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Chapter 2: The Knot

Dear Mom,

I hope this letter finds you well.

Midterm exams are coming up soon, and I've been studying in the library every day. The courses I'm taking this semester are Microeconomics, Western Modern History, and Mechanical Transmission III. They're not too difficult, and I hope to get all 'A's like last semester. Spring is coming to Illinois, and the trees have started to sprout. Every morning, the campus is filled with mist, and red squirrels come to visit.

I might take some time next week to go into the primeval forest with the Plant Society to collect some leaf buds for specimens.

That's about it. I'll apply for the internship as you suggested, and I'll try to get an internship in New York or Washington, D.C. this summer.

By the way, I had fried eggs and buttered toast for breakfast, potato salad and bacon burgers for lunch, and carrot pork knuckles with shrimp bisque for dinner today.

Remember to drink your milk, and remind Aunt Tong to heat it on medium heat for five minutes.

Love,

Chu Zihang

It was late at night, 11 o'clock, and Chu Zihang had just finished writing this letter when he turned back to check it.

He wrote a letter to his mother every night before bed, even though his mother didn't check her emails every day. But when she occasionally opened her inbox, she would see a series of emails lined up neatly, dated and even including what he ate for the day, making her feel that Chu Zihang was leading a peaceful life at Cassel College.

So, his mother stopped worrying and turned her attention back to having fun with her girlfriends.

Initially, Chu Zihang's mother was not very satisfied with his decision to attend Cassel College. In her heart, she felt that with Chu Zihang's grades, he should have gone to a more prestigious university like Yale or Harvard. She searched online but couldn't find any ranking for Cassel College, and she suspected it might be some unknown university in the United States. Chu

Zihang's mother often browsed the college's website, and her evaluation was that Professor Gudrian looked like he had dementia.

Chu Zihang did his best to portray a positive image of Cassel College in his emails, describing the academic atmosphere: Principal Anjou was a well-dressed old gentleman who graduated from Cambridge and was dedicated to educating the youth; the vice-principal was a pioneer in education who loved researching the history of American westward expansion and often dressed like a cowboy; Professor Gudrian was eccentric but lovable, obsessed with literature; and as for his mentor, Schneider, although his appearance was a bit scary, he was truly a kind-hearted person who had sustained facial burns while rescuing a student and now had to wear a half-face mask... Through these carefully crafted descriptions, Chu Zihang gradually built an image of Cassel College as an elite academic institution in his mother's mind.

A thunderous explosion shook the windows, and a 10-meter-high pillar of blood-red flame erupted from the well in front of the Hall of Heroes, illuminating the entire campus in a bloody hue. A crack appeared in the outer wall of Dormitory 3, and chunks of plaster fell from the ceiling. Chu Zihang calmly blew away the plaster that had landed on his notebook.

The well led to the underground laboratory of the Equipment Department, and it seemed that they had another accident, perhaps an explosion of refined sulfur or a burst of mercury vapor... The fire trucks arrived with blaring sirens, screeching to a halt at the burning well, and a group of muscular men skillfully set up water cannons to spray the well.

The Cassel College Facilities Department was on the scene, handling the rescue operation. They maintained a calm demeanor, chatting casually as they worked. Such incidents were commonplace at the mountaintop campus, happening every few days, so there was no need to panic.

"It's sulfur flames!" shouted the leader of the rescue team. "Everyone, put on your gas masks!"

The muscular men donned their gas masks and continued their work nonchalantly, unfazed by the situation. Although the number of water cannons increased, the fire was spreading towards the Dormitory 3 area.

The students remained calm and collected, with hardly anyone peeking out of their windows to watch the commotion. This was due to a few reasons: first, it was the Student Council's ball, and Caesar's retinue of lace-clad maidens were likely dancing passionately in the Amber Hall; second, the interns of the Executive Department were either working late in the library, cracking the Pentagon's firewall or decrypting the encryption of a satellite; and third, the rest of the students were probably online, discussing the fire in the forum, chatting, and placing bets on when the fire would be extinguished.

Chu Zihang logged into the "Night Watchman Discussion Area" in stealth mode.

"Your friend @Cambridge Folding Knife is online."

"Your friend @Night Watchman is online."

"Your friend @Greenland Shadow is online."

Apparently, the big shots of the school had also been alerted by the fire, and their IDs were quite telling: "Cambridge Folding Knife" was Principal Anjou, "Greenland Shadow" was the head of the Executive Department, Schneider, and "Night Watchman" was none other than the vice-principal himself, the administrator of this discussion area.

"What the heck is the Equipment Department up to in the middle of the night? Even I, the Night Watchman, was jolted out of bed!" The vice-principal started the thread.

"You're the vice-principal! Shouldn't you be calling the Facilities Department to oversee the fire instead of surfing the discussion forum?" Cambridge Folding Knife replied.

"After a bottle and a half of brandy, do you think I'm still capable of directing the fire-fighting efforts? I'm here to show my support for the Facilities Department comrades working tirelessly at the front lines!" Night Watchman replied to Cambridge Folding Knife.

"Those lunatics in the Equipment Department! Sometimes I feel like dropping a bunker-buster bomb into their underground lab!" Cambridge Folding Knife said.

"I support the principal's proposal. Let's leave this matter to the Executive Department to handle." Greenland Shadow replied.

"Schneider, instead of surfing the discussion forum, why don't you go to the fire scene and take charge? As the head of the Executive Department, you should have the mindset of a deputy principal and step up when the principal is away in Paris, attending a party and surrounded by scantily-clad women much younger than him. I see that you and the Equipment Department lunatics are cut from the same cloth!" Night Watchman began a political lecture.

"The Executive Department is a quasi-military organization. This fire was caused by the Equipment Department, so it's their responsibility to deal with it. I'm not going to babysit them." Greenland Shadow replied.

"School affairs should be handled by someone reliable. I've already called Professor Manstein to take charge. I have to log off now. The new season's fashion show is about to start, and I'll pass on your regards to our colleagues in the Facilities Department." Cambridge Folding Knife signed off.

"Also, bring some sparkling wine from the Champagne region." Night Watchman added.

"Will do." Cambridge Folding Knife logged off.

Another round of earth-shattering explosions shook the well, and a second column of blood-red flame erupted from the depths, as if a fire-breathing dragon lurked beneath the ground.

"Don't panic, everyone. This is an expected explosion. Please remain calm. The experiment is still ongoing, and there may be two or three more explosions of similar or greater intensity within the next hour. Please take necessary precautions." The Equipment Department posted an announcement.

This was the public ID of the Equipment Department, and it seemed that the hot discussion in the forum had caught the attention of the lunatics in the underground lab, or perhaps they were already browsing the forum while conducting their experiments. Dozens of tomato icons appeared in the replies to the post.

"The combustion of refined sulfur releases toxic fumes, and carrots can help neutralize the toxins. Students are advised to eat carrots for dinner tonight." Shortly after, the Equipment Department posted another announcement.

"Bad news, everyone. Please help us catch some snakes. The snake breeding pools in the underground levels were damaged by the explosions, and approximately 200 snakes of various species are escaping through different passages, including 12 Eyeball Pythons, 2 Amazon Giant Anacondas, and 20 Proto Bothrops. A detailed list will be sent via email in 10 minutes." The Biology Institute posted an announcement.

Chu Zihang had taken a course called "Reptile Zoology" in his second year, and he knew that these snakes were not to be taken lightly. A single bite from any of these snakes was enough to kill a person, and the only hope was to pray to God for mercy. The Amazon Giant Anaconda was an exception, as it was non-venomous, but an adult could grow up to 16 meters in length and was capable of constricting a water buffalo to death.

"Holy crap! I just saw an anaconda climbing up the clock tower! Help! Help!" Night Watchman exclaimed.

Chu Zihang shook his head and decided not to read further. He returned to his email page and clicked the "Send" button.

The email was delivered to his mother's inbox within seconds, and she would see it when she checked her emails.

In reality, campus life was quite different from what parents imagined. Before Chu Zihang left for the United States, his stepfather had given him a copy of "Hu Shih's Diary of Studying Abroad" to encourage him to study hard. Chu Zihang still remembered some excerpts:

"April 9: Went to Shen's place to play cards and returned home at midnight."

"April 29: The temperature rose above 80 degrees, making it too hot to study. Played cards with Shen, Chen, and other classmates. Also played Chinese poker with Liu and Hou."

"May 6: Played cards. Attended a gathering of the Chinese Students' Association in the evening."

"May 12: Played cards."

It seemed that Hu Shih had also only written about his studious endeavors in his letters to his family, so Chu Zihang felt that it was acceptable to embellish his own letters a bit, portraying a peaceful and studious life at Cassel College.

If he were to tell his mother the truth—that the campus was filled with lunatics conducting explosive experiments daily, that the professors, from the principal to Schneider, were either eccentric or violent extremists, that he himself was not a model student but the leader of a violent club, often engaging in clashes with another violent club led by Caesar, and that venomous snakes and giant forest pythons might be lurking in the dormitory building at that very moment—his mother would probably just laugh it off, thinking that he was joking to cheer her up.

Chu Zihang initiated the shutdown procedure and prepared for bed. The shutdown process took about 10 seconds, and during that time, he could still see the posts in the Night Watchman discussion area scrolling up the list.

A red post suddenly popped up, standing out among the others. Red posts indicated a bounty thread.

"Who can get me an introduction to the Japanese royal family? I want to rent out the Meiji Shrine in Tokyo for one night for a wedding."

The poster was "Dick Tudo," most likely Caesar, the president of the Student Council.

Chu Zihang's fingers twitched on the keyboard as if they had been electrified.

"Is this a hint that you're proposing? Congrats!"

"Caesar, why don't you hold the wedding in Beijing's Taimiao instead of going all the way to Japan?"

In an instant, the thread was flooded with replies, pushing it to the top of the list. Compared to the raging fire and the snakes running amok in the campus, the real news of the night was: "Countdown to the Student Council President's Wedding! Caesar to Marry Red-Haired Miko!"

Chu Zihang wanted to read more, but his screen went black as the computer shut down. The dormitory was quiet, with no lights, and the wind chimes outside the window tinkled softly. The wind chimes were made of bronze, and the clapper was a key.

That key could unlock a certain door in an old apartment building in Beijing, or perhaps a certain place in his heart... Wherever that door led, it was empty and dusty.

He got up from his chair and put on his school uniform jacket.

The dining hall was quiet.

The Baroque-style hall could accommodate up to 100 people for meals, but at that moment, there was only one diner. A certain someone was devouring his food with single-minded focus, treating the dishes like a whirlwind sweeping through fallen leaves. On the long table in front of him were a whole roast chicken, a smoked pork knuckle, a beef burger, a vegetable salad, and a large portion of mashed potatoes... It seemed that this guy had quite an appetite.

Lu Mingfei always had a hearty appetite.

As he ate, completely absorbed in the flavors, someone sat down next to him and placed their plate on the table. Lu Mingfei chewed on a chicken bone, swallowing the last bits before turning to look at the expressionless Chu Zihang.

Chu Zihang's midnight snack was usually a simple meal of double-fried eggs and milk with oatmeal, along with an orange juice.

It was already past midnight, and the Facilities Department had successfully put out the fire around 10 p.m. For the next two hours, the dining hall was packed with people celebrating. Well, it was more like an excuse to drink beer, as the Equipment Department's antics often provided a reason to party. Sometimes, the lunatics from the Equipment Department would even join in the celebration, dancing and singing together.

Now that the celebration was over, the tables were left with piles of dirty dishes and empty beer glasses, and the dining hall was empty except for the two of them. Outside the window, the cuckoo birds called for their mates.

There was a sense of "two lonely souls" in the air.

At this time of night, it was unusual to see Chu Zihang in the dining hall. Not that he didn't eat midnight snacks, but he usually took his dinner from the dining hall and ate in his dormitory,

saving the 18 minutes it would take to walk back and forth. Chu Zihang nodded slightly, acknowledging Lu Mingfei's presence, and then proceeded to stir his oatmeal into his milk.

Since returning from Beijing, the relationship between Chu Zihang and Lu Mingfei hadn't improved much. Chu Zihang wasn't the type to socialize much, and even with Su Xi, he kept a certain distance. This was a person who never wasted a minute on small talk or idle chit-chat, always focused on the task at hand. Sometimes, Lu Mingfei wondered if it was because of the presence of Xiaomi that he and Chu Zihang had been closer before.

But now, Xiaomi was gone.

Or perhaps she had never truly existed.

"I heard you came for a midnight snack. I thought you would be with Finger."

"He's doing an internship. Isn't he about to graduate?"

"Are you here to reminisce about him? It's a big portion for one person."

This sounded like a joke, but when Chu Zihang said it, it didn't seem funny at all. Instead, it felt like a question that required a serious answer.

"No, I'm just really hungry." Lu Mingfei replied.

"Your midnight snack has too much fat."

"I'm a carnivore."

"It's better for your health to reduce your fat intake."

"Brother Zihang, have you read a book called 'Shanghai Fortress'?"

"Yes, I bought a copy and read it on the flight to Chicago. Why?"

"Do you remember the plot? There was this loser who liked a great girl, but the girl was about to get married." Lu Mingfei spoke softly, "The loser kept texting the girl, and the girl would reply to his texts. He kept all the texts she sent him, thinking that it proved that the girl liked him.

Chu Zihang listened quietly, his eyes narrowing slightly as he recalled the story. Outside the window, the cuckoo birds continued to call. There were some stories that you didn't want to read again once you knew the ending, and this was one of them. Some stories were destined to be tragedies, and there was no changing that.

He had read "Shanghai Fortress" on Lu Mingfei's recommendation during his flight from Beijing to Chicago in first class. After finishing the book, he had left it in the magazine pocket of the seat, intending to leave it for the next passenger to discover and hopefully enjoy. Then, he had ordered a glass of iced water and silently watched the passing clouds outside the window, thinking about the story for three hours, but he couldn't find a solution.

Some stories in this world had no happy ending.

Lu Mingfei continued, "But one night, he sent a very important text to the girl, and she didn't reply. The loser thought, how could she not reply? It was such a nice night, and she must be with her boyfriend. He kept thinking, 'Why isn't she replying? What could be keeping her from replying to my text?'

"The loser suddenly realized, 'Of course, she's spending time with her boyfriend. They're probably kissing and cuddling, and here I am, texting her.' So, he thought, 'I'm just a loser, and the only thing I can do is text her.' But over all that time, all they had between them were those texts. The girl and her boyfriend, on the other hand, went on dates, watched movies, and ate meals together... and kissed."

"He just thought that he was important to the girl, but in reality, he was just a loser." Lu Mingfei spoke softly, "What's the use of having love if you're a loser? Love is great, but what if you're a loser?"

"Enough." Chu Zihang said in a low voice.

"I'm just saying, brother Zihang. You know, I..." Lu Mingfei trailed off.

"You don't need to say it. I know what you're thinking." Chu Zihang said, his voice cold.

"I saw your bounty post. So, you're giving up?"

"I'm not giving up. I just..." Lu Mingfei's voice trailed off again.

"If you've decided to go, I can be your accomplice. Consider it repayment for the favor I owe you." Chu Zihang said.

"Thank you, brother Zihang. I really appreciate it, and I'm touched." Lu Mingfei scratched his head, "Thank you."

"Are you still thinking about Nono?" Chu Zihang asked.

"No, it's not about her. It's just..." Lu Mingfei hesitated, "Brother Zihang, do you remember 'Saint Seiya'?"

"Yes, I've heard of it."

"I was so moved by it that I could recite the lines. There was one part where Seiya was beaten to a pulp and couldn't get up. He told Athena, 'I have no strength left, I can't go on.' But Athena said, 'But you still have hope.' Seiya thought, 'Of course, I still have hope. With hope, I can do anything.' So, he stood up and defeated his opponent." Lu Mingfei stared out the window, "At that moment, I thought, 'That's so cool! I also have hope, and with hope, I can be awesome too!'"

"Then, in the Hades arc, Seiya was defeated by a god. This time, he had no hope, and Athena said, 'But you still have your life.' Seiya thought, 'That's right, I still have my life! I can burn my life and be awesome!' So, he stood up and defeated the god. I was so moved, and I secretly made a vow that I wanted to encounter something that would make me willing to bet my life on it."

"But later, I realized something. Athena was Seiya's boss, and she was a ruthless one. She told her exhausted employee, 'You still have hope, so use your hope to fight!' Hope, life... these were just excuses to manipulate the poor kid. When you're faced with a difficult situation, your boss will tell you to have hope and keep fighting, but in reality, they're just using you." Lu Mingfei spoke softly, "Some things are just impossible, no matter how much hope you have."

"Some people just don't have the luxury of hope."

The two of them fell silent, but the air between them crackled with tension, and Chu Zihang's eyes flashed with anger.

"I know what you're thinking, brother Zihang. I'm just a coward." Lu Mingfei lowered his head.

"It's not the first time you've known me."

Chu Zihang took a deep breath, struggling to suppress his inexplicable anger. He usually didn't care about other people's affairs, but for some reason, he was angry at Lu Mingfei's sense of powerlessness.

"In elementary school, I was looked down upon by my classmates," he said softly, "because they knew that my mom had remarried, and my dad wasn't my biological father. I went to an

international school, and the other students' families were well-off. Some of their parents even had business dealings with my stepfather. They mocked me, saying that the only reason my mom married my stepfather was because he wanted to sleep with her. That's why I got to go to that school."

His voice trembled slightly, "They said, 'Chu Zihang's dad only pretends to be nice to him because he wants to sleep with his mom.'"

Lu Mingfei was stunned and didn't know how to respond. He shouldn't have known about this, as it was a private matter. He was Caesar's lackey, the Student Council president's pet dog, and it was risky for him to be seen having a heart-to-heart talk with the Lionheart Club president, Chu Zihang, in the middle of the night. If they were caught by the paparazzi, it would be considered colluding with the enemy, a serious offense.

"The one who led the mocking was a black belt in karate, the youngest in China. My bloodline hadn't awakened yet, so I couldn't fight him."

"Your stepfather isn't good to you? Why don't you ask your stepfather to talk to his dad? If you compare dads, you definitely won't lose, and your two dads are both awesome. His dad is probably nothing compared to yours." Lu Mingfei blurted out.

"No, it has nothing to do with him. This is my problem." Chu Zihang shook his head, "I just asked him to send me to learn kendo. It took me three years to get a black belt, and I had to do it within those three years, before I graduated. Otherwise, I wouldn't have the chance to beat him."

"Wow!" Lu Mingfei exclaimed.

"I challenged him to a fight on graduation day. Every time he kicked me, I would strike his knee with my bamboo sword. For three years, I practiced that move over and over, imagining how he would kick and how I would strike. Every time he got up, he couldn't believe it and would ask, 'How did you know where to hit?' I didn't answer, because of course, I knew! I had practiced that move ten thousand times!"

He placed his hand on Lu Mingfei's shoulder, "Everyone can hold their fate in their own hands, as long as you believe that you can do it!"

Lu Mingfei stared at him, and Chu Zihang's eyes burned with a fiery determination.

"Brother Zihang, you're truly an inspiring figure." After a while, Lu Mingfei said, "I understand what you mean. Nono's situation is her own, and I shouldn't give up on other things."

"Do you know what my mom did after that?" Chu Zihang asked, "She went to the school and met with his mom, wearing her best clothes, her Patek Philippe watch, and Cartier diamond ring,

riding in my dad's most expensive Benz, with her driver and my family's bodyguard. You know, when a woman wants to show off, she'll do it with style. My mom looked at his mom's flashy outfit and knew that she had already lost in terms of appearance. So, she just listened to his mom's insults, which were probably things that her son had heard at home and was repeating."

"His mom said that it was true that my mom had married my stepfather because he wanted to sleep with her, but that didn't matter. What mattered was that my stepfather was paying for my education, and that was a fact. However, if we were to compare who was providing more, it would be a contest between my stepfather and his biological dad. My stepfather was giving me a good life, and his dad was giving him weak genes. That's why he was so weak, and my genes were better because my biological dad had given them to me! Why was he so weak that he couldn't even beat me? Wasn't he a karate black belt? Maybe his dad had some health issues. Why don't you take him to the hospital to get checked?" Chu Zihang smiled bitterly, "Then, she threw some money on the table for medical expenses and took me home. My mom can be quite ruthless when she wants to be."

"Your mom is awesome!" Lu Mingfei gave a thumbs-up.

But he suddenly stopped smiling, "Brother Zihang, do you know about the classification of people into 'gaofushuai' (high, rich, and handsome) and 'diaosi' (loser)? 'Gaofushuai' refers to those handsome guys that girls throw themselves at, and when they get dumped or cheated on, the girls will go cry to some nice guy who likes them but that they don't like back. The nice guy will comfort them, and when they recover, they'll go find another 'gaofushuai' to date, leaving the nice guy behind. Meanwhile, the nice guy is left wondering, 'Why didn't she choose me? I'm such a nice guy!' But the truth is, girls don't want a nice guy, they want a 'gaofushuai.' So, the nice guy will be left alone, feeling sorry for himself."

