Those in the police duty room started to move.

As for Fang Zhao, after ending the call, he went to find something to eat. He would leave the rest to the police squad.

Fang Zhao had made a casual police report not for merit or fame. He would leave the capturing of criminals to the police. Although he was a reserve duty major and had lawful gun ownership rights, he did not have the authority to interfere here.

However, two minutes later, Fang Zhao looked around the restaurant but did not see the suspicious person at all. That person had probably left the restaurant, but Fang Zhao would leave that to the cruise ship's police squad.

Fang Zhao sat near the windows, enjoying his dinner while contemplating what to do next.

The area beside the windows was slightly cooler and quieter. It was more suitable to do some pondering.

At the same time, the people in the police duty room were investigating.

The sharp gaze of the police squad's captain scanned through the investigation results of the few pieces of surveillance footage that had been brought up.

"Although he doesn't seem to be that suspicious, half an hour ago, where did he disappear to for five minutes? Continue investigating! From my experience, there might be something wrong with this person." As he spoke, the police captain also became curious. "Who made the report just now? Does he have a dog's nose? What sharp perception! He might not even lose to a cemetery guard."

# Chapter 284
# Plea for Help

Fang Zhao didn't know what kind of gossip the security guards on the cruise ship were trading about him. He was preoccupied with the prospect of running into Director Roman at the auction later in the day. How many competitors were also in the running? How would he deal with them?

Thanks to habits formed during the Period of Destruction, Fang Zhao was a fast eater, although he had already slowed down significantly to cope with his current life. Still, he was faster than the others. He started noticing curious glances thrown his way, but they bore no ill will, so he didn't mind.

After finishing his meal, Fang Zhao checked the time. There was still a while to go before the auction started, so he called Zuo Yu for an update.

Zuo Yu had no news on Roman's whereabouts but had overheard some folks mentioning the director in conversation. They all knew about the auction, so odds were Fang Zhao would run into quite a few like-minded folks at the auction.

After hanging up, it was about time, but just as he was getting ready to get up and leave, Fang Zhao heard his name called with a soft laugh. "Fang Zhao?"

He lifted his head to see a beautiful blonde girl take a seat across from him. She was holding half a cup of fruit tea whose aroma was wafting through the air.

The blonde girl stared at Fang Zhao. "I know who you are. I saw you at the Fiery Bird annual gala that year in Huangzhou. My friend and I are fans of yours!"

Even though she sounded quite emotional and her facial expressions were exaggerated, her gaze was relatively calm.

Fang Zhao had come across many crazy fans in Yanzhou. He could tell instantly that the blonde girl before him was faking it.

Then again, her indifference was also understandable. Someone who showed up on a

luxury cruise ship filled with rich people in Teasandsea had to come from money. A-list celebrities were regular sightings, so Fang Zhao was nothing to write home about.

Also, judging from her pattern of speech, Fang Zhao guessed she was from Huangzhou. Apart from her snobbish tone and her comment, there was also her syntax and accent.

"What are you doing here? You're not…" The blonde leaned in, her bright blue eyes staring at Fang Zhao flirtatiously. "Are you here for Director Roman too?"

Fang Zhao glanced at the girl, probably still in secondary school, and arched his eyebrows slightly. He was about to answer when he heard the blonde continue.

"It's OK if you don't own up to it. Totally understandable. Eight out of the 10 actors I ran into today are here for Roman. The auction is about to start. I won't keep you. Why don't you sign me an autograph as a keepsake? I have two friends who are also your fans. Pity they are out shopping."

She claimed to want Fang Zhao's autograph, but she had absolutely nothing for him to sign, not a piece of paper or anything, not even a pen.

Fang Zhao stared at her in silence.

Realizing she didn't have anything handy, the blonde took off her jacket and tossed it in front of Fang Zhao, without any hint of embarrassment. "Sign here."

The blonde girl wore a skimpy tank top that revealed a big chunk of her midriff, her look typical of the type of wholesome beauty common during teenage rebellion—part innocent, part sexy.

She rotated her teacup with one hand and twirled her hair with another as she gauged Fang Zhao with a mischievous smile. She wanted to jam Fang Zhao in a moment of embarrassment or awkwardness, or any other type of discomfort.

Fang Zhao glanced at the young woman, raised his arms to shut a nearby window and asked a waiter to bring a pen that would leave a permanent mark on clothing. He signed quickly and returned the jacket.

"The evening breeze is very chilly. The temperature gets quite low outside."

The blonde blanked. It clearly wasn't the response she had been expecting. She picked

up her autographed jacket without so much as a glance and said, "Do you have anything else to say to me?"

Fang Zhao pondered, then, with a kind smile, responded, "Have you finished your homework yet?"

"…"

That comment came across even chillier than the sea breeze.

The blonde froze, a look of astonishment replacing her mischievous smile. She hadn't expected Fang Zhao to say something like that.

She was a rising year-six secondary student, the equivalent of a rising senior under the education system of the Old Era. The workload at most New Era secondary schools was typically quite heavy in the summer between year five and year six. Summer vacation wasn't over yet in Huangzhou, and the new term was about to start. The summer workload was indeed significant, something even a rich kid had to cope with, not to mention the fact she still hadn't finished her summer homework.

F*ck!

Party pooper!

The blonde girl stopped smiling. She frowned, hissed, and stormed out.

Fang Zhao sighed. "I really don't know what's going on in the heads of kids these days."

He was just about to leave when he got another call.

It was a number he didn't recognize, but it was tagged verified. Fang Zhao put it through.

"Fang Zhao? This is Eric, head of security here on Teasandsea Cruise Ship No. 9."

A pale-looking Eric was sitting in his office. After receiving the tip from Fang Zhao, he had dug up footage of the suspicious-looking man, and he had found the man questionable as well. He had sent officers to pick the man up while keeping an eye on the surveillance footage, but lo and behold, the suspect had disappeared and his men couldn't track him down.

Meanwhile, Eric had gotten word after ordering a thorough inspection of the entire vessel that two heavily injured sailors had been found unconscious in a storeroom. They would have been lost causes had they been found any later.

After confirming that something was going down, Eric had ordered his men to locate the suspect while continuing the inspection and keeping up appearances.

But the suspect was slick as a piece of hot butter. Taking advantage of his stature, he had blended into the crowd seamlessly. Before they had known it, he had been gone.

Even though the cruise ship was fitted with many security cameras, the cruise ship's wealthy patrons had their concerns about privacy. The cameras were mainly installed in public places and some of the shopping malls. Not every inch of the ship was under surveillance.

What if they lost the suspect?

What if they couldn't track him down?

Should Eric expand the search?

Most definitely.

He had to keep looking and deploy more men, but at the same time, Eric decided to contact Fang Zhao as well.

People had different strengths. Some folks could pick up a scent from miles away, like cemetery guards, for example. No quality of disguise could fool their eyes and their inexplicable instincts.

Given the fact that it was Fang Zhao who had called in the tip, considering he seemed to have instincts that rivaled a cemetery guard's, then why not ask him to assist? Eric looked up Fang Zhao's personnel records. He had to be quite competent to have been promoted to officer grade during one brief year of military service. As much hyperbole as the news reports contained, they had some grounding in facts.

So Eric decided to utilize whatever assets he had at his disposal, lest any go to waste. Otherwise, he might have yet another unsolved crime on his hands.

Why "another"?

Because incidents like this were too common.

Not to mention that many of the tycoons aboard had their own bodyguards. They didn't give a d*mn about anything that didn't concern them. Who cared if someone might be missing, if someone's life hung in the balance? As long as they had fun and partied hard, nothing else mattered provided the cruise ship's security detail didn't get in the way.

So even if Eric wanted to expand his investigation, he would meet resistance. That was another reason he wanted to ask Fang Zhao for help. It was a hassle-free, efficient, and low-profile solution.

After briefing Fang Zhao on the situation, Eric made clear his request for help.

Fang Zhao looked at the time. The auction was about to begin.

He responded decisively. "No problem. Did you pick up a trail? Where did you lose him?"

As he listened to Eric's voice through his headset, Fang Zhao headed in the opposite direction of the auction, leaving the restaurant in a hurry.

In another corner of the restaurant, the blonde girl who had just asked Fang Zhao for his autograph was meeting up with her friends and giving them the lowdown on her encounter.

A pair of siblings, fraternal twins, craned their necks and surveyed their surroundings.

"Zhao God is here too?"

"Where, where, where?"

The blonde girl hadn't lied about the fact that her friends were Fang Zhao's fans. The twins were fans indeed, and of the more fanatic variety at that. The got emotional upon hearing that Fang Zhao was also on the cruise ship.

"He left. I just saw him head that way in a hurry." The blonde girl pointed her finger in the direction Fang Zhao had gone.

Then the girl realized something was wrong. "That's not the direction of the auction.

So he's not here for Roman after all? Was I wrong?"

"That's right. I heard the director of 'Founding Era' is on board and that he is scheduled to attend the auction," another person said. "Speaking of Fang Zhao, I remember voting for him in an online poll on who should be cast as Fang Zhao. I did it for fun, but to be serious, there's no way he will be cast."

The twins were already disappointed that Fang Zhao had left. That comment was the last straw.

"Why wouldn't my Zhao God be cast?"

"Yeah, of course he might be."

The twins were determined to defend their idol.

They had started out as gaming fans. After a series of events, they had become Fang Zhao's diehard fans. All their friends knew.

Once the topic of their idol came up, any semblance of reason or decorum went out the window. To put it bluntly, they went from normal people to psychos instantly.

Young people were prone to getting emotional, especially teenagers. Once they got started, there was no talking sense into them.

The friends who had just said that Fang Zhao was a long shot raised their hands in surrender. "OK, we're not going to argue with diehard fans like you. The cast will be announced soon. Nothing speaks louder than the facts."

In fact, the twins weren't total idiots. Of course they knew that a blockbuster project like this had strict standards. Fang Zhao had an edge in gaming, but when it came to movies, he really had nothing going for him. The twins just didn't want to concede defeat in front of their friends.

Never mind how boisterous they were in defending their idol, now that they had calmed down and reason had set in, the twins moped and sighed silently.

"Sigh, how come 'Founding Era' can't be postponed for a few decades? Who knows, by then Fang Zhao might be a much bigger star. He might be a contender then, but now is a bit early."

But matters concerning "Founding Era," its casting decisions, and so on, weren't things these kids had a say in.

The twins consoled themselves by saying, "Why don't we save up our allowance and fund a TV series for our idol?"

# Chapter 285
# Expert

Whatever the twins were currently thinking about, they were temporarily unable to find Fang Zhao. They had even especially run over to the auction venue for a look, but they were still unable to even catch a glimpse of their idol.

"He is probably in a private room. If not, he really isn't here."

"He was seen walking in the opposite direction. Maybe he really has no intention of coming here."

"Or maybe there are too many people here and that's why we haven't found him."

"Forget it, let's stop looking. After all, he is still on this ship. Who knows, maybe we might get to see him tomorrow or something."

Friends of the twins advised them to give up searching for Fang Zhao. Having achieved zilch in their search, they could only abandon it altogether.

Ruan Shuang, who had also had the idea of finding director Roman, had gone to the auction venue for a look-see. He had caught sight of neither Roman nor Fang Zhao and thought to himself, Did that little fella Fang Zhao really not come? My previous words were indeed effective.

Elsewhere, Fang Zhao referred to the information that Eric had provided, and he started his search.

"Is this where he disappeared?"

The place Fang Zhao was standing at currently was known as the central plaza. This was the central open-air entertainment district on the cruise. It was teeming with people at all times. Besides commercial shops, there were also many self-service dispensers with a variety of goods.

Among the crowd of guests, Fang Zhao also spotted some plainclothes. These were

probably the men that Eric had dispatched.

"My men have split up and have been searching the nearby area for 10 minutes, yet they have not seen the target. We have used the surveillance system and are still unable to detect him. Even with face recognition, we still aren't able to find him. I suspect that he might have put on a mask or a disguise," Eric said on the call.

If the target had reacted and changed his disguise before they had even responded or if the target had other accomplices assisting him, then it would really be hard to find him.

So much time had already passed. Just one minute was enough for someone to go into hiding, and it had already been 10 minutes since they had lost sight of the target.

There were too many people in this district. Even Eric, who was looking through each and every surveillance camera, felt tired and did not know where to start.

Although this was not the first time such a situation had occurred on this cruise ship, Eric still felt he had no other alternatives. There were too many people on board that had special statuses, so the manhunt operation was limited. Both his subordinates and himself had limited capabilities, as their hands were tied.

Watching Fang Zhao standing there, Eric felt that he had forced Fang Zhao to do something, so he told Fang Zhao, "Never mind, go ahead if you have other matters to attend to first. I will dispatch more manpower to investigate here."

Since he had already come over, Fang Zhao had no intention of leaving immediately. "I'll take a look around first." The auction had already started; he wouldn't be able to make it even if he went over now. The venue entrance had already been shut and there would be no entry. He might as well search around here. Any additional clues were always good.

Somewhere on the 12th floor.

A person stepped out from the disco dance floor at a bar. This was the suspect that had put on a disguise and was currently being sought out by the police squad.

He stood leisurely in front of the railing and answered a call.

"Wait another 30 minutes. They would probably disperse by then," the person on the

other end of the line said.

"Who did you say their backup was?" the suspect asked.

"No idea, the wiretap information is not complete. All I know is that it's the person who made the police report."

"The one who set the police's attention on to me? Has he come over? Who is it?"

He knew that the police's attention was on him because someone had made a report and disrupted his escape plans, exposing him too early.

To actually make a police report!

D*mn it!

"I feel that what is most important now is to wait," the voice in the earpiece advised.

"Got it. After this job is done, I'm going to leave this place and lay low for a couple of years."

However, he just wanted to know exactly who it was that had made the police report. What had that person been able to see through? At which point had he screwed up?

As he scanned the central plaza, he saw a few plainclothes.

Plainclothes?

Tsk!

This bunch couldn't be any more obvious even if they were in disguise.

The corner of his mouth curled upward into a grin. He just loved standing at a high place and watching this bunch thinking that they were well hidden as they searched for him.

However, he had only just broken into a grin when his face froze.

He saw someone, and their eyes made contact. At the moment the other party met his eyes, the suspect felt a shred of alarm in his heart.

Following that, all he noticed was the other party's gaze locking on to him and that person saying something. Immediately after, the few plainclothes turned to look over!

What followed was like the police squad turning into hungry cats that had caught the scent of a fish as they started to encircle the suspect!

"You have been found!" the voice in the earpiece said, sounding both questioning and confused.

"I have a disguise on!"

The tone in the earpiece was anxious now. "But you have been exposed! What have you done?"

"Nothing! All I f*cking did was unintentionally make eye contact with him!"

At the other side, Fang Zhao had originally wanted to search upward floor by floor. He had not expected to see the suspect right away. The suspect even had the gall to stand so brazenly at the railings and look down.

After informing the police squad, Fang Zhao also made his way in that direction.

Police duty room.

A police officer watching the screen was surprised. "Is it really this person? But his hairstyle and appearance have totally changed.

"Probably. There is no other reason for why our men hadn't been able to find him. If he was innocent, why would he be trying to escape?" Eric was delighted with his decision to get Fang Zhao. Otherwise, who would have known that the completely unfamiliar person standing out in the open was actually the suspect that they had so painstakingly been trying to find?

"That impressive? I feel that Fang Zhao can moonlight at the Cemetery of Martyrs on Memorial Day," another police officer lamented.

Eric didn't have too much to think about. The dejection he had been feeling previously had vanished. Clutching the comms device in his hand, he instructed the scattered squad members on each floor while staring fixedly at the screen. His tone was somewhat elated as he barked out instructions. "Seize that person! Surveillance,

watch closely! Don't let him escape this time!"

As he saw Fang Zhao also heading over, Eric decided to withdraw Fang Zhao from the capture, but after thinking about it, he changed his mind. He would wait till the suspect was caught first. What would happen if they lost sight of this guy again?

At the central plaza.

Tonight, Fang Zhao was wearing a slightly more formal suit for a soiree. This sort of outfit was not conspicuous here, as it was meant for the night's auction.

Fang Zhao had wanted to dress a little more headstrongly, but from his days at Silver Wing, he knew that this sort of formal suit gave a better impression and projected the serious and dignified appearance of someone going for an interview.

Only someone with a high enough status had the capability to be headstrong. If one wasn't at a high enough level, it was best to adhere to the rules. This was something that both Xue Jing and Ming Cang had told Fang Zhao before. Thus, Fang Zhao had specially dressed up formally. However, the current circumstances were extraordinary, so he didn't care about being formal or not.

Hearing about the suspect's movements from inside his earpiece, Fang Zhao took off his jacket and hung it on a nearby public clothes rack.

He dispensed a drawstring from a vending machine—the sort that was used by guests at the swimming pool to tie up their children's bags or to tie items such as swimming tubes to the kid to prevent them from losing it. The length and elasticity of these strings were adjustable. It was extremely childish in pink and blue, and it even had cartoon illustrations on it.

Fang Zhao pulled on both ends; it seemed rather durable.

Police officers watching Fang Zhao's movements on the screen were somewhat stunned by this series of actions.

Captain Eric glanced at the scene but simply had no time to express his views. He had received information on the suspect they were pursuing.

"Target his gone to the roof!"

"He's heading to the bow of the ship!"

A conjecture came to Eric's mind as he heard this while keeping an eye on the pursuing operation. It seemed like this suspect was very familiar with every area on the ship. Had he infiltrated the ship quite some time ago? There was probably someone giving him instructions inwardly. Perhaps the few cases aboard cruise ships previously had also been committed by them.

Thinking about it, Eric got more worked up. Not about the merits he might log—if they could solve the previous few cases, the brooding feeling in his heart would disappear.

"Continue to chase! If you lose him this time, forget about returning!"

When he finished issuing commands, Eric watched Fang Zhao through the surveillance systems. The comms between the two were still ongoing. Eric passed on the disseminated information to Fang Zhao. "The elevators here are very crowded. There is a door 20 meters toward the left side of where you are. Head through that door and move another 70 meters before making a right. You will see a special elevator there. I'll inform the command center to give you special privileges for it and you will be able to reach the roof very quickly… Where are you running to!"

Over there, after Fang Zhao had left the central plaza, his pace picked up. As the crowd became more sparse, Fang Zhao kept increasing his speed.

The route he took was completely different from the one Eric had advised him to take!

There was a section at the end of the central plaza that was a rock-climbing wall simulating a natural cliff. This was specifically used for rock climbing, and it satisfied guests who had a passion for extreme sports.

At the moment, a group was performing an activity on the rock-climbing wall.

The instructor had just demonstrated to the members of the group how to effectively climb up the wall at speed and had competed with a few competitive people, quite simply crushing their eager spirits.

"All right, take a break before having another go! Next, anybody else want to have a go against me?"

The words had just left the instructor's mouth when he realized someone had rushed

over from the side in a flash. Following that, there was a rustle of wind as that person started ascending the wall.

The other person had climbed up with rapid speed, as if he were on flat ground. In a flash, he had vanished from the summit. To be precise, the other party had ascended the rock wall and had climbed to the roof deck.

People from the group who had raised their heads early had still been able to see a silhouette climbing. Others who looked up too late could only see the top of the wall.

A short while later, that instructor blankly asked, "Did someone… just… climb up?"

"I think so," members of the group replied.

"Are you sure it was a person?"

"I think… so."

"Who was that just now? I hadn't even said to start yet!"

"Couldn't see clearly."

There were still some people who had their heads raised as they stared at the summit. "Seems like he was bare handed, and his attire wasn't suited for climbing."

"Very good. Now, who can tell me how a bare-handed person without the aid of any equipment and wearing clothing not suitable could climb up so quickly?" the instructor asked.

"…"

Silence.

The group of extreme sports fans collectively faced the wall and pondered hard.

How exactly had he done it?

The instructor waited for a bit, and before anyone answered, clapped his hands to draw the attention of everyone once again. "All right, let's change the question. Anyone know who that expert was?"

Everyone shook their heads, and they continued to face the wall and pondered.

The instructor asked once more but discovered that nobody knew the able person who had ascended the wall with a "woosh."

"We have seen a ghost!"

Police duty room.

Those who had witnessed the scene were already dumbstruck.

The cruise's command center was currently in a comms channel with Eric.

"Captain Eric, the elevator is ready for use and the authority has been handed over. When is the person you mentioned going to come?"

Eric, who could not take his eyes off the screen, had a complex look on his face. “…Thank you. There is no longer any need."

# Chapter 286
# Director Sighted

Watching Fang Zhao's speed of ascent before taking a look at those other police officers in the screen, Eric thought to himself, I didn't realize they were that slow normally!

Too little training indeed!

At this moment, a police officer on the roof deck made a report to Eric. "Our deployment at the bow of the ship was complete, but the suspect suddenly changed his direction and is headed to the side!"

"Why is he running over there?" Eric queried.

"I remember that there is an SVIP area on the 17th floor. The balcony there doesn't have any surveillance," Fang Zhao replied in the same comms channel.

Hearing this, Eric understood what Fang Zhao meant right away.

"There is indeed a royal high-end suit on the 17th floor with private balconies. Does that person intend to jump from the roof to the 17th floor?"

The whole SVIP area on the 17th floor did not have any surveillance monitors, nor were there any police officers there. Most importantly, the statuses of the people staying there were even more special, and they were more particular about privacy. Normally, they would simply not allow the police access to search and investigate that area.

Was the suspect's intention to once again evade the surveillance and then change into a new disguise?

Fang Zhao's conjecture really made sense. Eric also agreed with it.

"We can't let him go down! Who is the nearest to the place?" Eric asked.

"The men from T squad… and Fang Zhao," another police officer replied.

At this moment, the suspect, who had already arrived at the side of the ship, jumped decisively without so much as a hint of hesitation. No random person would have the guts to jump from such a height at this sort of place. It was obvious that he had made preparations beforehand and probably had equipment on him.

However, the members of T squad, who were in pursuit, were not as adequately prepared, and they did not have any equipment for descending. The distance between the roof deck and the 17th floor was only three stories, but dropping down straight was dangerous if one wasn't careful. Whether it was falling into the ocean or landing on the decks of another floor, there was a risk of suffering fatal injuries. At least, according to past statistical data from accidents.

T squad slowed down and waited for equipment to be delivered to them before jumping off and descending. On the other hand, Fang Zhao, who had appeared at almost the same time as T squad, did not pause at all.

The few people watching the situation unfold through the surveillance system were once more startled.

"Is he going to…"

"Jump into the ocean!"

"Fang Zhao, don't be impulsive! The suspect dared to jump because he came prepared. Don't think that the plaything in your hands can ensure your safety! Dropping into the ocean at this time is not amusing at all!" Eric exclaimed. He was extremely anxious when he saw Fang Zhao's position.

Yet as Eric was spewing out these words, Fang Zhao had already leaped off the deck and was falling.

"Save him!" Eric howled.

———

Inside a special high-grade custom-made suite on the 17th floor.

The preinstalled phone in the room was ringing constantly, as if it wouldn't stop till its

purpose had been accomplished.

Roman's eyebrows knitted as he frowned. He didn't want to break his train of thoughts to answer the phone.

Following that, his personal comms device also rang. If the call was from close family members or friends, the notification tone would have been different. Thus, the incoming call was from an unknown number.

Since he did not know the caller, there was no need to take notice of it.

Now was probably around the time when the auction was starting. Perhaps some person had managed to get his contact information through certain means and was harassing him with the continuous calls.

Under normal circumstances, perhaps Roman might have answered, but right now, his inspiration was overflowing and his train of thought was in a superb state, just like painters not wishing to take a break while they were still painting and composers not liking being disturbed when composing. This was totally trying to start a feud!

What a bother!

Roman scratched his head agitatedly. His somewhat disheveled hair became even messier.

He took large strides over to shut off the room's preinstalled phone and set his own communications device to silent mode. After that, he hurriedly returned to the screen and continued his deep musings.

Roman's eyes were bloodshot from staring at the screens for so long. He still had the same expression of unparalleled concentration as he studied every subtle expression of the characters displayed on the screen.

He watched the audition videos of a few actors and compared them to some historical video resources and felt that there still was something missing. Thinking about it more, he brought up videos of Fang Zhao again.

He kept studying videos of Fang Zhao. Those from his military service and those from normal entertainment media reports. Every time he studied these videos, he gained something new.

"This expression, so good. It's 30% cultured, 70% unyielding. That's more like it!"

"This is very good too. Composed enough, incisive, and steady!"

