

*Already within ten kilometers of Qingqing Ni?* Qiao Sang's heart stirred, but she wasn't particularly excited.

After all, she had already seen two Phantom Beasts, even lived with beasts from another planet for months, and later encountered an Ancient Pet Beast. She considered herself someone who could now remain calm even in front of extremely rare beasts.

Her real reason for entering Secret Realm No. 16 this time was simply not to waste the hard-earned Secret Realm Key and the Qingqingni Compass.

If along the way she could find Qingqing Ni and witness the legendary beast with her own eyes, that would naturally be best.

If not, then at most it would just be a little regret.

She had prepared herself mentally, but hadn't expected to pick up Qingqingni's trail so soon.

*Truly worthy of its nine-hundred-million value, this Qingqingni Compass... Otherwise, who could possibly know Qingqing Ni was nearby?* Qiao Sang sighed inwardly and looked toward the direction indicated by the compass needle.

At this moment, the three rings of the compass were still rotating faintly, and the center needle wavered as if disturbed by a magnetic field, never settling in one fixed direction.

Qiao Sang tested the compass in several directions.

When she faced southeast, the needle's wobbling became less pronounced.

*Looks like it's this way...*

Just as the thought crossed her mind, she heard a rustling sound nearby.

Turning her head, she saw Little Treasure had somehow taken out a black cloak from his ring and was draping it over himself.

Qiao Sang paused, about to ask if the low-level Electric-Tail Worm was feeling cold but when she lowered her gaze, she saw Electric-Tail Worm curled up in Yabao's fur, fast asleep in comfort.

*Not cold, then. Good...* She withdrew her gaze and yawned uncontrollably.

Suddenly she remembered another important detail she had read in the forum post about Secret Realm No. 16:

[In Secret Realm No. 16, there is no night, only daytime. So once inside, you must monitor the time yourself.]

*Could it be that much time has already passed? Not impossible.* Yabao usually went to bed right on schedule, yet now he was still forcing himself to stay awake. She could no longer rely on Yabao's routine to tell if it was night outside.

Qiao Sang glanced at Yabao, then turned to Little Treasure.

"Phone."

"Xun xun..."

Reluctantly, Little Treasure handed over the phone.

*It's not like I won't give it back, geez...* Qiao Sang complained silently at his pained expression, then took the phone and checked the time: 2:29 a.m.

*Already this late?!* She was stunned, then set the phone aside and once again lifted the Qingqingni Compass to confirm Qingqing Ni's direction.

It was still pointing southeast.

“Yabao, put me down. You should get some sleep first.”

“Yap...”

Yabao forced his eyelids open, insisting he wasn't tired.

But he clearly was. Qiao Sang's expression turned serious: “This is a secret realm. Only with proper rest can you handle the dangers ahead.”

She hadn't forgotten, when Yabao was this sleepy, even Lubao's Healing Light wouldn't last long. Normal sleep was best.

“Yap...”

Hearing her reasoning, Yabao realized she was right. He stirred his limbs, preparing to land.

“Gang Zhan.”

At that moment, Gangbao spoke up, offering to take over while Yabao rested.

Qiao Sang was about to tell her to rest as well, when Gangbao's voice echoed clearly in her mind: Gang Zhan.

*Unlike Yabao, if she felt sleepy, Lubao could always give her a Healing Light. And in this place, staying airborne was safer.*

Qiao Sang paused, then nodded.

“Send me onto Gangbao's back.”

Gangbao grew in size once more.

“Xun xun~”

Little Treasure’s eyes glowed blue as he lifted Qiao Sang and the Electric-Tail Worm onto Gangbao’s back.

Yabao shrank down, curled beside his Beast Master, and shut his eyes.

“Duanwei...”

The Electric-Tail Worm shivered.

“Take out one of my down jackets.” Qiao Sang instructed.

“Xun xun~”

Thinking his master was cold, Little Treasure quickly produced a black down jacket.

Qiao Sang covered Yabao and the Electric-Tail Worm with it.

Then she raised the Qingqingni Compass and directed: “Fly straight. No need for more Spatial Shifts.”

Ten kilometers wasn’t far for Gangbao now. With careful speed control, she could precisely manage the distance. If Little Treasure used Spatial Shift again, they might overshoot and disrupt the compass’s reaction.

“Gang Zhan.”

Gangbao acknowledged, spread her wings, and flew forward steadily.

The frigid wind blew, but Qiao Sang didn’t feel pierced by cold, instead, it refreshed her drowsy mind.

The deeper they went into the icy land, the more violently the compass rings spun.

From time to time, Lubao poked her head out of the backpack to give Qiao Sang and Gangbao a Healing Light.

“Help me! Help!!”

Suddenly, a desperate, bloodcurdling scream rose from below.

Qiao Sang’s heart clenched. She tapped Gangbao’s back.

At once, Gangbao dove toward the sound.

Before long, they saw a cyan lion-type beast running frantically, carrying a pale-faced, terrified man.

Behind them, over a dozen six-meter-tall snow-white beasts, shaped like twisted trees, were in hot pursuit. Their branch-like arms stretched out unnaturally, striking at the lion beast again and again.

The cyan lion barely dodged the attacks.

*Snow-Branch Trees. Ice-type, General-level beasts. Usually found in groups...* Qiao Sang recognized them instantly. She didn’t hesitate:

“Pull that man and his beast up here.”

She pocketed the Qingqingni Compass just in case.

“Xun xun~”

Little Treasure’s eyes shone.

The lion beast and its rider floated upward uncontrollably.

“Snow!!”

The white creatures howled, their branch-arms twisting upward like a web.

*This looks a bit like a white version of Shadow Control...* Qiao Sang shook off the thought.