He took a sip of his egg yolk-covered egg, "Brother Zihang, you're truly a 'gaofushuai,' and I'm a 'diaosi.' I hate this classification, but it's so accurate."

"Don't talk about courage and hope with a 'diaosi.'" He patted Lu Mingfei's shoulder, "You're still eating?"

On the table in front of Lu Mingfei was an iPhone with a bronze-colored roulette wheel on the screen. The pointer was at the 1/2 position, and there were two slots left in the blood gauge at the bottom, with a skull marking.

Lu Mingfei had been staring at this roulette wheel before he fell asleep, counting down the time he had left. It must have been an interesting feeling.

"Brother, you're truly a fan of 'Saint Seiya.' You've even reached the stage of burning your life, skipping right past the stage of burning hope." Lu Mingze smiled, looking at the sleeping Lu Mingfei, "You really have the soul of an anime fan."

"But you're not admitting it. You keep saying that you're a 'diaosi,' but here you are, holding a torch and burning yourself up..." He caressed Lu Mingfei's hair.

In the empty dining hall, the two of them sat under the majestic ceiling painting of "The Twilight of the Gods." In the painting, the Midgard Serpent, Nidhogg, rose from the roots of the World Tree, its wings adorned with the skulls of the dead, as the sun was about to set below the horizon. Odin, the King of Gods, rode his eight-legged horse, Sleipnir, and threw his spear of victory at the black dragon.

"When you die, what will they engrave on your tombstone?" Lu Mingze smiled, "Nice Boy Ricardo M. Lu?"

Lu Mingfei didn't respond, but he hummed softly, licking the egg yolk from his lips.

"You're such a pig." Lu Mingze shook his head.

He sat next to Lu Mingfei, holding a wine glass filled with red wine. He took small sips, savoring the deep red liquid like a king tasting power. But his hand remained on Lu Mingfei's shoulder, as if he were caring for a sleeping patient, worried that he might wake up in distress.

The clock in the church tower struck, and the sound of the bells echoed through the quiet night.

"Listen, the wedding bells are ringing. Brother, the wedding car is coming to take away the girl you care about." Lu Mingze's face twisted into a mocking smile, "She'll be wearing a white wedding dress, with lace-trimmed shoes and holding a bouquet of orange blossoms and white roses... The bridesmaids will be holding her veil and train, and the groom will have a diamond ring in his pocket. The flower girls will be kneeling and singing hymns... Wake up! Wake up, brother! Go and wish her a happy marriage! I'll tell you a secret. Under her wedding dress, she'll be wearing a lace garter, and the groom will take it off and throw it to someone who wants happiness. Go and grab it! It's her intimate garment, and it's hard to come by. Do you want to keep it as a memento of your pathetic life that's about to burn out?"

His voice grew faster and more agitated, and his smile became more and more sinister. His eyes flashed with anger, and his handsome face was contorted by his rage, his golden irises spinning with fury like a dragon dancing in the depths of a storm.

Lu Mingfei seemed to sense something in his sleep, and he shivered slightly, his eyes twitching as if he were experiencing pain.

"No one can escape sadness, brother," Lu Mingze said softly, "Sadness is the true devil, and the stronger you are, the deeper it hides."

"But don't worry! I'm here for you!" He hugged Lu Mingfei tightly, "Anyone who tries to take anything away from you is our enemy. Caesar? Caesar, the son of Gatuso? We'll kill him together!"

His irises spun like golden flames in the depths of his black eyes, like an ancient dragon dancing in the darkness, about to unleash a punishing thunderbolt.

Chapter 3: Drumheart

Anjou closed his notebook and scanned the men on both sides of the conference table.

He was supposed to be at a glamorous party in Paris, but instead, he found himself in a meeting room 120 meters below the campus. Anjou was very reluctant to meet with these guys. Just looking at their attire made him want to get up and leave. Admittedly, their clothes were neat and uniform, making them a group of true uniformed men... but what was with the full-body protective suits? Complete with rubber boots, protective goggles, respirators, and portable oxygen cylinders.

The heavy huffing and puffing of the respirators filled the room as over a dozen pairs of eyes peered at Anjou through the protective goggles.

"Gentlemen, before we begin the meeting, I have a question," Anjou frowned. "Why do you always wear biochemical protective suits when meeting with me? It makes me feel like I'm a dirty pathogen, and you're not even willing to breathe the same air as me."

"Please don't take it personally, Mr. Principal," one of them corrected the principal's scientific ignorance. "You are certainly not a pathogen, which refers to disease-causing microorganisms and parasites, a different classification from humans in biology."

"If I'm not a pathogen, then why do you still need to wear oxygen masks?" Anjou asked.

"We are just allergic to your body odor, to be honest. You are like a source of pollution in Vatarlheim. Every time you come for a meeting, we turn the ion air purifier to maximum power... but your body odor is just too strong!" Another man sized up Anjou as if he were a smelly gorilla.

"That's not body odor; it's my special cologne!" Anjou said through gritted teeth.

"Cologne? According to our instrument analysis, it's a mixture of Turkish kebab, seaweed soup, and moldy cheese..." The third man displayed his unique taste in the realm of smell.

"It's sandalwood, seaweed fragrance, and fresh cigar leaves..." Anjou continued to endure, "but are you saying I smell like a meal?"

"Well, it could be considered a meal, but it's certainly not appetizing." The fourth man expressed his regret as if he were trying to carve a rotten tree.

Anjou began to regret coming to Vatarlheim for the meeting. Every time he came here, he felt like he was immersed in an ocean of insanity. Here, insanity was the norm, and one had to be insane to survive. This group of lunatics was collectively known as the Equipment Department.

Vatarlheim, in Norse mythology, meant the land of dwarves. It was home to the world's top dwarf craftsmen, who forged the weapons of the gods. The Equipment Department named their underground base Vatarlheim, showing their pride and arrogance.

The Equipment Department was just a shortened form of their full name, the Institute of Applied Alchemy and Science Engineering. The elites of the department didn't engage in theoretical research. Their job was to turn scientific and alchemical theories into practical applications... although 90% of these applications were explosives. In this regard, the Equipment Department should be renamed the Bomb Maniac Concentration Camp.

Although they were bomb maniacs, the members of the Equipment Department were very cautious about their safety. The water they drank had to be distilled and filtered through thirteen purification processes. The air they breathed had to be dust-removed, ionized, and humidified. As for their food... they only ate junk food, but they were trying to prove that hamburgers, fries, and cola were the real health foods.

There were nine different isolation layers above their heads, including 3-meter-thick concrete walls, 50-centimeter-thick high-strength armor, and lead-zirconium alloy plates capable of withstanding nuclear weapon attacks... The layers were filled with large amounts of graphite

powder. According to the professional calculations of the Equipment Department, even the US military's most advanced Blu-117 bunker-buster bomb couldn't penetrate their isolation layers. Solar flares wouldn't affect Vatarlheim, and biological weapons would be thoroughly purified by the graphite layers. Even if an enemy of Dragon King-level were to arrive, unless they used a super mantra of Shiva dance level, they wouldn't be able to harm Vatarlheim.

In recent years, the Equipment Department's paranoia had grown stronger. Their imaginary enemies were no longer the US military's bunker-buster bombs or nuclear weapons but apocalyptic-level disasters, such as an asteroid hitting the Earth. After watching the movie "2012" together, the Equipment Department began to discuss the possibility of the Earth being completely flooded after the glaciers melted. They then wrote a request to Anjou for increased funding to build a tenth waterproof isolation layer. This way, even if the Earth were engulfed in floods, Vatarlheim would remain intact, preserving the spark of human civilization like Noah's Ark in the Bible.

Anjou joked that he might as well approve more funding for them to dig an escape tunnel from his office to Vatarlheim. That way, if doomsday came, he could roll straight into Vatarlheim for shelter. But Akadula, the director of the Equipment Department, refused, saying, "In the face of an apocalyptic-level disaster, it is our duty to seek shelter and protect the spark of human civilization, which is preserved in our brain cells. But what's the use of your escape? As a leader, you should share the fate of the majority. After the apocalypse, humanity won't need leaders; they will need engineers to rebuild civilization. We will reproduce like Adam and Eve, teach our descendants how to use advanced tools, logic, philosophy, science, and alchemy, and pass on the spark of civilization from generation to generation. We will also tell them the story of how you sacrificed yourself for humanity."

Anjou couldn't hold it in anymore. He patted Akadula on the shoulder and said, "My dear Akadula. Ahmad. Muhammad. Faruq, I am glad that besides doing your job well, you are also thinking ahead and preparing to take on the responsibility of saving human civilization in times of crisis. You are of a certain age, yet you are willing to take on the heavy responsibility of Adam and Eve and personally reproduce to continue the human race! I am very moved! But I think there is a flaw in your plan. As a department of pure males... without an Eve, what's the point of having over a hundred Adams in Eden?"

The Equipment Department was indeed a department of pure males because no woman could last even a week in this department. There had been a brave woman who applied to join, as valiant as a Valkyrie. She learned to talk and act like a neurotic, ate junk food, and played stupid, outdated games, winning the favor of the entire Equipment Department. But in the end, she lost to Akadula in the final interview. The brave girl entered Akadula's office, waiting for the final interview. The urinal was hung right next to Akadula's desk, opposite the sofa where the girl sat. Instead of sitting behind his desk, Akadula was peeing while staring at his crotch and shouting, "Cheer up! Cheer up! Don't give up, little Qiang! You mustn't die! If one day the world ends, it will be up to you to pass on the human genes and spark!"

The brave girl fled in embarrassment.

Anjou' words had obviously hit Akadula's soft spot. He fell silent, buried his head in his hands, and shook his head in dismay, "Even I have overlooked something. It seems this plan to save human civilization is doomed to fail."

Just when Anjou thought the matter was over, he received the modified request. This time, the funding requirement had increased because, in addition to the cost of waterproofing, Akadula also planned to dig a vertical escape tunnel, not to Anjou' office, but to the girls' dormitory building.

"We will name that escape tunnel Eve!" Akadula said excitedly. "This plan is foolproof, isn't it? Please give your feedback, Mr. Principal!"

Anjou sighed, "Alright, alright, I assure you all that I will try to reduce the number of times I come here for meetings to avoid polluting your air. Now, let's begin the meeting. What's the urgent matter that made you summon me back from Paris in the middle of the night? I was supposed to be on vacation, and Akadula sent such a heartfelt... or rather, threatening email. To be honest, when I read that email, I felt like you were urging me to come back to make my will."

Every spring, Anjou would go to Paris for vacation, attend the latest fashion shows, savor the fresh Perigord black truffles at his favorite restaurant, and stay at the century-old Royal Monceau Hotel. He would go to the rooftop bar to admire the Eiffel Tower and chat with the old bartender about this year's caviar. This spring trip was almost a fixed routine. The old bartender would prepare Anjou' favorite mint liqueur in advance, waiting for a rainy day when Anjou would suddenly walk into the bar, lean his umbrella against the wall, sit in the window seat, and say with a smile, "How's it going, my old friend?"

But this year, Anjou had to interrupt his trip temporarily due to Akadula's urgent email. The email began with, "Death is approaching you..." If Anjou didn't know Akadula so well and understand that he never meant what he said, he would have no doubt interpreted it as a death threat. However, he still ordered the change of course and returned to the academy because Akadula only contacted him for two reasons: either Vatarlheim needed more budget, or a crisis had exceeded the Equipment Department's control, requiring Anjou' decision.

The room fell silent, and the lunatics looked at each other with serious expressions.

"Can someone please speak up? Your seriousness is scaring me," Anjou said. "Seeing the word 'serious' on your faces is as unsettling as seeing the word 'thinking' on the face of an Argentinian sloth."

"I'll give the report," said Karl, the deputy director, as he stood up. "But first, let's listen to an audio recording."

The sound of the sea breeze filled the room, and if one closed their eyes, they would imagine themselves standing on a small boat in the middle of the ocean. Anjou furrowed his brows slightly, as it seemed to be just an ordinary recording of the sea breeze.

But upon listening carefully, it was an audio recording made by the Monyak in the Japanese sea area. "It's not just the sound of the sea breeze," Karl said.

Anjou widened his eyes in surprise. Indeed, if one focused, there was a deep, resonating voice amidst the sea breeze: Dong! Dong! Dong! Its rhythm was so powerful and distinct that once Anjou parsed it from the sound of the wind, he was immediately drawn to it. The sound of the wind gradually faded, and the deep voice became more and more prominent. Dong! Dong! Dong! It was as if, on an ancient battlefield, a tattooed barbarian was beating the war drums to declare war.

"It's a heartbeat," said Anjou, who was familiar with the rhythm of the heartbeat, having a Ph.D. in medicine. "But I've never heard such a strong heartbeat before."

"It's the heartbeat of a dragon, lurking in the depths of the Japan Trench," said Karl. "Do you remember the sunken ship you asked us to search for, Mr. Principal? We used sonar to scan the seabed where the incident occurred, hoping to find the shipwreck, but we accidentally recorded this heartbeat. It's obviously a large creature, although we can't determine its size. The Japan Trench is over eight kilometers deep, and its heartbeat can penetrate eight kilometers of seawater. Just imagine how huge it must be! This heartbeat signal doesn't belong to a shark or a whale but has the characteristics of a reptile's heartbeat."

Anjou's hand, which had been playing with a folding knife, suddenly tightened, and the veins on the back of his hand popped out, as if a warrior hearing the call to war.

"Fortunately, it's not yet an adult dragon but a dragon embryo, so it won't suddenly surface and attack humans. But its heartbeat is getting stronger, and the hatching process is progressing."

"Can you estimate how long it will take for it to hatch?" Anjou asked.

"We can't be sure. Generally speaking, the larger the animal, the longer the gestation period, and the dragon's gestation period is much longer than humans. This embryo is probably still in the early stages of incubation," Karl thought for a moment. "It's safe for at least a year."

"Can you determine the level of the target? Is it a first-generation species or a subsequent generation? Or maybe a tiny creature from four or five generations later?"

"We can't do that yet. We can only confirm it after it hatches."

"So, it's an unknown factor, a high-risk target of ancient dragon-level."

"Yes, that's why we asked you to return to the headquarters immediately," said Karl. "How should I put it? Although it's bad news, it's good that we found out in advance."

"It's like your doctor telling you that you have early-stage lung cancer," added a researcher.

Karl glared at the lunatic, silencing him with a deadly stare.

"We were searching for a sunken ship, but we found a dragon embryo instead. Should there be any connection between the two?"

"The most reasonable speculation is that the ancient dragon embryo was the cargo on that ship," said Karl. "Although it would be meaningful to trace the source of the embryo, we must first deal with it. It's developing, but it won't grow into a curvaceous girl; it will become a troublesome monster."

Anjou nodded, "I enjoy talking to you, Deputy Director Karl, because in this insane asylum, you have the strongest sense of logic."

Karl proudly displayed his expression.

"What's the opinion of the Japanese branch?" Anjou asked. "The Iwashiro Institute, which is under the Japanese branch, has the same strength as the Equipment Department. We can let them monitor that sea area."

"How can those guys at Iwashiro Institute compare to us?" Karl scoffed. "It's true that they've been making continuous breakthroughs in alchemical research lately, but they're just a bunch of hard-working idiots. They compete with us by working overtime and pulling all-nighters. We do one calculation, and they repeat it ten times. We try one formula, and they try a hundred. Achievements gained this way are not impressive. While those Japanese are red-eyed from exhaustion, we read books, eat snacks, and gather every night to discuss science and philosophy."

"I'm not sure what you're proud of, Deputy Director Karl," said Anjou.

Karl looked noble, "If we want to surpass them, all we have to do is give up these activities that are beneficial to our body and mind and focus our time on work, turning ourselves into workaholics. But which excellent student would be willing to give up the opportunity to play in a band and compete with bookworms over grades? Our current work pace is the most ideal in the long run and will maximize our creativity."

"To create more and more dangerous bombs? Alright, alright, let's get back to the topic. Have you communicated with the Japanese branch?"

"The Iwashiro Institute has taken over the Monyak and is exploring that sea area. They are desperate for data on the embryo."

"Are you sure you want to use the word 'desperate'?"

"Yes, desperate. They're like neurotics, sending faxes day and night asking for data and analysis results. Anyone can tell that they care a lot about the embryo, as if it were their illegitimate child."

"Your rhetoric is truly exhilarating..." said Anjou.

"In any case, the Equipment Department's opinion is to deal with the embryo as soon as possible. But the Japanese branch is still hesitating, saying that further analysis is needed to confirm that it's a dragon embryo."

Anjou nodded slightly, "The Japanese branch's opinion is not unreasonable. To target a dragon hidden in the depths of a sea trench, even if it's just an embryo, would entail huge risks. You've ruled out the possibility of it being a shark or a whale, but how can you be sure that the dragon embryo isn't some unknown deep-sea creature?"

"It's not a deep-sea creature," said Karl. "I think you remember, Mr. Principal, that this isn't the first time we've heard a heartbeat in the deep sea."

Anjou's expression turned solemn.

"We compared this heartbeat signal with the one we recorded before, and they match perfectly. That's why we're sure it's a dragon embryo."

Anjou fell silent for a full minute, "Do we have an absolutely safe way to eliminate the embryo?"

"Theoretically speaking, there is no absolutely safe method," said a veteran member of the Equipment Department as he stood up. "But we have several ideas with a high safety factor for your reference."

Anjou rarely showed a happy expression, "Do you have reference proposals? I'm truly surprised. Usually, you just hand me a bomb and tell me to get the Executive Department to send someone to blow it up."

"Ah... well... unfortunately, our tentative plan A is still to blow it up. But we don't need to send anyone; we can do it with remote detonation." The veteran member said.

"Let me introduce to you, Mr. Researcher Matul, a graduate of the Indian Institute of Technology, specializing in underwater blasting." Karl said.

"What's the difference? You're all bomb maniacs," Anjou muttered under his breath.

Matul proudly glared at the crowd, obviously the leader in underwater blasting, "Currently, we can only observe the target through sonar, and precise positioning is impossible. It could be anywhere within a 12-kilometer diameter circle. Therefore, precise blasting is infeasible. The only way," Matul said, making a powerful gesture, "is to blow up the entire seabed!"

"I'm glad the embryo didn't choose New York as its hatching ground, or Manhattan would be sunk with that wave of your hand," Anjou teased. "But I don't object to deep-sea blasting. Continue."

"Do you remember the US military's Blu-17 bunker-buster bomb?"

"Yes, it can penetrate up to 61 meters into the granite layer but can't get through your Vatarlheim." Anjou said.

"We can modify that bomb, add a torpedo propeller, and launch it from the sea surface to enter the deep sea," Matul used his pen as a prop to demonstrate the launching process. "Bang! Whoosh! This is the sound the torpedo launcher makes in the water... Slap! This is the sound of the secondary jet propulsion booster detaching..." He chattered as he demonstrated, and the pen in his hand kept falling onto the table.

"Alright, alright, I don't care if it makes a bang, whoosh, slap, or hurra sound in the water. I only care about the effect," Anjou said.

"At a depth of 7,500 meters, the warhead detaches, and the deep-sea version of the Blu-117 bunker-buster bomb will continue to descend and eventually penetrate the seabed." Matul said, "We launch 16 of these bunker-buster bombs simultaneously and then detonate them together... Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!"

"Stop! I don't want to hear 16 consecutive booms," Anjou said. "Are you sure the power of this bomb is enough to destroy the embryo? And what kind of adverse consequences might this explosion have?"

"It's absolutely enough to destroy an ancient dragon embryo!" Matul said confidently, "As for the consequences... if not handled properly, Japan might sink."

"How could that happen?" Anjou was startled.

Matul shrugged nonchalantly, "You know, Japan sits on very unstable ground. From a geological perspective, it's located at the junction of the Eurasian Plate and the Pacific Plate, prone to volcanic eruptions and earthquakes. This underwater blast is on a nuclear scale and could cause a large-scale plate slip, sending the Japanese islands sliding into the sea..."

"Hold on!" Anjou raised his hands, "We are the Dragon Slaying Secret Party, not terrorists! Only bin Laden would approve of such a plan!"

"But bin Laden doesn't hate the Japanese. If it were to blow up America, I'd have other plans to suggest..."

"Alright, alright! I'll write a letter to bin Laden's successor, recommending you for a position in Al-Qaeda. Now, tell me, what's plan B?" Anjou had to interrupt him.

"If plan A doesn't work, plan B is also risky... it might affect the Korean Peninsula... but so what? It won't affect the North American headquarters."

Anjou took a deep breath, "Thank you very much, Researcher Matul. Having you in Cassel College makes me feel honored. Now I understand that the college has initially possessed the capability to destroy the world. If the next US President refuses to issue us an education license, I will use this as a threat. Now, please take your seat, and let's change our approach. How long will it take for us to manufacture an underwater robot capable of detecting the embryo? Three months should be enough, right?"