"Crossing swords in the fires of war tempers a person indeed…"

With his bloodshot eyes, Director Roman was like a crazed maniac chanting an incantation as he mumbled to himself. He had been tired, but he had gained a second wind and was stimulated. Even the ocean breeze flowing through the window was unable to calm him down.

Watching video after video in succession and analyzing them carefully, Roman discovered that Fang Zhao was simply just like the Fang Zhao from all those historical video resources!

Not in terms of his physical appearance, but this was what Roman felt when looking at Fang Zhao's expressions.

But if he was more stringent, they weren't exactly the same.

Comparing the two, the Fang Zhao from the historical video resources had a much more frightening aura emanating from him. His imposing manner was even more terrifying. The sort of fire and blood vibe that seemingly was capable of transcending the screen was not something actors could easily replicate.

The historical video resources that had been preserved were limited, and Roman did not know the true nature of the historical Fang Zhao. All he could do was use these resources as a foundation before gradually carving the image of this historical figure into his mind.

Having gone through numerous resources, especially precious videos preserved from the Period of Destruction, Roman already had a vague idea of the image of this Fang Zhao. When he saw these videos and photographs before him, it once more helped make the image in Roman's mind clearer.

When audiences spoke about a certain role, they would always associate it with the actor who played the role. However, an actor was the direct transmission of a director's thoughts.

When "Founding Era" started filming, what the actors acted out would be what Nova

Roman envisioned.

Perhaps it might be different from the actual historical figure, but at least this role would be Nova Roman's own version modeled according to historical resources!

And Fang Zhao was indeed a good template and an important reference.

Roman sighed with regret. "What a pity!"

If Fang Zhao was an actor with many years of experience, Roman would have contacted him for an audition. Unfortunately, he was an industry outsider.

"But his expressions are still really good, and his mannerisms are decent too. He has reference value. I'll just buy some video copyrights when the time comes."

Mumbling to himself, Roman took a little step forward and leaned closer toward the screen. He looked at Fang Zhao's photograph displayed on the left side of the screen, then observed the screenshot taken of Fang Zhao from one of the historical videos.

"There is just a little something lacking in that imposing manner."

Roman wouldn't insist on that frightening aura. That had been honed by the martyr Fang Zhao for decades from close to a century of fighting for survival in a fiery hell, whereas the Fang Zhao on the screen in front had grown up and lived in the peaceful New Era. Even the most top-notch actor might not necessarily be able to act this out, and there was no need for placing such high demands on Fang Zhao.

You win some, you lose some.

"How rare it is to find such a good template. I have to study this more, and when I'm explaining to the actors how to act, I can show them these videos."

Roman enlarged the photograph of Fang Zhao.

"I still feel like there is a little something lacking…"

"Right, too young!"

"Some wrinkles should be added, and the scars. The face needs some fine tuning to raise his domineering look!"

Roman extended his hand, preparing to use some software to age the person in the photograph and add on scars and others details to make the photograph closer to the image he had in his mind, but he suddenly heard activity coming from the balcony. Turning his head over, he saw a figure tumble onto the balcony and rush over to the interior.

A stranger using this sort of method to intrude into this sort of place at this sort of time could only be described as "not a good person"!

Alarm bells were already ringing in Roman's head. However, before he could react, another figure descended from the top and tumbled onto the balcony. At the same time, a snake-like whip flashed across.

The suspect that had successfully landed on the balcony of this suite on the 17th floor was about to silence the person in the room and prevent said person from calling for help or making a police report, but just before he could do so, he felt his legs be looped and pulled under him as he crashed into the floorboards with a loud bang. Immediately afterward, his entire body was bound up like a dumpling.

The suspect was in a daze at the sudden mishap that had occurred in the blink of an eye. Glancing at the rope binding him, the cartoon illustrations on it appeared to be sneering at him.

He thrashed about a few times trying to break free, then stopped moving.

With the cold muzzle of a gun pressed to the back of his head, who would dare move?!

Once Fang Zhao had subdued the suspect, he intended to explain to the guest in the room to prevent any misunderstandings arising. As he looked up at the person in the room and clearly saw the situation in the room, he was rooted for two seconds before saying, "Handling a police case. Please do not panic."

As he said that, Fang Zhao brought up the electronic warrant that Eric had sent him, proving that he was assisting the police with this case.

The suspect, who was wrapped up like a dumpling, did not dare make any large movements. All he could do was carefully twist his neck and rotate his eyebrows to analyze the surrounding conditions and seek a chance to escape.

Sneaking a peak at the person behind him who was pointing a gun at his head, the

suspect cursed silently. Where did the police get this sort of godly person? Even his landing after that jump was much smoother than mine!

With this intuition and skill, you could work at any of the 12 large Cemetery of Martyrs. If you have the time, why not go deal with terrorists or head to foreign planets to fight for merit? What reason do you have to stay on a cruise ship as a small cop! Why did you have to f*cking take note of me?!

The suspect carefully turned his neck again and looked toward the front. When he saw the situation in the room, he froze too.

Inside the room, the walls were adorned with many mounted screens. There were videos, screenshots, and photographs on every screen. There were different backdrops: jungles, cities, streets, stages, and so on. The person in the photos had different outfits. Some were military uniforms, while others were suited for events. Some of these images were full-length shots, while some were feature close-ups…

There were all the same person!

And they were exactly the same as the person behind him!

But he kept feeling that he had seen this person somewhere. The more he looked at it, the more familiar the person seemed.

After that, as if the suspect had thought of something, his eyes widened and he wished that his neck could just snap right now.

The wretched old fella in the room with an unkempt appearance and stubbly face, with his hand still on a photograph, seemed like the globally acclaimed director that had been a recent hot topic on the internet.

Furthermore, thinking about how famous, rich, and powerful people like him led their secret private lives, he felt his brain going through countless possibilities in a flash before he finally comprehended.

Unwritten. Rules!

The suspect that assumed he had discovered the truth wailed over his misfortune in his heart. Seems like I have just witnessed a transaction that can never ever see the light of day! Am I going to be silenced for good?

As for Nova Roman, who was standing in the room, he was also stupefied by the chain of unforeseen events. He had not expected that there would be people landing on the balcony of his suite in the SVIP area!

When he saw the way the dumpling-like person lying on the floor was staring at him, Roman was even more displeased.

Why do you have to stare at me like you I'm an old pervert?!

# Chapter 287
# You Are…

Roman looked to the other person. Just now, when he had heard "handling a police case," he had only been paying attention to the electronic warrant and had not noticed was this person looked like. Now that he had clearly seen this person, Roman was suddenly at a loss for words

The entire room was filled with videos and photographs of Fang Zhao. Before this, he had been studying them and his eyes were bloodshot from all that staring. Now that he suddenly saw the actual person, his first reaction was that he was seeing things.

"You are…"

Words had just left his mouth when Roman saw a few people in police uniforms land in succession on the balcony outside.

Roman: "…"

Was this how cruise police handled cases nowadays?

Eyebrows twitching, Roman calmly turned off all the screens in the room.

The few that arrived later were the police on the roof deck who had come down after they had received the rappelling equipment.

"Fang Zhao! Are you alright?"

"Caught him?"

"This is that fellow?"

Members of the police squad looked at the tied-up suspect and, after confirming that he was the one, used their handcuffs to restrain the suspect.

Another officer, probably the leader of the squad, walked toward Roman to explain the

situation that had unfolded before his eyes.

"Mr. Nova Roman? Sorry for disturbing you. When the police duty room dialed your room number, nobody picked up and you were uncontactable through your communications device…"

The police had previously contacted guests in the SVIP area and given them warnings beforehand to get those with bodyguards to deploy them. Only Roman had been uncontactable, and so they had been unable to inform him. It just so happened that the suspect had landed on this balcony and Roman did not normally have a bodyguard by his side while he was working. If not for Fang Zhao's quick reactions and prompt arrival, Roman might have been injured or taken hostage. If he had been even unluckier, he might not be alive.

Hearing the police's explanation, Roman also understood that Fang Zhao had saved him. However, now Roman's brain was beginning think again.

If it had been anybody else, then so be it, but it just had to be Fang Zhao.

Roman tried replaying the incident in his head. His line of thought regarding Fang Zhao had not been broken yet, and because of these unforeseen circumstances, it had started changing again.

Fang Zhao received a call from Eric.

Eric inquired about what had happened and also allowed Fang Zhao to follow the police squad and the suspect to the interrogation room.

Eric had even dispatched a small flying craft to pick them up.

Time was tight, so Fang Zhao didn't have any time to approach Director Roman for a chat.

However, under the present circumstances, the suspect had to be delivered first. After that matter was resolved, he would come and look for this director.

After Fang Zhao and the police squad left, Roman once again turned on the screens and viewed the images displayed on them. He kept replaying the whole chain of events in his head and began deeply contemplating.

———

After the detainee had been delivered to the police's interrogation room, Fang Zhao was called to another room to give a statement.

Outside the interrogation room, Eric first lectured the members of the police squad.

"Even Fang Zhao knew how to prepare equipment beforehand, so what about you guys? Did you carry the equipment that is supposed to be on you? No efficiency, no operational capability! Even an amateur puts us to shame!"

One police officer timidly replied, "Captain, Fang Zhao is really a professional. He's from the Baiji military district and has directly gone up against terrorists. He really cannot be considered an amateur. Didn't the military reports say that—"

Eric's eyebrows flew upward, his enlarged eyes compelling that junior police officer to swallow his words. "You still dare to talk back?!"

Fang Zhao had served in the Baiji military district, this Eric also knew, but he could not take back the words he had said. It was a matter of pride. He was the boss here!

However, they really could not be compared with Fang Zhao. That mysterious intuition was another matter altogether. Just the way he had leaped off the roof deck was out of this world. Even if it was someone worked all year round on the cruise and trained frequently, they might only be able to accomplish it with some difficulty, and they wouldn't be as nimble either.

"Luckily, not every suspect is just like Fang Zhao. With his skills, if Fang Zhao was to commit crimes, we would lose our jobs," another officer lamented.

Hearing this, Eric's mood became poorer. "Don't talk about Fang Zhao to that extent. Let's say, if we weren't fortunate enough to have encountered Fang Zhao, do you think we would have caught the suspect being detained inside?!"

But this wasn't time to be disciplining his subordinates. Eric had an interrogation to handle first.

When Fang Zhao got here, Eric had already gone inside to interrogate the suspect. However, that had nothing to do with Fang Zhao. After he had given his statement, Fang Zhao was informed that he could leave.

Just as he was about to leave, Fang Zhao heard two police officers discussing something in hushed tones.

Any normal person would not be able to listen to the contents of the conversation, but Fang Zhao's hearing was not like a normal person's, and he could catch what those two were saying.

When making his statement, Fang Zhao had heard from a police officer that the person he had detained had stolen something. He had stolen an important item stored in a safe in the storeroom.

At first, Fang Zhao had thought the person had stolen a precious gem or something similar, as the auction this time around featured gemstones. He had not expected that the person had stolen an antique.

A portable hard drive from the Old Era. Given the storage technology used in the New Era, it was indeed an antique.

During the Period of Destruction, many firms had not made preparations for data recovery for a calamity. When the apocalypse had descended, there had been severe data loss, and 90% of people's personal storage equipment had been destroyed. Too little had been able to be preserved.

Some fortunate storage devices had managed to survive the Period of Destruction due to special methods of preservation that had managed to extend the lifespan of these devices. For devices that had not been so lucky, even if they were not damaged externally, they had spoiled over time and the data inside was impossible to recover.

Research teams established during the Period of Destruction had only preserved more important data, the sort that only concerned humanity's survival and development. As for popular entertainment, there was much less.

But as the world once again recovered and became peaceful, people once again sought out stuff from the Old Era.

In the first 100 years of the New Era, there were people who had gotten rich from discovering Old Era videos. But now, 500 years later, there was already a database with backups. When some people discovered storage devices from the Old Era, they would spend large sums of money to contract historical relic restoration specialist and appraisers. After investing large sums, they would often find out that the videos stored

inside had already been uploaded to the database and the first discoverer of those videos had already been recorded. These items in their hands could not be sold for a high price, and it had all been a wasted effort.

People of the New Era always had an Old Era complex, and this was this reason people still valued these sorts storage devices. Naturally, what was more important was the data they contained and whether there were videos from the Old Era that had not been uploaded to the database.

Antiques could be faked, as could videos. Therefore, professional appraisers had to be contracted to verify the authenticity and evaluate the item's value.

The two police officers were discussing finding for a historical relic restoration specialist and appraiser to determine exactly what was in that portable hard drive, why somebody would fork out a large sum to hire a thief to steal it, and exactly who this hard drive belonged to.

However, Fang Zhao's focus was on a different thing. Historical relic restoration specialists are so capable now!

Even a portable hard drive can be repaired!

However, with this matter, Fang Zhao had other thoughts.

The difficulty of being a historical relic restoration specialist was too high, but a historical relic appraiser? He decided he would become one. With those qualifications, he would be able to enter certain venues. He had quite a lot of interest in these "historical relic videos."

As Fang Zhao contemplated this, another police officer came over.

"Hey, Fang Zhao, your rock climbing skills and your landing after jumping from a height were really impressive!"

"Lots of practice. I'm used to it," Fang Zhao replied.

During the Period of Destruction, there hadn't been any elevators for many years. Forget about climbing or landing from a height, Fang Zhao had also done even more dangerous activities. That had long become a habit, as it had been commonplace. Even though he had been reborn and gained a new body, he still retained those memories.

Every muscle and cell in his body retained that clear muscle memory.

However, these policemen evidently had no way of verifying the truth of Fang Zhao's words, so they only assumed that Fang Zhao trained a lot normally and had probably trained a lot during his time on Baiji military district, resulting in this proficiency.

Having left the police district, Fang Zhao received a message. It was from an unknown number, but the signature at the end of the message read "Nova Roman."

Fang Zhao blanked for a second before smiling immediately after.

Before coming here, Fang Zhao had thought about many circumstances where he would be able to see this director, yet he had not expected that the first words he would say when meeting the director were "Handling a police case, please do not panic."

He had thought that missing out on the auction would mean letting this opportunity slip by. However, he had actually come across the director here.

What a coincidence. His luck was too good.

Had being reborn really changed his fortunes?

However, what exactly was with the situation in the room back then? Fang Zhao had clearly seen the images on those screens. Had this director really been studying Fang Zhao himself?

Anyone who saw that scene would find it odd and would be suspicious.

However, for Fang Zhao, this might not be something bad.

After leaving the police district, Fang Zhao once more arrived at the 17th floor of the SVIP area. This time he did not need to jump from a height.

In the room, Roman had already changed his attire, washed up, and combed his hair. He no longer appeared so sloppy and disheveled.

Roman had gotten Fang Zhao to come over for a few reasons: first, to explain why there had been so many screenshots and photographs of Fang Zhao in the room previously; second, to thank Fang Zhao for saving him in the nick of time; and third, he wanted to

speak with Fang Zhao about those videos. He wanted to assimilate some of Fang Zhao's previous videos into his own instructional resources, and when the time came, he would use it to guide actors and also help assist their understanding of the role of Fang Zhao.

Recalling the situation that had happened before, Roman did not feel awkward meeting Fang Zhao again. After all, with his age, experience, and status, and as he was thick skinned, he could maintain sufficient composure.

"Sit, make yourself at home." Under normal circumstances, Roman was rather affable. "Teasandsea's specialty tea leaves. There are very few authentic goods on the market. I just managed to get these from an old friend." Roman laughed heartily and personally poured a cup of tea for Fang Zhao. "I know all about this matter. Thank you for acting promptly. Otherwise, this old life of mine might have suffered. I'm old and wouldn't be able to bear being tormented. I listened to your concert online. It was really decent. When will your next concert be? If I have the time, I will surely attend it live."

"I haven't started preparing for the next concert yet," Fang Zhao replied.

"Oh? Right, take a break and rest first, give yourself a vacation before preparing for the next one. Teasandsea is a really great place to have a holiday!"

"No." Fang Zhao looked towards Roman, his expression serious. "I received news that Director Roman would be at Teasandsea, so I specifically came here."

Roman paused midway through sipping his tea. Raising his head up, in a flash, his gaze became extremely penetrating. Although he still had a smile on his face, the amiable warmth was no longer there.

Fang Zhao did not shy away from Roman's gaze. "I wish to act as Fang Zhao."

# Chapter 288
# Given an Opportunity

After Fang Zhao said this line, the room sunk into silence.

It was so quiet that only breathing could be heard.

The specialty tea leaves of Teasandsea had a refreshing scent to them. On a blistering hot day, the scent would let people feel a pleasurable cooling, but now, under this sort of silent and stagnating atmosphere, it caused one to feel a little chilly.

Both parties in the room were trying to outlast the other in keeping their composure.

Roman's penetrating gaze studied the young man sitting on the opposite side of the coffee table.

It wasn't as if he had not given any thought to Fang Zhao's purpose for appearing here, and he had even suspected that the other party had come because of "Founding Era." He had very quickly given up on that thought, as from what he had seen, the possibility was so low that it was completely impossible. Furthermore, Fang Zhao had indeed been helping the police with a case and had appeared elsewhere on the cruise when the auction had started. Therefore, Romans doubts had been cleared in no time.

But now…

Roman abruptly shattered the silence in the room. "You still dare to even think about it!"

The circumstances in front of him showed that not only did Fang Zhao dare to think about it, this youngster had even said it out loud right in front of him.

If he hadn't received a proper explanation about the unfortunate events involving the suspect a short while ago, he would even suspect the whole incident to have been an elaborate ruse!

However, Roman really did not like it when actors beat around the bush when in front

of him either.

Having been a director for so many years, he had seen countless film emperors from every continent. He only instructed actors as a director during filming, and actors trying to play games in front of his eyes would find it hard. Furthermore, now that Roman's status was already so high, he disliked it when minor actors tried to beat around the bush in front of him.

He had never expected that the one in front of him had not even tried such a thing. Fang Zhao had gone straight to the point!

Roman squinted and once more studied the person in front of him. Did he speak this way after fully understanding my temperament?

"I have studied many historical resources and understand the martyr Fang Zhao. I cannot deny that on many fronts, you are indeed very similar to the Fang Zhao in the drama series and that there is some resemblance between you and the image I have envisioned, which has given me lots of inspiration. I can let you become a body double. Given your agility, I can draw up a contract for you to sign right now. But!" At this moment, Roman's entire demeanor changed. It was as if a raging tempest had surged, enveloping the entire area around the coffee table. "If you want this role, that is basically impossible! You aren't even an actor. At present, you don't even have a single representative work, and you completely lack acting experience! You, what can you use to fight for it?!"

Fang Zhao's gaze did not back down from Roman's change in demeanor, nor did he lose confidence or appear weak. On the contrary, he replied, "For this role, I can act better than all the others."

"Representative works! Awards! Only these are the most direct proof of your ability, not empty promises!"

"That is why I'm asking for a chance now, a chance to prove my worth," Fang Zhao replied.

Why had he looked for Roman?

Because Roman dared to use newcomers. This was an unconventional gambit!

Fang Zhao had analyzed a lot of people to try and find a breakthrough. Roman was the

best place to start. Only here would he be able to fight for a chance!

The room once again fell back into silence.

It was so quiet that the sound of Roman's fingers rubbing the rim of his teacup could be heard.

Fang Zhao did not add anything further, instead continuing to wait in silence. There was no need to say too many unnecessary words in front of this globally acclaimed director. Roman would make his own judgments.

After a short while had passed, Roman said, "You studied my temper beforehand."

Roman loved to promote fresh talent in his own works, as he loved to unearth gold that had been neglected and buried away. He loved to "wipe away the grime on a pearl" so he could see the instant when it glittered!

He loved creating stars!

When his career finally concluded, he wanted to look back at his accomplishments, that night sky full of resplendent stars!

If a question was posed: "Among the people from the entire project with the authority to decide such a thing, who among them had the highest possibility of using fresh talent?"

The answer would be only Nova Roman!

Every newcomer that had been pushed forward by him would make it big, and those with brains or who could speedily adapt to this industry had already stood on the golden pedestal in the entertainment circles.

However, for the "Founding Era" project, Roman had originally decided to go about it conservatively. Now that he had met Fang Zhao in person, though, he was wavering.

A revolutionary film project like "Founding Era," according to Roman, naturally had a different significance, but his internal raging ambition and his tendency to take risks caused Roman to change his original outlook.

Not only was Fang Zhao not considered a fresh newcomer, he wasn't even an actor.

However, what harm was there in giving him a chance? Who had asked this youngster to suit Roman's tastes!? And furthermore, Fang Zhao was practically the same as the image of the role Roman had constructed in his mind!

Never mind, just consider it me repaying the favor.

In his heart, Roman had found a very good excuse for himself. Should Fang Zhao fail, and if others were to ask about it in the future, he would be able to explain.

"On account of the inspiration you have furnished and you saving me, I shall give you a chance. However, there are some things I have to say. 'Founding Era' is a revolutionary project. The role of the martyr Fang Zhao is an extremely important one. Even as the lead director, I don't have full authority, and I can't just decide alone." Roman added extra emphasis in his tone. "Ten days from now, I will give you a chance for an audition! But this is just a preliminary trial. If you pass this stage, your audition video will be put together with the audition videos of other actors and sent for the second round of selection. After those videos have been filtered, the ones that pass will be shown to the other policy makers and a vote will be called to decide. You have to prepare well!"

Fang Zhao had to make mental preparations for being overlooked, facing those policymakers with high authority, and dealing with the vicious looks from other great masters in the film circles!

After he had said all this, Roman's penetrating gaze once again became warm, like the gentle breeze after a torrential downpour. He didn't look at Fang Zhao and instead gazed out the window and brandished his hands, indicating that Fang Zhao could leave.

If Fang Zhao had not brought up this request, perhaps he might have discussed with Fang Zhao and analyzed the historical figure Fang Zhao more, but now, there was no need.

"The entire selection process takes a long time, and the competition is very intense. Whether you can make it depends entirely on you. You have to be aware of your own strengths and weaknesses," Roman said unhurriedly.

In 10 days' time, if the results were satisfactory, he would give Fang Zhao an official chance to be in the running and would surely give Fang Zhao guidance and assistance.

But that was all he would be able to do for Fang Zhao.

Fang Zhao stood up and sincerely replied, "Many thanks!"

After stepping out from Roman's place, Fang Zhao returned to his own room on the cruise before giving Duan Qianji a call. He needed a professional acting instructor to come over and give him guidance. Even if he was only showing his inherent qualities, he still needed to grasp the necessary acting techniques, and online coaching had its limitations. Also, Roman would not be able to provide Fang Zhao with much help, so 10 days was actually very tight.

Yanzhou, Silver Wing headquarters. The time zone was different; it was still daytime here.

In the top floor office, Silver Wing boss Duan Qianji had been frustrated recently. The few big name film stars in the company were all in the midst of fighting for roles. Duan Qianji had already provided all the assistance she could give, but not a single one had been able to lock down a role. Even the company's top-rated He Lisi had yet to receive a final contract.

But of course, Duan Qianji also understood that there were many other entertainment companies that were as anxious as Silver Wing. Everyone was having the same feelings.

Duan Qianji got her assistant to pour a cup of coffee and was about to go over the latest reports. It was at this moment that she received an incoming call from Fang Zhao.

"Fang Zhao? Aren't you on a long vacation—important matter? All right, go ahead, I will listen to it… Cough, cough, cough…" Duan Qianji, who had been sipping on coffee to freshen herself up, choked when she heard Fang Zhao's words.

Duan Qianji's assistant shot her boss an astonished look. Recently, she had not seen her boss so excited.

But right now, Duan Qianji could not bother about anything else. The shock of Fang Zhao's information had been too forceful.

"Who did you say it was?! Are you sure it was that Roman?"

Probably only top-rated film stars could get the opportunity of a screen test from Head

Director Nova Roman, and if those top-rated film stars lacked some tricks, they wouldn't even get that chance. As for others, they wouldn't even get to see Roman's shadow, let alone an opportunity for an audition.

Yet Fang Zhao, who wasn't even in the showbiz circles, had actually obtained a rare opportunity for an audition from Nova Roman.

Duan Qianji tried to control her fluctuating mood, but when she spoke, her tone still contained disbelief and surprise. "Where are you now?"

"Teasandsea Cruise Ship No. 9," Fang Zhao replied.

"He is really on the cruise?"

There was too much smoke online. An hour ago, there had been many people saying that Director Roman had participated in the auction, but it had very quickly been refuted by others saying that they had not spotted Roman at the actual venue. There had only been someone who had a similar body shape to Roman. People treated this as Roman duping them once again.