“Wing Blades.”

“Gang Zhan!”

Gangbao’s steel feathers morphed into countless violet blades, raining down in a storm.

The blades sliced into the Snow-Branch Trees with ease.

“Snow!!”

One after another, they shrieked and collapsed, unable to resist.

The blades whirled back into Gangbao’s wings.

*A Signature Move with Sharpness, no wonder it worked so well...* Qiao Sang was satisfied. Even though these wild General-level beasts lacked proper training, the fact that Gangbao had dispatched so many at once showed her strength had soared after evolving.

The lion beast and the man reached her altitude.

“Thank you, thank you! Without you, I’d never have escaped those monsters!” The man gushed.

“Feng feng!” The lion beast also looked grateful.

Qiao Sang remained calm, replying lightly, "It was nothing."

She had already decided, if the threat had been too great, say a Emperor-level beast, she would've turned around without hesitation. Fortunately, it was only a pack of Generals.

The man's eyes swept over Gangbao and Little Treasure, then back to Qiao Sang.

"This place is too dangerous. Could I... perhaps join you?"

"You came alone?" She asked.

He sighed.

"I don't know many people at the Rune Center. None of the others who qualified to enter this realm are acquaintances, so I had no team."

"You don't have a flying pet?"

The man hesitated.

"I do. But it's been flying too long, it's resting in the Beast Codex now."

Qiao Sang's eyes narrowed.

A Wind-Rush Lion, a Fairy-type General-class beast, capable of carrying a person at 120 km/h. With that speed, it shouldn't have had any trouble shaking off Snow-Branch Trees.

Yet this one wasn't injured, and even had aesthetic white rune patterns drawn across its body, runes that she recognized, thanks to Teacher Li Dongdong's lessons, as speed-enhancing runes.

*So why hadn't it escaped?*

Her guard went up. Smiling pleasantly, she said, "I still have matters to attend to, so I can't go with you. But if you tell me which direction you're headed, I can send you partway."

The man quickly said, "What is it? I can go with you!"

Then, embarrassed, he added, "I... I don't really dare act alone here anymore."

*Dare not act alone, yet he'd gotten this far?* Qiao Sang thought drily, but kept her expression calm.

"I heard that potions made from Frostbird feathers can greatly boost ice-type moves. I plan to see if I can collect a few."

"You're going after a Frostbird?!" The man's face froze in shock.

Qiao Sang nodded.

His expression shifted several times before he forced a smile.

"Then... perhaps I won't join you after all."

"Where are you headed?"

"Back that way." He pointed vaguely to where she had come from.

"I'll see you off." She offered.

"No need, I'll-

But even as he spoke, Qiao Sang signaled Little Treasure. His eyes glowed, and the man and his Wind-Rush Lion vanished in a blink, sent away by Spatial Shift.

“Let’s go.” Qiao Sang said calmly.

“Gang Zhan.”

Gangbao spread her wings and carried her deeper into the icy expanse.

Once they were gone, several figures emerged below.

“What now? Zhicheng just got teleported away...” A man in a white down coat muttered.

“Did that girl have the Qingqingni Compass?” Asked a short-haired woman.

“No.” Said a man in a cap.

As he spoke, a small black cat-beast, twenty centimeters tall, appeared from thin air at their side.

“Then what do we do?” The short-haired woman asked.

“Find Zhicheng first. Without the Qingqingni Compass, only his Wind-Rush Lion can sense the unusual currents in the wind.” The capped man replied coolly.

“That girl’s no ordinary person. As long as her goal doesn’t clash with ours, we’ll leave her be.”

---

So it wasn’t just wild beasts to beware of, humans too. Qiao Sang shivered inwardly.

She had thought only the rescued man was suspicious, but after sending him away, others had stirred below. If not for her enhanced hearing from a 50% brain-domain awakening, she would never have noticed.

*A team, laying traps. If she had gone down to save him, she would've walked right into it. Lucky she was cautious...*

She steadied herself and pulled out the Qingqingni Compass again.

The needle still pointed southeast.

The forums said a Emperor-class Frostbird nested in the mountains southeast. *Could Qingqing Ni be there?*

*Calm down. Even if it is, if I run into the Frostbird, I can just flee...*

She glanced at Little Treasure.

“You’ve used a lot of Spatial Shifts and telekinesis today. Take an Energy Recovery Potion.”

“Xun xun~”

He obeyed, took off his ring, and drank the potion.

Relieved, Qiao Sang checked the compass again.

Suddenly, the three rings spun violently, the needle whirling erratically-

And the outer needle, usually still, began to spin counterclockwise like mad.

Her heart jolted. She recalled the instructions:

If the three rings spin out of control and the outer needle completes a counterclockwise 360, it means Qingqing Ni is rapidly approaching your location.

*Qingqing Ni is coming this way?*

Her pulse raced. She didn't tell Gangbao to stop, it only meant Qingqing Ni was heading in her direction, not that it was right beside her.

Time passed. Her heartbeat grew faster.

The compass spun more and more violently. She felt as though Qingqing Ni was drawing ever nearer.

*Could I really be about to see it?*

*Steady. You've seen endangered beasts, two Phantom Beasts, and an Ancient Pet Beast. Don't lose your composure over one you can't even contract.*

As she tried to calm herself, a breeze brushed past, not the icy wind, but something warmer.

Warmth touched her cheek. Her thoughts froze. She looked down at the wildly spinning compass, pupils shrinking. Instinctively, she cried out: "Wait!"

"Gang Zhan."

Gangbao halted in midair.

"Xun xun."

Little Treasure also froze mid-drink.

“Qing qing?”

Then, a clear, childish voice sounded behind her.