The men of the Equipment Department looked at each other and shrugged. Finally, Akadula knocked on the table to indicate that he had something to say.

Akadula nodded, "Although it may sound like there's nothing we can't do..."

Anjou was fed up with this opening line. Every time Akadula rejected his request, he would say this boastful sentence and nod frequently. As an Arab, Akadula nodded to express disagreement and shook his head to agree, which always confused Anjou.

Akadula continued to nod, "But three months is not enough time to make a qualified submersible robot. We need a year."

"A year is definitely not acceptable. By then, that dragon might have circled the globe. I can extend the deadline to six months," Anjou said.

Akadula nodded, "Six months is not enough."

"You can sink Japan, but you can't make a submersible robot in six months?" Anjou said, "Do you think I'll believe that?"

Akadula nodded again.

Anjou took a deep breath, "Please don't stay silent, my dear Akadula. Every time you stare at me with your bright black eyes, shaking your head and nodding, my worldview shatters! I must

say that I can't understand what you Arabs mean by nodding and shaking your head. I can't tell if you're agreeing or disagreeing with me. Do you understand?"

Akadula shook his head.

Anjou stood up and walked behind Akadula, cupping his face in his hands, "Then, don't nod or shake your head. Speak up and tell me what you need to make an observation submersible robot."

Akadula struggled a few times but eventually gave up, as he couldn't shake his head or nod with Anjou's strong hands holding his face. If he continued, Anjou might not break his neck, but he could end up with a stiff neck.

"The bottleneck in making a submersible robot is artificial intelligence. AI is still not as advanced as a human driver, especially when exploring such deep seas, and with such a large exploration range. Therefore, designing a submersible robot with extremely high artificial intelligence is very difficult. Of course, we could have the controller on the sea surface, controlling the robot through kilometers of cables. But there's another problem: dragon embryos generate a field to protect themselves. Once the submersible robot enters this field, the remote control will be interfered with." Akadula said.

"So, you're saying that if I want to observe this embryo up close, I'll have to send a specialist to dive 8,000 meters into the sea?"

"And the specialist must have excellent bloodlines. The stronger the bloodline, the stronger the resistance to interference. Akadula tapped his skull.

"If we send a manned submersible, we can precisely locate and blast the embryo. I have a perfect plan for that!" Matul stood up abruptly, displaying his authority in the industry.

"Your so-called precise blasting... won't it sink Japan?" Anjou was still worried.

"There's no need to sink Japan. I plan to use a brand-new refined sulfur bomb! That's why we've been conducting blasting experiments around the clock to test the power of the sulfur bomb." Matul said excitedly, "The refined sulfur bomb has minimal explosive power. We can even conduct blasting experiments inside Vatarlheim without any issues. But when it explodes, it will radiate alchemical refined sulfur powder and release a large amount of mercury vapor. The mercury vapor, absorbed by the sulfur powder, will stick to and penetrate the embryo's surface. This bomb may not have much power, but when used against dragons, it has the combined effects of penetration, corrosion, and erosion. Even a Dragon King couldn't resist its power!"

"So, your suggestion is to send a manned submersible, and if we observe the embryo, we'll use the carried refined sulfur bomb to destroy it?" Anjou said.

"Exactly, but making a new manned submersible also requires a year," Akadula said. "The key technology of a manned submersible is pressure resistance. At such extreme depths, even a tiny crack in the submersible could lead to the team's demise. If we hastily make an iron shell and call it a reliable submersible, which specialist would be willing to dive?"

"I will!" Anjou said, holding his forehead.

"I didn't expect that you, as the leader, would have the bravery of a warrior and be willing to dive yourself," Akadula was shocked. "Mr. Principal, please think carefully!"

"I don't know why I suddenly don't feel like listening to you... I need a solution within three months! You keep telling me to wait a year, but I don't have a year!"

"Making a new manned submersible takes a year, but modifying an existing one doesn't," Akadula shrugged, "It's just that modifying an old submersible won't showcase our professional technical skills."

"Then how long will it take to modify an old one?" Anjou asked excitedly, holding Akadula's shoulder.

"It's almost done. The technicians are testing a few new systems," Akadula said.

"Is a submersible modified in such a short time really reliable?"

"Absolutely! Our predecessors have already solved the core issue of pressure resistance. We're just polishing, adding new systems, and installing the sulfur bomb. If we haven't finished such simple work by now, we wouldn't have the face to stay in Cassel College," Akadula said, giving a thumbs-up.

"When you Arabs give a thumbs-up, it does mean 'good', 'correct', and 'yes', right?" Anjou was still unsure.

Akadula shook his head...

"Finally, I want to remind you again that the manned submersible must be driven by a specialist with a sufficiently excellent bloodline. Once it enters the embryo's field, the driver's neural circuits will be interfered with, no matter what. The better the bloodline, the less the impact." Akadula shook hands with Anjou, and the veterans of the Equipment Department sent off the principal at the elevator.

"Understood, I already have a suitable candidate in mind," Anjou said. "But since you're modifying the submersible and sending it to Japan, shouldn't you also send a technical representative?"

Akadula suddenly looked troubled and turned to look at his beloved subordinates, who were supposed to shake hands with Anjou one by one...

"The Japanese branch's technical team is also very capable. They can figure out a small thing like a submersible by studying it, and we've already written a comprehensive technical manual for them," Akadula said, taking a brick-like manual from his subordinate and slamming it into Anjou's palm. "If they have any questions, let them contact the director of the Iwashiro Institute, Miyamoto Shiou. We're available 24/7."

"Just to be safe, send a technical representative. If Director Akadula and Deputy Director Karl can't go, Researcher Matul can," Anjou said, holding the technical manual in one hand and tightly grasping Akadula's hand with the other.

"But the Japanese branch... they're a bunch of perverts!" Akadula looked anxious. "Working with perverts will shorten your lifespan."

"Are they that perverted?"

"We'd rather work with you, Mr. Principal, than with the Japanese branch."

"Hey, is that comparison really appropriate?"

"May Allah bless you and help you slay the evil dragon!" Akadula couldn't break free, so he leaned in and kissed Anjou, who was so shocked that he took a step back, involuntarily letting go of Akadula's hand. Akadula seized the opportunity and quickly walked away.

"May God be with you and help you slay the evil dragon!" The next one to pounce was Karl.

"May Vishnu's power make you invincible." Matul said.

"Nam Myoho Renge Kyo. Cause and effect, karma, good and evil actions, Mr. Principal, take care and slay the evil dragon."

"Hey, hey, that doesn't sound like a blessing!" Anjou shouted in his mind as he pushed away the man who was hugging him.

"May the great Ahura Mazda grant you wisdom, Mr. Principal, and help you slay the evil dragon!"

"Do we have Zoroastrians in the Equipment Department?" Anjou was surprised.

After a rapid series of loud kisses, the veterans of the Equipment Department disappeared before Anjou's eyes, leaving him alone in the empty corridor, holding the brick-like technical manual, while the elevator was still descending from the ground floor.

Anjou sighed, "Even the lunatics of the Equipment Department are unwilling to cooperate with the Japanese branch. No wonder they have such a reputation in Cassel College. But it's no surprise, as the Japanese branch gives off the vibe of a black hole. No one knows what's inside a black hole, but if you get close, you can smell the bloody storm raging within."

Chapter 4: Black Sea Of The White Moon

A boundless sea of ice stretched before him, and Lu Mingfei walked on the frozen surface, with the Milky Way arching across the sky above and the shadows of giant whales swimming below. In the distance, a huge white moon was rising from the sea, half of it above the ice and the other half still below the horizon, with the craters on its surface clearly visible. The moon's reflection on the ice formed a perfect circle with the half-moon in the sky. A boy sat in the moon's shadow, fishing, with a long fishing rod suspended over a hole in the ice, revealing a pool of deep blue seawater.

"What's this all about?" Lu Mingfei stopped behind the boy and asked, "Is it interesting?"

Without a doubt, the boy fishing was Lu Mingze, and such a scene could only exist in the paintings of abstract artists. Only Lu Mingze could turn such an abstract concept into reality. He was a devil, capable of anything.

"Why not change the scenery every time we meet? When playing 'Street Fighter IV', you can choose your own battlefield, right, brother?" Lu Mingze smiled. Dressed in a thick woolen coat, stylish moose leather boots, and a bearskin hat that covered his ears, he certainly looked the part of someone out ice fishing.

"Then, why don't you switch the scene to the Moulin Rouge in Paris next time? The can-can girls are dancing, and I'd be happy to chat with you for a while." Lu Mingfei pulled up his collar to ward off the cold and sat down next to Lu Mingze, "Why are you making me admire the moon with you in this freezing weather? If you have something to say, just say it. I'm freezing to death here."

Lu Mingze smiled and handed something to Lu Mingfei. It was a soft wool scarf with a hand warmer inside. Lu Mingfei wrapped the scarf around his neck and held the hand warmer close, immediately feeling a wave of warmth spreading through his body. The joints and bones that had been stiff from the cold loosened up, and he couldn't help but admit that the little devil was quite thoughtful. He recalled that every time he met Lu Mingze, the setting was always relaxing, like a warm corner of the world that only the two of them knew about. With the warmth spreading through his body, the magnificent moon and the serene sea before him seemed more pleasant, and fishing side by side with Lu Mingze under such a full moon did have its charms. If

only the charcoal in the hand warmer could burn forever, and if there was a bottle of strong liquor to warm him up, that would be perfect.

Just as he was thinking this, Lu Mingze handed him something else—a metal can.

"It's a 30-year-old Macallan whiskey. Drinking it is like drinking a mouthful of fire." Lu Mingze said, "They say that drinking this can make you brave enough to go for a winter swim in the sea."

"Are you my conscience or something? How did you know I was thinking about having a drink?" Lu Mingfei took a small sip and felt the warmth spreading through his body, just as Lu Mingze had described.

"Because we're brothers, and brothers often have similar thoughts. When I felt like having a drink to warm myself up, I figured you would too." Lu Mingze smiled, "I also have a scarf and a hand warmer for myself."

"Don't you feel ashamed saying such boastful things? If we're talking about having a sense of brotherhood, Guan Gong should be ashamed of himself!"

"But, brother, you're being unfair. How can you compare me to Guan Gong? He relied on his loyalty to Liu Bei and his good looks to get by, while I rely on my wit and cunning to make a living. It's not right to compare me to him." Lu Mingfei lazily took small sips of the whiskey, "However, I know that you're just rambling, and you didn't really come here to fish and chat. What's the matter? Don't worry, I don't have any souls to sell to you. My life is going well. I passed all my midterm exams, and I even ate two people's portions for dinner tonight. I'm so full and content that I even forgot about the few thousand dollars I owe on my credit card. Life is perfect."

"Let's talk about that later, after Caesar and Nono's wedding." Lu Mingze said calmly.

"Don't bring that up. You're the second person tonight to come and whine about that to me." Lu Mingfei twisted his mouth, "Don't assume that I'm some kind of saint who will commit suicide or become a monk just because Nono is getting married. In fact, I'm quite a playboy. Even if I became a monk, I'd still flirt with the cute little nuns."

"I know you're not that kind of saint, brother. You're just a loser who can't let go." Lu Mingze said, "I believe that deep down, you still like Nono. Otherwise, why would Vice-Principal Schneider be so interested in your download history? He's even secretly monitoring your small account on the Night Watchman forum, where you only follow Nono's posts."

Lu Mingfei stared at him, "How do you know all this?"

"Because I'm your little devil, and I know everything about you." Lu Mingze smiled, "The vice-principal is actually the administrator with the highest permissions in the entire campus network. Not only does he know about your collection of adult videos, but he also knows about your crush on Nono. He secretly stalks your small account, but you can't see him because he's invisible."

"I thought he only stalked the good-looking girls..."

"Everyone likes to gossip. It's interesting to watch a loser pine for a goddess, work hard, and eventually have his heart broken. After a satisfying meal and a good night's sleep, they can reflect on their own peaceful and fulfilling lives. Now that the news of Caesar's wedding preparations has come out, the upperclassmen are discussing whether or not you'll attend the wedding. At least half of the campus knows about your crush on Nono, and they've even opened a betting pool. The odds of you crashing the wedding and stealing Nono away from Caesar are 1 to 220. That's higher than the odds of China winning the World Cup!" Lu Mingze said, "The only one who thought to come and comfort you is Chu Zihang, and his motivation is probably more out of pity than anything else."

"Bullshit, I'm not worthy of being compared to him. To be honest, I always felt that Xiao Longnu liked his stoic demeanor, but she just couldn't bring herself to admit that she was in a cross-racial, forbidden love." Lu Mingfei said, "They're truly a match made in heaven."

"I think it's more like a case of misery loves company." Lu Mingze said calmly, "Do you want to make a wish and have me help you steal Nono away? I can even lend you a few thousand dollars to bet on it. That way, when you succeed, not only will you have won the girl, but you'll also be rich overnight. Now that's what I call a perfect life."

Lu Mingfei fell silent for a moment and shook his head, "This has nothing to do with you. Please stay out of it. I'm just a little sad, and I'll get over it soon. Mom, I'm fine. I've got good grades, I passed all my exams, I eat well, and I even ate two people's portions for dinner tonight. The only thing missing is paying back a few thousand dollars in credit card debt. Life is perfect."

"Let's talk about that after Caesar and Nono's wedding." Lu Mingze's expression turned somber, "I have to take a vacation soon, and it's not just a break from work. It's the company's last chance for me."

Lu Mingfei was stunned for a few seconds, and his heart felt a little heavy. Although the little devil was a harbinger of death, and he hated the sight of him, the thought of never seeing him again made him feel a little lost. But he quickly shook off the feeling, "Thank God, it seems that my constant prayers to the Buddha have worked. However, why would your vacation affect me? As long as you're not in my area, I won't have to deal with you knocking on my door."

"Guess where I'm going on vacation." Lu Mingze's eyes sparkled, "It's the country that every otaku dreams of, full of lolis in frilly dresses, violent games, perverted uncles, molesters on public transportation, and AV."

"Japan?"

"You guessed it! Are you excited or surprised?"

"I'm just glad that I'll be rid of you for a while."

"Aww, brother, don't say that. It hurts my feelings." Lu Mingze pouted, "I'm just trying to be considerate and give you a heads-up. My vacation is non-negotiable, and there will be another agent taking over my duties. I hope the next agent will be more to your liking and that you'll be willing to sell your soul to them. Otherwise, I'll feel bad for leaving you in the hands of someone incompetent."

Lu Mingze rolled his eyes, "You're really something. You're not even trying to hide the fact that you're trying to get me to sell my soul. Fine, I'll make a deal with you. If you can make Nono fall in love with me, I'll make a deal with you."

Lu Mingze scratched his head, looking a little embarrassed, "To be honest, that wish is beyond my capabilities. I can help you steal Nono away, but I can't make her fall in love with you. Stealing a girl and making her fall in love with you are two different things. I can instantly give you a harem, with different groups led by Su Xiaoxiao, Liu Miaomiao, and Chen Wenwen... Su Xiaoxiao can do your homework, Chen Wenwen can make you lunch, Liu Miaomiao can play the piano for you, and Zhao Mengua, the chief eunuch, can shine your shoes. Nono will be your queen, and she'll do whatever you want, whether it's wearing sexy lingerie, see-through outfits, or cosplay. She'll even call you 'Your Majesty!'"

"Are you trying to force her into prostitution?"

"No, no, in my setting, you're the emperor, and the emperor's women aren't prostitutes, they're concubines." Lu Mingze corrected him.

"What's the difference? Either way, I'll have a bunch of beautiful girls who don't love me, or at least, they only love my money and power. And the only reason I have money and power is because I sold my soul to you. So, I'm just a loser, right?"

"There's not much difference, but at least I can make them sing 'I love you, Mingze, just like rice loves millet' every morning to wake you up."

"Damn it, you little devils don't understand love!" Lu Mingze huffed, "You're still so young and innocent, how would you know?"

"I may not understand love, but I understand desire. If you want to talk about love, you should find an angel, not a devil. Customers, please exit to the right to find an angelic exchange." Lu Mingze smiled.

"I know you can't do it," Lu Mingfei said softly, "Just like Chen Wenwen didn't like me back then. Although she did think I was a good person."

"Actually, the reason I came tonight is to inform you that I'll be taking a break soon." Lu Mingze paused for a moment, "When we made our pact, I told you that I would be at your beck and call, but I forgot to mention the additional clause—I can't provide services during my vacation."

Lu Mingfei was silent for a few seconds, feeling a little disappointed. Although the little devil was a harbinger of death, always reminding him of his limited time, Lu Mingfei hated to see him go. But the thought of shouting into the void and getting no response from the little devil made him feel a little lost.

"Thank God, Buddha, and all the deities! It seems that my constant prayers have worked, but why is it that instead of striking you dead, the effect is sending you on vacation?" Lu Mingfei's heart felt a little heavy, "How long will you be gone? A whole year?"

"Aiyoh, brother, don't be so dramatic." Lu Mingze sighed, "We little agents don't get much paid vacation time. It's just a month. Please be kind to me, brother. Sell me a quarter of your soul, and I'll be able to continue working in this area. Otherwise, I might get transferred to another area."

"Where would you get transferred to?" Lu Mingfei asked.

"Maybe the Sahara region. There, I'd have to walk for three to five days just to see another person. The only ones I could make deals with would be camels and camel grass. My life would be over!" Lu Mingze's face twisted in despair, "And after all the hard work I've put in for you, going above and beyond, even sacrificing two Dragon Kings for you... Not to mention the times I helped you get close to Nono! We may not have gone to school or studied together, but we've worked together to pursue the same goal. How can you be so heartless?"

"Bullshit! Stop trying to guilt-trip me!" Lu Mingfei jumped up and was about to kick the little devil's cute, innocent face, "If you want to talk about being heartless, why don't you turn yourself into a girl and develop a forbidden love with me? Otherwise, I'll consider you a pervert!"

"Although I can't turn myself into a girl, I can enter your dreams as a cross-dresser and develop a forbidden love with you." Lu Mingze's expression turned serious.

"Get lost! I'll kick your ass if you dare!" Lu Mingfei took a step back, afraid that the little devil might actually try something, "And stop trying to tempt me with your sugar-coated bombs. I have strong willpower!"

"Are you sure you're not interested?" Lu Mingze smiled, "I can see that you do like Nono. Otherwise, why would you be so upset about her getting married?"

"Damn it, you little devil!" Lu Mingfei was furious, "Stop trying to read my mind! I'm not interested in anything you have to offer!"

"Brother, you're so sensitive." Lu Mingze's eyes narrowed, "I was just stating a fact. Caesar is preparing for the wedding, and the girl you like is getting married. She'll be wearing a pure white wedding dress, reciting her vows in front of all the guests, and you're still running around trying to save the world. Caesar is the last person you want to see right now, yet you still call him 'old man' and 'shorty'. You're like a ball boy, standing by and watching the game, with a fake smile on your face, as if you're always ready to catch the ball."

"So what?" Lu Mingfei retorted, "What's it to you?"

"Why don't you try to stop the wedding? They're not married yet, and it's not too late to change things." Lu Mingze's expression turned cold, "As long as it hasn't happened yet, it's still within my power to change it. A wedding is not set in stone, and as for their undying love... that's the most unreliable thing in the world. Make a wish to me, and I can still rewrite your fate."

Lu Mingfei's heart skipped a beat, and he snapped back to reality. In his eyes, Lu Mingze was no longer the harmless little devil but a devil who held the power to control the world.

He took off the warm scarf and hand warmer and threw them onto the ice, "Keep your sugar-coated bombs to yourself. I have strong willpower!"

"Strong willpower?" Lu Mingze smiled.

"I did consider making a wish to have you help me steal Nono away." Lu Mingfei stood up, "But then I realized something. I don't want to steal her away from Caesar, because that would be betraying her. I won't do anything she wouldn't like."

He turned to leave, walking away from the white moon. He didn't know where he was going, but he felt that there was no point in continuing this conversation with Lu Mingze. They had nothing in common, and it was a waste of time... Well, except for the fact that Lu Mingze was a devil.

Just then, Lu Mingze's fishing rod jerked, and he had a catch!

Lu Mingfei turned back in surprise and saw Lu Mingze holding his fishing rod high, with a huge black dragon struggling at the end of the line! The massive creature roared and writhed in the moonlight.

"Holy crap!" Lu Mingfei exclaimed, too shocked to speak. Before he could react, Lu Mingze had already grabbed the dragon by the neck and stuffed it into a nearby fishing basket. No one knew how he managed to fit such a huge creature into the small basket, but he did it effortlessly.

"Alright, we have something to eat tonight. Cut it into three sections. One section will be braised, another stir-fried with scallions, and the last one grilled."

"But with the sea god of this area gone, the tide will soon flood this place..."

The sound of the tide filled the air, and Lu Mingfei turned to see a waterfall pouring down from the edge of the white moon, turning the moonlight into a torrential downpour. The ice beneath his feet cracked, and black seawater rushed up from the cracks, mixing with the white moonlight. The entire world was engulfed by the sea, and the white moon was left as a dark shadow. He had nowhere to escape, and he could only watch as the tide swallowed him... He sank into the black sea, subconsciously calling out a name.