She could not believe that this was actually true!

"All right… Prepare yourself first, and you must absolutely not leak this information externally. I will send someone over immediately!"

Now, Duan Qianji was even more nervous than Fang Zhao. She had known that Fang Zhao was definitely up to something when he had applied for the vacation.

And when he was up to something, it would be a big matter!

Regardless of how Fang Zhao had gotten ahold of this opportunity, Duan Qianji was only looking at the result right now! An opportunity meant hope, and with hope there was a possibility! Every single opportunity had to be grasped.

After ending the call, in line with Fang Zhao's request, Duan Qianji went to browse through a few satisfactory names and checked on these people's arrangements. Following that, she made a call.

On a certain floor in Silver Wing tower, an actor was coaching over 10 second- and third-rate actors. Shen Wei was signed to Silver Wing on a special contract as an

instructor. He received a call from Duan Qianji and left.

This batch of students thought that Shen Wei had stepped out to make a call and would return very quickly. However, 30 minutes had already passed and Shen Wei had not returned. Instead, it was another younger instructor who came over. "Senior Shen Wei has something to attend to. I will be taking over this week's training sessions."

When the students heard this news, suspicions and doubts surged like a torrent in their hearts. However, they tried their best to maintain "we understand," "we will cooperate," and "we are quiet and obedient" looks.

But the instructor was able to see through it from the twinkling in their eyes from time to time, as well as their lack of focus.

However, this much-younger instructor did not say anything. He also knew what this bunch was thinking. Actually, even he had his own suspicions.

The training classes had only started two days ago, and they were changing instructors now?

Changing instructors was not something uncommon, but circumstances now were different. This was a sensitive time.

Unless some actor in the company had landed an opportunity for a screen test? Otherwise, the company would not be so urgent in transferring Senior Instructor Shen Wei away.

Very quickly, this information spread through the company.

"Was Shen Wei really transferred out for the time being?"

"Indeed, it's been verified!"

"How is the progress of the companies top-rate and first-rate film stars? Which of them has gotten an opportunity for a screen test?"

"No idea. Information about that bunch is kept under tight wraps. Even if they got a chance for a screen test, they wouldn't reveal it."

"All we can do is wait, then. Let's see which entertainment reporter will release the

news first."

"Speaking of entertainment reporters… Where has Wang Tie gone to? Wasn't he given the title of Yanzhou's Paparazzi King? He's been so quiet—there hasn't even been a fart from him!"

"Recently, there really hasn't been any news of him. At this sort of time, being too quiet doesn't seem like his style."

"I having a nagging feeling in my heart, as if he is up to something big."

"Actually, there is only so much in these circles. The roles are all determined by the status of the industry. How big can it even get? Whatever stirring and hyping in the news is ultimately just going to be something that makes sense and is expected!"

# Chapter 289
# Who Is This?

Oblivious to the fallout within Silver Wing, Fang Zhao, situated in faraway Teasandsea, had already reached Shen Wei.

Shen Wei still hadn't found his composure by the time he boarded his flying transport. He had gotten a call from Duan Qianji.

He had thought he was going to be asked to train a few of the company's priority A-list actors. Duan Qianji hadn't prefaced her remarks, simply asking him if he could spare some time right now. When she had gotten an answer in the affirmative, she'd had him sign a confidentiality agreement.

Chills had gone down Shen Wei's spine once he had realized the severity of the situation. He didn't dare let down his guard, but he also realized this was an opportunity for him. He was as tight lipped as he had ever been lest he squander such a rare career move. Once he completed the handoff at Silver Wing, he headed straight for Tessandsea in the flying transport Duan Qianji had prepared for him.

Only when the flying transport had left Yanzhou airspace did Duan Qianji reveal who he was going to see in Teasandsea.

"Who would have guessed?" Shen Wei marveled silently at this, knowing that all the folks at Silver Wing would get a kick out of the fact that his mystery assignment was Fang Zhao, someone who had nothing to do with acting.

Unlike Duan Qianji, who was a results-oriented boss looking out for the company's interests, Shen Wei had started out as an actor. He knew full well how hard it was to land an audition for this film project, and for a key part, no less. He wanted to know how Fang Zhao had managed to secure the opportunity. That was what he was wondering about during the journey to Teasandsea.

More often than not, actors were pawns. They had no authority. All they could do was wait to be chosen. So what was had prompted Director Roman to give Fang Zhao this precious opportunity?

Was a backroom deal involved?

Shen Wei got a sense of the answer on the first day he worked with Fang Zhao after arriving at Teasandsea.

After analyzing Fang Zhao's personality and Fang Zhao the character as described in the script, he realized they were a perfect match.

Fang Zhao had won by simply going with the flow.

That is an advantage too , Shen Wei thought to himself. If there was a huge discrepancy between Fang Zhao's personality and Fang Zhao the character, or if he wasn't already an entertainment industry insider, he couldn't possibly have landed the audition without the proper backing and connections.

But acting in keeping with your personality didn't mean behaving the same way you did in real life when you acted. You still had to depict traits assigned to the character in the script, building from your own personality in order to craft a complete portrait.

As far as Fang Zhao was concerned, apart from mastering some basic acting techniques, he also had to learn how to be himself in the movie, how to deliver a performance that moved audiences. That was Shen Wei's job.

Duan Qianji had asked for Shen Wei, which meant he was highly skilled and the most suitable coach for Fang Zhao. Shen Wei knew how to help Fang Zhao master the skills that were necessary for his audition in the shortest time frame. As for everything else, Shen Wei would simplify. He didn't have enough time to go into detail anyway.

Fang Zhao holed up in his room after Shen Wei arrived in Teasandsea. The cruise ship was still in motion. He didn't need to head back to Teasandsea just yet. He instructed Yan Biao, who had remained on Teasandsea, to help Shen Wei settle down. He would then communicate with Shen Wei via videoconference and receive coaching online.

Fang Zhao rented a seaside villa for Shen Wei. There were plenty of similar options for tourists. They were private enough and conducive to his online coaching sessions.

Meanwhile, in the latest online gossip.

A video had caused quite the stir.

One of the passengers on the cruise ship had uploaded a hastily shot rock climbing video while sharing his pictures from the trip.

The residents of Teasandsea, who prided themselves on being worldly, were blown away. The video was reposted countless times, becoming a top headline in all the local news outlets.

The passenger who had shot the video might have been in a hurry and had only captured the latter stages of the climb, and the climber had been in a hurry. Rock-climbing professionals and non-professionals alike gave their two cents.

"That kind of speed—it's gotta be fake, no? Post-production?"

"How did he do it?"

"On first glance, he seems to be climbing with his bare hands, but maybe he's carrying some secret equipment in his palms."

"But he doesn't look like he came prepared. He looks like he's coming from a banquet or something."

"I know. It's gotta be a publicity stunt. When all the hype dies down, we'll find out that some rock-climbing athlete is making his debut in the entertainment industry."

"Word has it that several quite-good-looking extreme athletes are contemplating new careers."

"It's not them. They were still broadcasting live from their climb up a snow mountain in Muzhou yesterday."

"Let's stop guessing. We'll wait and see. The publicity team behind this will follow up for sure."

"True. Let's let things play out."

So the folks fixated on the video waited for the incident to percolate—except it didn't.

The rock climbing incident on the cruise ship was soon eclipsed by other events. It barely got a mention after a while. It just dropped off the radar.

Folks who thought they had seen through the act were bewildered.

This didn't make sense.

What about the hype?

The athletes switching careers?

Where did they go?

Teasandsea.

Yan Biao watched the video online while he conferred with Zuo Yu by phone.

Others would have missed it, but as Fang Zhao's bodyguard, Yan Biao had no trouble recognizing the silhouette. He just wasn't sure and wanted Zuo Yu to confirm. It was also a chance to ask what had happened on the cruise ship.

Zuo Yu's face went blank. "I'm not clear either. After hanging up with Boss, I went for a cup of coffee and listened to some music. Before I knew it, Boss was in the headlines again."

Even though it was a local headline story, it was still a headline story.

After a slight distraction, Boss was in the news again.

"What good are you for?" Yan Biao thought Zuo Yu wasn't doing his job.

In contrast to the folks in Teasandsea, readers from other continents had other concerns. They wanted to distinguish fact from rumor, to figure out whether Director Roman was actually on the cruise ship and which celebrities had managed to successfully stalk him.

At times like this, the people who got the most flak were the best-known entertainment journalists on each continent.

In Yanzhou, Wang Tie was the one who came under fire.

"Godfather, should we release what we have?" Fu Rui asked Wang Tie after browsing the online chatter.

Wang Tie shook his head. "We still don't have enough stuff. Let's wait and keep at it."

Wang Tie had been sitting on the material he had shot because he felt the timing was wrong.

"We're not going to release anything at all? You haven't seen the online commentary. They're saying that your reputation as 'King of Paparazzi' is at stake."

"It's all talk. I'm not actually going to suffer. It's better than being fed to the sharks. Believe it or not, if I released what we have now, Fang Zhao would show up tonight."

Fu Rui was going to suggest they simply go into hiding after releasing their material, but he thought back to the last time Fang Zhao had paid them a visit and shut up.

"Then should we keep following? How much more can the situation evolve?" What Fu Rui was worried about was Fang Zhao being eliminated from consideration for the role of his namesake in a few days. Then their material would be less valuable. They would be ridiculed for not following credible candidates and chasing Fang Zhao instead. Even idiots had better judgment.

Did Wang Tie have a brain?

But Fu Rui didn't speak up in the end. He chose to execute Wang Tie's plan. So be it if I'm a blind follower.

Fu Rui's question gave Wang Tie pause as well. He had been reviewing his decision-making since arriving in Teasandsea. Was it the right call to come here with his team? In the end, he decided to trust his instincts, to trust the finely-tuned antenna that distinguished him as the leading entertainment journalist of Yanzhou.

I'm definitely right!

"Keep at it," Wang Tie said.

"Aye, aye! Oh, Shifu, where's Xiao Bo today? I haven't seen him all day. How's his assignment coming along?" Fu Rui was a bit puzzled and worried as to why he couldn't reach his colleague.

"He's getting a shot. He got bitten by a dog while on assignment," Wang Tie responded.

"What? Whose dog was he bitten by?"

"Fang Zhao's, the tiny one."

"Godfather, you warned us to be on the lookout for Fang Zhao, but you never mentioned his dog."

Wang Tie took the opportunity to lecture Fu Rui. "That's why I say our line of work is quite dangerous. We have to be on guard at all times. Not only do we have to on the lookout for certain people, we have to watch out for animals too. We can't let down our guard against any form of life." His underlings were getting inflated egos after a few successful assignments. They had to be beaten down.

Fang Zhao ignored all the online debate. He was fully focused on the audition. After resolving the incident on the cruise ship quietly, he never again left his room. When the cruise ship arrived at its destination, he blended in with the other passengers as they disembarked and got back online to receive coaching from Shen Wei.

Several days later, a day before Roman's deadline.

Fang Zhao arrived at the address Roman had provided. Rooms were reserved for the audition.

Before Fang Zhao had set off, Shen Wei had told him, "There are some things that you want in life that you may never get, and some you may fail to escape even if you try, so try your best, but don't force things."

Being granted the audition was enough cause for celebration. It was a rare and incredible opportunity for a movie industry outsider like Fang Zhao. He was also unusually talented and had been a hard-working student the past few days. He had done the best he could. If he was ultimately rejected for the role, there would be no shame in it.

Shen Wei had seen too many talented actors come and go. These kids were often quite fragile, failing to recover after a single stumble. As an elder, Shen Wei felt obliged to pass on his wisdom.

Roman didn't show up in person. His assistant greeted Fang Zhao's party and led Fang Zhao to the room where the audition was going to take place. Shen Wei, Zuo Yu, and Yan Biao waited in a living room.

Shen Wei was a bit disappointed that he didn't get to meet Roman in person, but soon his sense of regret was displaced by nerves. As a teacher, he was even more jittery than his student.

The room reserved for the audition was completely empty. There were no props. Certain images would be projected during the audition to help set the scene.

The audition comprised three parts: a conversation, a fight scene, and a random scene picked by Roman. The third scene was extra credit, so to speak, an opportunity for actors to show their stuff.

"I'll give you five minutes to prepare for each scene." Roman didn't bother asking Fang Zhao if five minutes was sufficient. After barking his orders, he sat down on a nearby sofa to study a document. He was very busy. He'd had to reshuffle his schedule to make time for Fang Zhao's audition.

According to Roman's schedule, there were three scenes, plus five minutes of prep time for each performance. The whole process would take no more than half an hour.

Half an hour later.

Shen Wei, who was waiting in the living room, could no longer sit still.

# Chapter 290
# Committee of 100

Shen Wei once again shifted his gaze away from the audition room. As the minutes passed, his heart, which had required some effort to pacify, once more started to stir restlessly.

Does an audition require this much time?

Half an hour had passed, and that already exceeded their estimated time.

If it had just been a formality or if Roman had not been satisfied with Fang Zhao's performance, it simply would not have taken this long!

Unless… there had been progress?

The more he thought about it, the more Shen Wei could not sit tight. Every two minutes, he would take a look at the time. He had already drunk three cups of tea and had paced around seven or eight times, yet he still could not calm down and was growing even more jittery instead.

When there was expectation, it would give rise to impractical thoughts and a loss of rationality.

When it came to anticipating, who wouldn't tend to think about the positive aspects?

Who wouldn't be willing to have a better result?

Roman was willing to give Fang Zhao an audition, which meant he also regarded Fang Zhao highly.

A director who loved taking risks and using fresh talent…

The more he thought, the more his heart beat faster. Shen Wei's fingers, clasped around the teacup, were also trembling slightly.

Although he wasn't the one auditioning, if Fang Zhao could really snag that role, as Fang Zhao's coach, the benefits that Shen Wei would gain would also be extremely attractive.

Shen Wei kept telling himself to calm down. Stay cool, calm down!

An hour passed.

Not only did Shen Wei's heartbeat not slow down, on the contrary, it was pulsating even more intensely. Both his fists were clenched—otherwise, his fingers would be trembling from the nervousness.

Shen Wei could not sit still, and he got up to pace around. After gulping down a few glasses of water and taking two trips to the washroom while telling himself to calm down, Shen Wei finally saw the sliding doors open. Shen Wei had only just sat back down when he shot straight up. He could not control his own legs as they took a few steps closer to the door.

Fang Zhao had just stepped out of the audition room. There wasn't any hint of excitement on his face, and this made Shen Wei calm down.

“…How was it?" Shen Wei asked with great difficulty. He had wanted to ask why it had taken so long and what exactly had happened inside. There was too much he wanted to ask, and he had only been able to force out these three simple words.

"Return back and wait for the results," Fang Zhao replied.

"What?"

Shen Wei wanted to probe further but quickly realized that the location wasn't appropriate for doing so. Only after they had left Roman's place and were on their way back did Shen Wei find out about the details.

"The audition went rather smoothly. This sort of important role cannot be decided solely by Director Roman. He told me to return home first and wait for news," Fang Zhao explained.

"Oh, right, that makes sense." Shen Wei was much calmer now, and he understood. Although he had not gotten to hear the outcome he had wanted to hear and was a little disappointed, looking at things from a different perspective, as long as the role wasn't

fixed, that meant there was still a chance.

"Then how long do we have to wait?" Shen Wei asked.

"Director Roman didn't say, but he did say that this matter would be decided within the week. In two days' time, he will be returning to Huangzhou to discuss and determine the actors for all the important roles," Fang Zhao replied.

Just as Shen Wei had told him, Fang Zhao did not worry about personal gains or losses. He had already done all that he could. Now all that was left was waiting for the results. Even if the results were not satisfactory, he would still accept it. At least he had tried his best, right?

"Oh right, why was the audition so long?" Shen Wei asked.

"At the start, he got me to do three scenes. After that, Director Roman spent an hour speaking to me about filming, then asked me to do another three scenes." When Fang Zhao said this, he was very thankful toward this famous director. Although this director had his own selfish desires, this also benefited Fang Zhao.

Shen Wei was surprised. "Director Roman spoke to you about filming?"

"He even shared some acting techniques that can be used in front of a camera," Fang Zhao replied.

Shen Wei could not help but break into a smile. "Not bad! To be able to receive the guidance of this famous director, it seems like he really thinks highly of you."

"Boss." Yan Biao spoke from the front passenger seat. "There has been somebody watching us continuously for the past few days. I noticed them when you were having your screen test. However, they kept their distance. Whoever it is, they are being very prudent."

"The bunch that Curly Hair bit?" Fang Zhao asked.

After returning from the cruise, Fang Zhao had learned from Yan Biao that Curly Hair had bitten a sneaky person who had been following them. However, Curly Hair had not bitten down with too much force. The other party had escaped very quickly and Yan Biao had been unable to catch them.

After that, Yan Biao and Zuo Yu had both asked Fang Zhao whether they should catch the person, but Fang Zhao had indicated that they need not bother.

"Probably."

Form Yan Biao's perspective, these bunch of paparazzi that followed them and tried to secretly film should be caught and beaten severely!

But it was obvious that Yan Biao did not understand these entertainment reporters' dedication to going about seizing news at all costs.

Shen Wei also did not approve of Yan Biao's suggested method of handling it. Besides, from what he saw, dealing with these entertainment reporters was not the most important agenda. The company's public relations teams were not just for show. The company's staff could keep an eye on things, and should any unsavory news appear, they would quash it. At this sort of time, the company would be more than willing to fork out cash.

"Fang Zhao, don't pay any heed to all this right now. Do read more books regarding acting and watch video guides online. You can ask me about any matters that you don't understand. Prepare Well!" Shen Wei advised.

Although he had not pinned too much hope on Fang Zhao… what if?

What if Fang Zhao was really selected?

As a new hand and a completely fresh talent that could not even be called an actor, what Fang Zhao needed to do was spend more effort honing his acting skills and be prepared to be called up to join the cast at any time. If he was really selected and could not keep up with the cast, he might be fired. If that were the case, he couldn't cry even if he wanted to!

"You can never defeat entertainment reporters. The more you fight, the more vicious they become!" Shen Wei told Yan Biao. "Let's not talk about other continents first. Just take a look at our very own Yanzhou. How many people in the entertainment circles have tried to feed those top few entertainment reporters to the fishes? But aren't they still living well and happy all day long?"

Shen Wei felt that, as a self-proclaimed precursor within the circle, he had an important duty, and he took the chance to impart some lessons to Fang Zhao. Even the

bodyguards with him, Yan Biao and Zuo Yu, were unable to avoid this. However, what they learned was different. Shen Wei imparted professional knowledge to Fang Zhao, whereas he taught Zuo Yu and Yan Biao about some of the troubling matters that were commonly encountered within the circles and ways to deal with them.

Fang Zhao also attentively absorbed the techniques that Shen Wei imparted to him. Opportunities were always left to people who were prepared. Just as Shen Wei had said, before he even got a chance to be fired, he needed to make preparations to be ready to get selected at any moment.

Elsewhere, Director Roman was in a videoconference with his Huangzhou colleagues and was talking about the matter of Fang Zhao. However, he had not directly said which actor it was, nor the actor's background. All he said was that this was a very talented person who suited the role.

"You don't understand. When he stood in front of me, it gave me a really odd feeling. At that time, it coincided with the image of the role I have envisioned in my heart!"

"Stop finding excuses. Are you starting to get restless and trying to stir up something big again? I'm warning you, Roman, the 'Founding Era' project is to be a milestone. A milestone! Do you know what that means?! You should know how many people are eyeing this project. Understand its significance. You better work according to the rules!"

Despite being separated by their communications devices, Roman could still feel the other party's spittle flying all over.

"Got it, got it. All of you are just worrying groundlessly!" Roman exclaimed impatiently.

"You think I wanted to say all this? Roman, you have a record! If I hadn't said, it I wouldn't feel at ease! Remember well, this time, we are going about things in an open and honest fashion according to the industry rules. Don't stir things up. This project doesn't belong to you alone. There is still a Committee of 100 above you. Every single one of them will not be pleasant to deal with. Don't stir up any trouble. Otherwise, your position as the head director might not be stable."

"All right, how can I not understand all this? Cut the nonsense. Preparations over the last week have almost been completed. We have to fix the actors soon. Tomorrow we head out. See you at Huangzhou."

Ending the call, Roman's mouth twitched.

Follow the rules?

Whose rules?

Default rules?

If there were no expressly stipulated rules, it was nothing but bullsh*t!

Roman was prepared to give these people a big surprise this time. He was indeed very satisfied with Fang Zhao's performance, so much so that the Fang Zhao character that Fang Zhao had played out was exactly the same as the image of Fang Zhao in his heart.

Too suitable!

As for how for how much of a gamble Roman was willing to take, he would once again challenge the community's so-called "rules"!

"Please work hard!"

Roman knew how to guide a complete amateur to appear as a seemingly mature actor in a short time. Fortunately, Fang Zhao was extremely talented and great had perception. Although one hour was short, whatever essential points and knowledge he had spoken about, Fang Zhao had actually been able to completely grasp them!

The sort of feeling of unintentionally unearthing a gem was what Roman loved the most. At this sorts of time, he felt especially great about himself.

If industry outsiders were to watch all six scenes that Fang Zhao had recorded for his audition, they might not necessarily be able to see a difference, but the eyes of professional would be able to see a vast improvement, and they would find it difficult to find any minute errors.

If this was Roman's own movie, he would have decided right on the spot, but this was "Founding Era"…

"Committee of 100…" Roman had calmed himself, and he looked at the projection. He heaved a sigh. "Fang Zhao, this is all I can do for you."

The next morning, Roman brought his assistant and set off for Huangzhou.

The relevant parties had all been informed, and a time was set for the conference.

Huangzhou Art and Cultural Center's assembly hall.

The hall wasn't large compared to many other commercial meeting venues and was less presentable. The furnishings here might appear simple, but they were definitely not basic.

Here, the projection and sound equipment were of the highest grade in the industry.

There were not many seats, but everyone qualified to have a seat at the venue either held high positions or had impressive credentials. These were all people with status, important figures with power.

Roman took a look at the time. It was almost time.

A number of projections appeared at the venue in succession. The originally empty meeting place was filled with projections in less than 10 minutes. Near the front of the assembly hall was an area with larger seats, which was segregated from the other areas. There were over 100 seats in that segment, and they were nearly filled with projections.

"Everyone from the Committee of 100 is here. Let us begin."

The Committee of 100 were the people in the "Founding Era" project that had the power to vote for the actors of important roles in the series. Amongst these people, besides investors, there were production representatives, outstanding precursors, in the showbiz circles, direct descendants of the heroes from the period of destruction, and exceptional members from aristocratic families.

These people added up to a total of 100, which was why the group was called "The Committee of 100." Their position was the specially designated area closest to the stage.

Members of the "Committee of 100" were scattered in many regions, and there were even some that held positions that required them to spend extended time on foreign planets, so they were unable to return back to Huangzhou just because of this matter. Therefore, this would be an online voting conference, and it would be accomplished

with the aid of holographic projections.

Just taking a look at the few clad in military uniforms and the general insignias on their shoulder epaulets would let everyone know how much of a big deal this was.

Roman's assistant cast a glance at the Committee of 100. Other than those few senior precursors of the industry that made his legs turn to jelly, the lowest-ranked military personnel among those clad in uniforms was a lieutenant colonel. Even he looked very young, and he would surely rise to a general in time.

Although it wasn't the first time Roman's assistant was encountering such a situation, every time he faced this, he was afraid of even breathing. His nervousness was at its highest point, and he was extremely observant and alert so as to not make any mistakes.

"Today we have to decide on three important roles. The first is 'Great General Wu Yan,' the second is 'Great General Ajina,' and the last… is 'Fang Zhao.' We shall first select 'Fang Zhao'."

Although 'Fang Zhao' was not a great general of the Founding Era, he was an integral character in that period of history. Without him, there would not have been a Yanzhou, and even Wu Yan might not even have survived. Nobody could deny the status of Fang Zhao in history. Therefore, although he wasn't a great general, he still was an important role with many scenes in this series, and selecting the actor for this role required the Committee of 100 to make a decision.

In the large screen at the front, Roman displayed the photographs of nine of the candidates he had selected.

These nine photographs had been taken after the actor had been dressed up and had makeup applied. A number of them looked like the Fang Zhao from history, and their faces had similar outlines. After makeup had been applied, it became very difficult to distinguish them apart.

There was also no indication of the names of the nine actors on screen, only the numbers from one to nine. These numbers had all been assigned randomly.

However, for people extremely close to these actors, they were still able to recognize them.

"These are the final nine I have selected," Roman told the Committee of 100 below the stage. "Just like the previous time, I will play the audition videos of the nine candidates, starting from number 1. Each candidate has three scenes, and the final vote result will determine the actor."

# Chapter 291
# Number Seven

Although the names of the nine actors displayed on the large screen were not shown, those that were more familiar with the entertainment circles had already started to "decipher" who they were in succession. However, when they came to the seventh person, they were stumped.

"I can recognize the first six, but what about the seventh?" whispered a member of the Committee of 100 to his old friend occupying the seat beside him.

The other person was also puzzled. "Is that Dasmi?"

"No, Dasmi is number 9."

"Then… Nion?"

"Not him either. Nion is number 2."

"That's strange. Is it because of the makeup? I can't recognize him."

At first, those in muted discussions had been those from the showbiz circles and people who were more familiar with the industry.

At the area where the Committee of 100 sat, there were a few members clad in military uniforms in the third row. Although they did not share a family name or come from the same military district, they all knew each other. Normally, they were incredibly busy and did not have time to pay attention to the entertainment circles, but as the quintessence of the descendants of the great generals, they still had voting rights when it came to selecting the parties that would play those important roles.

When the "Founding Era" project had first been established, they had been informed that it would be broadcast across every military district as a compulsory series. Since it was a compulsory series and they had voting rights, they definitely had to represent their respective military districts by picking actors that were most pleasing to the eye.

Actors that had criticized military districts were not required!

Those that had immoral characters were not required!

Personality traits that did not pass muster were not required!

…

In short, whoever they voted for had to be pleasing to the eye and satisfy their criteria.

If the actor wasn't good, when the time came for the military district to broadcast it, how different would it be from compelling the viewers to eat sh*t?

Therefore, all of them had come with a duty.

At this moment, when those seated in the third row heard the discussions of those surrounding them, they were immediately delighted.

"Nine actors, yet that bunch can't even recognize them all. Generally, we don't even pay attention to the entertainment circles; we will surely find it even more difficult to recognize them."

"I can see nine different people, but who is who, I can't tell. I don't recognize celebrities."

"I can still recognize the faces of some female celebrities, but I can't remember any male ones. They don't give me a profound impression."

"I just heard people talking about number 7. I can't help but feel that this number 7 seems a little familiar."

"I think so too, but recently, I was on vacation at home and watched a few web serials with my wife. I see a few here that look familiar. Number 7… also seems a little familiar. Surely he acted in some recent series, but this makeup is disguising him, as are those scars on his face."

As for those that were chummy with Roman, when they saw the nine actors displayed on the screen and then heard the sound of discussion, an ominous premonition appeared in their hearts.

"I can't help but feel there is something wrong."

"Can you all recognize who that number 7 is?"

"I have already determined eight of them already. I'm just missing number 7. He seems familiar, but I can't put a name to him."

"Do you think that… Roman is trying to stir something up again?"

"No way! You are kidding, right? This is the 'Founding Era' project! When I spoke to him yesterday, I even specifically warned him to follow the rules!"

"Hard to say."

"He might not necessarily be trying to stir up something big. Perhaps it is just the makeup that has resulted in everyone being unable to recognize number 7 at the moment. After all, with a costume and makeup, it is easy to deceive the visuals. Later, when the audition videos are out, we will be able to recognize him."

"Oh, right, when the audition videos play, we will know who it is."

The large screen's display changed. The first scene of candidate number 1's audition video started to play.

Candidate number 1 was a very famous actor. When his face, adorned with makeup and scars, appeared on the screen, a few of those close to this actor laughed. When it came to voting, they would certainly not be entirely impartial. If the following candidates were not up to scratch, they would surely vote for someone they were close to or, perhaps, someone that they had promised to assist.

On the screen, a segment of the audition video played.

A tattered map with all sorts of markings hung on a mottled gray wall. On the archaic but sturdy table to the side lay a bunch of stationary for taking notes.

It was a sight to behold and had a distinguishing Period of Destruction feel to it, as if all the items there seemed to carry dirt and blood.

There were a few blurry shadows in the room. These were virtual images; when it came to the actual filming, these shadows would be other actors.

At the moment, all these shadows were gathered standing around the table. The entire scene was very quiet, matching the furnishings of the room and giving off a somber vibe.

This was an ad hoc indoor meeting.

A hand full of calluses and scars unrolled a map and laid it out on the table.

That scarred face and that grave expression did not seem sinister. Instead, his every gesture seemed to be naturally imposing, intimidating others.

In the video, Fang Zhao appeared to lean slightly to his side, as if he was listening to something attentively. At the same time, his gaze swept the map before he extended a finger and pointed out a certain point on the map. Like a flash of lightning, he scanned through the side of the table, and everyone appeared to pause momentarily, as if their scalps had tightened.

"A month is too long. We don't have enough time. Within half a month… we have to seize this area!"

What followed was a rather lengthy battle strategy. It integrated the day's weather, how to lay an ambush, the most suitable weapons and equipment, troop movements, and potential threats and factors.

An overcast tune could be heard, modulating, quick at some parts but slow at others. Other emotions could not be heard, as if feelings were being hidden, letting viewers somehow feel like they were unable to grasp the situation. The atmosphere was grave and heavy.

This was a tune that Roman had specifically selected. When it came to the actual filming, the camera would definitely be following Fang Zhao's eyes for this scene. However, these were just for preparing for the role.

Below the stage, there were already people starting to evaluate this scene's performance.

"His dialogue basics are really impressive. For such a long segment, the logic and accents are spot-on," said an old man who had long retired.

Someone else nodded his head as he watched the large screen. "An actor at this sort of grade would rarely make a mistake here. Brilliant tempo control, and his ability to

adjust his dialogue to fit the mood is really skillful."

"There aren't any big problems right now. Let's continue watching.

In the video, the character continued speaking.

For this portion of dialogue, the closer it got to the end, the more the words were laced with killing intent. The severity of every single word seemed to grow at an exponential rate right up to the last sentence. Fang Zhao stared at the region marked out on the map as if his gaze was a sharp sword.

An old man in a military uniform sitting in the second row laughed. "Whoa, what a striking demeanor!"

A few military personnel on the third row also concurred. "Seems good enough?"

"Passable."

"The demeanor is all that is important. It looks rather impressive."

Only an old man dressed in leisurely yet refined attire frowned slightly. "It seems a little excessive."

This was a professor that had recently retired from Huangzhou Art and Drama College. He had nurtured countless outstanding actors in his entire teaching career.

When it came to analyzing from a professional aspect, people like them would surely be different from industry outsiders. Thus, when he watched the segment, he was able to see a few minor problems, and he gave voice to them.

However, there were also objections from those of the same industry.

"Where is it excessive? I feel that it is just right! The Fang Zhao of this time was already Yanzhou's leader. Regarding those battles during the Period of Destruction, whether it was theoretical knowledge or actual battle strength, he was very strong in both. He ought to have the valiant demeanor of a person occupying the top position!" someone else refuted.

What sort of person was this historical Fang Zhao?

Perhaps when it came to battle techniques, he might not necessarily be the best, but he had been able to endure the 100 years of the Period of Destruction and become a prominent leader. His resourcefulness, ability, and physical prowess were things that others could not compare to.

An old man with grizzled white hair defended his own student. "The start of 'Founding Era' will be when Fang Zhao was at his peak. He should not be as weak as he was later. Therefore, he needs to have an imposing manner! There is nothing wrong with this segment's performance!" Candidate number 1 was his student, and they had always kept in touch. For this round's vote, he would surely allocate it to this student of his.

The old man in refined attire shook his head when he heard this. This was not what he meant, but he would not say more. His eyebrows continued to be knitted up, indicating that he maintained his own opinion.

"Hahaha, this has only just begun. There are still more to follow. We can compare all of them. This isn't all that we will be deciding today."

"Right, right, right. Let's continue watching. There is still a fight scene later on."

"There will definitely be no problems with the fight scene. This student of mine has filmed many such scenes before. This time, for the role of Fang Zhao, he even went for special training."

This was shielding one's own interests. By saying that number 1 was his student, he was telling others to vote for his student on his account.

Inwardly, there were also some that sneered. It would have been fine if you hadn't said anything. Now that I know candidate 1 is your student, I won't vote for him!

When the Committee of 100 chose actors, the struggles were also intense.

The video continued to broadcast, and the audience once more paid attention and examined it carefully.

Candidate 1's fight scene was indeed decent. Whether it was real or not, at least the result turned out very well.

After a candidate's audition videos concluded, there were some below the stage who wrote down some evaluations in their own small books. After watching all the videos,

they would select the one they felt was the best and vote for him.

Immediately after, candidate 2's audition videos played, followed by 3… 4… 5… Five candidates' audition videos were played in quick succession.

The discussions among the audience were even more intense. One might reckon his own student's performance was the best, while another might feel that his own senior or junior was the most outstanding.

Some people chose to gloss things over and not offend any parties. "All of them are really decent. They are all very capable actors."

Without the means and without contacts, these people would not have been able to get the script or a chance to audition. Therefore, anyone that had arrived at this final selection stage was not a simple person. There were some people at the venue who would refrain from voting when the time came so as to avoid offending anyone.

In the third row, those from various military districts appeared slightly distracted. Hearing the discussions all around, their faces seemed detached and indifferent.

"All of them seem fine."

"The acting is quite good."

But that was all.

Even if the people in question were first-rate or top-rate actors, the military personnel here wouldn't recognize them. The military personnel here were garrisoned on foreign planets most of the time and had very little contact with the entertainment circles, especially at places with arduous conditions, just like planet Baiji before power ore had been discovered there. Even the internet bandwidth was limited, and the only news they received to relieve their boredom was official political and educational news. They wouldn't receive any entertainment gossip or any popular films or drama series.

Of course, the most important point was that these bunch did not have much real interest in the entertainment circles.

How troublesome. Why was this voting assignment taken up?

At first, they had still found this rather meaningful. However, at this point, they were starting to find it a little troublesome. It would have been better if these actors had been brought to the mines or to out explore the cosmos. They could conveniently have "friendly" interactions with the native creatures on some foreign planets.

Seriously speaking, on their sides, there were actually many people with exquisite acting skills. On normal days, they all put on masks and acted. The military personnel here had naturally also honed a set of piercing eyes. If these sorts of people were to act, just based solely on acting skills, they would not necessarily lose out to these professional actors.

In their eyes, actors were just that. Actors were not that wonderful, but the military personnel here had no right to criticize.

These people did not chase stars, nor did they pay attention to the entertainment circles, but sitting here, they would still show the respect that these actors ought to receive. Even if these people felt impatient, they would still sit quietly and watch the entire thing before completing their own assignments.

"There are four more to go. After watching these, the role will be settled," a major general of a certain military said while glancing at the time.

"That is only the first role for today. There are still two more roles that require selecting. Each role will follow the same process."

"Sitting here listening to this bunch ramble on and on seems even more tiring than training."

"What else can we do? Let's continue watching. It's number 6 now."

After candidate 6's audition videos concluded, the professionals in the area started discussing once again.

This bunch of professionals had seemed rather upright at the start, but now, when almost all the candidates had been viewed, the competition was more intense, and arguments were laid out in the open. There was even an old fellow who said he was going to campaign for votes.

The audience in the third row continued to be detached.

"Three more left."

"Hey, it's number 7's turn! It's the candidate that these bunch can't recognize."

Hearing that it was candidate 7's turn, some people who were distracted became more alert!

They had to properly see whether they could recognize who this person was from his three audition videos. Candidate 7 was an actor. Who exactly was he?

"I also want to take a look. Perhaps I might recognize who it is before this bunch."

"You don't even watch dramas. How many actors can you recognize?"

"Perhaps not the others, but number 7 gives me the impression that I have seen him somewhere before."

# Chapter 292
# Vote Results

The veteran artists sitting in the second row were also deep in discussion. Their focus was, as usual, on technique.

"I watched some footage of General Fang Zhao. This leader has unique speech patterns. Others might miss them, but we can spot them right away."

When most folks spoke, they put an emphasis on certain words—sometimes just one, sometimes several. They also paused to highlight certain points. Fang Zhao didn't speak extensively in the footage of the conference attended by many leaders, but he had his own style of speech, which included emphases and pauses. The veteran artists considered this Fang Zhao's signature style.

The first six candidates had tried to imitate that style in their performances. They had clearly studied the archive footage carefully, but they weren't quite there. They couldn't replicate Fang Zhao's speech pattern completely. Their deliveries were close approximations at best.

The veteran artists were impressed with the young actors' professionalism and attention to detail. "They actually all did very well. It's a tough call."

"If they'd had more time, they would have done an even better job. They would have resembled Fang Zhao even more."

"They don't have to be exact duplicates. Art is an embellishment of reality to begin with."

"OK, it's time for number 7. I gotta take a close look at this guy."

Roman sat in a corner, trying to gauge the audience's reactions.

A still photo of candidate number 7 appeared on the screen, followed shortly by footage of his audition.

It was the same scene that the previous six had acted out, the same lines.

A gray-haired old man sitting on the edge of the first row of the area assigned to the Committee of 100 didn't seem to be paying attention—his posture was relaxed, his eyelids drooping—but the moment candidate number 7 opened his mouth, the gray-haired old man's eyelids fluttered and he bolted upright. He gradually opened his eyes and glared at the screen.

As a veteran artist who had won countless awards, including the most prestigious honor in performing arts, the Galaxy World Medal, this old man was eminently qualified to sit in the first row.

True professionals paid attention to minutiae that the actors were prone to miss. They zoomed in on these finer points and isolated them for scrutiny and evaluation. This old man was no different. The moment he heard number 7's voice, he knew this one was different from the previous six candidates.

There were many professionals in the audience, so the old man wasn't the only one to catch on.

True, it was the same lines and the same scenes. There were only so many ways you could break the lines up and vary the rhythm. Candidate number 7 didn't handle his pauses, emphases, and long vowels any differently. The amazing thing was that they detected a form of musicality in his lines.

It was a completely unintentional yet mostly natural rhythm.

The casual rhythm was seamlessly incorporated into the character.

This was what distinguished him from the previous six candidates.

Even the nonprofessionals in the audience couldn't help but be captivated by every word in the delivery even though they couldn't explain the attraction.

The members of the audience secretly grumbled. Yet another strong candidate!

The most frustrating thing was that they had no clue who number 7 was.

He seemed familiar, but they couldn't identify him, which bugged the hell out of many viewers.

They looked at their colleagues probingly. Any luck?

All they got in response was confused headshakes.

"I'm absolutely positive I've never seen one of his movies before," an instructor from the Huangzhou Academy of Art said.

Every performer had his or her quirks, regardless of the role—something in their acting, their delivery, or other features that were easy to overlook. These made up their signature. But the veteran artists in the audience searched their memories in vain for an actor that matched the characteristics of candidate number 7.

"Where did Roman find this guy?"

Folks who were close to Roman went through a mental checklist of the world's top actors. No matches.

Other industry heavyweights in the audience looked equally confused. Clearly, none of them had recognized number 7 either.

"That's impossible. He seems so familiar. It's gotta be someone we know."

But after a mental review of all the TV series and movies they had seen, they still had no matches.

"This is bizarre."

Just the delivery of candidate number 7 distinguished him from the previous six candidates, which prompted many in the audience to direct their attention to the screen for a careful look.

Generally speaking, number 7 did indeed resemble the Fang Zhao as scripted in "Founding Era." He wasn't an exact replica of old photos of the real Fang Zhao, but at first glance, there was a striking resemblance.

"Considering this level of skill, has a retired colleague of ours decided to join the fun?" someone speculated.

If it were indeed a retired veteran artist, he would certainly be competent enough acting-wise, but could his body endure the rigors of the shoot? Could he cope with the

fast pace of the shoot? Could he keep up? Was Roman willing to take the risk?

Someone caught a glimpse of Roman, who was standing in the corner, pursing his lips. The observer's heart went "thud."

Something was wrong.

Something was definitely problematic with number 7.

The observer knew Roman well from working with Roman for many years. He knew instantly from Roman's smile that there was more than met the eye.

How dare he play games with such an important project like "Founding Era?"

Let's see how he cleans up his mess.

The audition video kept playing on the screen.

Just like the six performers before him, number 7 stood up at the end of his extended monologue. He was oozing the ambition and the ruthlessness of a climber who had toiled for decades during the Period of Destruction.

Yet number 7's aura wasn't as in-your-face as the previous candidates'. He even looked calm. He spoke quickly, but it was the determination and killer instinct in his delivery that shook the audience much more strongly than all the previous candidates.

It was a very special feeling.

The military officials sitting in the third row felt it all the more acutely. It was just a video, but the seemingly innocuous face on the screen, the seemingly peaceful eyes projected the utmost fear. They felt their muscles tense despite being hardened by countless missions.

They took a deep breath and only exhaled slowly after a few seconds.

"Such a strong killer vibe!"

The comment intrigued one of the veteran artists sitting in the first two rows. Killer vibe? So that's a killer vibe?

He hadn't felt the vibe as acutely. He wasn't from a military background, after all, but he had felt a sudden chill. It was a bizarre feeling and had prompted him to avert his gaze.

"I bet all the stripes on my shoulder that this guy definitely has blood on his hands!" the military official said.

"Not necessarily. He might be a graduate of the military arts academy. Word has it they've been training their people quite rigorously, possibly to the level of candidate number 7. The academy is run military style, after all, unlike other arts academies."

"How rigorous is their training, to have produced someone like this?"

"Hey, Old Tan, aren't you in charge of the arts academy? Is it someone from your school? What a good job you've done of keeping him under wraps."

Professor Tan wore a blank expression on his face. "Huh? Who are you talking about? I don't know this guy."

"Hahaha, don't deny it. I know you don't like openly lobbying for votes. We cast our votes independently. There's no lobbying involved at all, haha. This actor really did a good job."

Professor Tan started panicking. "I really don't know number 7! I did indeed recommend people for the role of Fang Zhao, but they were all rejected by Roman. He said they weren't artsy enough. What business does a Founding Era leader have being artsy?"

The mere mention of the matter made Prof. Tan furious.

Thirty percent artsy and 70 percent killer—Roman's stringent requirements were maddening.

Now came the action scene. Number 7 moved deftly, quickly, and powerfully. His punches were very forceful and realistic. There was no fakery involved.

This was true talent.

The real deal.

"Who is this? Who's number 7?" an old man in uniform couldn't help blurting out.

A member of the audience who didn't know the entertainment industry well asked a friend who was more familiar with the community, "Hey, Charlie, who was that?"

"I couldn't tell."

"Don't you know all the actors well? Someone in charge of censorship like yourself should know the actors well. How come you can't recognize him?"

"It's probably the makeup."

His friend was incredulous. "Really?"

Makeup didn't turn the actor into a replica of General Fang Zhao. You could still more or less tell who the actor was. It wasn't that the makeup artists were incompetent. In this particular project, the actors weren't allowed to resemble the real Fang Zhao exactly.

Even if their natural features were similar, the makeup artist was supposed to make clear the distinction between the actor and the real-life Fang Zhao. This was a stipulation from the descendants of the Founding Era heroes. People were self-contradictory—they wanted convincing imitations but not exact replicas.

Many folks thought number 7 looked familiar. Given his talent level and the fact that he had been given a slot, there was no doubt about number 7's ability. Bowing to conventional thinking, many folks thought the actor had to be a senior figure in the industry.

That led many to guess that this was a veteran artist.

One scene might not prove anything, but three strong performances in a row…

The Committee of 100 was dumbfounded. They didn't know what to say. Clearly, number 7 was a great fit, but they couldn't figure out who he was.

A fleeting thought flashed through someone's head, but it was quickly dismissed as ridiculous. The person kept on brainstorming about number 7's identity.

Number 7 caused quite the commotion, because no one knew who he was. But to avoid

getting hung up on the issue, the audition videos for number 8 and number 9 were played immediately.

After the audition videos of all nine candidates were played, Roman got on stage again. He wore a knowing but also slightly stiff smile.

"These are the nine candidates. Voting will begin now. You have 10 minutes. Please get ready."

The chatter began again. Among the Committee of 100, some started lobbying, others started group discussions and fell into deep thought.

Ten minutes later.

Roman tried hard to control his nerves. "The vote results will now be announced. This vote will determine who will be cast as Fang Zhao. Please direct your attention to the screen."

A table tallying the votes that each of the nine candidates had gotten, in descending order, appeared on-screen.

Number 7: 21 votes

Number 9: 15 votes

Number 1: 12 votes

Number 2: 10 votes.

…

The winner had beaten the runner-up by six votes.

The total number of votes for number 7, the only candidate who had received more than 20 votes, wasn't that sizable, but it made for a commanding lead. It was an impressive feat, securing more than 20 votes amid such intense competition.

The audience had mixed feelings as they examined the results. Some went pale, others fell silent, and some went red—though it was unclear whether it was due to anger or excitement. Some faces looked ghastly, oozing disappointment. There were also some

who showed no emotion. Who knows if they were actually calm or faking it.

As Roman studied the results on the screen, he could feel his heart skip a beat and the temperature of his blood rise. He could no longer suppress the pursing of his lips. What he would give to burst out in laughter. But he had to maintain his composure as director of the film and host of the meeting.

Roman struggled to contain his emotions. "Please double-check your votes."

It was standard procedure for members of the Committee of 100 to verify that they hadn't cast the wrong vote.

After the voters checked their votes, the computer system verified the results.

Roman smiled knowingly again. He could no longer hold back his amusement. "In that case, candidate number 7 will be cast as Fang Zhao."

Roman gestured, and the in-character photos of the nine candidates appeared on screen in three rows. However, the photos immediately flipped, revealing the mugshots of each actor and their personal information.

Apart from number 7, the youngest candidate was number 8, who was 59. The oldest was 81, which was considered middle age in the New Era.

Number 7 was an outlier.

His youthful face stood out among the middle-aged men.

Number 7's portrait showed him in uniform. It seemed like a military ID photo. Next to it was his personal information: Fang Zhao, Yanzhou native, 25.

The audience went dead silent.

# Chapter 293
# He Is Just a Kid

After the deathly silence, a roar erupted in the venue.

"Fang Zhao?"

"Which Fang Zhao? Who is this person?"

"Is it really that Fang Zhao from Yanzhou?"

"Why is it this youngster!?"

"Impossible! Utterly impossible!"

Numerous eye daggers shot out and flew toward the front, itching to stab the large screen.

If it were any other candidate that had been selected, they would have accepted it, but Fang Zhao?

A pure new hand who wasn't even an actor was now going to play a leading role? Could he do it?!

This sort of important role, why should it be given to him?!

Refuse to accept!

Protest!

"Roman! This person is out of the question!" someone shouted.

Standing on stage, Roman wasn't at all worried. "He has the highest vote count. How is he out of the question?"

"But he hasn't acted in any films!"

"He has acted as an eye model. He has natural acting talent and ability. Otherwise, how could he have been able to get so many votes?"

"An eye model cannot be counted! What about works? Awards? Qualifications? For someone who cannot even be considered an actor, how can we let him act in such an important role?"

"It doesn't matter. He can learn and I can guide him."

"Do we have that much time for him to slowly learn? How long will he take…" The person halted midway into his sentence.

Couldn't learn well? If he couldn't learn well, how could he have beaten the other eight candidates?

The voting results were still displayed on the screen.

Someone just could not accept it. "In any… In any case, there are no guarantees!"

"Roman, you are going crazy again!"

"I see that you have gotten itchy sitting in the position of the head director!"

Hearing these criticisms, Roman heaved a long sigh. With a rueful look, he said. "As you all know, I am someone with principles. When I select actors, I select the most appropriate. And from what I see, he is the most suitable person."

Roman did not pay further heed to them and instead looked toward the area where the Committee of 100 was. Calmly, he asked, "Old General Renault, do you have any objections regarding this outcome?"

Old General Renault was seated in the front row. He had long been retired and was also the father of the current Leizhou governor. This time, he also had voting rights. Everyone could tell how important this old man considered this film project to be.

During the voting, Old General Renault had given his vote to number 7.

Hearing Roman's inquiry, the calmly seated Old General Renault gave a faint reply: "None."

Roman looked toward the old artist with silver hair in the first row who was a Galaxy World Medal winner. "Teacher Gao Deng?"

The old man chuckled. "None." He had also cast his vote for number 7.

From what he saw, some of the candidates had acted too excessively, like they were hunting a tiger when they should have been slaughtering chickens, or too lightly, like they were stepping on ants when they should have been hunting a tiger. Only candidate seven had had the most natural acting. This old man had only voted for the one that had satisfied him the most. Even if the official result was a little shocking, he still accepted it.