Lu Mingfei jolted awake, covered in cold sweat. The scene of being engulfed by the sea felt so real, as if it wasn't just a dream.

The dormitory was quiet, and there was no sound of Finger's snoring. Finger had received special permission from the principal to do his graduation internship, and with his credits finally in order, he would be graduating soon. Lu Mingfei was now alone in the dormitory, and he wondered if someone new would move in.

Nono was getting married, Finger was graduating, and even the little devil was going on vacation... Soon, he would be the only one left.

He reached for a glass of water, as he often did when he couldn't sleep. Suddenly, his phone rang, and he picked it up to see a text from Norma: "Ricardo M. Lu, this is to inform you that the Executive Department has arranged an internship task for you. You are expected to depart at 7:00 a.m. today. A car will be waiting for you in front of the dormitory, and you will be taking the CC1000 special express train to Chicago. For task details, please contact the person in charge of this task. Don't worry about your attendance and credits, as the Executive Department has already arranged for leave with your professors."

Lu Mingfei jumped out of bed, his heart racing. The text from the Executive Department was urgent, and it was rare for them to send a notification in the middle of the night. He looked at the digital clock, which showed 4:00. He only had three hours to prepare. But what should he bring to Japan? He pulled out a small booklet, "100 Useful Japanese Phrases for Travelers," from his bookcase and started flipping through it. Then, he went to his wardrobe and dug out an electronic dictionary, wondering if he should bring it. It was a bargain model that didn't support Japanese, so he would have to rely on his basic Japanese skills. He also found a book, "100 Lectures on Japanese Mythology and History," and a collection of erotic paintings. The paintings

were of a girl wrapped in Indian sari, her body hidden but her long, reddish-brown hair unmistakable.

"Damn it, I need to find some tissue paper!" Lu Mingfei exclaimed, his nose bleeding at the sight of the girl.

"No, it's not what you think. It's just that the girl in the painting is too sexy." Lu Mingze's voice came from behind him, "She's wearing a sari, but it's see-through, and her body is perfect. I bet you're curious about what's underneath."

Lu Mingfei turned around and saw Lu Mingze standing there with a silver aluminum-magnesium alloy suitcase and a red and blue luggage strap. The suitcase was a Rimowa, a high-end brand from Germany, and it seemed out of place in their humble dormitory. He and Finger certainly didn't own such an expensive suitcase, and he wondered how Lu Mingze had gotten his hands on it. Then, he noticed a yellow sticky note on the suitcase, with neat handwriting: "The '100 Useful Japanese Phrases for Travelers' booklet is in the inner pocket of the suitcase, and your wool socks are rolled up in your pants. However, your electronic dictionary was a bargain model that doesn't support Japanese. You'll have to rely on your basic Japanese skills. As a bonus, I've included a quick guide to Japanese traditional culture, '100 Lectures on Japanese Mythology and History,' and an erotic art collection, both of which are in your backpack."

Lu Mingfei noticed his backpack next to the suitcase and opened it to find the book and the erotic art collection. He flipped through the art collection and saw a girl with long, reddish-brown hair, her face obscured as she sat in a Japanese-style room, bathed in the warm afternoon sunlight filtering through the paper doors. Although he couldn't see her face, he knew it was Nono.

He remembered that Nono and Su Xi had gone to take sexy photos together, and the photographer was a Finnish female photographer. She offered to take free photos of the girls in their most beautiful moments and seal them in a metal container with their childhood photos, burying them in a snail-shaped container underground. The container would only be opened 30 years later, when the girls would see their most beautiful selves again. Some might laugh at the sight, while others might cry.

"I want to see, just show me the behind-the-scenes footage!" Lu Mingfei had begged when he heard about the photo shoot.

"No way! Caesar wouldn't even be allowed to see, let alone you!" Nono had pinched his eyes, "You'll get a nosebleed if you see it!"

"What's the point of taking sexy photos if no one can see them?" Lu Mingfei had asked.

"Thirty years later, anyone can see them. By then, those who are interested will be too old to get excited, and those who are still young will just laugh at the wrinkles on my face. They can see

my wrinkled hands and ask, 'Do you want to hold my hand, grandpa?'" Nono had giggled, "But if you really want to see, I'll show you the photos when I'm 50."

Lu Mingfei was silent for a moment, his heart heavy. Only the man who married her would see her at her most beautiful and grow old with her.

Suddenly, Lu Mingze's words came back to him, "Brother, before you decide to give up, think carefully. What you're giving up is not just a wedding and a promise, but her entire life."

Lu Mingfei closed the art collection and locked it in his bookcase. Then, he noticed something—in all the photos, Nono was alone. There was no Caesar, no parents, no classmates, no one. These photos were her most precious memories, carefully selected to capture her most beautiful moments, yet she was alone in all of them...

Chapter 5: Japan Branch

A large size 45 shoe viciously stepped on Takashi Koyama's neck, burying his head in the sand. Koyama could hear the anguished cries of his neck cartilage as only the hard bones struggled to support the fragile blood vessels and nerve tubes.

"Damn it, why am I wearing these Ferragamo custom-made leather shoes to do this dirty work? If the blood splatters on the shoes, will it leave stains?" The man complained loudly as he continued to step on Koyama's neck. "These are made from fine old crocodile leather!"

"Stop fussing over your shoes like a woman, hurry up! Our young master's patience is wearing thin!" The other man said as he carried a plastic bucket filled with water. "Dunk his head into the bucket, three minutes for the first time, and increase by one minute each subsequent time until he confesses!"

"Why don't we just hang him up with a rope and enjoy the show of him desperately kicking his legs as he struggles to breathe?" The first man suggested.

"Come on, let's get on with it! We're not into that kind of sadistic stuff, are we?" The second man poured the entire bucket of water onto Koyama's head from behind.

The sand soaked with water blocked Koyama's mouth and nose, preventing him from breathing. The sweet and putrid taste rose up his trachea, likely from the ruptured lung alveoli bleeding. Koyama desperately wanted to say something, but these two men didn't give him a chance to speak. Koyama was going crazy; were these men really trying to force a confession, or were they simply enjoying the pleasure of torture? Even if they were trying to force a confession,

couldn't they do it in a more effective way? A confession was impossible if the victim couldn't even speak!

Takashi Koyama was an unlucky surgeon who graduated from a well-known medical school and had once worked at a large hospital. Now, he could only help out at a private clinic for friends due to his low income, and he lived in an old apartment building where his neighbors were mostly small office workers from out of town.

One would think that a man like Koyama, who was not very successful in his career and had a cautious personality, would not get into any trouble. However, on this night, heavy footsteps shook the entire apartment building, followed by the sound of a shotgun blast. Koyama's reinforced anti-theft door was kicked open, and two men in black suits rushed in, dragging one of his legs as they crossed the corridor and carried him away. Koyama didn't even have a chance to cry for help as he was punched in the abdomen, the attacker accurately aiming for his nerve plexus. The pain was so intense that he couldn't make a sound, and the whole apartment building remained silent, with no one daring to call the police. The black suits of the men flapped in the wind, revealing colorful embroidery of a blue-faced Yasha and a naked female demon, as intricate and chaotic as a ukiyo-e print. The residents immediately understood that these men were from the underworld, and everyone guessed that Dr. Koyama had borrowed money from loan sharks.

"Yasha, stop. Let him lift his head so that I can at least see his face." Someone ordered.

"Hai," the burly man wearing crocodile leather shoes replied obediently and bent down to pull Koyama out of the sandpit.

"Crow, wash his face for him." The man in command said.

The cold and pale-faced man with thin-framed glasses, known as Crow, poured the remaining water from the bucket onto Koyama's face and casually wiped the sand off.

Koyama finally opened his eyes and was able to see his surroundings. It was a construction site by the sea, with a long cement pier extending out. Under the night sky, the tide was rising, and the black waves crashed against the jagged tidal wall, leaving fine white foam. In the distance, the lights of Tokyo could be faintly seen. Koyama roughly guessed his location; this place was probably a secluded coast in the Tokyo Bay area, and it was unlikely for anyone to pass by at this late hour. Even if he screamed for help, it would be futile.

At the end of the pier stood a black Hummer SUV, and a young man in a black trench coat sat on the bumper, gazing out at the sea. The sea breeze lifted his bangs, and he was smoking a cigarette, the glowing tip illuminating his slender eyes from time to time. The man's aura was completely different from that of the Yasha and the Crow; he was handsome, with a hint of gentleness, and his pale skin had the texture of marble. His eyebrows were distinct and well-defined, and his black trench coat was of fine quality. Overall, he gave off the impression of

a young professor from a prestigious academy. He had not been involved in Koyama's abduction and seemed to be the leader of this operation.

The man crushed his cigarette under his foot and slowly walked along the pier towards Koyama. "Takashi Koyama, is it? Is this why we came to find you today?"

"Who... who are you? What do you want from me? I... I don't have any money, and I haven't borrowed from loan sharks. I don't have any enemies, you must have the wrong person! Please let me go!" Koyama pleaded desperately.

"Takashi Koyama, a graduate of Waseda University School of Medicine, worked as a geneticist at the University of Tokyo Hospital for six years before being dismissed for sexual harassment of female patients and illegally extracting their genes for unauthorized experiments. Since then, you've been performing abortions at an underground clinic and injecting the women with anesthesia to rape them while they're unconscious. This is your sick hobby. You're quite wealthy, dealing in illegal drugs and organ trading. Your Mitsubishi Bank account has a balance of 96 million yen, with 50 million deposited just thirteen weeks ago." The trench coat man recited the information from a file and then threw it at Koyama's feet. "It would be in your best interest to cooperate with us, or else, for someone like you, we won't show any mercy."

As Koyama listened, his heart sank deeper and deeper. The man knew his bank account balance, which meant this was not a random act of violence, and these men were not amateurs.

"How do you know so much about me? Do you even know the balance of my bank account? If you want money, just name your price, but don't be too greedy. I also have some influential friends, and if things go wrong, none of us will end up well!" Koyama lifted his head, shedding his pretense of helplessness. "How about a cigarette before we talk business?"

This was a shift in tactics; Koyama was not as afraid as he seemed. He was well aware of his actions and the consequences. He knew that people make enemies in life, and as long as he could afford to pay, he could settle things. He was considering how much money it would take to satisfy these three mysterious men. Would a hundred million yen be enough, or should he start the negotiation at fifty million?

"You should get your teeth fixed." The man grabbed Koyama's head and forced him to look up. Crow handed the man a sheathed dagger, which he ruthlessly shoved into Koyama's mouth, stirring it around.

Koyama heard the sound of his teeth breaking, and the intense pain exploded in his brain. His stomach cramped, and he vomited a mouthful of gastric acid.

"I told you, for someone like you, we won't show any mercy. Molesting pregnant women, manufacturing drugs, and trading organs. It's a wonder you've survived this long. Either God is dead or He's been sleeping too long."

"What does my messing around with women and trading kidneys have to do with you? You're not the police! Just tell me what you want! I've done nothing wrong, and if you push me too far, we'll all go down together!" Koyama rolled on the ground in agony, his face twisted like a malevolent spirit.

"Of course, I'm not the police. The police would show you some humanity. But we have no intention of treating you like a human being." The trench coat man took out his credentials and flashed them in front of Koyama's face. On the ID was a circular golden badge with a half-rotted World Tree emblem.

"Cassel College, Japan Branch. I'm Executive Officer Gen Chisei." The man introduced himself. "Now do you understand?"

"You are..." Fear exploded within Koyama, not from an external source but from something deep within him, like an ancient tree with gnarled roots. Over the years, instead of forgetting, the fear had taken root and grown deeper. He had been hiding and evading these people for so long, careful not to live in luxurious apartments or flaunt his wealth, keeping a low profile and concealing his tracks. But now, he realized that their net had never had any gaps; they simply hadn't needed to tighten it until now. Koyama understood what they wanted, and only something as forbidden as that would bring these men to his door.

"You're a half-breed, but the proportion of dragon blood in your lineage is very small, and on our surveillance list, your color code is white, the safest category. Normally, you would never have come to our attention, but you've done something wrong. As a medical student at Waseda University, you've been conducting gene experiments related to dragon blood since your student days. Recently, your experiments made a breakthrough, and you developed a gene drug called the 'Molotov Cocktail.' This drug can enhance bloodlines but has strong side effects. You sold the formula to a major client, who paid you 50 million yen as compensation. In addition, you've been helping him conduct human experiments to observe the side effects of this drug." Gen Chisei stared intently into Koyama's eyes. "I just need a name, the name of the test subject."

"You've got the wrong person! It's been many years since I've had any contact with half-breeds, and I haven't researched any gene drugs! I only sold the patent for a new type of drug purification!" Koyama sputtered, his mouth foaming with blood as he spat out broken teeth. He knew that threats and bribes would not work on these men, so he resorted to pleading again, his eyes resembling those of a pitiful little animal.

"We've wasted enough time," Gen Chisei said as he stood up. "Yasha, finish him off."

"Hai, hai!" Yasha clapped his hands. "With Crow's help, we'll be done in half an hour!"

Crow frowned, clearly reluctant to take on this task, but he still grabbed one of Koyama's legs and dragged him over to the huge concrete mixer. The construction site required a lot of

concrete every day, and if there was any leftover concrete, it had to be kept in the mixer and stirred continuously overnight to prevent it from solidifying. Yasha tied Koyama's arms and legs with wire and threw him into the vertical deep pit of the mixer.

"Is 52.5 cement going to crack when it's poured?" Crow scooped up some of the concrete mortar from the outlet and quickly identified the cement grade.

"The cement piers for the pier are submerged in the sea, so 52.5 cement won't crack in the water." Yasha skillfully started the mixer, and the concrete mortar poured down.

Koyama understood what "finishing him off" meant. These men didn't even want to waste time forcing a confession; Gen Chisei's order was for Yasha to dispose of the body. Koyama had heard of this method of body disposal used by the underworld. They would encase a person in concrete and then use a pile driver to hammer the concrete pier deep into the seabed, making the body disappear forever.

The hot and heavy concrete mortar hit Koyama's shoulders, almost breaking his bones. In just over ten seconds, the concrete mortar had already reached his thighs, and the lime powder choked his eyes and throat. He could almost smell his own rotting corpse. As death approached, all he could think about were the women he had played with. In his delirium, he saw their limp, exhausted bodies, so alluring, and he desperately wanted to confess, hoping to continue enjoying the pleasure of violating pregnant women...

When he was in university, he had a crush on a classmate, Masami, but she was in love with a handsome heir to an electrical appliance store chain, Fujima. Koyama watched as Masami and Fujima grew closer, even going on overseas trips together behind their parents' backs. However, Koyama thought that Fujima, with his leisurely lifestyle, would eventually get bored of Masami and abandon her. At that time, he planned to comfort the heartbroken Masami and take advantage of the opportunity. This expectation was hidden deep within him, and when Masami came to him one day, saying she was pregnant with Fujima's child but that Fujima denied it, Koyama saw his chance. Pretending to be a good friend, he offered to take her to get an abortion and even lied that he was her boyfriend. Thirsty for the opportunity he had longed for, he couldn't resist the temptation. However, as Masami's belly grew, he suddenly felt disgusted by her. He thought that Masami, carrying another man's child, was no longer pure and no longer his Masami. Filled with hatred, he wanted to teach her a lesson, so he anesthetized her, raped her, and imagined himself as the wealthy heir, Fujima. That feeling was incredible, and from then on, he indulged in this twisted pleasure.

But he still dared not confess, because he knew the buyer's cruelty. If the buyer found out that he had leaked information, his death would be a hundred times more painful than being encased in concrete. Koyama gritted his teeth, praying that this was just a psychological tactic, a means of intimidation. Surely they wouldn't really kill him, and the concrete would stop pouring before it completely buried him... it had to stop!

"Spare me, please! I really don't know anything, you've got the wrong person!" Koyama screamed hoarsely.

In response, he heard the Yasha and Crow humming a song as they worked.

"Yasha, with your experience, will the hardness be sufficient? If it cracks during the pile driving, it'll be troublesome." Crow said.

"Then add some more lime, put some effort into it, and mix the mortar thoroughly. The pier is a century-old project, so we need to make it sturdy." Yasha said as he dumped an entire bag of lime into the deep pit. "Come on, put some muscle into it! Brothers!"

The lime and concrete mortar mixed, releasing heat that burned the concrete mortar to a scalding temperature. Crow covered his nose and mouth as he stirred the mixture with all his might, and Koyama felt like every pain receptor in his body was being grilled over a fire.

"Yeah, yeah, the folk song in my hometown goes, 'The pier is my father's yoke, and my brother and I stand at either end of it,'" Yasha sang in a Kyoto accent.

"Sakura Aki! His name is Sakura Aki! Spare me! Please, please spare me! I haven't killed anyone, I'm just a beast... Please... please... please spare me!" As the concrete mortar reached just above Koyama's head, his last line of defense crumbled, and he tilted his head back, screaming hoarsely to avoid the mortar from pouring into his mouth.

"This guy's a real idiot. Does it matter if he's killed anyone or not when it comes to us pouring him into a concrete pier?" Yasha said as he opened another bag of lime.

"He's already confessed, so stop wasting time on him!" Crow threw down the stirring rod and turned to leave.

"Come on, we're almost done, it would be a waste to give up now!" Yasha shouted.

"Alright, alright, let's hurry up then..."

Screams of hysteria echoed from the pit, and Koyama was desperate. At that moment, he realized that he had completely misunderstood these men. They were not just thugs but a group of psychopaths and sadists. No wonder they seemed so happy and cheerful as they mixed the concrete; their singing was filled with genuine happiness. What was that about "the pier is my father's yoke, and my brother and I stand at either end of it"? These guys must have grown up together, pouring people into concrete piers. To them, this wasn't a cruel and inhumane act but a fond memory of their childhood. Confessions and such were irrelevant to these lunatics!

"Alright, that's enough. Compared to them, you're the real perverts." Gen Chisei crushed his cigarette underfoot and jumped into the Hummer. "Get the helicopter ready. By the time I get to the airport, it should be ready for takeoff!"

Koyama was immersed in the concrete mortar up to his neck, feeling himself slowly solidify in the night breeze. In his entire life, he had never experienced such a moment. He desperately wished for the police to appear, even if they arrested him and threw him in jail. As long as he could escape the clutches of these psychopaths, he would be content.

However, it would be another six hours until dawn, and it would be daytime before the construction workers discovered him. By then, he would already be a half-formed concrete pier... hopefully, it would be solid enough.

The train rumbled northward, leaving a trail of white smoke in the mountains.

This was an old-fashioned steam locomotive, much slower than the modern high-speed trains, and the destination was Hokkaido, with numerous stops along the way. Passengers would have to spend a full 12 hours on the train. One would think that such a slow train would be unpopular, but every spring, many young people chose to ride it. This was because the train ran on tracks laid before World War II, and the journey offered beautiful scenery along the way. Most of the passengers were high school students on school trips or young couples. Being cooped up in the old-fashioned train car for 12 hours, gazing out at the picturesque mountains and leaving them behind one by one, every girl would want to rest her head on her boyfriend's shoulder.

Sakurai Aki was in a carriage with only about half the seats filled, and the boys and girls excitedly pointed out the window at the passing scenery. Sakurai quietly sniffed, taking in every scent in the carriage. His sense of smell had become incredibly sharp, almost like that of a wild beast, and he could even tell that the girl sitting across from him, wearing a beige wool skirt, was aroused. When the boy next to her secretly kissed her earlobe, her body released a surge of enticing pheromones. Sakurai controlled this carriage through his sense of smell, searching for a suitable prey among the passengers.

This was the fifteenth day of his escape, and he had already hunted and killed fifteen women during this time.

Sakurai Aki was twenty-three years old and worked as a janitor at a church school, having graduated from the same school. The school was located in the mountains of Kobe and was surrounded by thick stone walls. On top of the walls was an electrified barbed wire fence. Once, a daring student had wrapped himself in insulating cloth and managed to climb over the fence, but he got lost in the deep mountains and was only found by the rescue team when he was severely dehydrated. The school was a "special care school," catering to students who had been rejected by other schools, like Sakurai, who had been assessed as having "violent tendencies." Every night before bed, the nuns would kiss the children's foreheads, and then the burly guards would lock the iron door with a chain.

When Sakurai was a child, he often sat in the middle of the playground, gazing up at the sky, but all he could see was the same square patch of sky. He sat on the grass, naming every cloud that drifted by, but the next day, those clouds with names would be gone, leaving him alone in the same spot. The school only provided education up to high school, and there was no university that would accept students like him. So, Sakurai was hired as a janitor by the school. He got his own single dorm room but was still not allowed to leave the campus, and every night, the guards would lock the iron door of his room. The doctors said that his violent tendencies had not been cured, and if he were released into society, he would become a problem.

Sakurai was well aware of the real reason he was sent to this special care school. It was because of his lineage. He came from the mysterious Sakurai family, an ancient clan that inherited dragon blood. When he was five years old, his elders performed a bloodline assessment and determined that his bloodline had congenital defects and was prone to going berserk. He was quickly taken away from his family and sent to the church school deep in the mountains, and the school's biggest donor was his own family. His parents never visited him, and in their place came various men in black suits.

Every year on his birthday, a man in black would come to see him, claiming to be his guardian. They wore exquisite black suits, and the lining of their suits featured intricate and terrifying images of demons and hybrids. Sakurai knew that these men were the so-called "executors," and in this country, every half-breed was under the surveillance of these executors. Some executors seemed laid-back and would bring him treats like dried persimmons and carp streamers, while others were stern and intimidating, but to Sakurai, they were all the same. When necessary, whether they appeared friendly or authoritative, they would mercilessly execute someone like Sakurai, who was deemed a dangerous target.

Each executor would ask Sakurai similar questions: "Do you suddenly get agitated and lose control of yourself? Have you fallen in love with any female classmates? Do you masturbate? Is it every night or at irregular intervals? Is there anyone you particularly dislike? Do you ever feel like killing them?"

Each question was like a sharp scalpel, dissecting Sakurai and examining him under a microscope. Sakurai never thought of resisting; the executors' bloodlines were stronger and more stable than his, so they were the executors, and he was the prisoner. All he had inherited from his parents was "garbage blood," while the executors possessed "elite bloodlines." The garbage blood increased the risk of going berserk, while the elite bloodlines granted the half-breeds incredible abilities. The executors filled out evaluation forms as they asked questions, and the forms, along with the results of physical examinations, were faxed back to the main family. If Sakurai's file was marked with a green or yellow color code, it meant he was safe for the time being. If it was orange, surveillance would be increased, and if it was red... Sakurai didn't know or want to know the consequences. Every assessment, Sakurai's color code was green, indicating that he was safe and under control. The executors would reassure him that if he could maintain this stability until he was forty years old, he might be granted freedom,

and they would no longer need to question him through the reinforced glass or visit him annually.

However, by the time he turned forty, who would want to be with him? At forty, Sakurai would have no accomplishments, having never left the mountain school. He would be an aging uncle who had never experienced the outside world, a lonely and friendless man.

After the executors left, Sakurai stood under the shower, letting the coldest water wash over his body.

"Who would be content with such a life?" One night, a stranger came to visit him.

The man wore a hemp-colored suit and sat casually in a chair. Just as Sakurai was about to get a good look at him, the lights in the room suddenly went out, and the guards outside seemed completely unaware.

In the darkness, Sakurai heard the man's voice, which seemed to come from a distant place: "Who would be content with such a life?" The man's voice was gentle, with a hint of androgyny, but his authority surpassed that of the executors. He simply sat there, yet he seemed to be enthroned.

"No... I'm not content!" Sakurai answered instinctively. "I haven't done anything wrong!"

The man pushed a set of twelve ampoules towards Sakurai. The ampoules gradually transitioned from bright red to a somber hue, like a rainbow cocktail. "Then let your blood boil and awaken."

The man then stood up and left, and the lights came back on. The guards took Sakurai back to his room, and the whole encounter felt like a dream. From then on, on those quiet nights when even the owls were asleep, Sakurai injected the colorful ampoules into his body, one by one.

Sakurai didn't know what the ampoules did to his body, but his bloodline had undoubtedly been awakened. Every cell in his body seemed to awaken from a deep slumber, and power surged through his veins like tidal waves. Sometimes, he would suddenly wake up from his dreams, gazing at the moon outside the iron bars, feeling like he was the master of the world. Just as the man in the darkness had promised, Sakurai gained what he had always desired—confidence, strength, and a life of his own.

Along with this came dark desires. One night, Sakurai felt an unbearable heat within him, as if fire was burning from his body. When he woke up, he found himself naked and entangled with Nami, a female teacher, her spine broken and throat slit. The memory of what he had done to her flashed in his mind—he had knocked on Nami's door, overwhelmed her with his newfound strength, torn her nightgown, and... The excitement during the act had caused his powers to go out of control, resulting in Nami's death.

Sakurai buried Nami under the sakura tree and escaped the school in the middle of the night. The high walls could no longer contain him, and he ran with the speed of the wind and lightning, leaping over the electrified fence with ease.

Nami had been twenty-nine years old when she died. She had been Sakurai's teacher, and he had a crush on her when he was a student. To him, she was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen, but she was so far out of his reach. All he could do was act naughty and hope that she would get angry and scold him. Even after becoming a janitor, Sakurai never thought he could get close to Nami, let alone possess her. But now, he had changed, and he had entered a whole new world, filled with absolute confidence. In his eyes, everything else seemed insignificant, and he wanted everyone to submit to him. After a brief moment of fear and regret, he was consumed by ecstatic joy.

During his escape, Sakurai stopped injecting the ampoules, and with each one he refrained from using, his confidence multiplied. The growing desires urged him to hunt and kill women along the way. He savored these encounters, even drinking their blood, finding satisfaction in completely draining them of life. However, despite his newfound confidence, he couldn't be sure if he could evade the executors' pursuit. Sakurai didn't know how many executors there were or who they were, but he had heard that they were the embodiment of all evil when they executed their targets. Their methods were brutal and bloody, and it was said that they could extract secrets even from the mouths of stone statues. If one broke the laws of the shadows, the only option was to flee, to run endlessly... until the day they were captured and executed.

Sakurai had not yet found a suitable prey on this train carriage, as most of the passengers were young couples or high school students on a school trip. If someone disappeared, it would quickly be noticed by their companions.

There was only one lone girl, a high school student wearing her uniform, who looked about seventeen or eighteen years old. She was definitely younger than Sakurai. The girl wore a slightly tight school uniform, indicating that she was still growing and developing, and she hadn't had time to get a new uniform made. She also wore a childish cat hair clip and carried a Hello Kitty backpack, exuding a youthful aura. Sakurai usually preferred more mature prey, as he enjoyed the thrill of seducing sexually attractive women and then killing them. It was like a fantasy come true for him.

However, this girl had a pair of beautiful long legs, and to keep warm, she wore black stockings with white sock covers, creating a curve that was a mix between a woman's allure and a girl's innocence. Based on Sakurai's limited experience of hunting women over the past few days, he believed that with some makeup and a sexy outfit, this girl could easily be the center of attention on the streets of Tokyo. Sakurai looked forward to tearing off her school uniform and stockings, but his desires made his eyes red, so he kept his gaze lowered to avoid arousing suspicion.

He knew he had to act quickly, as he was a fugitive with a limited lifespan. Sakurai could sense that the girl was observing him through the glass reflection, and he was confident that his charm, enhanced by the injection of the Molotov Cocktail, would be irresistible to her. The drug had significantly boosted his bloodline, and dragon blood gave him an innate advantage over lower species, making women fall under his spell with just a glance.

Sakurai sniffed discreetly, detecting the scent of a young girl on her, like flowers but not quite identifiable. He didn't particularly like this scent, as he craved the enticing pheromones of sexually mature women. The girl's scent reminded him of his days sitting in the middle of the playground, gazing up at the sky, surrounded by the fragrance of flowers and grass that filled the valley where the school was located. It was pleasant, but it was still a cage, a cage filled with flowery scents.

He could tell that the girl was hesitating, her feet nervously tapping the floor as she debated whether to sit down and talk to him.

"You're Koguma, right?" Sakurai opened his eyes and smiled slightly.

"Hai! I'm Koguma Madoka!" The girl stood up excitedly and introduced herself, as if she were answering a teacher's question in class.

"I'm Sakurai Aki, a magician, so I know your name. We were destined to meet." Sakurai's smile was sinister and mysterious, and no woman could resist its allure.

"Wow, a magician! Mr. Sakurai, you're so amazing!" Koguma clapped her hands in admiration and sat down across from Sakurai.

Sakurai suddenly felt that his previous behavior had been a bit childish. His usual tactic in bars was to say, "It's no wonder I felt drawn to you; my heart started racing the moment I saw you." And the woman would inevitably reply, "You must be a magician, my heart is beating so fast!" But this time, the girl's reaction was completely different from what he had expected.

Sakurai had learned her name from the handmade cat doll hanging from her Hello Kitty backpack, with the name "Madoka" embroidered in an inconspicuous corner. It was a detail that anyone who paid attention could easily notice.

"So, Mr. Sakurai, are you also traveling alone?" Koguma asked.

"Yes, I'm going to Otaru."

"What a coincidence! I'm going to Otaru too!"

This dialogue felt like it belonged in an '80s drama. Sakurai was at a loss for words. In recent days, he had been using his eyes to seduce women, and he had come to believe that he was

irresistible to them. But now, faced with this high school student, he felt awkward and tongue-tied. Should he act like an excited high school student and say, "That's amazing! Let's travel together!" Or should he play the role of a worldly, weary man and say, "The snow scenery in Otaru is the most beautiful, but we're a bit late for that." Or should he be a sleazy middle-aged man and say, "You're so pretty, aren't you afraid of traveling alone? What if a bad guy takes advantage of you?"

Each of these responses seemed terrible, and they all reminded him of cheesy drama lines. At that moment, Sakurai realized that he had hardly ever talked to girls his age. His understanding of social interactions came mostly from watching dramas, and he had spent countless nights alone in his small room, staring at the screen.

"Are you a university student? I'm a third-year high school student. Can I call you 'senpai'?" Koguma asked.

"Sure." Sakurai replied dryly.

He was getting impatient. This high school girl with her cat hair clip seemed a bit out of touch with the times. In Tokyo, girls her age were already into enjo-kosai (compensated dating) and had been for years!

"I'm sorry, senpai, I didn't mean to bother you. I'll go back to my seat now." Koguma stood up anxiously and bowed.

"No, no... it's not your fault." Sakurai said helplessly.

This was the first time he had encountered a problem in his hunting routine. The prey had practically walked into his trap, and now she was about to leave. He felt that something was off.

"Why are you going to Otaru?" Sakurai asked, trying to keep Koguma engaged in conversation.

"I'm going to bury Nyan-nyan."

"Nyan-nyan?"

"Nyan-nyan is my cat." Koguma took out a beautifully crafted ceramic urn from her backpack. It was a handmade pottery piece, featuring an illustration of herself and a black cat in a chibi manga style.

Sakurai breathed a sigh of relief. Now he was certain that Koguma was not an executor. Even if there were teenage girl executors, they wouldn't have had time to make such a detailed cat urn to carry around, pretending to be on a trip to bury her cat.

"Then, tell me about Nyan-nyan." Sakurai said.

"Nyan-nyan and I..." Koguma thought for a moment, "Let's see, I guess I should start from when I was little... I had autism when I was young, it's a secret, so please don't tell anyone, senpai."

Sakurai understood the issue. Koguma's conversation seemed stiff and unnatural, a common trait among those with a history of autism. Autistic children often grew up in their own isolated world, only interacting with themselves, and their psychological age tended to remain that of a child even as their bodies aged. Many autistic children learned to speak by imitating TV characters, resulting in stilted speech patterns, as if they were reciting lines from a second-rate script. Koguma's physical appearance suggested she was eighteen years old, a blossoming flower, but her mental age might be that of a middle schooler.

Here is the provided text translated from Chinese to English:

Speaking of which, the two of them do seem a little similar... As soon as Sakurai Aki got on the train, he noticed Madoka, who was sitting by the window, staring blankly out at the platform, where people were coming and going. The train hadn't started moving yet, and Madoka was already entranced by the view. Now, Sakurai understands that feeling. It's the longing of someone who lives in a lonely world, watching the bustling human world, feeling warmed by the flow of people. No wonder this girl, in the bloom of youth, has a snow-like quality to her. Because she has lived in a world of solitude and experienced the most terrifying cold the world has to offer, even in the most scorching sunlight, there is a hint of coolness about her.

"I've had autism since I can remember. I was afraid to talk to people, even my mom and dad. Everything I saw and everyone I heard talking scared me. I would curl up and cover my ears to feel less afraid. I didn't learn to speak until I was five years old..."

"Did your parents take you to a doctor?" Sakurai was finally able to engage Madoka in a somewhat strained conversation.

"They were always fighting, yelling until they were hoarse. Everyone was saying they couldn't take it anymore... It terrified me. But covering my ears didn't help; their voices were too loud. When I was most scared, I would run to the bathroom, fill the sink with water, and bury my head in it," Madoka pinched her cute nose and made a suffocating expression, "That way, their fighting sounded muffled, like thunder, and I couldn't hear anything clearly, so I felt less scared."

"Parents fight sometimes when you're young. They make up afterward. They fight and make up," Sakurai also felt that this comforting statement was a bit perfunctory. What "fight and make up"? That's something middle-aged uncles say on TV.

He had never heard his parents fight. Before he turned five, his parents were respectful and polite to each other, and their home was filled with laughter. His mother played the piano, and his father was an excellent cook. When his mother played the piano, his father would be in the kitchen cooking, while Sakurai played with his toys. On the day his blood was tested, he was

taken away, and he doesn't know if his parents blamed each other for passing on the wrong genes to him, like Madoka's parents did. He also doesn't know if they still play the piano and cook, or if they've started fighting and making up. Maybe they've already had a new, healthy child. Sakurai suddenly felt a bit agitated.

"Then, one day, I noticed the house had become quiet because my parents had divorced, and I was given to my dad to raise. After that, I never saw my mom again..." Madoka lowered her head, "My dad is a carpenter and works in a factory making furniture all day, so I'm always alone at home. One day, he suddenly said he would bring a friend to keep me company, and I was so scared I hid under the covers. I thought my dad was going to marry another mom. But what he brought from behind his back was a palm-sized kitten, whom I later named Nyan-nyan. Nyan-nyan came on a snowy day, shivering from the cold. She meowed and climbed into the sleeve of my pajamas. He stared at Madoka's neckline, guessing the development of this prey's body from the curve of her chest. Looking closely, Madoka was surprisingly voluptuous. Her chest stood out even more due to her slender waist, and Sakurai's gaze traveled lower and lower, eventually reaching her slender, graceful legs. He couldn't control himself anymore. In his eyes, Madoka's uniform gradually became transparent, and her body looked so beautiful in the sunlight. Sakurai imagined a drop of water tracing Madoka's skin, outlining her gorgeous curves.

"Because of my autism, my parents never took me out, except to the hospital. I remember Nyan-nyan curling up in the sleeve of my pajamas, so warm and soft, meowing softly. That was the language of the spirits in the mountains," said Madoka, "Although she only meowed, each meow was different, but I couldn't understand what she was saying, so I tried to meow like her."

"You learned to speak from a cat?" Sakurai thought this was truly absurd.

"Yes!" Madoka nodded vigorously, "I learned to speak from Nyan-nyan. She always spoke softly, unlike my parents, who yelled at each other. She told me about the spirits in the mountains, including the cat spirits, the tanuki spirits, and the fox spirits."

Sakurai thought, according to you, there are only three kinds of spirits in the mountains: cat, fox, and tanuki. So, does that mean the tanuki spirits are the offspring of the cat and fox spirits? He found this girl a bit amusing, but his gaze remained fixed on her exquisite body without her noticing. He shifted his large black travel bag slightly, and from the small mirror on the side of the bag, he admired the view under Madoka's uniform skirt, although he couldn't see anything. However, he was aroused by the thought of his hand on her leg, which was covered by silk stockings, and he lost control a little.

"Then, one day, my dad discovered the secret between Nyan-nyan and me. When he came home from work, I was holding Nyan-nyan's paw and meowing to her. Nyan-nyan could still only meow, but I had already learned to say her name in Japanese." Madoka said, "The first Japanese word I learned was Nyan-nyan's name. I learned to speak from a cat spirit, so if I accidentally meow while talking, please forgive me, Senpai."

Sakurai thought this was probably also a form of chuunibyuu, but nowadays, people usually have cooler delusions, like "Master of Black Flames" or "Evil King's True Eye." Madoka's delusion was a fairy tale from decades ago, fantasizing that she was a princess raised by cat spirits in the mountains, a severe case of Miyazaki Hayao poisoning.

"Then how did the cat die?" Sakurai asked this bland question, wanting to prolong the conversation with Madoka.

"Because all loving beings in the world must eventually part." Madoka answered seriously.

Sakurai was stunned for a moment and suddenly thought of Nami... Loving beings? Has he had a loving relationship in his life? Including Nami, he has hunted down sixteen women. He only spent one night of madness with each of them, and some, he didn't even know their names. So, in a way, his life has been lacking. Although he has possessed many beautiful women, he has never experienced love. If you don't even know the other person's name, how can you say it's love? There was no understanding, only desire and impulse. The only exception was Nami. Sakurai had spent many years fantasizing about a romantic relationship with his female teacher, and Nami was indeed a good teacher. Sometimes, she would scold him for his stubbornness, but afterward, she would take him to the faculty room and, in the glow of the setting sun, patiently encourage him, gently stroking his head. After Sakurai graduated and became a school worker, Nami was the first to greet him. She brought a lunch box as a gift for his first day at work, containing well-steamed egg custard and plum rice.

But he killed her and buried her under the cherry blossom tree.

"Cats can only live for fifteen years. Although cat spirits can live for a very long time, once they leave the mountains, they only have the lifespan of ordinary cats. Nyan-nyan left the mountains to save me. I met her when I was three, and she left when I was eighteen." Madoka's face was filled with sadness, "That day was also in winter. When I woke up, I saw her lying motionless under the kotatsu, and I thought she didn't want to come out because it was too cold. So, I reached out to touch her head. But she placed her head in my palm and meowed, and I understood that she was saying goodbye. That afternoon, she passed away. I placed an open can of cat food in front of her, but she didn't lift her head to smell it. Slowly, her body grew cold." Madoka supported her head with her hands, bowing her head, so Sakurai couldn't see her face, but he could see the tears falling one by one onto her skirt.

Her shoulders trembled slightly, and her frailty made him want to cherish her. But Sakurai's mind was filled with the image of this prey, naked and trembling in his arms, and his eyes were almost bleeding with excitement.

"Senpai, I started crying again while talking. I'm sorry!" Madoka wiped away her tears vigorously and raised her head, revealing a brilliant smile, "Nyan-nyan went back to the mountains to become a cat spirit again, so why am I crying?"

Sakurai didn't like her smile at all. It was stupidly bright and also a bit sad, and seeing it made him feel sad, too. He wished Madoka would smile more coquettishly and maybe even twist her body a little.

"So, I'm going to Otaru to bury Nyan-nyan's ashes there. That way, I won't cry every time I see her urn. Nyan-nyan wouldn't want me to be crying and ignoring people when she's not around, would she?" Madoka said, "She taught me how to speak, so she wouldn't want me to go back to the way I was before, would she?"

Sakurai was shocked. He suddenly realized that he had entered Madoka's story and that was why he asked such a question. Although he had been admiring Madoka's body and suppressing his urges while she was telling her story, the scene of Madoka and Nyan-nyan together gradually appeared in his mind: in the morning light, Nyan-nyan holding Madoka's shoe in her mouth, meowing at the door; in the evening, Madoka sitting on the roof with Nyan-nyan meowing on her head; at night, Nyan-nyan curling up on Madoka's belly as they slept, meowing in her dreams... It was like a nonsensical art film.

But why was he doing this meaningless thing? And with a girl who used to have autism and still had some after-effects. What she was saying was just her imagination, and all he cared about was what was under her uniform. Why talk about life and the past? It was like a prostitute and a client discussing love, or a politician talking about ideals to the people.

"Madoka has such a beautiful body! And long legs! She must be in the sports club at school, right?" Sakurai changed the subject.

"Yes! I'm in the rhythmic gymnastics club, and I'm also a member of the basketball cheerleading squad!" Madoka nodded vigorously.

"Wow, I love cheerleading performances! Regular exercise improves your figure and makes your skin smooth, too!" Sakurai was much happier with this topic, and his gaze roamed over Madoka's entire body, like a snake's tongue licking a girl's body. He felt that he had gotten close enough to Madoka, and her guard was probably down, so it was time to make his move. It was strange, though, that such an easy prey had never been approached by any senior boys before.

"It's getting hotter and hotter in this train car. Madoka, you're still wearing stockings. Aren't you hot?" Sakurai said that the air in this carriage was indeed getting hotter, and the air conditioner was blowing hot air.

"Yes, it is hot. When I got on the train, the temperature was just right with the stockings." Madoka said, "Maybe the conductor is worried about everyone getting cold."

"Madoka, why don't you go to the bathroom and take off your stockings? It's not good for your health to be too hot. If you're worried about your luggage, I can wait outside and help you carry it." Sakurai was ready to make his move. The bathroom was the best place to make a move on

a train. All he had to do was push Madoka from behind, follow her into the bathroom, lock the door, cover her mouth, and do whatever he wanted.

"Wouldn't that be a bother for you, Senpai?" Madoka hesitated.

"It's just carrying luggage. How could that be a bother?" Sakurai thought the snake in his heart was hissing.