Roman looked toward the third person. "Brother De Lai?"

"Heh, the votes have already been cast. Indeed, his performance was the best."

"Professor Lee?"

"Let's not change it! This young fella acts rather well."

"Director Torma?"

"I feel that… we can give this youngster a chance." Director Torma would not admit that his judgment was wrong.

"Teacher Viga?"

"I don't doubt his acting skills, but I also do not understand the rest. Since he is a person recommended by you, I have one question."

"Please voice your thoughts." There was respect in Roman's tone. Viga had been his teacher for an optional class back when he had been in university.

"Can he keep up with the pace?"

"Definitely! The moment he is a burden to the production team, I will personally kick him out and settle the problems within the cast."

"Since you have already considered this, I don't have any other doubts."

Roman turned to look at Yanzhou's Wu family representative. "Mr. Wu?"

The Wu family representative's main objective today was to audit the role of Wu Yan. However, he now wanted to pay attention and reevaluate the role of Fang Zhao.

Those from the Wu family who had voting rights originally had not found the results satisfactory. A youngster without any qualifications actually wanted to fight for the role of Fang Zhao? That was simply wishful thinking!

But considering it again, it wasn't impossible. Among the other candidates, even if they weren't top-rate film stars, they were at least first-rate actors with considerable influence in every continent, and they were very accomplished.

If the actor playing the role of Fang Zhao had too much influence, those of the Wu family might not feel comfortable.

Their Wu family had members in the entertainment circles and had quite some experience when it came to the entertainment industry. The tragic role of "Fang Zhao" was one that was liable to provoke public opinion online. If the role was acted out too well or too profoundly, their Wu family might be embarrassed. After all, during the Founding Era, Yanzhou had been officially named after Great General Wu Yan, not Fang Zhao, who had departed from the world a step earlier.

Rather than let an accomplished old actor perform the role of Fang Zhao, why not let a newcomer play the role instead? Given the current circumstances, that seemed like the best option.

After some consideration, the members of the Wu family no longer objected. "The voting outcome is acceptable."

The biggest obstacle, Yanzhou's Wu family, was out of the way.

Following Roman's inquiries, the sounds of discussion within the venue became softer.

All these big shots were indicating that they had no objections, so what else could they say? Could they make these big shots withdraw their votes? Could they make these big shots swallow their words?

Nobody had the nerve to even try!

As for those who had abstained from voting, they did not support or object to this result. What they meant was: Whatever, you can do whatever you want. I don't give a d*mn!

Other than the people from the military districts, there were also many old artists who had made names for themselves in the film circles who had also voted for Fang Zhao. Thus, when faced with all sorts of doubts, Roman wasn't anxious and instead remained confident. He also wasn't worried that these people who were protesting would talk drivel when they left. They were all smart people and knew how to carry themselves.

Thus, the outcome could no longer be changed.

Roman was pleased and chuckled inwardly. It didn't fall short! Taking this risk wasn't in vain!

Fang Zhao, this youngster, had popularity.

Ability?

The voting results were proof.

Skills?

Insanely good! They were said to be of a special grade.

Furthermore, in the few audition videos and from the understanding Roman had of Fang Zhao after interacting over that short period, he greatly anticipated Fang Zhao's performance in the series.

"What sort of age is 25 years old?" someone in the venue lamented ruefully.

Considering the average age of the Committee of 100 was close to 120…

"He is still a kid!"

Handing the role of Fang Zhao to such a young person, would he be able to perform well?

Afterward, the meeting continued with the other two more important roles. After the

situation with Fang Zhao, this round of voting saw many people being more cautious. They were especially guarded against those that could not be recognized easily. They were afraid that another Fang Zhao incident might occur.

Even those who had previously voted for Fang Zhao actually felt some regret after knowing the truth. As a newcomer, Fang Zhao had no guarantees. If he did not perform well in the series, then it would be their fault and there would be criticism.

Luckily, all the candidates for the later two roles were old faces. Roman himself had only dared to take a risk just once. He wouldn't dare to tempt fate too many times. He really didn't want to be removed from his position as head director.

As the selection for the other two roles was underway, on an online social platform, Wang Tie uploaded a new status:

"The role of Fang Zhao in 'Founding Era' has already been decided. It is somebody nobody would expect, heh~~~. Can anyone guess who it is? [Image][image][image]…"

Wang Tie posted 9 successive images. These nine were of the nine candidates in the final selection for the role of Fang Zhao. From the 'heh' and '~~~,' the rippling ecstasy in Wang Tie's mood could be clearly seen.

It had to be said that Wang Tie indeed had information from a reliable source. At practically the same time that the vote had been fixed in Huangzhou, he had already received information. Even Fang Zhao, who was involved, found out later than Wang Tie.

But Wang Tie knew that Fang Zhao had not yet officially signed the contract and was not part of the cast yet, so he wouldn't cause too much of a ruckus. He could use this matter to fish for some cash and sell some news, but he would do so in moderation. If he created a commotion and caused Fang Zhao to lose the contract that was in his grasp, even if Fang Zhao did not pay him a visit, Silver Wing would not let them off either.

As an entertainment reporter that had safely lasted so long, Wang Tie knew some skills for surviving in this industry.

Until the contract had been signed, he would not release the news. Those parties at the conference would not make irresponsible remarks outside, so Wang Tie could still make some money with this news.

However, Wang Tie knew how to whet people's appetites. Eight of the nine celebrities were seasoned actors. All of them could be considered an expected result, the only one unexpected being the seventh photograph: Fang Zhao.

The photograph's backdrop was a cruise, and the words "Teasandsea Cruise Ship No. 9" could be clearly seen.

Many netizens that saw Wang Tie's status started to make some noise.

"What Old Wang means is that they have settled on Fang Zhao?"

"I have pondered hard over this. Among these nine people, the most most most unexpected one can only be Fang Zhao!"

"Is Fang Zhao really going to play the role of Fang Zhao? This is a joke, right?"

"Ridiculous!"

"A trick, this is definitely a trick."

"Why choose him? Because he looks like Fang Zhao?"

"I have given up all hope on this superficial world of ours!"

"My *ss! There are plenty of people who look more the part. I feel that the reason is probably because he has the exact same name."

"That's even more ridiculous! Do you actually think that with that name he can do as he pleases?!"

"This series is a historical epic, not some comedy flick! Is letting a fresh newcomer perform really such a great idea?!"

"If this is real, I really suspect that there are some hidden details that cannot see the light of day!"

"Can this person who is still wet behind the years really act as a great warrior who has experienced the vicissitudes of life?"

"Fang Zhao also came from the military. He won't lose out to anyone!" supporters of

Fang Zhao retorted.

"That isn't the same thing! There's an old saying, 'different trades, worlds apart.' The boundaries that Fang Zhao needs to stride across are just too vast! Furthermore, if his age and qualifications were put out, how could he have been selected?"

Some fanboys and fangirls were so excited they lost all logic. "There is really nothing that my Zhao God can't do!"

"If your steps are too big, be careful you don't step on eggs!" someone added in sourly.

At this current moment, Fang Zhao was getting bombarded with calls from close friends and even other actors within the company who he normally did not interact with. They were all trying to inquire as to whether or not he had really been selected.

Fang Zhao's reply was this: "No news as of yet."

At the moment, all these people were excited. Fang Zhao's "No news as of yet" meant that what Wang Tie had said was the truth. Fang Zhao just hadn't been informed or signed the contract yet!

When Duan Qianji saw the status that Wang Tie had posted, she had used her own means to find out about the voting results, and when she informed Fang Zhao about it, she specifically exhorted, "Don't be too bothered about public opinion. The company's public relations team will handle that. All you have to do now is prepare to join the cast!"

"Shen Wei, you have to guide Fang Zhao properly for this period," Duan Qianji instructed.

"Don't worry. I will surely do all that I can!"

When he had found out about the voting results, the way Shen Wei had viewed Fang Zhao was slightly envious and frustrated, plus a hundred other feelings. However, after he had sobered up, Shen Wei had suddenly felt a sense of purpose.

On the whole, he was nurturing a great person!

# Chapter 294
# Violent Battering

Online, netizens across the world were paying attention to this revolutionary film project "Founding Era." Any news regarding those important roles would give rise to heated discussions. People with the means of obtaining reliable information got ahold of this information before the general public.

Famed entertainment reporters and paparazzi from other continents released the news in succession, confirming that Fang Zhao had come out on top in the Committee of 100's vote.

Although there were many entertainment reporters reporting on this news, the one that was most well received was still Wang Tie.

Why?

Because he had exclusive information!

He knew how Fang Zhao had gotten the role!

There were many people with wild ambitions who had yet to squeeze into the cast of "Founding Era" and were unable to sit still.

Wasn't it because a few important roles in this series had not been set in stone? If these people were able to learn from Fang Zhao's experiences and imitate him, perhaps they might be just like Fang Zhao and manage to snag a satisfactory role?

Not only the more important roles, even a character that could just survive one season was more than satisfactory.

One season was still too difficult? Never mind, seven or eight episodes wouldn't be too little. Two or three episodes was fine too! If they did not try their hardest, there wouldn't even be a chance for a minor role!

Thus, they were willing to spend more money to purchase this information! Maybe

there really was a secret shortcut?

Many newcomers in the showbiz circles got restless.

If this situation had not occurred, they would not have thought much about it, but now, Fang Zhao—an industry outsider—had managed to get such an important role. How many people were watching him with covetous eyes? These people had foundations in acting or came from families with distinguished showbiz backgrounds. How could they have lost to Fang Zhao?

They refused to concede!

They would strive and fight for it! Who could say that newcomers had to stand aside now?

Not everyone was a first-rate or top-notch film star, and not everyone had connections or a background, but the emergence of Fang Zhao's news showed that even a person without reputation or background had a chance!

This was what Wang Tie had been playing for!

At the moment, Wang Tie was hidden in his own secret base, lying on the sofa, shaking his legs while on the phone. From the moment he had published that information, his phone had been ringing nonstop and the inbox of his social platform was almost full.

This time around, Wang Tie's attitude was high and mighty. Exclusive information! Want to know how Fang Zhao managed to get the role? Come on, show me the money! If you don't fork out a high price, you won't get it!

On the same day, after the news of the Fang Zhao role being set broke, the voting outcomes for the other two important roles, Wu Yan and Akalina, were revealed, but they were unable to overwrite the entire entertainment circle's shock at the news about Fang Zhao.

The actress who had gotten the role of Akalina was from Azhou and had achieved numerous awards. She was renowned worldwide.

Although there had been some controversy online regarding her obtaining the role, there wasn't much.

For Wu Yan, as this series would begin when Wu Yan was young, ultimately, three actors had been chosen. A child actor that was popular currently would act as the young Wu Yan. A famous star from Yanzhou from the Wu family, Wu Yun, would act as the grown-up version of Wu Yan.

Wu Yun's acting skills, when compared to some precursors, might not be sufficient enough, and his global acclaim could not be considered too high, but he was a member of the Wu family and had many fans in Yanzhou. With such high support and backing, there was nothing much to dispute.

As for the Wu Yan in his middle and later years, the role would be played by Yanzhou's top-rate actor He Lisi. Wu Yun was unable to act as Wu Yan in his later stages, so he wouldn't disgrace himself and vie for this spot.

This was also something He Lisi had discussed with the Wu family, and he had received their backing. Wang Tie also had some information about He Lisi coming into contact with the Wu family.

The situation with He Lisi was not a rare case. When competing in the entertainment circles, everyone relied on their ability, and exchanging resources was commonplace. It wasn't a big deal.

The role of Wu Yan in the series was more important than that of Fang Zhao. To be able to act as Wu Yan in his later years, it would have been something for He Lisi flaunt—if the matter with Fang Zhao had not occurred.

Now, the limelight had all been stolen by Fang Zhao. He wasn't in as many headlines as Fang Zhao. He Lisi's team was left with no choice—they privately spent some money to purchase a number of push-notification headlines for entertainment news in various continents.

Five hours later, Roman informed Fang Zhao that he had to head to the designated location within a day for a medical examination. If there were no problems, the contract would be negotiated.

Fang Zhao had already made preparations. He set out when he received Roman's official notification.

Naturally, there were no problems with his medical examination. Silver Wing had already arranged for a team of professionals to go along with Fang Zhao to negotiate

the contract. There was no need for Fang Zhao to worry about anything.

As of now, Silver Wing had classified Fang Zhao as a focus for development. During this time's competition for roles in "Founding Era," other than He Lisi managing to snatch a lead role, all the other film stars that had high hopes placed on them had been utterly defeated. On the contrary, Fang Zhao had given them all a large surprise, and diverting resources to him now was something that the company ought to do.

Despite being extremely busy, Roman still found some time to speak with Fang Zhao. The more important a role, the more pressure the actor playing the role had to bear, and it would certainly be exhausting with those important scenes. Roman felt that Fang Zhao was still too young. It was Fang Zhao's first performance, and he was already acting in such an important role for a large-scale project. Roman needed to say a few words to Fang Zhao to feel reassured.

"Perform well. My face and reputation are being represented by you! If you don't perform well, that is unpardonable."

These words were not aimed at Fang Zhao alone. Roman had the same demands for all the other actors and actresses in this serial. If you are not able to keep up with the pace of filming and you drag everyone else down, then you better scram immediately!

After Fang Zhao officially signed the contract, "Founding Era" officially announced that they had finalized the actors for three roles and pointed out that Fang Zhao would be playing the role of Fang Zhao.

This news was like a shockwave, battering the entertainment circles.

"Official seal of approval!"

"It's been confirmed!"

"It is actually him!"

This made many people who had doubted the news land in a state of self-doubt. Was it them who were unable to catch up with the times, or had the industry rules quietly changed?

Fang Zhao? Who was he in the showbiz circles? How had he gotten this role just like that? How the hell had he done so?!

Were newcomers now so impressive?

Media outlets that had adopted a wait and see approach started to move too. They wanted to interview this dark horse Fang Zhao, yet despite searching high and low, nobody was able to find him.

Since interviews were not going to work, they would stir stuff up.

Many media outlets went to interview people in the showbiz circles and listen to what professionals had to say regarding this.

Unfortunately, those with even a tiny bit of brains would not say too much. This had been decided by the Committee of 100, not them. They dared not question the Committee of 100's decision.

Whatever inner thoughts people might have had, the outcome had already been decided. They could not smack the faces of the 20-plus voters in the Committee of 100. They couldn't afford to offend the Committee of 100, nor were they willing to do so. Whether they approved it or not, they wouldn't express a different view.

Roman also publicly praised Fang Zhao during an interview he accepted. "That's right, Fang Zhao was recommended by me, but him getting the role was the Committee of 100's decision through voting. All I can say is that he is the most suitable, and the Committee of 100's decision is the right one."

Of course, there was no lack of people who took advantage of the opportunity to make their presence felt by calling into question the Committee of 100's decision during interviews.

Very quickly, a member of the Committee of 100 who had a fiery temper blasted others in an interview and directly replied to these people. "Call into question? Accept? What a joke? It's our decision—why do we need them to accept it? Are they more professional than me? Or perhaps they know more about acting than me?"

Regardless of how industry professionals and reviewers stirred up arguments in the media, this incident with Fang Zhao had thoroughly shocked the entertainment circles and shaken up the original notions of some people.

Many people blew their tops, but they could only clench their teeth and swallow it as they regretted not fighting for a few roles themselves.

A role that could only be fought over by globally acclaimed first-rate actors had actually been stolen by an industry outsider. How could they not rage?

They were p*ssed that they hadn't been staunch enough, and they hated those people that had swayed their opinions. And they were even more envious of this dark horse Fang Zhao.

At a certain bar.

A certain intoxicated actor was having a foul-mouthed tirade. "Fang Zhao might have some reputation in the music circles, but in the film circles, he is just a…" As he cursed, he stuck out his pinky finger and then, pushing his thumb against the upper joint of his pinky finger, pointed out with only the tip of his pinky, the rest of his fingers curled in.

A server who walked by inwardly ridiculed, Tsk, if it was me, I would have picked Fang Zhao over you. Not only do you have no ability, but you are so petty. You have high ambitions, but you aren't able to pay the price. You are still a long way off.

In Jinzhou.

Ruan Sheng, who looked exactly like the Fang Zhao of the Period of Destruction, stared at the news with his mouth agape.

Yesterday, he had still been hanging onto a little hope when he had seen the news that Wang Tie and other entertainment reporters were spreading. Perhaps the news is fake? Maybe it's fake news, or perhaps this is just stirring up news?

But now…

When he recalled the words he had said to Fang Zhao back on Teasandsea's cruise, he felt a stinging pain on his cheeks, as though he had been slapped.

It turned out that person had simply not taken his words too hard. When he recalled those events… Reality had given him a punch!

Now, Fang Zhao had already signed a contract to play the role of Fang Zhao, and Ruan Sheng hadn't even managed to get the role of a body double.

Leizhou.

Zaro tugged on his bed hair that looked like a bird's nest. His eyes were bulging so much they were on the verge of dropping. His face looked as if he had seen a ghost when he saw the headlines of this news notification.

"What the f*ck!"

He had just woken up from a nap when he was violently battered by this headline.

Violently gulping down a glass of ice water, Zaro muttered, "Surely my posture when I opened up the news wasn't right."

As he said that, he made a bunch of calls to his agent.

For the sake of getting a satisfactory role in "Founding Era," he had put in a lot of effort, spent a lot of money, and even been beaten by his father a few times! With great difficulty, he had managed to snatch a role. Yesterday, he was just being ridiculed by that idiot Barbara, and today he had received a battering from the news about Fang Zhao!

Zaro fumed. "It isn't fair! Why does Fang Zhao get to play such an important role? Which people didn't have eyes and selected him? Their dog eyes must be totally blind!"

Zaro's agent hurried in and, with a stony face, warned Zaro to watch his words. "Old Master sat in Committee of 100's first row. I have heard he voted for Fang Zhao."

Zaro seethed. "…Surely he was misled by someone! Great Grandfather is so wise and farsighted… In any case, it's all your fault! I didn't get a satisfactory role because you are too useless!"

Without any expression, Zaro's agent replied, "Yes, it is all my fault."

Zaro "Hypocritical Dog" Renault was someone who wouldn't find fault with himself. His agent would always be a scapegoat.

However, his agent understood that Zaro had a trashy mouth. He would just treat these as farts. Zaro did not fire his agent, either; he had genuinely received a huge shock and needed to vent. It just so happened that Old Master Renault had voted for Fang Zhao, so Zaro did not dare to continue scolding and just went crazy mumbling to himself.

Zaro paced up and down in his house, feeling unresigned. "That fella really managed

to steal the role. What methods did he employ? Surely he found some connections to pull some strings! Pooh! I despise this sort of person the most!"

With that, he turned around and gave his grandfather, the governor, a call. He would hug the governor's thigh and get the governor to help him get a role.

Zaro's agent cursed silently. Pooh! Hypocritical Dog! Setting standards for others but giving oneself special standards! What sort of morality is this where you can't even identify your own shortcomings?… However, if the Leizhou governor can really help Zaro obtain a role, that would save me a lot of work, Zaro's agent thought to himself.

On the internet.

The focus of netizens always changed very quickly. A while ago, netizens had been discussing exactly how well Fang Zhao would be able to act and whether or not he would be able to perform in the role of an old martyr. Now, they were digging up Fang Zhao's family background.

"Comparing the images of Fang Zhao alongside the Fang Zhao from history, then thinking about news from the last two days, I suddenly had a thought: perhaps they are related by blood!"

"Take a look at Wu Yun. He was able to obtain the role of Wu Yan because his family name is Wu!"

"I just heard that Leizhou's Zaro managed to get a decent role. Guess it can't be helped—his family name is Renault, so he enjoys special privileges."

"In any case, we still have to take a look at backgrounds! And their family names!"

"Fang Zhao is also a Fang, and he looks 70% like Fang Zhao. An industry outsider without inside information managing to snatch the role of Fang Zhao, if someone says there are no secret things going on behind the scenes, I definitely won't believe it!"

"Does anyone remember the time when Fang Zhao's grandfather was revealed as a high-ranking military officer?"

"It's his great-grandfather. He's retired."

"He still has influence even though he is retired. Can anyone dig up the backgrounds

of others in Fang Zhao's family?"

"Given my acute sense of smell honed from watching hundreds of detective flicks, the Fang family is definitely not as simple as they seem!"

There were quite a lot of capable people online, and nobody knew where they dug out this "evidence" from, but it was all gathered together and it was rather scary.

Yanbei retirement facility. When Great-Grandfather Fang saw these discussions online, he specifically went to check the household register and the family lineage files.

"If I don't check the household register, I might really believe the nonsense that this bunch is making up. Whatever they make up seems so real."

The family lineage files were like the family trees of ancient times. These were much more detailed, and as he went up generation by generation, there was not a single one that had any relation to Martyr Fang Zhao!

If there was any relation, it was just Fang Zhao, for his parent's had named him after a great person.

Actually, there were many people in the world who had the exact same names as martyrs. In so many years, none of them had created ripples, but internet users were excited now that they had encountered a Fang Zhao.

After looking through the family lineage files, Great-Grandfather Fang was certain that the Fang family did not have any bit of connection to Martyr Fang Zhao. Although he was a little disappointed, when he thought about it from a different angle, it meant that Fang Zhao had really relied on his own ability and not his ancestor's shadow to win the role!

After confirming this, Great-Grandfather Fang tidied his clothing and prepared to head out to brag!

Before heading out, Great-Grandfather Fang logged onto his social platform and uploaded a new status: "Our family has absolutely no relationship with Martyr Fang Zhao whatsoever!"

Fang Zhao, who had just seen this status: "…" Actually, there is…

# Chapter 295
# Belief

Fang Zhao received a notification that the remaining roles of "Founding Era" would all be decided within the next week. At the start of October, the cast and production team would head for planet Wai. There wasn't much time left for them to prepare.

Once filming started, even though technology had improved and the film production cycle had been shortened greatly, it was not known how long the cast would be on planet Wai before they could return. It was rumored that the drama serial would begin airing in January around Memorial Day. This series would be longer than normal. After all, it was telling 100 years of history, and so it would broadcast and film concurrently.

When the time came, idle time to do other stuff would be hard to come by and it would be even more impossible to return back to Earth.

Fang Zhao would have no way of returning to Yanbei City for Memorial Day in January to spend time with the rest of the Fang family. Thus, Fang Zhao settled matters in Qi'an City and returned to Yanbei City to visit Second Uncle Fang's family and see his great-grandparents at the retirement facility.

Great-Grandfather Fang was very happy and dragged Fang Zhao for a stroll throughout the retirement facility. Actually, his intention was to flaunt. He was an old person, after all. In the past, they compared their careers, but now that they were retired, the achievements of their descendants were always brought up for comparison.

In the past, Great-Grandfather Fang had not been fond of the entertainment circles and had found them to be foul, but ever since he'd found out that Fang Zhao had entered these circles, Great-Grandfather Fang's attitude had changed drastically. Furthermore, after everything that had happened, Great-Grandfather Fang now paid much more attention to the entertainment circles. Of course, he only took notice of matters involving Fang Zhao. One thing he did every day without fail was check up on online news regarding Fang Zhao.

Great-Grandfather Fang was repeatedly reminding Fang Zhao to be wary and take care of his health on planet Wai when his ears pricked up from the sound of footsteps

ahead. Great-Grandfather Fang, smiling till his eyes turned to slits, pulled Fang Zhao along. "Come, come, come, let's head this way."

When the few old folks approaching from the opposite direction saw Fang Zhao, they chuckled and said, "Old Fang, your family's Little Zhao has returned, heh."

"It can't be helped. Little Zhao will be following the production team and heading to planet Wai to film shortly. He won't be able to return for Memorial Day, so Little Zhao came over to visit us two old folks. He bought a lot of stuff over, including Muzhou produce that isn't sold externally, a whole carload! How are just the two of us old folks going to finish everything! Really… I just told him, even though he earns a lot, he cannot be too extravagant."

The few old folks before him: "…" Is this old head showing off how much his great-grandson earns, or is he lecturing his great-grandson?

An old man sighed. "Oh, acting is tough."

Great-Grandfather Fang's expression straightened. "Can this be called acting? No! This is considered accomplishing a historical mission! It's 'Founding Era'! Even though we have already retired, we all know its significance. I was just telling Little Zhao that he isn't playing a role, he is performing a belief! No matter how tough or tiring it gets, he still has to complete it earnestly! If he tries to be lazy, I will be the first person not to let him off! Besides, if youngsters do not work hard and strive, they aren't worthy of the vigor of youth!"