"Attention, passengers. Attention, passengers. This is an emergency announcement. Due to a short circuit in the control system, the air conditioning system in Car 8 has malfunctioned, causing a significant increase in temperature. The conductor needs to make repairs. Passengers in Car 8, please take your luggage and move to the VIP carriage to rest. To express our apologies, we have prepared free afternoon tea for you in the VIP carriage." The conductor announced over the broadcast.

"I was wondering why it was getting hotter and hotter. It's annoying. But we're lucky to be able to move to the VIP carriage and have free afternoon tea." The high school girl was excited.

"Hurry up, let's go get a good seat with a view. The Kyozan Bridge is coming up." Her boyfriend whispered.

Everyone was happy to be able to go to the VIP carriage, which had spacious and comfortable seats and cost three times as much as the regular carriage. The passengers got up in groups of three or two, picked up their luggage, and headed for the VIP carriage, quickly emptying Car 8.

Sakurai sat stiffly, unmoving. His hearing was far more sensitive than that of ordinary humans, so he could hear the sound of someone walking on the roof of the train, moving calmly and slowly. What kind of person could walk on a speeding train like that? Danger was approaching from all directions. Before the broadcast, Car 8 had already been heavily blocked off. The enforcers were here, and their scent was in the air. They were the best golden retrievers, with the claws of a leopard. The air conditioner wasn't broken; it was just a tactic used by the enforcers to clear the carriage. Usually, their captures were made in secluded places, and if it was an execution, they would perfectly destroy the body afterward, as if the executed person had never existed. This carriage had been chosen as the execution ground, and Sakurai couldn't jump off the train. The area along the tracks was uninhabited, making it the perfect hunting ground for the enforcers.

He could only take the risk and fight the enforcers to the death. The loser dies! The carriage was still hot, but Sakurai's body was getting colder and colder, and his bones felt like ice.

He clutched the pressure injector in his sleeve, which contained the last Molotov cocktail. It was a deep purple color, and after this injection, he would be completely purified and enter a new world. Sakurai had never injected this last dose into his body because he lacked a little courage. But now, he had no choice but to evolve. Only by evolving could he have a chance against the

enforcers. But evolution took time. Would there be enough time? Sakurai sniffed hard, trying to capture every strange smell in the air. What did the enforcers smell like? Bloody? Or rusty? Or the stench of rot in the darkness? All he could smell was a faint floral fragrance.

"Senpai? What's wrong, Senpai?"

Sakurai's muscles tensed up suddenly, like a startled hedgehog raising its spines. Everyone had left, and only Sakurai and Madoka remained. The sunlight shone through every empty window, and the dust danced in the light beams. Madoka's eyes were filled with concern.

"Are you sick, Senpai?" Madoka asked.

"Why didn't you go to the VIP carriage?" Sakurai asked hoarsely, staring into Madoka's eyes. If there was the slightest hint of danger in those pretty, empty eyes... He would pounce and tear her throat out!

"Because... Senpai didn't go either." Madoka said softly.

Sakurai stared at those beautiful yet hollow eyes, and his tensed-up body gradually relaxed. So, this late-blooming, awkward girl really did like him... Three minutes had passed, and the enforcers hadn't appeared yet. Sakurai suddenly understood. It was because Madoka hadn't left Car 8, and the enforcers didn't want to harm innocent bystanders. This prey, whom he hadn't been able to hunt yet, had become his tool to buy time, even if it was only for a few minutes. Those few minutes were crucial to him! He crushed the sealed neck of the bottle, and the high-pressure air pushed the injector, slowly infusing the drug into Sakurai's veins.

Sakurai's heart was filled with hope. Maybe he still had a chance. Could he defeat the enforcers after completing his evolution? If he could escape this carriage, he would have eternal freedom!

"There are a lot of people in the VIP carriage, and I don't like crowded places... It scares me." Sakurai said softly.

The Molotov cocktail was like an unleashed wild dragon rampaging through his veins, causing incredible chemical reactions and biological evolution. The heat rushed to his skull and the ends of his limbs, and he could hear his bones slowly growing again. The bottom of his pupils reflected a golden, fiery light. That feeling of dominating the world and being invincible returned, and his confidence surged wildly. His fear of the enforcers began to fade. For seventeen years, they had caged him, and now it was time to tear out their hearts with his bare hands and take revenge! In a few more minutes, the evolution would be complete, and the first thing he would do was to grab Madoka by the neck and hold her up in the sunlight, tearing her clean. A girl's body should be as pure as a white lamb, right? She would be the perfect sacrifice!

"Why are you scared of crowded places, Senpai?" Madoka asked.

Damn it! Why ask questions? Just keep talking about that damn cat, and the enforcers won't rush in! Don't ask questions. A dying woman doesn't need to know anything! Sakurai's cheeks twitched, and the burden of evolution and the intense pain it brought made it difficult for him to utter a single word. But he had to answer. The enforcers were undoubtedly monitoring him, and this carriage was under their watchful gaze. If they noticed that he was evolving, he would be done for.

"Because... they will kill me." Sakurai managed to make his voice sound less strange, revealing his deepest fear. Deep down, he was afraid of the enforcers. They hid in the shadows, experts in killing. When Sakurai was still a well-behaved child in the enforcers' eyes, a careless enforcer had once casually mentioned that they had locked a rampaging target in a freezer and poured in several tons of liquid nitrogen. The target had struggled desperately in the super-cold liquid, approaching a temperature of minus 200 degrees, eventually turning into a gray-white human statue and slowly sinking. That night, Sakurai had felt as if the whole world was freezing cold, and he himself was that gray-white human statue, slowly sinking and his heart turning to ice.

Over the years, he had lived in fear, feeling like he was harboring a demon inside him. The demon would wake up and devour him, taking over his body. That day would be when the enforcers executed him. He had tried his best to act normal, experiencing all the reactions listed on the survey forms. In the middle of the night, he would suddenly feel hot and want to run; he would follow Nami, watching her swaying hips as she walked in a pencil skirt; one moment, he would be deeply apologetic, and the next, he would fly into a rage, wanting to grab the bullying PE teacher and slam him against the wall... He had never told anyone about these feelings. Instead, he would hide in the shower, turning the water pressure to maximum and using cold water to suppress the fire burning inside him. He would huddle in the shower corner, hugging his shoulders, and cry silently, listening to the cawing of crows outside the window, feeling like the dark world was filled with the shrieks of demons, and everyone wanted to kill him.

"Senpai... Do you also have autism? You seem similar to me when I was little..." Madoka stood up and leaned forward to look at Sakurai.

Damn it! Don't come near me! Not now! Sakurai screamed in his mind, trying to shield himself with his hands. As Madoka leaned forward, her uniform collar shifted, revealing the white straps of her underwear. For Sakurai, who was struggling with the effects of the Molotov cocktail, it was a deadly temptation and poison. Madoka's youthful scent was more potent than any aphrodisiac, and the lamb-like prey was right before him. But this was not the time for hunting.

Madoka carefully placed her hand on Sakurai's forehead, and he desperately leaned back, restricted by the chair. The effects of the Molotov cocktail stirred up his desires, and any physical contact was a deadly temptation. His body was hot and painful, and he stared at Madoka's flower-like lips, like a starving man wanting to pounce and bite.

Damn it! Damn it! Damn it! Evolution isn't complete yet! If I lose control now, it will all be for nothing! Damn this stupid woman! Everything you say is a temptation to me! I don't have the

willpower to answer your next question! Sakurai screamed weakly in his mind. The hands he had hidden under the table were mutating, sharp bone spurs piercing through the skin on the back of his hands. His fingernails were replaced by newly formed sharp claws, and tiny scales were pushing through his skin... Those hands had tightly held many naked women, breaking their spines... Sakurai extended his mutated hand from under the table, unable to control himself any longer. He wanted to tear Madoka's uniform and stockings, relishing in her terrified screams.

"Don't be scared. I'll stay here with you, Senpai. Meow, meow." Madoka wiped the cold sweat from Sakurai's forehead.

"Meow... Meow..." Madoka whispered. It was just a murmur, like a cat purring.

The sharp claws stopped just an inch away from grasping Madoka's smooth knees, and Sakurai's eyes were filled with confusion. "Meow... Meow..." Madoka continued.

Indeed, each of her meows was different, with unique intonations, rhythms, and volumes, just like the language of the spirits in the mountains. Sakurai thought of the cat shrine on Tashirojima Island, which Nami had told them about. In that shrine deep in the mountains, cats roamed freely, meowing softly in the candlelight. Every holiday, many people took a boat to visit the cat shrine, but no one could understand the cats' language. The priests said that the cats were divine beings, discussing the joys and sorrows of every visitor from above. For those who were most in need of help and had the kindest hearts, the cats would sacrifice one of their nine lives and incarnate to help them.

"Do you... want to help me?" Sakurai laughed bitterly, his laughter sounding like a cry.

He was a wild beast drowning in black desires, and no matter how many Buddhist temples rang their bells, they couldn't bring back his humanity. But hearing the girl's soft meows, it was as if his head had been split open, and light poured in, dispelling the black, violent desires that filled his mind, leaving only emptiness. He wanted to mock this prey for her stupidity, thinking that she, too, had autism... Was he that weak? He walked through the city at night, and with just a seductive glance, he could make heavily made-up women fall for him. With his mutated, sharp claws, he had torn apart one snow-white body after another. He was the conqueror! The violent king!

"Meow." Madoka meowed again.

With her intelligence, she probably couldn't detect the mockery in Sakurai's laughter. She only felt that since Sakurai was laughing, he must be feeling better, so she smiled sweetly, her cat hairpin gently swaying its fluffy tail.

Damn it, stop meowing, you stupid woman! Don't think that just because a cat cured your autism, there's nothing in the world that can hurt you! You're so stupid, and what good are your

pretty face and alluring legs? In the future, when you marry a man, he will deceive you. He will go to the nightclubs in Shinjuku behind your back, spending money on alluring women there... And you, even facing a thug, won't be alert. Maybe you'll even meow at him like you're doing to me now... Madoka, you stupid woman, you will die one day! Because you're a low-intelligence, late-bloomer, and the only one who could protect you, that cat named Nyan-nyan, is already dead! Sakurai laughed hysterically in his mind, feeling like dancing... but also like crying.

Sakurai leaned against the window, his laughter slowly fading. The sunlight illuminated half of his face, and his long bangs danced in the wind. Outside the window, the mountains seemed to be washed with indigo dye.

"Madoka, you're so cute. I feel better now," Sakurai said, looking into Madoka's beautiful eyes, "I like you very much, and I want to go to Otaru with you."

Madoka's face turned red, as if she had drunk alcohol, and she stood up and bowed deeply, "Thank you, Sakurai Senpai!"

"I'm also going to Hokkaido to bury a friend. If it's convenient, we can bury him together with Nyan-nyan." Sakurai said, "You will visit Nyan-nyan's grave, won't you?"

"Yes, every year! I hope he will like Nyan-nyan!"

"He likes Nyan-nyan very much. Believe me." Sakurai handed his travel bag to Madoka, "I'm going to the bathroom to wash my face. We'll meet in the VIP carriage later, okay? Can you hold on to my bag for me?"

"Can I?" Madoka hugged Sakurai's travel bag to her chest.

"Of course, I trust you, Madoka. Let's head to the VIP carriage now. Don't walk too fast or too slow." Sakurai said. Yes, don't walk too fast or too slow. Don't let the enforcers think something is wrong. If they think you're trying to escape, they will suddenly appear and attack. Then, you will witness a hellish bloodbath. But don't walk too slowly, either. I need to maintain at least a bit of my humanity...

"Senpai, do you want to go to the VIP carriage to use the bathroom? I can take you there." Madoka said.

"No, it's fine. I have a task for you. Get me some matcha ice cream, please." Sakurai smiled.

"Okay! Let's go, matcha ice cream, here we come!" Madoka also smiled.

She wore a Hello Kitty backpack, hugged Sakurai's travel bag, and happily walked towards the end of the carriage, passing through the sunlight, where the dust danced. The door closed, blocking Sakurai's view of Madoka's back. Sakurai waved goodbye with his mutated hand,

which was now a凶器truly凶器, to the girl who might be the only one to have ever pitied him in his life.

I'm so scared... I want to hold you tight and feel a little warmth... Do you know that? But I can't, because I no longer have human hands that can embrace others.

"Come out." He placed the凶器-like claws on the small table.

Sakurai smelled the enforcers for the first time, and their scent was surprisingly light, like clear alcohol.

The door opened, and a young man in a black trench coat walked in. He casually chose a seat in the front row, his back to Sakurai, as if he were just a passenger on the train. The sunlight illuminated half of his body, and in his hand, he held an open badge case with a golden badge inside, depicting a serpent coiled around the world tree. On his hand was a silver ring with a dragon's bile pattern, and in that hand, he held a red-sheathed long sword. The man leaned the sword against the seat, and with the hand wearing the silver ring, he slowly drew out the sword, which had a beautiful arc to its blade. The sword's銘was "Spider Mountain Demon Exorcising Night Blade." It was an ancient sword that had tasted the blood of humans and monsters, and its graceful arc made it even more beautiful. The man used the sound of unsheathing his sword to interrupt Sakurai's heavy breathing. At this moment, Sakurai, sitting in the back row, could no longer be considered human. Blue scales covered his hands and arms, and his disproportionately large claws dragged on the ground. The veins on his once-handsome face pulsed with a snake-like blue color, and his irises burned with a reddish-gold light.

"It's not easy for a person to travel this far alone." The man said softly.

"Who are you?" Sakurai's voice was hoarse and muddled.

"Kasahara Academy, Japan Branch, Executive Bureau, Director Chisei Ikki, Executioner. This is our first meeting, but it will also be our last. I am here to announce the Main Family's verdict: you will be eradicated. There is no need for you to argue, as no one will listen."

"I won't argue. I'm used to it. No one has ever listened to what I have to say. You fill out the survey forms however you want, calling me green if you want, or red if you prefer."

"I don't want to offer sympathy because it won't do you any good." Chisei said, "You shouldn't have accepted that gift. That drug is called the Molotov cocktail. Do you know what that term means? It originally refers to a homemade bomb used by the Finns to throw at Soviet tanks during World War II. This drug can only be used to vent your hatred, burning your life away in an instant. There is no such thing as a safe evolution in this world. Humans are humans, they cannot become dragons."

"But I'm happy." Sakurai raised his stern and terrifying face, letting out a twisted smile of satisfaction, "At least during my 15-day escape, I had confidence and happiness."

"Even if you call your murder of women happiness, can 15 days of happiness make up for your entire life?"

"You're an enforcer, you'll never understand. In fact, I didn't pay any price at all because my life is worthless."

"One last question: why did you let that high school student go? You never gave up on any prey along the way."

"Because she's so disgusting," Sakurai laughed, "Eating her would ruin my appetite!"

The fact that Sakurai let Koimaru go greatly surprised the Execution Bureau. That prey was within easy reach, and even if they didn't capture her, they could have kept her as a hostage. But Sakurai let her go. According to the conclusions of the Iwashiro Institute, Sakurai's evolution had reached its final stage, and the remnants of human will in his consciousness were very weak. He had transformed into a violent beast, possessing animal-like senses, a cruel lust for killing, and a fiery desire for women. Yet this beast willingly gave up its prey, and it wasn't for lack of trying to lure her into his trap.

What could make a beast give up its most desired prey? But time was running out, and there was no more room for Chisei to ask questions. The carriage, having lost its momentum, slowed down and eventually stopped in the middle of the Kyozan Bridge. This was the execution ground chosen by the enforcers.

The Kyozan Bridge was a 1,200-meter-long railway bridge, beneath which was a knife-like rift valley with a waterfall flowing through it. Above the rift valley were mountains covered in cherry blossoms, a famous scenic spot on this train journey. It was the perfect execution ground, with no escape routes. Crows and yakshas guarded both sides of the railway bridge, and below was a valley more than 100 meters deep. Even an A-level hybrid would surely die if they jumped. And if Sakurai jumped, there were the crows. In the Main Family, which valued sword fighting above all else, the crows were exceptional sharpshooters. Sakurai's brain would be blown to pieces by the crows before he even hit the ground.

Chisei didn't have much time left. In 13 minutes, the next train would pass over the Kyozan Bridge. Chisei stared at the silver ring on his hand and slowly tightened his grip on the sword hilt. Even against a rampaging A-level hybrid, he couldn't afford to be careless. He appeared relaxed on the surface, but he had been keeping an eye on Sakurai through the reflection in his silver ring. He knew that with Sakurai's current bloodline, he would be as still as a mountain one moment, and the next, he would strike like a thunderbolt, instantly deciding the outcome.

"I don't regret killing those women." Sakurai's voice was unusually clear, with no hint of madness, "After all, they were the ones in pain, not me. On the contrary, I felt satisfied. I chose to take that drug, and I injected it into my body one needle at a time. If I had to choose again, even if you stood before me with a drawn sword, I would still inject the drug into myself. If I didn't take that drug, I would be nothing. I have nothing in this world, and I was pushed to the edge of a cliff by humans. I didn't know when I would fall. I fled for 15 days, raping and killing women along the way. Those 15 days were the only time I truly lived."

"But many people died because of you. No one has the right to take away the lives of others for their own sake." Chisei said.

Sakurai's words didn't surprise Chisei. A fallen one would naturally speak like this, disregarding human morals and laws, pursuing only desire and violence. Their words might seem irrational, but they followed a bloody logic of their own.

"You wouldn't understand. A moth that has never seen the light in its entire life will rush towards the flame. It doesn't matter if others burn, and it doesn't matter if the moth itself burns. Even if the whole world burns, it doesn't matter, as long as the moth can feel the light..." Sakurai reached out and grabbed at the air, as if there were a vivid figure standing before him, and he wanted to hold that person in his arms,

"This is a moth's hunger for light."

Chisei suddenly understood. Sakurai was blind. A severe side effect of the Molotov cocktail was the destruction of vision. During the final evolution, Sakurai's pupils were destroyed by the drug, leaving his eyes empty.

"If a moth that has experienced even a little light in the darkness were to burn down the entire world just to warm itself, would you blame it? Wouldn't you, Executioner Chisei?" Sakurai asked softly.

At that moment, falling cherry blossoms drifted past the window like snow, and in the sunlight, the color of the petals was as pale as faded purity. Chisei was distracted for a second, sensing something unusual in Sakurai's words. That profound metaphor about the moth and the light was too sophisticated for Sakurai, who had a limited vocabulary from watching TV dramas. The simile was like a haiku or a poem, exuding a frost-like sadness. Chisei felt that Sakurai was repeating someone else's words, someone he vaguely remembered...

He looked at the silver ring again, but there was no longer any trace of Sakurai in it! In this carriage, a perfect execution ground with no escape routes, the prisoner had vanished as if he had evaporated!

Without hesitation, Chisei drew his sword from its sheath, brandishing it in a wide arc! As the ancient sword left its sheath, it made a thunderous sound, and the blade glowed with an eerie blue light. Chisei held the sword as if it were not just a weapon, but a void of cold air.

At the same time, it was as if a golden sun enveloped him, and he stood in the midst of a glorious sun wheel, his every movement like the sun's edge!

Sparks flew from the sword as it clashed with Sakurai's sharp claws. Sakurai had dropped from the ceiling, and his deformed claws reached for Chisei's head, intending to tear it from his neck. In just a few seconds, the dragon-like Sakurai had crawled above Chisei, making no sound. Chisei's seemingly perfect strike was aimed at the air, but Sakurai used his claws to grip the sword blade and flip himself in midair, aiming his other giant claw at Chisei's throat. This was a desperate battle between beasts, and every attack was meant to be fatal.

Chisei swung his coat open and drew a short sword from the back of his waist. Once again, he was enveloped in that incredible golden sunlight, and the short sword pierced through Sakurai's claw. Chisei leaped up, kneeing Sakurai in the chest and sending him flying backward. Taking advantage of Sakurai's momentum, he pulled the short sword out.

Sakurai crashed into several rows of seats and rolled into a corner, but before Chisei could follow up with another strike, Sakurai lunged forward again, his claws piercing through the backs of the chairs and aiming straight for Chisei's heart. Chisei crossed his long and short swords to block, retreating as Sakurai relentlessly pressed his attack, his claws locking onto Chisei. Sakurai's deformed claws were sharp enough to cut through metal, and Chisei was now facing ten blades instead of two. As Sakurai's claws opened and closed, the air was filled with the sound of slicing wind.

The claws tore through the metal of the carriage, finally pinning Sakurai down. However, Sakurai didn't feel the satisfaction of piercing human flesh. As the carriage shook violently, the inside was riddled with cuts and scars, and the excellent quality of the steel used in this old-fashioned carriage made it difficult to even drill a hole with an electric drill. Yet Sakurai and Chisei had managed to cut through it with their sword and claws. The crows, who were sitting on the tracks, smoking and admiring the distant mountains, were glad they had locked the doors on both sides of the carriage. Otherwise, if Sakurai had broken free, even with their combined efforts, they might not have been able to stop him, and they would have had to chase him down, which would have been exhausting.