Fang Zhao: "…" That isn't what you just said to me.

Great-Grandfather Fang then chatted with his old friends for a bit. After they had left, Great-Grandfather Fang's solemn face immediately became softer as he turned toward Fang Zhao and said, "Those words weren't meant for you."

Fang Zhao: "…"

"Let me tell you, Little Zhao, you have to act professionally for this show, but your own health is even more important. Yesterday, I saw some news about certain film stars striving too hard during filming when they were young. They picked up lots of injuries, and they suffered all sorts of ailments when they got older. Even with the current level of medical science, it is still not possible to completely treat everything. How pitiful! Therefore, striving is good, but don't strive too hard!"

Fang Zhao: "…"

Great-Grandfather Fang continued, "There is another saying that I have told you before: be benevolent to others, but you still have to always be guarded against people, especially since you are a newcomer. I heard that rookies without any background support are liable to be bullied in the entertainment circles? I can't help you much on this; you just have to make sure to be very careful! There will be times where you need to tolerate it. After all, your qualifications are the lowest in these circles. There will be times where you would need to swallow your pride and anger, but the baseline is that if there are times when you shouldn't tolerate it, then you must absolutely not hold it in!"

Great-Grandfather Fang even imparted some methods on how to deal with negative people. These were all methods that this old man had put into practice during his own military days.

"Can you remember all that I have just said?" Great-Grandfather Fang asked. He wasn't too reassured.

Fang Zhao. "…I can remember."

Great-Grandfather Fang looked at his own gentle and refined great-grandson and felt less assured. "You are just too honest!"

Fang Zhao: "…" Where do you get this from?

After spending two days at Yanbei City with the two old Fangs, Fang Zhao returned to Qi'an City and received a notification to report at Silver Wing. The company would be gathering all actors that had made the cast of "Founding Era" for a meeting.

Besides the cast members of "Founding Era" that would be heading to planet Wai for filming, there would be assistants as well, although they would be limited. Those without sufficient status could not even bring along an assistant. Even an actor with a status like He Lisi's could only bring along one. Once they got to planet Wai, the entire cast would be under unified administration.

Thus, Silver Wing and the other entertainment companies involved did the same thing, gathering all the celebrities under their flag that were in the cast to take note of this.

"Some of you might be very successful in Yanzhou, but on a global scale, you might not

necessarily be such a big deal. Furthermore, there are many experienced precursors in the cast of 'Founding Era.' Your each and every move might be deemed immature in their eyes. Don't try to play any tricks! They have traveled along this path much longer than you!"

"'Founding Era' will be different from any of your previous serials. Do not have any funny ideas. Filming conscientiously should take precedence over everything else!"

"Although you all have signed contracts, that doesn't mean production can't do without you! If anyone gets kicked out for causing trouble, you can forget about ever returning. As you all know, the competition is very intense. Some people who announced their retirements from the entertainment circles came back because of 'Founding Era,' and there are many people waiting to drag you down…"

Department managers, bosses, and board members all took turns speaking in succession.

"I don't care what conflicts you might have internally, but when you head out, you are all part of the Silver Wing family. You have to stay united!"

Silver Wing had a total of 12 actors that were in the cast of 'Founding Era.' More than half would not appear in the serial for more than a few episodes. Silver Wing's little group was headed by He Lisi, and Fang Zhao's position inside was only slightly lower than He Lisi's.

After the meeting, many actors from the company came over to greet Fang Zhao.

"Brother Zhao."

"Brother Zhao, please look after us when the time comes!"

"Brother Zhao, it's your first time filming. If you have any doubts, feel free to ask us. We will be more than happy to help."

"Yes, we are all from the same company. There's no need for formalities with us!"

Entertainment circles were very realistic and pragmatic. These people's attitudes changing was nothing strange.

Especially a for some A-lister celebrities. Back when they had first gone to the Wai film studio complex for filming, they had thought Fang Zhao did not seem in touch with

reality. He had been an industry outsider back then. They had never felt that Fang Zhao would be any threat to them.

But now, their positions had changed.

Finally, the date of departure arrived.

From the official news releases these few days, it seemed like the cast and crew heading to planet Wai had vast fame and influence.

Two large art academy high-level collectives had appeared!

Five large live-broadcasting platforms would provide instantaneous coverage!

Twelve large media organizations focusing on Huangzhou Airfield!

Thirty art institute professors and student representatives as a sending-off party!

It was as if all the entertainment circles elite were included!

The splendid battle array of the cast and crew alongside the omnipresent news coverage online made the public feel that this wasn't just purely entertainment, that it possessed epoch-making significance. This was a milestone that would be recorded in the annals of history!

This was also the reason why many actors were willing to get into the cast even without receiving a paycheck, and there were actors who spent large amounts of money to squeeze into minor roles in this serial.

A certain live broadcast channel. The host was currently broadcasting live at the airfield.

"I'm here live at Huangzhou Airfield. At the moment, outstanding actors from all over the world, famous directors, gold medal screenwriters, authoritative advisors, top-notch production teams, and many others are all getting ready to set out! Everyone, take a look at the many flying transports behind me. These flying transports will send these people to the space station where the cast and crew members will board a transport ship and head to planet Wai!

"All 12 continents have transferred over a batch of troops heading to planet Wai too.

According to the information I just received, we aren't able to see the military now, as they are already at the space station. This serial's escort arrangements are unprecedented!"

After introducing the situation at Huangzhou Airfield, the program host noticed a comment left by a member of the audience: "Isn't this just filming a serial? Is there a need for such a huge battle array? And even mobilizing the military? This is just a waste of resources!"

The host read the comment out loud but did not reply to it right away, instead asking in a serious tone, "Does anyone know why each continent's Cemetery of Martyrs has a batch of the finest soldiers?"

Online audiences' comments started to get lively.

"Is the host talking about cemetery guards?"

"I know! I heard that there are hidden treasures in the 12 continent's Cemetery of Martyrs!"

"If anyone digs up a grave, they will become rich overnight! If no one is stationed to guard it, those treasures will be stolen!"

When the host saw these comments, his expression became even more grave. "Money and treasures are all dead! If you think about it, they aren't actually worth anything at all. What the cemetery guards protect is a belief, our spiritual support!"

The host's spittle was flying all over as he talked about martyrs and cemeteries.

Luckily, he had done enough preparation and memorized a lot of historical information. His seniors had also taught him what to say during the live broadcast, and it was the best and most politically correct answer!

Whether those historical incidents that had circulated down over the years were true or not, the host wasn't certain, nor did he have any profound feelings. After all, 500 years had already passed; it seemed so far away to him. Nowadays, people were incapable of understanding how desperate and arduous that time period had been.

Memorial Day was just a vacation to celebrate the new year. How many people actually went to worship the spirits of the martyrs? How many gravestones had thick layers of

dust on them?

Now, as the host faced the camera lens and spoke to the audience, everyone got all fired up, as if a burning passion had ignited within!

But when he finished, that was it. In just the few minutes after, everyone's blood had already cooled, let alone after 500 years.

They hadn't experienced it personally and had never lived during that period. How deep could their sentiments be?

When it came to characters from the Period of Destruction, what the masses came into contact with were only those groundless fabrications, those high-energy historical films with monotonous writing, and the very few historical images online that had been officially released to the public. How ardently could the masses feel about such a thing?

As the host thought about this, he saw the light. He suddenly understood some of the reasons the government wanted to reboot the "Founding Era" project.

When he thought to this point, the host's expression became very solemn as he stared straight into the camera. "Heroes never die; they are only forgotten. There are some things and some people that should never be forgotten! Don't even mention 500 years, even 500 years from now, we must never forget!"

"Now, 'Founding Era' isn't just a simple historical serial. It has been coined a revolutionary project to let everyone remember how the present came about! We, as people of the New Era, have to remember this belief!" The host raised a finger to his temple. "Later, when the transport ship leaves the space station, that will be the ark ferrying our beliefs! Those in the cast and crew are heading to planet Wai on a mission!"

When the host finished speaking and recalled what he had just said, he immediately felt that his pretentious level had just risen by a hundred times! I am a f*cking genius!

In no time, this portion of the host's speech during the live broadcast was clipped and uploaded to the internet. It was met with a round of approval by netizens, and even some big shots in the academic and entertainment circles acknowledged it!

When other live-broadcast hosts saw this situation, they were suddenly enlightened.

In the future, they would play this angle, since it could both attract fans and obtain acknowledgment from big shots!

Regardless of what they thought, during a live broadcast, a host needed to love the martyrs more deeply than anyone! Talk about their heroic deeds better than anyone! Be even more pretentious than anyone!

Inside the airfield, celebrities of all sorts of ranks were hurrying to take selfies before they set off.

In the past, many of these celebrities might have been obsessed with taking passerby-style shots of others at the airfield, but this time, in front of so many seniors, they were afraid their actions would be looked down upon, so most photos they took were very normal without too many gimmicks.

There were selfies uploaded online, as well as group photos with other actors from the cast. Regardless of how they treated each other in private, on the surface, everyone put on a show of unity.

"So many seniors from the industry, so nervous! Look who is standing behind me~[image]."

"Met my childhood idol, so excited! Took a photo together [image]."

"Preparing to set off! [Image]"

"Setting off to battle for our beliefs! I feel handsome beyond recognition today! [Image][image][image]"

…

Only when the notification to board the transports sounded did they put down whatever they were doing and board obediently.

Outside, in the area surrounding the airfield, media outlets, fans, and passersby collectively watched as the flying transports rose up into the air like they were saluting those flying off… Or maybe there was envy in their gazes.

When the transports arrived at the space station, everyone from the cast and crew transferred over to the transport ship.

Military personnel armed to the teeth sat in silence, and the solemn atmosphere quelled the lively and excited spirits of the actors, replacing it with a sense of nervousness.

And while there was this sort of peaceful atmosphere, someone just had to suddenly voice his thoughts. "If this transport ship meets with an accident, the entire entertainment industry will be set back by god knows how many years!

Everyone simultaneously looked over at Zaro standing there as they lamented, This bastard! We should just drag him outside and beat him up!

If gazes were like arrows, at this moment, Zaro's heart would have been pierced a thousand times over.

Who wanted to hear such inauspicious words like "accident" before they had even taken off!?

Zaro's agent was riddled with despair. What a talent! What did you just eat that made you able to offend an entire ship just after entering the cast and crew?

# Chapter 296
# Bad Luck!

To avoid a beatdown, Zaro's agent dragged his client to the side. If Zaro kept at it, they would be kicked off the flying transport.

Zaro's agent kindly reminded his client that his comments were problematic and that they would upset others. Zaro's agent also reminded Zaro that he had promised the Leizhou governor, in the governor's office, that he'd get along with the cast and crew and not act like a prima donna and so on.

The cabin soon went silent again.

Zaro's comments had stirred up a lot of emotions. The other passengers retrieved thoughts they had cast aside and started to get nervous.

The "Founding Era" cast and crew had been quite high profile from the get-go, the perfect embodiment of the kind of arrogance that came with being involved in a mainstream blockbuster. As far as the cast, crew, and investors were concerned, given the significance of the movie, they couldn't sneak around. They had to project a strong presence. There would be no cowering.

The cast had bragged to outsiders that they were portraying grand historical figures. They were artists on a mission to craft a milestone production. They would stand united with the production crew and face whatever difficulties and threats came their way.

There was no need to duck and hide.

Their goal was to launch the production with pride and pomp.

We have nothing to fear!

If you can't stand it, then we challenge you to make a better movie!

The fact was that a special production like "Founding Era" was bound to attract

saboteurs on top of public attention.

Between the time the cast and crew arrived at the spaceport and the time they took off, the troops stationed at the Huangzhou spaceport had already fended off three attempted terrorist attacks on them, but these attempts were hidden from public view. The public had no clue.

Soon after takeoff, the spaceship started shaking. The cast and crew in the cabin were terrified.

"What's going on?"

"We never ran into a situation like this on previous flights to Wai via freight transport."

"Is the spaceship malfunctioning?"

The passenger cabin was comprised of many small cabins and a large lounge. Each small cabin contained many berths. Where Fang Zhao was sitting, folks from Silver Wing had adjoining berths in the same small cabin. Many of the Silver Wing actors started getting edgy after the spaceship started vibrating.

"Big Brother He, should you look into it?" one actor asked, his face completely pale. He Lisi was the most senior member of the Silver Wing contingent.

"Yeah, Teacher He, let's send someone to get the latest in the lounge."

"Why don't I go?"

"I'll go too."

He Lisi was already wearing a deep frown. He raised his hands and the crowd quieted down.

He gave his assistant a quick glance. The assistant took off immediately.

Ji Polun, who had managed to land a small part in the movie, approached Fang Zhao and whispered, "Big Brother Zhao, what do you think is going on?"

Fang Zhao shifted his attention away from his composition notebook. "I'm confident our military escorts will take care of the problem."

Someone who overheard the conversation pouted, apparently not pleased with Fang Zhao's response.

Soon, He Lisi's assistant returned, shaking his head.

Someone else had opened their cabin door with an eye toward getting an update only to find an armed soldier standing guard in the corridor outside.

Alerted by the sound of the opening door, the soldier glanced over with an icy stare, spooking the person who had opened the door into retreating.

Others in the cabin who wanted to do the same gave up as well.

"Return to your seats. Look how frightened you are! If any of you actors are free, spend some time reading the script and memorizing your lines. Learn your characters," Roman said in an upset tone.

The older actors had more life experience, after all. They were also more cool headed than their junior colleagues. Several of the veteran actors told the younger members of the cast who were jittery, "Come, come, come. Let's study the script together."

The young actors were reluctant. Who is in the mood to read the script at a time like this!?

One of the second-unit directors sneered at the pacing young actors. "Ya think this is such an easy gig? Did you read your contracts carefully? They clearly state the likelihood of threats to personal safety."

The comment prompted blank stares in some and puzzled looks in others. A third group was wearing their hearts on their sleeves.

Clearly, not everyone had read their contract carefully. When they had signed, they'd thought they would be guaranteed fame and fortune. Who knew that the fame and fortune associated with "Founding Era" weren't so easy to harvest.

A shivering young man asked, "Should… should I prepare my will?"

"You kids! Worrying about your wills…" one of the veteran actors responded, shaking his head. "I wrote mine ages ago."

The young actors: "…"

Luckily, the turbulence didn't last much longer, and the rest of the journey was uneventful.

When the group finally arrived at the Wai spaceport and planted their feet on terra firma, their first reaction wasn't excitement about the imminent shoot or curiosity about their new surroundings—they breathed a long sigh of relief.

They had landed in one piece!

Having safely arrived at their destination, the cast and crew felt more relaxed, and they started chatting away.

"I just heard that a bomb was defused while the spaceship was in flight. Maybe that's what caused the vibrations. I was scared sh*tless."

"Some idiot kept making inauspicious comments during the journey. I kept feeling butterflies in my stomach."

"Historic missions aren't a walk in the park after all."

"It's the first time it's dawned on me that making a movie can be so dangerous. Thankfully, we had a military escort. Otherwise we may not have survived."

"It was so worth it joining this production. How many actors have gone their whole careers without experiencing this kind of treatment?"

"It's not an easy gig. I feel like I'm on a sacred mission. Let me take a picture first!"

The cast and crew didn't linger at the spaceport. They soon set off for the movie set in batches on several flying transports.

The set for "Founding Era" wasn't located at the Wai film studio complex. The first batch that arrived headed for the dormitory complex to locate the rooms they were assigned.

The actors were assigned rooms based on how important their roles were. There was a full array of rooms ranging from singles to dorm rooms that housed up to 10 people. Each room was equipped with a private bath and kitchen.

"Wow, how long has it been since I last lived in dorm conditions like this?" someone said.

Violin prodigy Fay Harmonik was part of the sound effects team and was one of the first to arrive at the dorm complex. After settling in, he made for a dirt slope nearby. His bright-red shoulder-length hair flowing in the wind, he set his sights on the vast desert on the horizon.

One's brain cells were bound to be excited by a new environment. Fay Harmonik was in a deeply emotional state. He could feel the inspiration oozing from him, a deluge of notes percolating in his head. The notes didn't form a melody, but he felt compelled to play them to quiet his restless soul.

He raised his arm and bellowed, "Violin!"

Only after belting out the command did he remember his assistant was banned from this shoot. There was no one to hand him his violin, so he rushed back to his dorm room for the instrument before climbing the slope again.

Fay Harmonik closed his eyes briefly, then gazed toward the distant clouds and desert as he cultivated his mood. I'm a lone whale swimming in the deep ocean, surrounded by…

"Dogshit!"

Fay Harmonik cursed. He was getting ready to bolt, but it was too late.

Zaro was scurrying toward him, waving frantically. "Fay Fay!"

Fay Harmonik: "…”

Uh, do we know each other that well?

"Fay Fay," this term of endearment typically used by affectionate fans, suddenly felt revolting.

Fay Harmonik's hand that was carrying his violin shivered as he watched Zaro appear before him. He was weighing the pros and cons of getting into a fight with Zaro.

Forget it, I'll just bear with him.

He couldn't afford to mess with Zaro—and he didn't want to lose his violin.

Zaro was completely oblivious to the calculations going on inside Fay Harmonik's head. He was thinking about his agent's reminder to be friendly and not act like a prima donna. He summoned the most polite face he could muster and asked, "I've always been dying to ask you something, but I'm not sure if I should." Fay Harmonik knew Zaro's temperament oh so well. Before he could say anything, Zaro had already blurted out, "When you're engrossed in playing the violin, how do you make sure your bow doesn't get tangled up in your hair?"

Fay Harmonik: "…" How the f*ck do you not lose it with this guy?

Ignoring Zaro, Fay Harmonik wore a cold expression. He silently turned around and left the slope, thinking to himself, Bad luck!

When he was heading downhill, he saw a gorgeous figure emerging from the dorm complex.

Weather conditions were rough. Apparently, a sandstorm was in the making, yet here was Barbara wearing her princess dress. She had an umbrella in one hand, the other lifting her dress slightly. She was accompanied by an assistant, who was carrying Barbara's handbag and forging a path for her. In contrast to her surroundings, Barbara looked like a rose that had sprouted in the desert.

Fay Harmonik looked like he'd stepped on a piece of sh*t.

You're on a friggin' foreign planet. Will not dressing up kill you?

Such bad luck!

I shouldn't have gone out at all today.

Zaro was number one on Fay Harmonik's blacklist, and Barbara was second. Unfortunately, he couldn't afford to piss off either of them.

A furious Fay Harmonik headed for the dorm complex only to run into Fang Zhao, who was dragging a suitcase.

Fay Harmonik got even more upset.

Three blows of bad luck!

Fang Zhao was the last person he wanted to see.

Because of Fang Zhao, Fay Harmonik's fan had persuaded him to give acting a try. If a composer like Fang Zhao can act, why can't our Fay Fay make a splash in the movie industry?

Fay Harmonik's first response had been, "Ha! Am I the type to spread myself so thin?"

In reality, the thought had indeed crossed his mind, but he set his sights high. If he was going to act, he was going to be the leading man. It had to be a big production too. Otherwise it would not befit his status.

He had even appeared on some variety shows to show his face, appease fans, and promote an upcoming concert at the same time. Yet acting-wise, he never came across the right part that also struck his fancy. He had been about to lower his standards when Fang Zhao had snatched a leading role in "Founding Era." At that point, he hadn't been able to drop his standards. He was too proud.

Fay Harmonik felt someone had gotten the upper hand on him, so seeing Fang Zhao was quite upsetting as well. He grunted and went on his way, clearly miffed.

Fang Zhao arched his eyebrows. He had wanted to compare notes with this violin prodigy, but it looked like it wasn't going to happen.

Due to the importance of his role, Fang Zhao was assigned to a single room. There was internet coverage, so Fang Zhao checked the headlines while his fellow cast members resumed posting photos.

Fang Zhao told his family and friends that he had arrived safely, then got in touch with Yan Biao and Zuo Yu. His two bodyguards would join him on Wai soon. They were supposed to bring Curly Hair, whose paperwork was almost in order.

Given Curly Hair's special talents, Fang Zhao felt it best to keep him close.

# Chapter 297
# Inferior to a Dog

As said by the masses, nowadays, there were only two sorts of actors left: those heading to planet Wai and those that had been eliminated.

And actors that were already filming at the Wai film studio complex, regardless of whether they were in the cast or not, were taking advantage of the situation. Since they were already on planet Wai, ignorant people might really think that they were playing some important role in "Founding Era."

Not everyone knew that the Wai film studio complex and the set for "Founding Era" were two different places. Many people were deceived.

On the first day, when the cast and crew arrived on planet Wai, the internet was abuzz. Many people that were unable to visit planet Wai were green with envy.

The headlines on every continent were seemingly dominated by "Founding Era." Netizens were also very happy to see these headlines.

Celebrities were falling over each other trying to post photos to flaunt. Online audiences hoped to see more excitement.

But no news came out from the cast and crew. Only the online interactive platform of "Founding Era" was releasing some trivial news every day.

The online masses that were waiting for excitement were not satisfied.

Where was the publicity?

Where were the trailers?

When it was going to be released wasn't mentioned either!

There wasn't even a single still from the serial, and all the big stars had collectively disappeared.

Regarding this, the official explanation of "Founding Era" was this: The entire crew does not have internet access. They are having a confined period.

Netizens of the New Era that couldn't even live without the internet in their daily lives couldn't help but pity the cast members.

"How cruel, to actually deny them internet access!"

"If it were me, not having internet access would be the same as denying my livelihood!"

"That is why I don't want to undergo military service. How am I going to live if I get posted to some destitute place without any internet!"

"Will you even have the energy to use the internet when you are undergoing military service?"

"Speaking of this, nowadays, aren't there very few serials that don't have internet access? Indeed, this is the royalty of serials, It just isn't the same as all those other inferior ones."

"I wonder when we will get to see those stars post their photos. Without those, the entertainment circle feels miserable."

Over at planet Wai, the cast and crew had indeed entered a confined period, but they had yet to officially start shooting.

The entire planet Wai had raised precautionary measures the moment "Founding Era" had announced its reboot. The military force here had also been expanded.

The military troops that had come along with the cast and crew were not just to ensure the cast's safety. At least 60% of these troops were incorporated into Wai base's military force.

In short, people of Wai base were delighted that the "Founding Era" project was setting up shop on planet Wai.

Once filming was completed, the set would change its name to "Founding Era Cultural Film City" and would become a tourist hotspot. Perhaps planet Wai might be able to apply for a second film cultural base.

In the future, when it was opened up to the public, planet Wai would only be worried if nobody came. With human traffic, there would there be resources and revenue. With revenue, there would be a guarantee for military expenses. If additional armaments were applied for, the probability of it being approved would be much higher. The base would be upgraded and gain wealth!

The area that "Founding Era" was using as a set had originally been a place that wasn't in planet Wai's development plans. This region did not even have a name, only an area number. But now, it had become a mystical place, although it was just a small corner when compared to planet Wai's vast land. Now it was going to become a trace of history.

Its vile weather and terrible environment similar to that of the Period of Destruction was a reason why it had been selected for filming. Most places on planet Wai had four distinctive seasons and had favorable climates, like spring, all year round. However, this place seemed like it had only two seasons: an excessive winter and a hot summer. On rare occasions where it wasn't cold or hot, the place was wrecked by sand and dust storms.

On the first day, when the cast and crew arrived, due to them being tired and having a lot of restrictions, they did not manage to explore the place.

The next morning, after the directorial team held a meeting, each cast and crew member was given an arrangements schedule.

For actors, they were giving a week's time to adapt to the environment, learn how to use props, and make other sorts of preparations to get ready.

It was clearly listed on the plan that all cast and crew would enter a confined period. Once they entered this region, they should forget about getting out before the filming was finalized. If they really needed to do so, they would have to apply for it beforehand. The cast and crew could also forget about sneaking out too. The entire area was surrounded by military personnel, and if they were mistaken for extremists and shot dead, they would have died for nothing.

Every seven days, they would have two hours of time for internet usage. At all other times, there wouldn't be any internet connection.

Zaro's face turned black the moment he saw this. "How do we live without the

internet!"

Older actors had experienced a lot and had encountered similar circumstances before. Although those conditions hadn't been as stringent, having experienced life without internet access, they were still able to adapt. The younger actors, on the other hand, found it much harder to bear.

Fang Zhao wasn't really affected. In his previous life, he had gone much longer without any internet. Even in this life, he had undergone a rather long period without much internet access on planet Baiji. Thus, his reliance on the internet was not as strong as that of other people of the same age.

The second day, after receiving the arrangements schedule, Fang Zhao and the others from Silver Wing gathered at the designated location. There, professionals would instruct them on how to use the various props.

The prop instructor wasn't the least bit courteous towards these celebrities.

"People from that era were forced to get stronger on battlefields. Whether it was having the ability to kill their enemies or having the skills to escape, people then were well versed in it. Any person could leap 8 meters with just one stride. Can any of you do so? If you can't do so, then you better familiarize yourselves with the usage of these props. Try not to become a burden when filming officially starts! No one will wait for you!"

"We aren't even athletes—how is it possible to even leap eight meters with one stride," someone muttered.

There were even people who joked about it. "If there is a dog chasing behind me, perhaps I might really leap 8 meters."

The prop instructor paid no heed to what this bunch of instructors discussed in private and continued at his normal pace as he explained the usage of every single prop. Whether the actors listened seriously, whether they comprehended, he couldn't care less.

Fang Zhao did not need it, but after some consideration, he felt that he shouldn't be too segregated from the rest of the group and needed to act normal. So when others interacted with the props, Fang Zhao used them too. Familiarizing himself with their usage would be beneficial as well.

As Fang Zhao memorized the prop instructor's introduction for each piece of equipment, he felt rueful. The convenience that technology brought humankind was indeed amazing.

The prop instructor left after finishing his talk. He had other matters to attend to and would leave the group of actors to train over here.

Ji Polun ran over to look for Fang Zhao. "Brother Zhao, should we had to the production team's dining hall or to the gourmet street later? How about we head to the large dining hall at noon to experience the atmosphere and visit the gourmet food street in the late afternoon to try some Wai specialties?"

The gourmet food street that had been mentioned was a street constructed on the fringes of the film set area. The shops there were run by family members of Wai base military personnel.

The investments and the cast and crew provided job opportunities for the military and were bringing planet Wai considerable revenue. Military personnel garrisoned on planet Wai would definitely look after things well here.

Even a powerful dragon could not repress a local snake. Regardless of how much power and influence one held elsewhere, when on planet Wai, they still had to foster good relationships with the military stationed here. This was the territory of Wai base's commander, Huo Yi. If the cast and crew should really encounter any big problems, they would still have to request help from the Wai garrison.

For the cast and crew, the gourmet food street definitely had a much greater appeal compared to the production team's dining hall. However, the three meals at the dining hall were free, whereas the gourmet food street required them to fork out their own cash.

Naturally, celebrities did not lack such small amounts of cash. So there isn't any internet for us to entertain ourselves with? In life, there are only a few other pastimes.

"We have to eat more. We definitely won't get fat training for days in this horrid place. If we eat according to our past portions, we will waste away before filming has even started," Ji Polun said. "We have to eat more good stuff before filming starts."

Fang Zhao approved of Ji Polun's statement. Before leaving, the prop instructor had given some parting words: "Try your best to eat. Even if you have no appetite or you

aren't acclimating well, you still have to force food down."

At lunchtime, Ji Polun dropped whatever prop he was holding and ran over to Fang Zhao to have lunch together. His eager manner appeared as if he was afraid that Fang Zhao would run off alone.

A few other Silver Wing young actors who were of similar grades to Ji Polun gazed disdainfully at Ji Polun's impatient thigh hugging. Following that, they compliantly joined in.

"Brother Fang, take me along!"

"Count me in!"

"Me too, me too!"

People who could squeeze into the cast of "Founding Era" were not foolish. They could clearly see that He Lisi was the head of the Silver Wing party, but there were too many people gathered around him. B-listers like them were nothing more than minions, and they could not force their way in. With no other choice, they could only follow Ji Polun and mix with Fang Zhao.

A few of them thought to themselves that fortunately, Fang Zhao was of a similar age to them. With common topics, they all felt comfortable talking to him

Even if any of them had mush for brains, the managers behind them surely had tricks up their sleeves. Previously, these managers had instructed them, If you aren't smart, then watch what smart people do and learn from them.

For the past few years, Ji Polun's stock had been rising. In the eyes of many people, he was a smart person.

Fang Zhao could see through their intentions, but as long as they had no evil inclinations, he would look after those he could. In his eyes, they were just little kids.

As Fang Zhao was bringing along a bunch of "kids" to the dining hall for lunch, he ran through the list of things he had arranged in his mind. Mmhm, no problems. Everything is accounted for.

Elsewhere.

At Earth's space station, a cargo transport ship headed for planet Wai was stopped.

Yan Biao and Zuo Yu were not in the passenger cabin but in a single room allocated to them.

They had followed Fang Zhao's instructions and brought along Curly Hair and all sorts of procedural documentation.

Fang Zhao belonged to the first batch of planet Wai cooperative partners, and planet Wai's commanding officer Huo Yi had given him the green light. However, for him to bring a dog, there were all sorts of tests that had to be done to prevent foreign bacteria and other microbes from being carried in. There were slightly more of these procedures, and despite starting in August, it was only now that Fang Zhao had gotten a pass from planet Wai. It was only a one-time pass, and when Curly Hair was going to leave planet Wai, he would need to apply for it again.

However, the reason Yan Biao and Zuo Yu were able to enjoy the treatment of having a single room was because of Curly Hair.

When they had boarded, cargo was being loaded up on the transport ship. Curly Hair had smelt some hazardous materials. Those were goods that had some toxicity.

Despite layers of safety checks, there had still been a little leaking, and nobody had any idea how it had gotten through the checks.

The person in charge at the space station was furious. Investigate! Investigate thoroughly! Find out whoever or whichever step had a problem!

Over at the transport ship, they had only been concerned about whether there were problems with the goods that had been loaded up. The majority of these goods would be for the "Founding Era" cast and crew. If any star was poisoned as a result, those on the ship would be done for as well.

"Wasn't there a police dog making a round? Why didn't it sniff out anything?" someone asked, puzzled.

The space station had 20 elite dogs from Muzhou's police academy with the specific purpose of searching the spaceport. Police dogs and technology gave a double layer of insurance.

However, this double layer of insurance wasn't able to make it 100% safe.

"Strange. How exactly was this dog able to sniff it out?" somebody asked as the ship's staffers gathered to discuss.

One of them was shocked by the results of his online search. "This dog is ranked fifth on the global pet value charts. It has a valuation of over 200 million!"

"I feel it is even better than the 200 million worth of new equipment that the space station just bought."

"I just knew that the space station's new batch of machines were no good. See, there are problems already."

"In the past, I had never understood why a dog could be so expensive. Now I know why. It's totally worth it!"

The transport ship's commander had even specifically come looking for Yan Biao and Zuo Yu. "Let us borrow your dog again."

Yan Biao and Zuo Yu were in an awkward situation.

Could their boss's dog be so easily loaned out?

Of course not!

But this was someone else's transport ship. They still had to ride on this ship to planet Wai.

Although Fang Zhao did not have any internet access, with some connections, the two bodyguards could still contact him. However, since it wasn't an especially important matter, there was no need to make use of those connections.

The two of them considered for a bit. It wasn't a big issue, so they sanctioned it.

"We can lend out the dog, but we have to follow along," Yan Biao said.

The ship's commander rejected it. "That won't do. Many areas on this ship are off-limits to non-crew members. You guys have to wait here. Don't worry! I will personally lead the dog to each cabin for a quick search before returning. It's just a dog. Would I

not return him after borrowing?"

Having reached this point, Zuo Yu and Yan Biao could only agree, since Curly Hair didn't seem like he was indisposed to it.

The ship's commander gladly brought the dog to patrol the ship and even got his men to allocate a room for Yan Biao and Zuo Yu with food and drinks.

Zuo Yu stared at the ceiling. "I feel that…”

"We are inferior to a dog," Yan Biao replied numbly.

# Chapter 298
# Thigh Hugging

The "Founding Era" film set district.

After a day of training with props and familiarising themselves with the site, in the late afternoon, Fang Zhao brought Ji Polun and the others to the gourmet food street for some food.

"This gourmet street has a lot of stuff, but the prices aren't low either," a young actor said as he looked at the menu.

"Does the Commodities Price Office manage this area?"

"It appears that they are unable to do so."

There was indeed a wide range of selections at the gourmet food street, but the prices were expensive.

However, this food was grown on Wai farmland. It was purely organic, no hormones or fertilizers, and it tasted great. Most importantly, many of these fruits and vegetables were varieties that had existed during the Old Era. It was rumored that at the moment, only planet Wai was able to supply these.

Therefore, eating this food was all about being pretentious!

After the dishes were served and Fang Zhao had just picked up his chopsticks, Ji Polun exclaimed, "Brother Zhao, wait a moment. Let me first disinfect the poison." As he said this, Ji Polun fished out equipment and started taking photos of the food on the table. He took quite a number from many different angles.

Since there was no internet, how about taking some photos?

When he got his internet usage time after one week, he could show off online!

"OK, I have disinfected the poison within myself. We can eat now."

"Wait, let me take some too."

"I was so hungry I nearly forgot about this! Everyone, please wait for a moment and let me take a selfie."

In this party of eight, other than Fang Zhao, the other seven were frantically snapping away at the table filled with food in all sorts of positions and angles.

Fang Zhao thought for a bit and also snapped a photo of the table. It wasn't to flaunt on the internet. Instead, he remembered what Great-Grandfather Fang had told him before about taking some photos of the food here. Great-Grandfather Fang wanted to know that Fang Zhao was eating well here.

When he got internet access, Fang Zhao would send these to Great-Grandfather Fang.

Ji Polun came over to suck up to Fang Zhao. "Brother Zhao, let's take a photo together."

The others all squeezed over as well. "Take together, take a photo together!"

The eight of them took a group photograph together.

Fang Zhao could not help but flash a grandfatherly smile toward the camera.

In the following few days, Fang Zhao had lunch at the large dining hall. Then, in the late afternoon, when learning assignments were done, he headed to the gourmet food street to seek memories from the Old Era.

Many of the staff, shop attendants, and chefs at the dining hall and food street were family members of military personnel. Some of them also chased stars and had been very excited to see the celebrities at the start. Here, it was really a resplendent area full of stars, an ensemble of heroes! Those who saw it especially wanted to brag online.

Forty-five film emperors and empresses filming together, have you ever seen this?

I have!

Eight top-rated film stars having hot pot together, have you ever seen this before?

I have!

Superstars, famous megastars, we have them all here, hahaha!

Here, shop attendants and staffers that were content with their lot just set their heads down and continue working without saying much. Other staffers that had higher EQs were more astute and knew what they could say and what they could do.

Unsettled people who thought themselves to be shrewd would not even be posted here. Therefore, there were no leaked images that sullied celebrities. Any photographs would only be taken after getting approval from the celebrities.

However, circumstances changed very quickly.

An example was the staffers at the dining hall. When they first saw the stars, they went: "Ah ah ah ah… Superstar, how are you!? Can I get an autograph!?"

A day later: "Please wait for a bit, everyone. Your food will be ready shortly. Can I get a photograph of us all together? I'm so excited!"

Yet another day later: "Oh, you are here."

Yet another day later: "Queue up, queue up! What are you looking at? I'm talking to you!!"

In less than a week, the employees of the dining hall had changed their attitudes toward these stars in the showbiz circles from "precious creatures" to "common as dogs." Nowadays, when the dining hall employees saw these celebrities, their hearts would not even skip a beat.

In these few days, a small group had formed beside Fang Zhao. Sometimes they would have meals together.

Silver Wing's faction was divided into two groups. The first group had He Lisi as the head, whereas Fang Zhao was the core of the second group. The former group was mostly first-rate actors and a few other old actors. The latter group was mainly made up of second- and third-rate young actors.

There were many similar small groups like theirs, and large groups also formed very quickly.

"Founding Era" was a huge project. It was huge because it consisted of 11 "chapters."

There had been 11 great generals during the Founding Era, and each of these 11 chapters had one of these 11 leads as its core.

Every chapter would have a director executing it. The Yanzhou chapter was helmed by a director named Bai Duan, who had worldwide acclaim.

Roman was rarely seen, but Fang Zhao saw Bai Duan every day. Some of Fang Zhao's daily tasks were set by Bai Duan.

Given the special nature of Yanzhou, although he wasn't playing a lead role, Fang Zhao's role was still especially important at the start. Therefore, Bai Duan frequently looked for Fang Zhao and gave him lots of tasks before filming officially began.

The living quarters were some distance away from the filming location. Every day, at allocated time intervals, there was a shuttle transport service to ferry the cast and crew. These weren't the public transports that were commonly seen everywhere in the New Era. Instead, these were specially modified and lengthened transport vehicles from the base. These vehicles could shield from the wind and rain and were bulletproof and resistant to explosions. Even if hailstones the size of fists were to come crashing down in torrential weather, the people inside would not be hurt. Of course, even though the environment here was considered vile, it was not that extreme. The cast and crew were here to film a show, not to play a survival challenge.

Today, Fang Zhao had taken the morning transport headed for the filming location. He had a few places to visit today. Director Bai wanted him to understand more about Fang Zhao's working environment back then.

When Fang Zhao arrived at his destination, Director Bai was instructing some men to move equipment.

Spotting Fang Zhao, Director Bai called out to someone: "You! Bring Fang Zhao to film set Y71!"

Ji Polun made his way over. "Director Bai, let me go. I know where film set Y71 is."

Director Bai did not seem to mind and waved his hands, indicating to hurry up and bring Fang Zhao over.

Ji Polun spoke as he led Fang Zhao toward film studio Y71. "I was just familiarizing myself at film set Y70 yesterday. Y71 is just beside it, so I remember it quite well."

On the way, the two ran into other Silver Wing actors that had gotten close to Fang Zhao. Since they had no pressing matters, they tagged along for a look-see.

There were others present when Fang Zhao arrived on film set Y71. He Lisi was there too, in the middle of a conversation with another middle-aged actor. Fang Zhao did not go over to disturb He Lisi and instead took measure of the film set.

This was a meeting room, similar to the backdrop of the first scene in the audition, but it was even closer to the real historical scene. Clearly, whoever had set this up had referenced historical resources to reconstruct it. Even the scratches on the table were very similar to historical videos that had been preserved from then!

Fang Zhao went over to the head of the table and walked alongside it. He brushed his fingers across the tabletop, feeling the uneven and bumpy scratches on it. He kept walking forward till he reached a very plain-looking chair placed near the front.

At present, the brilliant lights and vibrant colors of a New Era city had all become dull. Many memories were being awoken in his mind. The world that revolved around blood, fire, dust, and ash had become very distinct once again.

The lighting indoors wasn't sufficient, and the supplementary lights had not been turned on.

When He Lisi spotted Fang Zhao, he opened his mouth and prepared to remind Fang Zhao not to touch things carelessly.

At the side, a young actor's elbow accidentally bumped into a metal cup. The metal cup tumbled to the floor, creating a clanking sound. As if sensing something, that actor looked over and met Fang Zhao's gaze. In that instant, the young actor felt all the blood in his entire body freeze.

That penetrating gaze was ice cold and seemed so realistic, as if sharpened hunting knives had been hurled over!

That sort of immense bone-crushing pressure seemingly reeking of blood seemed to emanate all around, making it difficult for one to breathe!

Fang Zhao's attitude after stepping into the film set had been easy-going. Nobody in this room had made any mental preparation, and with the sudden change of pace, everyone was stunned simultaneously.

The entirety of film set Y71 was silent.

The sound of Director Bai shouting came from outside. "Fang Zhao! Is Fang Zhao here!?"

Following the shout, the freezing atmosphere in the room dissipated in a flash, as if the previous scene had never happened.

Fang Zhao responded and flashed an apologetic smile to everyone in the room before leaving. He had been a little caught up in his memories. He had not restrained his gaze and had scared that bunch of kids.

Only after Fang Zhao left did the person who had knocked over the cup feel his blood slowly warm back up. His heart was pounding, and he felt as if he had escaped death by the skin of his teeth! This was the first time he had ever felt like this. Even when the transport ship traveling here had experienced an anomaly, he had not trembled to this extent!

Other actors in the room could not help themselves, and they spoke out.

"Oh my god! Did you see his expression just now?"

"My skin was tingling!"

"I felt my legs going a little soft."

"Scary!"

"You even said yesterday that this brother is rather friendly? How is he friendly!"

The one who had been denounced defended himself. "Normally he is indeed very amiable. Who knew that he would become like this while acting."

"I finally understand how he was able to snag that important role and why I got a role that will only last one season. We are simply on a different level!"

"That manner just now… was awesome! I was caught off guard and shocked. If I was acting alongside him, I would have forgotten my lines."

"I thought the way his imposing manner was written in the script was just an

exaggeration. I have gained knowledge and experience! No wonder everyone was striving so hard to get into such a high-grade cast. Wow! Everyone is an expert!"

"Fang Zhao did not even have makeup on. If he had been wearing makeup, wouldn't he have had an aura like that of a great person?"

"Fang Zhao definitely wouldn't lose to those old seniors in the showbiz circles if he went head to head with them like this!"

At the side, He Lisi pursed his lips. He had forgotten what he'd wanted to say.

Taking a deep breath, he replayed that scene once more in his mind.

The sort of imposing manner that Fang Zhao had portrayed seemed as if it was an inherent ability he could release and retract freely. If it had been He Lisi acting instead, he might not necessarily have been able to achieve that degree.

No, it wasn't a might—he could not do it!

No wonder Roman had recommended Fang Zhao so profusely!

No wonder over 20 members of the committee of 100 had voted for Fang Zhao!

This youngster had hidden it really deep!

As He Lisi thought about having to spend a period of time acting with Fang Zhao, he felt an immense pressure.

After regaining his senses, Ji Polun violently sucked in air. "Sssss—" He wasn't able to share his own thoughts before someone beside him lamented:

"I just realized that the thigh we are hugging is really thick!"

Ji Polun nodded his head in agreement and made a staunch resolution to hug this golden thigh even tighter. Turning and guardedly glancing around at the other young actors, Ji Polun moved his legs and ran in the direction Fang Zhao had left in.

Seeing the situation, the others also hurriedly chased after him. If they were hugging a thigh, they had to hug it really tightly. What would they do if they lost it?

Outside, Director Bai was giving Fang Zhao some additional tasks. These would be of use for the filming.

Not too far off, there were some people taking note of what was going on over here.

"That guy is Fang Zhao?"

"Right, that's the one."

"I feel that he looks ordinary, and there really isn't anything special about him. How was he able to force aside a bunch of old actors to snatch such an important role?"

"Who knows. Probably a powerful backer."

"I don't believe that he doesn't have anyone behind him."

"There really isn't. I heard someone say last time that Fang Zhao's family even came out to clarify."

After Director Bai had spoken to Fang Zhao, he went to look for other actors.

Ji Polun and the others hurriedly gathered over. "Brother Zhao, are you free? I have a question I wish to consult with you about regarding acting."

Fang Zhao was just about to respond when he saw a silhouette out of the corner of his eyes and turned around.

That person was clad in a military uniform with the Wai emblem. Fang Zhao had seen this person on Wai base before, and this person was clearly coming toward him.

"Wait a moment," Fang Zhao told Ji Polun and the others.

"No worries, no worries. Brother Zhao, go ahead, we can wait," replied Ji Polun and the others without delay. Their gazes also followed Fang Zhao's as they looked over at the person and noticed he was a major. As the military personnel was walking over, his face remained expressionless.

As the filming had not yet officially started, the filming location had not been closed off yet. From time to time, soldiers would enter the interior of the sets. However, previously, they had been helping to deliver goods or equipment. Coming straight to

look for a certain actor was a rare sight.

When the major saw Fang Zhao, he saluted first. Fang Zhao returned the salute.

Seeing this scene, someone whispered to the person beside him. "What is going on?"

"I have no idea. I'm just curious. That major appeared so cold a while ago, but now he is smiling as though he has just seen his own biological brother."

"That Fang Zhao seems like he really has some influence."

Ji Polun and the others stared without blinking and only saw the major speaking to Fang Zhao before handing Fang Zhao a military use communications device.

After Fang Zhao received it, he informed Director Bai.

Director Bai had no objections and nodded his head in approval.

As they watched Fang Zhao walk away, a young actor beside Ji Polun rubbed his chin while looking pensive.

"Why do I feel that the thigh we are hugging just got even thicker?"

Fang Zhao walked over to an empty resting room and answered the comms.

Wai base's commanding officer Huo Yi chuckled. "Haha, long time no see, Fang Zhao! What is being in the cast like? Are you anxious?"

"Filming hasn't officially started, so I'm fine. Anything the matter?" Fang Zhao did not believe that such a high ranked and busy person like Huo Yi would personally contact him just for some idle chat.

"This… I have a matter I wish to discuss with you."

Wai base.

Zuo Yu was shaking as he gestured at the squad of armed soldiers obstructing a doorway. "Despicable! Shameless! To even steal a dog!"

The soldiers obstructing the doorway put on stony expressions: We aren't listening so

we won't return it!

# Chapter 299
# Takeout Delivery Man

Looking back on that day, the captain of the freight vessel had inspected the various cargo holding bays with Curly Hair in tow and yielded some results. Not a whole lot, but some. After all, the screening equipment and the elite dogs from the police canine unit weren't mere window dressing. Curly Hair had just caught what they missed.

When they returned to Wai, the captain of the ship couldn't bear parting with Curly Hair as Yan Biao and Zuo Yu prepared to take him to his owner, so he reported the matter to his superiors.

Port security was a major priority for Huo Yi. Planet Wai's fortunes were on the rise. It was on a development spree. If anything went wrong, it could spell disaster. So once he got word, he ordered them, "Tell Fang Zhao's two bodyguards we need to complete customs clearance for the dog. Stall them. Don't let them take the dog away."

The captain of the freight ship felt that wasn't sufficient grounds. "What if they disagree?"

"What say do they have? Then detain them. They aren't the dog's bodyguards. I'll take the matter up with the dog's owner," Huo Yi responded.

The captain felt reassured. "Commander, no matter what, you must keep the dog. It's so much more effective than the screening equipment at the spaceport. Who knows how long the 'Founding Era' shoot will take? My ship will be transporting a lot of stuff for the cast and crew. There are also other ships. Our military budget doesn't rival Baiji's. Even though we received a new batch of screening machines, it's still no guarantee. We should follow the MO of spaceports on the home planet: screening equipment and sniffer dogs. Didn't you ask Muzhou's police canine academy for dogs? We should get them this year, no?"

"Yes. I'll tell them it's urgent. We should be getting nine dogs."

The captain was delighted by the news. Even though other dogs might not be as competent as Curly Hair, they would still make a difference. He was always filled with

envy when he watched the canine units in action at the spaceports on Earth.

Machines were simply machines, and police dogs were police dogs. The dogs over at the Muzhou police canine academy were always in demand.

The captain was curious. "That many? They're that generous? Didn't we have trouble getting five from them in the past?"

"It's because the 'Founding Era' project carries quite a bit of clout. That's why the canine academy is being unusually generous."

Huo Yi had put in a request with the Muzhou police dog academy five years ago. Back then, Planet Wai had been the boondocks. Their security screening equipment had been quite outdated, mostly hand-me-downs from planets ranked higher in the development order. If they couldn't afford screening equipment, Huo Yi figured, at least they could afford to raise dogs.

But it turned out that the dogs at the Muzhou police canine academy weren't cheap either. The main problem was that Huo Yi hadn't acted quickly enough. Every time a quality pup was available, it was reserved right away. Planet Wai had to get in line.

Now that Wai's development prospects had improved, Huo Yi felt he was on more solid ground. After complaining of insufficient funding and leveraging the clout of the "Founding Era" shoot, he had managed to get his dogs.

And today, he heard about Curly Hair. He wanted to draft Curly Hair as well. It was just a dog, he figured. All he had to do was offer Fang Zhao something in return.

But after figuring out Curly Hair's market value through a quick internet search and reading the relevant news items, Huo Yi cringed. He knew there was no way they would land Curly Hair.

That said, Huo Yi still probed Fang Zhao when Huo Yi got him on the line. After confirming that a sale was out of the question, Huo Yi tried a different strategy.

"I'm thinking the reason you had the dog brought here is because you didn't want to leave such a precious dog at home. But frankly, Wai and the film studio complex aren't much better. It's a mixed crowd these days. Who knows, your dog may be marked soon. He's better off at our base. There will be pups from the Muzhou police dog academy to keep him company. The academy is also going to send a trainer and a breeder. They

will take good care of your dog. I've set aside land for the dogs, quite a sizable plot. We don't have much to write home about here on Wai, but we sure as hell have plenty of land."

Fang Zhao remained silent. He knew Huo Yi wasn't finished yet.