"Have you checked the local tourism information? I heard that the local specialty is rice wine made with cold spring water, and the hot springs here are also famous. In the depths of winter, monkeys often come down from the mountains to soak in the hot springs with people." Crow said.

"I heard that in Hokkaido, there are still places where men and women bathe together."

"I've heard that too, but apparently, the only women who still do that are elderly ladies with sagging breasts. I didn't know you had a special preference for old women, Crow."

The carriage shook violently, and the roof caved in. A moment later, the body of the carriage swelled like a balloon, and shards of glass flew everywhere, cutting through the warped windows and spraying hot air.

"No, I prefer tanned, energetic young girls. The only old woman I'm devoted to is your mother." Crow covered his head with his hands to avoid being hit by the flying glass shards.

"That's not good. Didn't I tell you that my mother has been dead for a long time? When I was five, my father had an affair with a bar hostess. My mother rode her motorcycle into that bar and threw a bundle of dynamite onto the stage where the hostess was singing, blowing her to pieces. The police classified it as a heinous murder, and the judge sentenced her to death. If you want to bathe with her, you'll have to go to the sulfur springs in hell, my friend."

"I didn't expect your mother to be such a chaste and fierce woman. That makes me want to keep my distance. I can't just be devoted to one woman, you know."

"Let me tell you, having no parents is the best thing in the world. That way, you can freely harass the prettiest girl in your class, and if you get into a fight outside, the other person's parents won't have anyone to complain to. That's why, in novels, many swordsmen are orphans. I was born to be a swordsman." Yasha took a drag of his cigarette, "Sometimes I feel a little lonely, but when I do, I feel even more like a swordsman, don't I?"

"Have you been reading lately? You're starting to sound like a philosopher." Crow shrugged, "You just said your chaste mother was sentenced to death, but how did your father die?"

"Oh, I forgot to mention a detail. At that time, the bar hostess was sitting on his lap, singing."

The two men's conversation was completely unnutritious, they were just killing time, waiting for Chisei. This was always how Chisei did things, luring the prey into a trap, walking in alone, and locking the door from the inside. Crow and Yasha just had to wait outside with the body bag, and a few minutes later, Chisei would come out, toss the bloodstained sword to Crow, and say to clean it with a tired look on his face. Over time, Crow and Yasha had gotten used to it, chatting about women or boasting while waiting for Chisei. It was like waiting for a companion in the bathroom, there was nothing they could do to help, and the companion would come out sooner or later anyway. Although this battle had taken longer than usual, they weren't worried that the one coming out of the door would be Sakurai.

They had been following Chisei for some time and knew how strong this young Execution Bureau Director was. The legendary Amaterasu, what a revered and feared bloodline.

"It's been six minutes, and the young master still hasn't finished the target." A voice came from the shadows of the carriage.

"Have you changed your clothes yet, Sakura? If you haven't, can we sneak a peek?" Crow leered.

"You've already sneaked a peek, haven't you? Anyway, you won't see anything." The figure in the shadows said.

A school uniform and white socks were thrown out from the shadows, followed by Oshima Maru, who walked out. But she was no longer Oshima Maru. Her aura had changed, and along with it, her appearance. Just ten minutes ago, she was an eighteen-year-old high school girl, but now, with her hair tied in a long ponytail, she looked several years older, no longer the sweet and tasty prey, but a sword exuding a subtle chill. In Sakurai's eyes, if Koimaru knew how to apply makeup and wear more revealing clothes, she would be even more alluring. But he never imagined that Koimaru's clear and transparent skin was actually the effect of makeup. The real skin of "Koimaru" was as white as snow, with no hint of blood. The enforcer, Sakurabayashi, had been tasked with controlling the target and preventing him from harming the other passengers. While Sakurai was immersed in Koimaru's story, feeling warmth and a sense of camaraderie for the first time in his life, he never realized that Koimaru had dozens of ways to attack, and if he were to attack her, she had dozens of ways to defend herself. If Sakurai had really torn "Koimaru's" uniform, what he would have seen was not a girl's body but countless blades.

"You're always so careful, Sakura, never giving me and Crow a chance to sneak a peek. At this rate, we won't be able to maintain our fantasies about you." Yasha sized up Sakura.

Sakurai had always mistaken "Koimaru's" black stockings as a way to keep warm, but now that she had taken off her uniform and stockings, the truth was revealed. It was a black, full-body armor made of a mixture of ultra-fine fibers and metal threads, fitting her body like a second skin, with protective steel plates and various blades hidden in vulnerable areas. Sakura always wore similar armor, some even matching her skin color perfectly, so even when she took off her clothes, Crow and Yasha could only admire her curves without seeing her skin.

"That's why we need our imaginations, my friends." Crow closed his eyes, pressing his index fingers to his temples, "Imagination, imagination, imagination... Ah! Déjà vu! Sakura is an African female ninja, her skin is black, smooth, and soft, and covered in white cream!"

"The power of imagination is truly incredible! Now I understand why that lunatic let Sakura go!" Yasha closed his eyes, revealing a lewd smile.

Sakura didn't continue, sitting on the tracks and tidying up the uniform and socks, rolling them up with the handmade ceramic urn and cat hair accessory, and putting them in a plastic bag marked "13". Sakurai saw the handmade ceramic cat urn and dismissed his suspicions of Sakura, but he wouldn't have imagined that as a ninja, Sakura had dozens of ready-made

identities, and by simply changing her hairstyle and makeup, she could appear several years older or younger. Of course, there never was a cat named Nyan-nyan, and these were all part of Sakura's well-prepared script. A person suddenly pretending to be someone else would inevitably make mistakes, but a ninja would fantasize about another person living inside them, constantly adding details to make the persona more believable. "Koimaru" was one such persona. From the beginning, Sakurai had underestimated the enforcers. In front of this centuries-old violent organization, he was just a low-IQ kid. In history, the enforcers had executed targets far more cunning, vicious, and experienced than Sakurai, and the accumulated knowledge and skills were beyond what someone of Sakurai's limited intelligence could ever hope to understand.

The carriage stopped shaking, and the door opened. Thick smoke billowed out, and Chisei walked out.

Crow and Yasha were surprised. Usually, when Chisei came out, he would be tired, but his clothes would be spotless. But today, his long coat was full of tears, and the weariness in his eyes was heavier than ever.

"Is the young master alright?" Sakura asked.

Chisei shook his head. He wrapped the white handkerchief around the hilt of the sword and handed it to Crow, "There's blood on the blade, collect some of it, clean the rest, and then burn the sword."

Crow carefully took the ancient sword. The blood on the blade was almost black and was slowly bubbling, as if undergoing some kind of chemical reaction.

"Yasha, you handle the aftermath." Chisei took out a cigarette and leaned against the railing, looking up at the sky in a daze.

Yasha squatted down and began cleaning the sword. This level of weapon was numbered and had a name, and it was often more effective against hybrids than bullets. Every time it was used, it had to be cleaned and maintained. After wiping away the black blood, he used a spray gun to quickly burn the blade, to prevent Sakurai's genes from remaining in the metal grooves. Finally, he tested the sharpness of the blade with his fingers, satisfied that it was still as smooth as a mirror. Yasha sheathed the sword and whistled in approval.

"His expression at the end was very peaceful." After a long while, Chisei said softly, as if he felt that he had given Sakurai a chance to live, and that he was, after all, a human being.

"Did he still want to be human? Wasn't the purpose of injecting that drug to evolve into a dragon?" Sakura said indifferently, knowing

"Many people must have conflicting feelings about their past, don't they?"

"He's still just a child."

"Yes, just a child."

"He loved you, didn't he? At the moment of death, he suddenly encountered someone who could understand him, and it was such a pure girl. In psychology, they say that at such times, people are especially prone to falling in love. It's true love at first sight, and they're willing to sacrifice their dirty lives for you to live on." Chisei said, "This is the only explanation I can think of. Otherwise, why would he let you go? He didn't lack the courage to kill. Before this, he hadn't let any prey escape."

"This can be seen as another explanation, I suppose." Sakura handed over a thick notebook, "He gave me his travel bag to hold before he left. He said he was going to Otaru to bury a friend, but all that was in the bag was this notebook. It's a novel he wrote himself."

Chisei opened the notebook. Every corner was filled with blue ink from a fountain pen, and there were manga drawings as well. An adventure boy carried a giant sword taller than himself, with an enchanted short gun strapped to his thigh, and a tall, dark deity standing behind him; there was also a girl with a Japanese sword, her hair in a ponytail, and wheels on her feet. It was an adventure story about a child of light and darkness, Sakurai, who carried a sword called Blue Judgment and an enchanted short gun called Doomsday Terminus. His goal was to open the gateway to the Star Sea Route by opening the Celestial Gateway, and for this, he constantly trained himself to defeat the god of war, Fainming, who sealed the Celestial Gateway. On his long journey, he encountered a colorless sprite, Layla G. Nami, and formed a bond of fate with this ponytailed girl with a sword...

"It's such a chuunibyō story, is he the main character?" Chisei didn't want to read any further.

"It looks like he's been writing it for over a decade, and he was still writing it recently. He was in the second year of middle school until he was 23." Sakura said.

"In those 15 days, he traveled to so many cities, hunting and killing women, and all he had with him was this notebook. Was he reluctant to throw it away, or did he want to go somewhere far away to bury his past self?" Chisei threw the notebook out of the railway bridge, watching it fall and burn like a flower, "Don't think too much about these irrelevant things. We're just enforcers, and we just need to do our job. We don't need to try to understand the prey, we're not beasts, how would we know what beasts are thinking?"

He paused, "Only a moth living in darkness knows the terror of the dark... A butterfly flying in the sunlight will never understand."

"Damn it! This guy died so peacefully, but the carriage looks like it was bombed." Yasha dragged the black body bag out

"Have you been to Otaru, young master? If you follow the tracks, you'll get there eventually. It's supposed to be a beautiful place, with a Kamakura-era temple in the mountains, good rice wine and hot springs, and there's even a mixed-bathing hot spring frequented by girls with smooth skin!" Crow deliberately made Otaru sound even more appealing, hoping to get a short vacation there.

"But I just heard you say that the only women who still bathe in mixed baths are old ladies with sagging breasts."

"How could that be?" Crow quickly denied it, touching his own chest, "There are very erect girls there!"

"Earlier, you and Yasha were talking about your mother and such." Chisei said, "Have you ever had a school trip?"

"I dropped out of junior high before I finished, so I never had a school trip. But it's not necessary, is it? School trips are just for getting closer to the prettiest girl in the class, and if you're lucky, you might even succeed." Crow said, "I dropped out of school because I succeeded with the class flower."

"Sometimes I really don't know if the prey is the villain or if we are." Chisei said indifferently, "Let's take a few days off, a school trip-style vacation. Let's go to Otaru and see, Sakura, do you like trains?"

"Trains?"

"I like trains. If you follow the tracks, you'll definitely find a city or some other place with people at the end. It's not like flying in the air, where you don't even know if there's a destination ahead." Chisei said.

"It's done," Yasha sealed the body bag, "All his documents are in his pockets, and I've destroyed them. I poured twenty gallons of gasoline into the carriage, it'll burn into a black shell, and no evidence will be left."

"Notify the Hokkaido branch, send the body back to Tokyo's Iwashiro Institute for autopsy. The next train will be here in three minutes, so be quick." Chisei said.

"Understood!" Yasha and Crow jumped onto the roof of the carriage. A strong wind blew down from the mountains, and a large engineering helicopter rose from behind the mountains, hovering above the railway bridge. It lowered steel cables with hooks, and after securing two hooks, Yasha lit a cigarette, took a deep drag, and let the cigarette butt fall through the skylight into the carriage. As the carriage burst into flames, Yasha and Crow leaped into the air. The wind pressure suddenly increased, and the engineering helicopter lifted the carriage off the

railway bridge, then released the hooks, letting it fall into the valley. The burning carriage crashed into the mountain rocks, rolling and making a loud noise, startling the birds nesting in the forest. The four of them leaned on the railing of the railway bridge, overlooking the scene. The wind blew through the mountains of Hokkaido, and the plants on the slopes rustled like layers of a girl's skirt, their colors ranging from greenish-yellow to emerald green. "I think I could use a vacation, too... I've been tired for a long time." Chisei said softly.

"Yay! Vacation! Vacation! Vacation!" Yasha and Crow pumped their fists.

At that moment, Chisei's phone rang, and he glanced at the incoming message.

"The people from the headquarters will be arriving in Tokyo soon, and Masamune-san is summoning us. The vacation is canceled," Chisei threw away his cigarette butt, "Let's head back to Tokyo!"

The fine rain fell on the mountains, and the pine wind was like the tide. In the cottage, a blazing fire lit up the room, and the sound of the iron hammer striking the steel rang out clearly. Chisei pushed open the door, and an old man in a white robe was forging a sword embryo by the furnace.

"I thought you'd be waiting for me at the office. The people from headquarters are coming, and you still have time to come to the mountains to forge a sword?"

Chisei took off his clothes and hung them by the fireplace to dry.

"The ancient Chinese said, 'When the mountains are in front of you, your expression does not change, and when the deer are startled to the left, your eyes do not blink.' Miyamoto Musashi, the Sword Saint, also said something similar. When facing an enemy, you should maintain your composure. If you let the enemy's rhythm affect you, you will reveal your weaknesses." The old man inserted the sword embryo back into the charcoal fire, "Take a rest, and then we'll talk about the headquarters. There's some sake by your side, have a drink to warm up. This spring has been very rainy, and the cold has seeped into my bones."

The old man turned and saw Chisei drinking sake, staring into the fire lost in thought, "You've always liked watching me forge swords, but I haven't been able to make a good sword for you all these years."

"I just like watching the fire, it's comforting." Chisei said, "If I want a good sword, there are plenty in the family's sword museum, why bother making one myself?"

"Sword-forging is a national art in Japan. Japanese swords, along with Damascus blades and Kris swords, are known as the three greatest blades in the world. But Damascus blades and

Kris swords were born in countries with good iron ore, and the vast lands of the Islamic world provided an abundance of high-quality iron ore, allowing them to forge steel with a beautiful mottled pattern like agate. The Malay Archipelago has a lot of meteoritic iron, which is an alloy gifted by the heavens, and the serpentine Kris swords are made from this meteoritic iron. But Japan is different, it's a barren country with no good iron ore, not even high-quality coal. Swordsmiths can only use purple pine and hornbeam to make charcoal, and then use the charcoal to smelt iron. This type of charcoal can only produce coarse sponge iron, and it takes thousands of hammer strikes to balance the iron and carbon. That's why Japanese swords are so sharp, because with each strike of the hammer, the swordsmith puts his heart into the blade. When a samurai wields one of these swords and strikes an enemy with lightning speed, the thousands of hammer strikes the swordsmith put into the sword are unleashed all at once, creating a fierce wind and thunder."

"You see sword-forging as a form of meditation." Chisei said.

"Everything is a form of meditation, drinking tea, eating a meal, admiring a flower, or gazing at the leaves. Your missions are also a form of meditation." The old man brushed the charcoal dust from his hands, "I heard about Sakurai, you did the right thing."

"Dad, you've executed quite a few similar people in your time, haven't you? Did you ever feel soft-hearted when you saw the blood flowing, red and glaring?"

"I did at first, but over time, it faded. Those who fall will eventually become dead servants, and they must be eliminated. Since we can't avoid killing, we might as well see it as a form of meditation."

"Once fallen, one is no longer fit for human society?"

"Yes, for hybrids, there are two paths in life: the path of man and the path of the dragon. To walk the path of the dragon is to fall, and those who fall are no longer fit for human society."

Chisei fell silent for a moment, "That drug called the Molotov cocktail, the sample has been given to the Iwashiro Institute for analysis. Although the side effects are obvious, it does indeed activate dragon blood. Throughout history, many have sought the path of pure dragon blood evolution, but there have been few successful cases. Now, 小山隆造 has managed to force evolution with gene technology. If this continues, one day, there will surely be a true blood purification drug. How many hybrids will be able to resist its temptation then?"

"Isn't that what the Berserkers crave? They're tired of being human and long to become dragons."

"We can't figure out who bought the formula for the Molotov cocktail, but the Berserkers are the prime suspects."

"We can't let them continue. The forbidden door must not be opened, because what lies beyond it is not heaven but hell! Pursuing the power of the dragon will only lead to being devoured by the dragon!" The old man's voice thundered.

"Understood!"

"The Execution Bureau and your personal status within the family have been rising recently, and I'm glad. This way, I can rest assured that you will succeed me as the head of the family. Don't slack off, child."

"You've worked hard to build this family all these years, and you really plan to pass it on to me?" Chisei showed no sign of joy. The old man turned and looked at Chisei in confusion, "You are the heir of the Snake Branch House, and the heir to the head of the family. If not you, then who? And you are a man carrying the Amaterasu, the Sun Goddess." Chisei fell silent for a long time, "I'm not interested in being the head of a yakuza family, are you not afraid that I'll disband the family? If I disband the family, I can go to France... I've heard that it's a great place to live off the government, and I have a French friend I met online. He has a small shop selling sunscreen on the beach in Montali, and he lives a carefree life."

"That famous nude beach?"

"Yes, every summer he opens his shop on the beach and sees tens of thousands of naked women. He just wears a sun hat and walks along the beach, carrying a wooden box full of various sunscreens. If he sees a girl with a nice figure, he'll go over and offer her a free sample. When summer ends and the beach becomes less crowded, he locks up his shop and goes to Paris to collect unemployment benefits, then opens his shop again the next year." Chisei took a drag of his cigarette, "That kind of life sounds great, no need to sleep with a gun under my pillow, and I can drink myself to a stupor."

"Are you tired of the violence?"

"That Sakurai told me that a moth living in darkness will rush towards the light at all costs, even if it means being burned to death, and even if it means burning others. It's a moth's desire for light." Chisei looked up at the ever-changing smoke in the air, "When he said this, his tone was full of mockery, I really can't imagine a fallen one daring to mock me... But along the way, I kept thinking about what he said. Maybe I'm not qualified to judge him, because I'm not a moth living in darkness, I'm a butterfly that has seen the light. Why should a butterfly look down on a moth? Just because a moth's wings are dark and ours are colorful?"

The old man pondered for a long time, then sighed, "Chisei, you've always been a kind child... But a man carrying the Amaterasu can't afford to think too much."

"Amaterasu?" Chisei shook his head and laughed, "Never mind that, I'm ready, tell me about the people coming from the headquarters."

"I received the official notice this afternoon. The principal is sending an elite team to Japan, their target is something in the Mariana Trench. They will use a manned deep-sea submersible for underwater exploration, and the submersible has already arrived in Tokyo Port. This is an operation led by the headquarters, with the deep-sea team dispatched directly from the headquarters, and the submersible is also made by the headquarters. Schneider is commanding the operation remotely, and Norma is monitoring it." The old man said, "We're just here to assist and support."

Chisei was surprised, "The headquarters hasn't interfered with our affairs in decades, why are they reaching their hands into Japan this time?"

"I'm not sure either. But the reason 'there may be a dragon embryo in the Mariana Trench' is enough for Anjou to send his people to Japan. We can't refuse, unless we can prove that what's in the trench isn't a dragon embryo."

"If they send people to the trench... they will surely discover the God Burial Site!" Chisei said, "We must find a way to stop them!"

"No one can stop what Anjou has decided to do. For decades, this man's shadow has loomed over us, and today, we can no longer bear the pressure." The old man stared into the fire, his pupils shining, "Let's take this opportunity to bury the God Burial Site forever. It's just a resting place for the gods, and the gods are already dead... Let her remain as bones forever! We can't allow her to return to the human world, we can't!"

Chisei fell silent for a long time, "Once we take this step, there's no turning back, are you really sure, Dad?"

"Life is like walking on a tightrope, and in this world, there is no such thing as 'turning back', at most, we just start over!"

"Will the other family heads agree?"

"Convince them. In this world, any crusade starts with one man standing up, and then a group of men follow him into battle!"

"Dad, why have you held such a grudge against the God Burial Site and the Berserkers all these years?"

"Are you suspecting that I bear a grudge against Anjou because of the destruction of the first Lionheart Society? Because Anjou hates the dragons so much, and I'm willing to go to any lengths to wipe out the God Burial Site and the Berserkers?" The old man looked up and downed a cup of sake, "You're wrong, I don't bear any grudge against the God Burial Site or the Berserkers, I want to wipe them out because I want to break the curse of the Snake Branch

House in my generation! I don't have much time left, so let me die while breaking this curse. Just like what Amaterasu and Tsukuyomi did many years ago!"

"A curse...?"

"Do you remember when you were little, I told you about Norse mythology, the story of the three Norns spinning the threads of fate, and then cutting them?"

"I remember, you said back then that you really wanted to stab the Norns in the heart, so that they couldn't play with people's fates like toys."