Lo and behold, Huo Yi continued. "Let Curly Hair serve at our base. He can do whatever he wants most of the time. All he has to do is take a stroll through the inbound freight vessels. This is a good thing for the dog. Dogs who have performed military service are entitled to government benefits down the road. Even though you're not exactly short on cash, this is an honor of sorts, no? By the time he heads back to Earth with you, he'll be entitled to preferential treatment at all sorts of places."

Fang Zhao demanded to see a live feed of Curly Hair.

Huo Yi knew he was still in business when Fang Zhao didn't reject his proposal outright. "No problem. Let me show you. That little fella is having a great time," he said in an upbeat voice.

And Huo Yi wasn't lying.

After their call was switched to a videoconference, Fang Zhao saw Curly Hair, who was already in uniform. Curly Hair's outfit was printed with the logo for the Wai military base, and he seemed to be enjoying himself.

The uniform Curly Hair was wearing was actually intended for the pups from the Muzhou police dog academy, but Curly Hair was a small dog, so the outfit was a good match.

"Don't worry. We're only going to use him to detect drugs and smuggled goods and the like. He'll be in a safe environment. We won't use him for dangerous military missions," Huo Yi added.

The fact that Huo Yi had made the call in person meant that the Wai base took the matter seriously, that it had been carefully thought out and was not a spontaneous request.

"Let me come over after I finish up tonight. We'll talk then," Fang Zhao said.

"No problem. I'll give your production crew a heads up."

After completing the tasks Director Bai had assigned to him this day, Fang Zhao skipped the routine trip to Restaurant Row with Ji Polun and company, boarding a flying transport bound for the Wai military base instead.

A quick look at Curly Hair revealed that the dog was in good health and spirits. Fang Zhao knew then that Curly Hair was OK with serving on the military base. The folks at the base thought that Curly Hair couldn't understand what was being said, but in fact, Curly Hair had understood everything. If he was upset, he would have started making a fuss a long time ago. How could he have possibly sat still without Yan Biao and Zuo Yu in his line of sight?

Fang Zhao also checked out the play area Huo Yi said he had set up for the dogs. It was quite big, not a whole lot smaller than Dongshan Farm. Much of the training equipment had already been installed. Curly Hair went nuts when he got there, making his rounds through each piece of equipment.

Fang Zhao also met the breeder. He was from Muzhou and a clear dog lover. He seemed like a decent chap. Come to think of it, the dogs were a top priority for Huo Yi. The nine pups from the Muzhou police canine academy were still due to arrive. Even if this breeder didn't cut it, there would be the trainer and breeder from Muzhou.

Curly Hair dashed toward Fang Zhao enthusiastically. Fang Zhao asked, "So, you wanna serve here?"

"Woof!" Curly Hair barked with gusto.

Fang Zhao stared at Curly Hair silently and waited until Curly hair stopped wagging his tail before saying, "OK."

Fang Zhao negotiated the terms of Curly Hair's service with Huo Yi before leaving.

Huo Yi headed back to base a happy man.

Fang Zhao would be quite busy with his shoot. Once filming started, he wouldn't be able to get away that easily. Still, he would ask Yan Biao and Zuo Yu to check up on Curly Hair from time to time, have the breeder brief them on Curly Hair's latest.

Naturally, Huo Yi was too busy to deal with these day-to-day tasks. His job was done when he successfully drafted Curly Hair into service. The breeder would handle the formalities that remained. He would brief Fang Zhao on Curly Hair's condition.

Starting from the day after tomorrow, Curly Hair would start serving in the Wai military base until Fang Zhao completed his shoot.

As for today, Fang Zhao instructed Yan Biao and Zuo Yu to take Curly Hair back to the film studio complex. They would deliver him to base the day after tomorrow.

After completing negotiations with Fang Zhao, Huo Yi put in a call to Muzhou asking the police dog academy to send their pups ASAP. The training grounds for the pups had been set up and their trainers had been selected. The trainers had already completed a year of training. The only missing piece was the dogs. Huo Yi threw in a mention of Curly Hair to rile the folks in Muzhou a bit.

Muzhou natives always prided themselves in producing the best dogs on the planet, and the Muzhou police canine academy was widely regarded as the best dog breeder in the world. It had long considered itself the industry leader.

Until Muzhou's sheep-herding competitions had had to change their rules thanks to a dog from Yanzhou.

At Muzhou's police dog academy.

"Who? Did you just say that dog is on Planet Wai?" One of the senior officials at the police dog school did a double take, wondering if he had misheard the previous comment.

"Curly Hair. You know, Fang Zhao's dog? The Wai military base took a liking to him. Word has it Commander Huo Yi called Fang Zhao in person with an offer, but Fang Zhao rejected it," a dog trainer responded.

"Duh! You'd have to be brain dead to give up that dog." The official pondered the matter some more and instructed, "Tell the folks on Wai to keep a close eye on our dogs. Elite police dogs can draw quite a few enemies after being in the field for some time. They need to be protected and shielded from the public eye." He eyed the nine pups prepared for Wai. "Let's replace these three with three from Class 1."

The trainer balked at the decision. "Huh? There are only seven pups in Class 1. Didn't you want to save them for us?"

The dogs at the police dog academy were also ranked. The pups from Class 1 were the cream of the crop.

"Stop it. We have plenty of top dogs in Muzhou. There will be more in the pipeline. Let's send Wai this batch." The official glanced at the pups bound for Planet Wai. "Be on your best behavior. Don't lose to that dog from Yanzhou."

At Wai film studio complex.

Fang Zhao headed straight back to the set, while Zuo Yu and Yan Biao retrieved Curly Hair. Their flying transport landed near the film studio complex. There was already a car waiting.

The driver was an old comrade of Yan Biao's who worked at the film studio complex. He had rented the car from the Wai military base. Such rentals were quite common, so their car didn't stand out.

A shadow emerged from a dark corner after Zuo Yu and company sped away in their car. The person returned to the film studio complex as well.

The stalker was an entertainment journalist who had infiltrated the film studio compound. He hadn't landed any scoops of late. News was hard to come by at the film studio complex. All the big stars were on the set of "Founding Era," which the entertainment press corps had failed to penetrate, so tonight he had decided to try his luck near the film studios. Lo and behold, he had managed to shoot something.

The entertainment journalist returned to the room he had rented after arriving at the film studio complex. Two of his colleagues were waiting.

"From the look on your face, you got something, didn't you?"

"What did you get? Which celebrity?"

"Wow, you'll never guess."

The man pulled up the footage he had shot on his camera.

"Aren't these two guys… Fang Zhao's bodyguards?"

Entertainment journalists memorized the identities of all the folks who worked for the stars—agents, assistants, bodyguards, and the like. Even if they couldn't, they kept the information on file. Fang Zhao's entourage had been thoroughly researched by entertainment journalists around the world because he had been cast as the male lead

in "Founding Era."

The other colleague figured out the real focus of the pictures. "Wait, isn't that the dog worth some 200 million?"

"Shouldn't Fang Zhao be shooting now? How come he had his bodyguards bring his dog?"

"How would I know?" The journalist paused the footage he had shot and pointed to a spot on the screen. "The Wai military base was responsible for their transportation. Check out the flying transport. It's emblazoned with the base logo."

The journalists were going to screen capture a few still photos out of the video. Even if they failed to shoot any celebrities, this dog was news.

"Let's brainstorm how to spin a story with these few pictures that draws the most readers."

"Should we make a connection to Fang Zhao's family history?"

"The dog is a hot topic. It's worth 200 million, one of the top-ranked dogs on the global list."

As for the truth, did it matter?

They were pros at extrapolating stories out of photos.

"Wait, hold on." The journalist glued to the screen brainstorming a storyline blurted, "It looks like Fang Zhao's bodyguard spotted you. Here, they threw you a glance."

"Don't worry. We're fine as long as we're not marked by the military. All I did was shoot a dog. What, are they gonna arrest me?"

The doorbell rang.

The three journalists were jolted to their senses and glanced at their door with alarm.

The leader of the group gestured, and one of the other journalists turned on their surveillance footage.

"Sir, your takeout is here." The man standing at the door was wearing a hotel uniform. He was a familiar face. He flashed his pristine-white teeth while staring at the camera.

The three men relaxed. They ordered takeout all the time. The film studio complex was off-limits to drones, so all takeout deliveries were made in person.

"It's my dinner."

"Scared the hell out of me."

"I'm going to start writing after I eat. We'll file the story tonight."

When they opened their door, they found about a dozen dark gun barrels pointed in their direction.

The trio: "!!!"

A group of armed soldiers stormed into the room. In the span of a few breaths, they had canvassed the entire room and confiscated the journalists' cameras and storage devices.

"Take them away!"

The squadron retreated. The three entertainment journalists didn't have time for so much as a grunt.

The film studio complex had a lively nightlife, so word of the arrests spread quickly.

Barring major infractions, the Wai military typically ignored what went down within the confines of the film studios. Journalists were generally free to roam around all day, then sneak out at night and find sanctuary outside the army's jurisdiction. As long as nothing major happened, only fines were imposed when reporters were caught.

This was their first time venturing into the complex to make arrests.

When they figured out who had been arrested, the other journalists based in the film studio compound started wondering what exactly their seized colleagues had managed to shoot.

"Judging from the response, it's gotta be something pertaining to military secrets."

"Isn't that a death wish? Why not stick to celebrities? Why shoot the military? You wanna cut your life short?"

The arrested journalists were downright baffled. All we did today was shoot a f*cking dog!

Another spot in the film studio complex.

Zuo Yu glanced in the direction of the commotion, then turned to tell Yan Biao, "When I was still with special forces, someone told me about an ace dog bred by the Muzhou police canine academy. It had completed many missions at various ports and made some major busts, which earned it a first-class merit medal. You know how much weight a first-class medal carries. You don't get one without a major contribution."

Yan Biao remained silent. Even though he had been part of a different branch of the military, he knew how rare first-class medals were. Few humans were awarded them, let alone dogs. The dog had been a bona fide ace.

"Back then, the Muzhou police dog academy was quite high profile and very cocky. They bragged about their ace dog many times. There was extensive news coverage. Eventually, it became a target after all its achievements. Someone placed a 20-million-dollar bounty on its head. The officer in charge of the dog got mighty worried and assigned 20 officers to guard it around the clock, but the dog was still assassinated during a mission. After that, the police dog academy took a different approach. They became very protective of these elite dogs that were as effective as high-tech robots, and they limited media coverage."

Such memories got Zuo Yu worried. "Port work is still quite dangerous. Does Boss really have no qualms about it taking on these security screening assignments?"

Yan Biao spread his hands. "Boss said it was Curly Hair's own call. This is an ideal situation. Boss is shooting on Wai and Curly Hair is serving in the military base. The two of us can keep dicking around."

Curly Hair was fast asleep in his kennel, belly up and snoring.

# Chapter 300
# I Won't Seek Him Out Even If It Kills Me!

After settling the matter with Curly Hair, the cast and crew officially began filming.

Once filming officially started, the pace of everyone in the cast and crew became very hectic.

Many people had been thinking they were already very busy during the previous preparations. Never had they expected that after filming officially started, there wouldn't even be time to visit the food street. Not just the gourmet food street, even the number of people visiting the large dining hall saw a large decline. Most of the time, people from the dining hall would send food over instead.

The next time they would be able to properly sit down and have a meal would probably be when their own scenes had all been completed.

Eleven chapters would all be filmed simultaneously. There were 11 filming teams, and nobody wanted to lag behind. Being conscious of competition was one thing; besides that, the head director was still shooting dark looks as he watched from the back. Nobody dared to slack off.

Before filming had begun, Roman had seemed rather easygoing and had even joked and giggled with actors, but when he became serious, Roman was actually very scary, and he became the devil incarnate.

Roman wished that he could bring along a whip while keeping an eye on each team. Whichever team's pace was slowest would receive a lashing.

Of course, he didn't really go to the extent of using a whip, but when Roman scolded someone, he would not give any face. Regardless of whether they were top-rate or first-rate actors or directors or assistant directors of the filming teams, if anyone's mistake was caught by Roman, they would receive a scolding all the same. The scolding was so great that one would start to doubt his own existence.

For these actors, the most relaxing time was probably the two hours of precious online

access time they got every seven days.

Under most circumstances, these two hours were leisure time given by the production team to everyone, and these two hours were the most relaxing period every seven days. Everyone's mind and body would be even more relaxed at this time, because they were able to seek some solace on the internet and find ways to vent. Whether it was chatting up someone or browsing online news headlines, compared to filming, it was much more relaxing.

Every week, when it came to that time, the internet would be abuzz. Every big name actor as well as the team behind them would hurry to seize the headlines.

When it wasn't the cast and crew's internet access time, other media outlets would hurry and push out other news. When it came to those two hours each week, everything else was insignificant. These two hours were termed by people as "Founding Era" time.

Fans of every actor would count down the days of the week till these two hours.

There was no need for additional publicity, nor was there any need for advertisements. When the time came, it automatically became "Founding Era" time.

Every time it reached this point, every website and every social platform's hit counter seemed to sprout rockets attached as they shot straight upward.

Celebrities and some other staff in the cast and crew would save up a week's worth of photos and videos and take the opportunity during this time to flaunt them.

Everybody in the cast and crew was handed a set of guidelines, which explicitly stated what could and could not be posted.

The matter of the three entertainment reporters at the film studio complex that had been visited by soldiers had also circulated among the cast and crew here. Roman had intentionally released this information so as to beat some sense into people who were getting restless. Don't go thinking you are too smart and try something funny.

If you did not abide by the regulations of the production team and wanted to put out content that wasn't allowed?

Roman would say this: "Go ahead and release it. If you can get it out, I'll accept the

loss! Do you really think that nobody monitors the internet? When the military comes knocking on your door, don't come looking for me. You can help yourself out the door!"

On an online interactive platform, a third-rate actor updated their status:

"Received my bento box [photograph]."

The accompanying image was a photograph of a bento box. The dishes appeared very tantalizing, attracting a lot of views and making people's mouths water just looking at it.

In the comments section below, lots of fans who did not know the truth were laughing and joking.

"The cast and crew's food doesn't seem bad at all. There is sufficient food too."

"Previously, I heard that the filming conditions are really arduous. Seeing you guys eating well makes me feel reassured."

"If you look closely, there are eight dishes, including fruits and a beverage; how luxurious! Most importantly, I actually see six dishes that I have never eaten before! Those are probably planet Wai specialties, right?"

"I have never had such a sumptuous lunch box banquet before. I'm so jealous."

"I want one portion of this lunch box too!"

But very quickly, another actor who was on good terms with the one who posted the picture posted: "Take care my brother [candle]. I can still persevere for a few more days."

Another actor from the same continent also joined in the fun: "[Candle] You guys go on first. I will follow after in a bit."

Following that, there were other actors who also replied to this post.

Fans were puzzled.

"Observing their posts, I feel like something isn't right."

"Is there some sort of hidden meaning here?

Some people also went over to the official "Founding Era" account to make inquiries.

"Founding Era" officially released a status explaining the special significance of this bento box.

The large dining hall would prepare a sumptuous bento box for cast that had finished filming all their scenes in the serial.

Seeing this, fans hurried over to their own idol's accounts and followed them in "lighting candles."

This also interested the average netizen.

Whenever any actor's new status update was an exquisite, tantalizing, and filling bento box, they would head over to light candles. A long line of [candles] would appear in the comments section below.

"Finished filming so quickly? [Candle]."

"We still have no idea when we will get to see it. When exactly is this serial going to be broadcast? So excited! [Candle]."

"Just finished my game, does this mean that this character in the serial is dead? [Candle]."

"Take care [Candle]."

"[Candle]. Saw quite a number of similar statuses today. The 'Founding Era' production team seems to be distributing these bento sets at a rather high frequency."

"There are so many stars from all twelve continents, of course there are a lot of bento boxes."

Although the frequency of bento boxes and candles had a sort of inauspicious feel, the majority of online audiences found it amusing. This merriment only occurred once per week, so naturally, netizens wanted to have fun to their heart's content, and they had fun with their anticipation for "Founding Era" and tried to guess for which episode their idols would receive the bento box.

While fans were having a lot of fun, actors in the crew were suffering.

Filming intensity was high. For some actors that had decades of experience, this wasn't considered much, as they were used to it, but when weather conditions were not good and filming still continued, that was when it became somewhat unbearable.

Just yesterday, there had been an abrupt change in the weather and it had started hailing. Everyone thought that outdoor filming would be halted and they would be able to take a break. However, Roman had been especially delighted. "Faster, faster, faster! Hurry! These are favorable conditions at the right time! Every group, make your adjustments. Start filming whichever scenes are appropriate here!"

The hailstones weren't considered very big and would not cause injuries when they struck bodies, but it would still hurt.

Because the lead director was watching attentively from the side, the actors could only clench their teeth and soldier on.

There was also a medical team on standby at the side. After the scenes were shot, they would provide a checkup, medicine, and injections to ensure the actors did not fall sick. Roman controlled this well and would not let the actors get caught up in any life-threatening situations.

They had to suffer hardship and wouldn't fall sick, but their bodies and hearts were extremely tired. The actors felt as though they were being tortured.

They recalled the start where the instructors and coaches had told them to eat more. Now, they felt that they had eaten too little, as they often felt very hungry during filming and they were quite tired, yet they had no appetites.

An actor from Muzhou scoffed in private. Simply treating humans as beasts of burden!

Regardless of whether they were willing or not, in order to not keep up the pace of filming, these actors still had to do perform nonetheless.

Even extremely pretentious superstars that had brought along a whole entourage when filming in the past had to follow the production team's demands and force themselves to adapt.

What else could they do? Anyone that was sent back would lose all face. Furthermore,

they weren't stupid. Who was even willing to give up such a chance? As long as there were able to endure it, the gains would be even greater than in their wildest dreams.

Every business-minded company had already warned their own artists that if anyone courted disaster or caused trouble and affected the production team's filming, without even a word from the production team, the company would go ahead and remove this "stain" to prevent the matter from involving the company's other artists.

But after two months of filming, there were still some experienced and big-name film stars who were unable to bear it and made suggestions to the director.

Technology had developed so rapidly. In the past, when they had shot films with similar scenes, all of them had been done with special effects. All they had needed to do was act indoors. As long as their acting skills were up to scratch, with technology supplementing it, the results had been good, and they had won awards for such scenes. It had always been this way. Now, it was fine if they were to shoot at physical sets. It wasn't like they have never filmed at such sets before, but now, some scenes needed to be shot when the weather was nasty. This wasn't right. Obviously this could be avoided, but did insisting on filming on a real set at this time and with such weather mean that their technology was on the decline?

Thus, they banded up, wanting to fight for some benefits and hoping to avoid these sorts of situations. These scenes could still be shot on the same set; what need was there to suffer so much?

After that, they received a merciless rejection from Roman. "Act if you want to act. Scram if you don't! Didn't actors back in times when technology hadn't been so advanced act all the same? If you want to act as a heroic character yet are unable to even take 1% of their hardship, you will never be able to understand the situation back then. You will never be able to act profoundly and you will never be able to interpret the script perfectly. Nothing else will be able to save you from acting skills that aren't even comparable to a newcomer's!"

Nothing else will be able to save you from acting skills that aren't even comparable to a newcomer's…

Acting skills that aren't even comparable to a newcomer's…

These film emperors and empresses with countless awards felt as if their chests had

been stabbed by a few knives.

As for the "newcomer" he spoke about…

Who else could it be?

Fang Zhao!

Everyone knew that Fang Zhao was the newcomer actor that Roman had recommended and also the only actor under 30 that shouldered a full important role in "Founding Era."

When weather conditions were poor, if Roman said to film, Fang Zhao never had any objections and did as he was told. Most importantly, there were no issues with his acting skills. Everyone could see that he was indeed very suitable for this role and acted well.

At the same time, Fang Zhao was the only person who, in the two months of filming, had never used a body double. Whether it was acting or doing stunts, Fang Zhao handled them himself.

Because the body doubles and stunt teams were not able to perform as well as Fang Zhao, Director Roman, who was always in pursuit of the perfect film, had said one line right away: "Fang Zhao, do it yourself!"

In the eyes of the cast and crew, Fang Zhao was someone who dared to fight and strive. From a director's viewpoint, there were no complaints. He was excellent and had obtained the acknowledgment of many older seniors within the circles.

But acknowledgment was just that. Every time Roman brought out Fang Zhao's name to strike others, who could bear that?

"Take a look at Fang Zhao!"

That was Roman's most common phrase.

This time, they had been a little stubborn and raised a suggestion but had gotten Roman's line of "Nothing else will be able to save you from acting skills that aren't even comparable to a newcomer's." Even their hearts felt weary hearing this.

It had to be said that Roman's ability to draw enmity to Fang Zhao within the cast and crew was top-notch, so much so that whenever Fang Zhao went to the dining hall to eat, he always received many faint gazes.

Over at Zaro's end, he had not yet started filming his scenes. Now he was undergoing a training period and was practicing his acting skills every day.

But he was listless.

Zaro had not even finished his second training class of the day, yet he had returned from the washroom seven times. His whole body was limp from having the runs.

Having taken some medicine his agent had just bought for him, Zaro felt a little better. However, his spirits had not yet returned when he raised his head and saw Barbara. She was even holding a fan in her hand.

Barbara's scenes had not started either, and she was also having training lessons during this period.

Zaro checked the outdoor temperature. It was negative seven degrees Celsius. Although there was a heater indoors, he wasn't hot either. Who would head outdoors at such low temperatures and carry a fan?

Zaro stared at Barbara as if she was a lunatic.

Barbara slanted her eyes and looked toward Zaro as if she was looking at a heap of trash. "I heard you are not acclimating well?"

"I'm well! Which part of me isn't acclimating well?!" Zaro retorted immediately.

"Your weak stomach and intestines…" Barbara sneered as she looked on disdainfully. "Useless person."

Barbara might look pretentious most of the time and always have the poise of a noble, but her constitution was really strong and she had inherited the "Lakalina royal bloodline." Members of the Lakalina clan might appear feeble, but in actuality, they had freakishly strong constitutions. Barbara also looked down on Zaro's resources.

Barbara's evaluation of Zaro as "trash" made him stomp his feet in anger. Turning his head to his agent, he uttered, "Go bring me a 40-meter great sword! I will duke it out

with her!"

Zaro's agent hurriedly held on to Zaro and whispered, "…Senior Master, let's not bicker with her. It's better to study the script. After you have strived so hard and filmed it, when the time comes for it to be broadcast, the governor will watch it. Old Master will surely watch it too."

When his agent mentioned the governor, Zaro did not think much about it, but when he mentioned "Old Master," Zaro's entire body clenched up.

After considering this in his heart, Zaro raised his hand and pointed at Barbara twice. "Just you wait!"

Afterward, he turned around and left quickly together with his agent.

"How do you feel after taking the medicine?" Zaro's agent was anxious. He was doubling as Zaro's assistant now and had to manage Zaro's clothing, food, transport, and housing. For the sake of his high salary, he could not let anything happen to Zaro.

Zaro's vitality had returned after taking the medicine. Hearing his agent's question, Zaro thought about it seriously and replied, "I feel much better now! I reckon that all the toxins in my body have probably been eliminated."

Zaro's agent: "…"

No, you were sick because you ate wantonly! The reason you can hop around happily is because I went to buy medicine!

Puzzled, Zaro asked, "Hey, are there any methods that can rapidly improve my acting abilities? I feel like my acting isn't bad right now; why does the coach still want me to improve it?"

Zaro's agent stared at Zaro blankly for a few seconds. Governor Renault had pulled some strings to get Zaro this role that would not appear until the second season. This sort of arrangement had been done so that Zaro would have ample time to polish his limited acting ability!

For past serials and movies that Zaro had invested in himself, with a little difficulty, his acting could still be watchable. This was because the other actors did not act very seriously and everything had been done to magnify Zaro's stronger aspects in his role

as the main character. However, in the "Founding Era" serial, compared to others, Zaro was still a long way off. His acting was so awkward that even his agent was ashamed.

After pondering seriously, Zaro's agent said, "How about you look for Fang Zhao and ask for some advice? He will surely have some ideas. Luckily, we have collaborated a few times with him before, so he wouldn't be a stranger."

Zaro fumed. "Don't mention Fang Zhao to me! Looks? Figure? Family Background? Qualifications? Reputation? In what way am I inferior to him?!"

Zaro's agent: "…" I actually have no idea how to respond. Whatever I say will be wrong. Zaro was still brooding about not having gotten a role with more screen time. "I won't seek him out even if it kills me!"

PDF by: traitorAIZEN