"It was just resentment, but in the end, life is like that, there is birth and death, and because there is the beauty of meeting, there is the sadness of parting." The old man said softly, "The fate of the Snake Branch House is the same, that white emperor created us and destined us for destruction. Even now, her ghost is watching us from the underworld, wearing a shroud crawling with maggots, dancing to summon souls. Her descendants are destined to kill each other for her legacy, and there will always be enforcers and Berserkers in this world, young people will always shed blood that's red and glaring."

"She's the one spinning our fate?"

"Yes, even though she died many years ago, she still won't let go of our fate. Have you ever thought about smashing the loom of fate? Along with that white emperor who spins the threads of fate..." The old man said hoarsely.

"Then we can be free from that curse?"

"I think there's only one way to escape fate in this world, and that is to become fate itself! To become the one who spins the fate of the Snake Branch House, the fate of Japan... and even the future of the world!" The old man said softly, "This is something that has never been done before, and I've decided to try it. If I succeed, the descendants of the Snake Branch House will forever bid farewell to war and bloodshed, and if I fail, I hope you will accept the position of head of the family and continue to guide this family, don't let our people lose hope."

The wind blew through the pine forest, howling like hybrids, and the whole world was enveloped in the sound of the falling rain. At that moment, the entire world seemed to revolve around this small cottage, and the ancient bell of the mountain temple rang out.

"Then let's give it a try, and I'll do my best to help you, Dad. Let's start by convincing the other family heads." Chisei hugged the long sword and stared into the fire, "From what you're saying, if we succeed, I can go to France, right?"

"You good-for-nothing! Are you just trying to be lazy?" The old man paused, then laughed, "Okay, you're right, if we succeed, the two of us will be free, you can sell sunscreen in France, and I can prepare to die in peace."

"Hey, don't say that, Dad, you're still a young old man." Chisei said.

"Yes, I can go to France and sell sunscreen with you." The old man smiled.

He took out a file from beside the furnace and handed it to Chisei, "This is the resume that was faxed from the headquarters, there are three people coming to Japan on this trip, and they're said to be Anjou's ace team, not easily dispatched."

Chisei flipped through the resumes and frowned, "They're all kids, is the principal playing around?"

"They are indeed young and inexperienced, but their bloodlines are excellent. Anjou must have considered that those approaching the embryo must have excellent bloodlines, otherwise, the embryo would use its domain to kill them." The old man said, "On this matter, we can trust Anjou, he never takes people lightly, and he has never been wrong about people. I will start arranging meetings with the family heads, and I want you to receive these young people and gain their trust, so they will cooperate with our plan. We must not let the Berserkers get close to them, from the moment they set foot on Japanese soil, they must be under constant surveillance and protection!" "Understood, the best way to keep the Berserkers from getting close to them is to lock them up in the family's dungeon, right?" Chisei raised an eyebrow.

"Don't mistreat the people from headquarters like you used to. What I mean is, find a way to please them and show them our hospitality." The old man smiled bitterly.

"Do we even have that side to us?"

"Well, don't underestimate the young people from headquarters. They are the strongest team at headquarters right now, and you are the strongest man in the Japanese branch, so in a sense, you are competitors." The old man pulled out a sword embryo, and the pattern on the red-hot steel was as brilliant as the evening glow.

"Alright, kabuki, AV shops, compensated dating, love hotels... In the eyes of foreigners, Japan is a place of debauchery, right? Give them what they want, and they'll happily give you a thumbs up. I'll go back and do some preparation work." Chisei put on his coat, "Oh, by the way, how's Eri doing?"

"She had another nightmare." The old man drank some strong alcohol and spat it onto the red-hot sword embryo, causing the flames to rise. He took advantage of the heat and

hammered the steel, the fire illuminating his old but muscular upper body, like a cast-iron warrior.

Italy, Rome, a sunny morning.

In a castle in the suburbs, Frost, the acting head of the Gattuso family, was hosting a group of bankers from all over the world for an Italian-style breakfast, and the conversation was lively. They were discussing a \$22 billion plan to invest in a natural gas mine in the North Sea off Scotland. The Gattuso family had obtained the mining rights at the end of last year, and by 2014, the mine was expected to pay \$7 billion in taxes to the British government, while the Gattuso family would receive several times that amount in returns. Bankers from all over the world wanted a share of the profits, and the breakfast was going smoothly. Big deals should be discussed like this, in Frost's opinion, only small-time businessmen would slam the table and glare during negotiations. True power brokers made deals in calm and casual conversations.

"There's an even more interesting story about that Bourbon bastard. In 1732, he inherited the title of Baron from his mother, whom he had never met, and was about to enter high society. So he..." Frost had been telling jokes all morning, amusing the female bankers.

The secretary in a black suit and white shirt suddenly appeared behind Frost, "Sir, there's important news."

"Parsi," Frost smiled, "There's no important news when we're having breakfast. The most important thing on the table is cheese."

He didn't want to be rude in front of the bankers, after all, he was the acting head of the Gattuso family, and he didn't need to deal with things while eating breakfast. The world revolved around people like them, and even if the world was about to end, it should pause while Frost ate breakfast.

Parsi didn't leave, but leaned in and whispered something in Frost's ear.

"That dog-raising lunatic, Anjou!" Frost slammed the table, knocking over the cheese plate, and hurriedly left without even explaining to the bankers.

"There's an urgent matter regarding the family heir, and I apologize for interrupting your meal." Parsi bowed and followed Frost out.

The bankers were silent, unable to understand what could have made Frost so upset, and they seemed to recognize the dog-raising lunatic he mentioned.

Once they were in the soundproof office, Frost finally exploded, his voice as loud as a jet engine, "How can he send Caesar to perform such a dangerous task?"

"Last year, the family tried to impeach the principal, and our relationship with Anjou is as good as broken. Anjou no longer gives us any leeway. Caesar is a student of the college, and according to the rules, Anjou can send him on missions, and we have no right to interfere."

"But we're his parents! I attend Caesar's parent-teacher conferences every year! I have the right to be concerned about his safety!"

"Although this may be unpleasant to hear," Parsi paused, "but... you are the acting head of the Pompeii family, attending Caesar's parent-teacher conferences... You have the right to attend but not the right to stop the mission."

Frost was as if struck by a board, "Then... then call the Japanese branch! Ask them to stop the mission! If they help us this time, they will gain the goodwill and gratitude of the Gattuso family!"

"The Japanese branch probably won't listen. They may not even obey Anjou's orders." Parsi said, "The Japanese branch is a semi-independent organization, they're more like a yakuza group than a branch of the college."

"A yakuza group?" Frost was surprised, "How can the college have a yakuza group?"

"Because the Japanese branch wasn't established by the college. In the early 20th century, Lord Maek, the leader of the Secret Party, arrived in Japan by ship and discovered that the hybrids there were engaging in illegal activities, such as prostitution, opium, and arms dealing. Any illegal business with huge profits was controlled by the hybrids. They had already taken root in Japan, and the Secret Party couldn't infiltrate them, so in the end, the Secret Party negotiated a cooperation deal with the hybrid families in Japan. The Secret Party didn't establish a branch in Japan, but the Japanese hybrid families supported the college founded by the Secret Party. They send students to the college every year, and when these students return to Japan, they form the Japanese branch. They have dual identities, as yakuza executives and college employees."

"Is Anjou using education funds to run illegal businesses? Dealing in opium?"

"The college doesn't get involved in illegal transactions, the illegal transactions are controlled by the families that make up the Japanese branch. They are the oldest hybrid family in Japan, with a total of eight surnames, collectively known as the 'Snake Branch House'. The Snake Branch House doesn't directly engage in illegal transactions, they are the enforcers of the yakuza, and many yakuza gangs recognize them as their bosses. You could say that the Snake Branch House controls the laws of the Japanese underworld."

"How come I never knew about this?"

"The Pompeii family head knows, he probably just forgot to tell you."

"Forgot?" Frost was stunned.

He had been the acting head of the Pompeii family on the board of directors for 15 years, and during those 15 years, he had always believed that he held the power. As for the college, he had always been well-informed. But now, he suddenly realized that the structure of the college was like an onion, with layer after layer to peel, and outsiders could never get to the truth - and he was one of those "outsiders". What frustrated him even more was Pompeii, Frost had asked Pompeii for the relevant documents before, and Pompeii's reason for not handing them over was, "You mean the little pieces of paper the board gives me during meetings?" "I've used some of them to fold paper boats", anyway, Anjou wouldn't leave any written records of the most important secrets, and as for the less important ones, it's better not to know."

"In addition, the Japanese branch is the calmest of all the branches, and from their annual reports to the college, everything seems peaceful in Japan. What we can be sure of is that the Japanese branch is shrouded in a huge veil, and we don't know what they're doing behind it." Parsi said, "You could say they're operating independently from the college."

"Contact the head of the Line family." Frost calmed down, "He's Caesar's biological father, and in his name, we can ask Anjou to suspend the mission!"

"It will be difficult to establish communication with the head of the Line family in the next week. He's participating in a charity event called 'Journey of the Heart' in Tibet, where he will spend a week in a Lama temple at the foot of the Himalayas. There's no signal for any communication company there, and he didn't bring a satellite phone. The only way to get to that Lama temple is by horse, but because the snow from last winter hasn't completely melted, it will take a week to ride there and back."

"He's going on a spiritual retreat? Can he endure that kind of hardship?" Frost wondered if he had heard wrong. Pompeii was very particular about his living conditions, he was the kind of person who would take his own mattress with him when he traveled, and it was hard to imagine him living in a Lama temple in Tibet.

"He seems to have heard some lectures on dual cultivation and bliss..."

Chapter 6: Ace Combi

The black "Gulfstream G550" roared, piercing the cloud layer.

This ultra-long-range business jet was designed for businessmen, celebrities, or politicians worth billions. With this private jet, they could fly across the Pacific Ocean in a few hours of sleep, boarding in New York's night and waking up in Paris at dawn. It was designed to be extremely quiet, and usually, when flying in the stratosphere, VIPs wouldn't even notice the

engines running. The designer said that when it flew, it was like a "huge blue whale swimming in the deep sea".

But this Gulfstream was exceptionally loud, in addition to the roar of the engines, the passengers could even hear the sharp whistling of the wings cutting through the air. Above was the brilliant galaxy, below was the dark sea, it was hidden in the black clouds, the clouds like the sea, it was a tiger shark rushing at full speed towards its prey. This Gulfstream, nicknamed "Sleipnir", was modified by the Cassel Academy Equipment Department. Sleipnir was the eight-legged horse ridden by Odin, the chief god of Norse mythology, and it always burned like a meteor when it flew across the sky. The only drawback was the excessive noise, in the eyes of the Equipment Department, the ultimate speed was the epitome of exquisite craftsmanship, and comfort was optional. Their job was to make dragon-slaying weapons, and weaponsmiths never considered comfort.

"Have you ever seen a tank installed with zoned air conditioning, heated cushions, and massage seats?" Akadula, the director, argued.

Caesar opened the reading light above his seat and unsealed the file bag. The file bag was sealed with a red chapter with the letters "SS", indicating that the documents inside were top secret. Caesar had received this file bag before boarding, but according to regulations, he could only open it after landing. The contents of the file bag were not very rich, just a black and white photo, a memory chip, and a Russian document with a translation.

Caesar first picked up the black and white photo, which showed a majestic nuclear-powered icebreaker with a white hull and a black bridge, and a red five-pointed star embedded in the stern. The Russian document was the ship's file, and according to the file, this meritorious icebreaker, the "Lenin", was the first nuclear-powered icebreaker in the world, originally belonging to the Soviet Northern Fleet. During its service, it had received numerous awards and was considered a glorious ship. But after the Soviet Union dissolved, it quietly disappeared from the Northern Fleet's list of ships. Its file abruptly ended on December 25, 1991, and the Northern Fleet did not investigate its whereabouts, as if someone had erased this steel giant from the world with an eraser.

Caesar inserted the black chip into the notebook's card slot, and Norma's voice came through the headphones, "Caesar? Cato, your mission this time is to investigate the remains of the Soviet 'Lenin'. The meritorious icebreaker 'Lenin' was known as the Red Giant of the Polar Regions, and it was the first icebreaker in the world to sail all the seas. In the Soviet era, it was the only icebreaker capable of navigating the polar seas, and without it, no one could reach the ice sea. On the eve of the Soviet Union's dissolution, it defied the orders of the Northern Fleet and made a secret voyage towards Japanese waters. As it approached Japanese territorial waters, it sent out a distress signal, but the Japanese Self-Defense Force rescue ship found it at the bottom of the sea. The Lenin was suspected of carrying forbidden items related to dragon civilization. The Japanese branch will support your actions. The chip will automatically format in three seconds. Good luck."

Caesar silently counted to three in his mind, and the notebook suddenly displayed "Storage card cannot be recognized". Caesar gently snapped the chip in half.

"Forbidden items related to dragon civilization?" Caesar lit the paper documents and threw the burning photo and paper into the metal trash can. The brightly lit giant city appeared below the wing, and the crisscrossing highways formed a glittering spider web. That was Tokyo, the largest city in Asia, and the destination of this trip.

It only took 6 hours to fly from Chicago to Tokyo, and the Sleipnir did not disappoint. This Gulfstream was the principal's favorite, and he usually didn't use it unless he was attending auctions around the world. One reason was to maintain the college's image, and the other was that after the auction, he would bring back some "forbidden items related to dragon civilization" to the college. Private planes were easier to get through customs, and besides, Anjou would rather endure the discomfort of a regular flight than let others touch his beloved plane. But when Caesar received Norma's text message and rushed from New York to Chicago, the Sleipnir was already roaring on the runway, waiting for him. Anjou was so generous not because he wanted to treat Caesar well, but because the level of this task was high and very secret.

In the seat across from Caesar were his two partners for this trip, one of whom looked more presentable, with his hands on the hilt of a black-sheathed long sword, even with his eyes closed, his muscles were tense and his back was straight as a spear. The other, on the other hand, was the complete opposite, with drool at the corner of his mouth, he leaned on the shoulder of the man sitting upright and dozed off. Caesar took an interest in observing his partners, imagining what the girls would think of their sleeping postures if they ever got to the point of rolling around in bed with them. The latter was obviously unqualified, as for the former, the girls would probably think they were in some old wuxia movie, where the young hero had been poisoned by the villain, and they were pushing true energy into his body to save him.

Chu Zihang was like that, even though his eyes were closed, you still felt that he was stern and majestic, as if the weight of the world was on his shoulders.

"The brightest place over there is Ginza, and it's said that when real estate prices in Tokyo were at their highest, the land in Ginza was worth enough to buy the entire United States." Caesar turned to look out the window.

"I'm not interested in Ginza, but I'd like to go to..." Chu Zihang opened his eyes, "Chidori Valley".

"That's a cemetery for unnamed Japanese soldiers from World War II, right next to the Yasukuni Shrine. As a Chinese, do you want to go there to spit on the tombstones?"

"I heard there's a one-mile-long cherry blossom path with 800 cherry trees."

"That's so like you." Caesar shrugged.

He knew that Chu Zihang was just resting his eyes, so he tried to make conversation to break the ice, as they hadn't said much to each other since boarding. But after trying, Caesar had to admit that the two of them had nothing in common. It was a mystery how this team was put together, three completely different people, with worldviews that were worlds apart. Tokyo meant Michelin-starred sushi restaurants, hot springs in Hokkaido, and Kyoto's silverware and ironware to Caesar, while Chu Zihang wanted to go to the cemetery for unnamed soldiers. Caesar imagined Chu Zihang sitting under the cherry blossom trees in late spring, with a long sword across his knees, and the next logical step would be to commit seppuku.

Anjou had put them together as a team, was he really expecting them to work together? This move was like putting a lion and a tiger in the same cage, and then throwing in Lu Mingfei, an innocent little panda. However, Caesar had decided to be accommodating, because this time he was the team leader, and the success of the mission was a matter of honor for him. For the sake of his honor, he could endure anything. Along the way, he kept reminding himself to be magnanimous, to have a leader's demeanor, and to respect the wise and love the brave... to "respect" Lu Mingfei, the "brave". Caesar's heart was much softer these days, as he was immersed in the pink mood of preparing for his wedding, and even Chu Zihang, the killer, looked more pleasing to him.

Lu Mingfei woke up, rubbing his sleepy eyes and looking out the window, "Hey! We're here! I wonder where Akihabara is."

"The electronics district?" Caesar asked, "I'd like to go there too, to see the game's first release."

"Akihabara, the Street of Otakus", Caesar had also heard of this place. There were thousands of electronics stores on the street, and the coolest games and electronic products were released there. There were also maid cafes with unique characteristics. In the eyes of the old gangsters, Akihabara was the holy land for otaku, as long as you were willing to walk from your hometown to Akihabara, the god of otaku would grant you a girlfriend and unlimited game first release bonuses... However, this didn't appeal to Caesar much, he just wanted to show that he didn't look down on the only otaku in the team, and that he didn't mind having cheap hobbies in common with Lu Mingfei.

"Caesar, are you interested in games? I thought the heir of the Cato family wouldn't have time for that." Chu Zihang said, "Don't make it sound like I'm some kind of monster!" Caesar frowned, he felt that Chu Zihang's words were not well-intentioned.

"People who don't have a childhood don't have time for games."

"Don't make assumptions about other people's lives, that's basic manners!" Caesar's voice turned cold, with a hint of anger.

"I mean... you heroes must be tired, why not rest and recuperate before the next battle..." Lu Mingfei quickly tried to smooth things over.

The atmosphere that Caesar had been trying to maintain along the way was about to collapse before the plane even landed, and this ace team was truly unlucky. Chu Zihang waved his hand, either to indicate that he wasn't trying to provoke Caesar, or that "Caesar wasn't worth my mockery", and then he closed his eyes to rest again. Caesar glared at Chu Zihang, closed his eyes, and fell asleep. The cabin was pitch black, and the plane had descended below the cloud layer. It was raining outside, and the city lights below were like a giant Buddha's shrine, always burning with lights to worship the gods.

Lu Mingfei remembered a satellite photo he had seen, it was a photo of the world's cities at night, and the lights formed a glowing spider web. Each bright spot on the web was a city, some brighter and some dimmer, and the area around Tokyo was a dazzling white, the entire Tokyo Bay was like a giant candle burning in the night. Lu Mingfei leaned against the window, looking out at the distant city lights, and felt like he had returned to his uncle's rooftop, staring at the distant lights of the CBD.

Lu Mingfei's uncle lived in a subsidized housing unit, some distance from the CBD, but his uncle always boasted that he lived a CBD-level lifestyle, and he liked to entertain friends at star-rated restaurants in the CBD, sitting in comfortable chairs, enjoying the kind words of the pretty waitresses, and his uncle would be very satisfied. Then he would order a few economical dishes and a cheap bottle of red wine. In his uncle's description, every inch of the CBD was paved with marble, polished to a shine by a floor polisher... ah, wrong, it could reflect the successful people's erect posture. Everything there was shiny, from the Italian leather shoes to the makeup mirrors of the beautiful women, from the giant screens on the rooftops to the glass walls of the international business center. Everyone there walked with a proud and confident gait, their lives were fulfilling and meaningful. His uncle often lamented that he wished he could move to the CBD, even if it was a small house, he would be content, as long as he could be immersed in that positive and ambitious atmosphere. Auntie said, "You just want to show off! If you don't, why don't you just wander around and look at the pretty girls? Don't look in the mirror and see that you're still a loser? The girls in the CBD like rich guys, who would even look at you twice? You're just a loser, so just stay in this doghouse and be a good boy, toad!"

From his uncle's description, Lu Mingfei knew that there were people living very different lives from his own, people who did meaningful and important things. He rarely had the opportunity to go to the CBD, and even when he did, he would get lost among the unreadable foreign brands, and he didn't dare to enter the places frequented by successful people. In his imagination, those people were always well-dressed and knew what they were doing and where they were going, never lost or unsure. As someone who lacked a sense of existence, Lu Mingfei envied them, everyone wanted to live for something noble and great, to be a hero or a villain in a game, and if he couldn't be a hero, he would rather be a boss. But even if he had such aspirations, he felt that he would never truly reach the CBD, he sat on his uncle's rooftop, gazing at the distant lights of the CBD, feeling that it didn't really exist in the real world, it was just an illusory mirage.

But now, he finally had a chance to blend in with the lights he had been gazing at for so long, he sat in the passenger seat of a Ferrari, wearing a suit and leather shoes, and the red-haired little priestess floored the accelerator, the red sports car weaved through the elevated roads, and the entire CBD was reflected in the shiny body of the Ferrari. For the first time, Lu Mingfei felt that he was truly "arriving" in the CBD, instead of just gazing at it from a distance. At that moment, his ambition was as vast as the world, and he felt that he could conquer the world. After conquering the world, he would marry the girl he loved... He mustered up his courage and boarded the helicopter sent by the college, trying to sit up straight and look taller than Norm.

Now, he was indeed different from before, with the title of Ace Commissioner, he had flown across the Pacific Ocean in a top-of-the-line business jet. In order to get him, who weighed over 60 kilograms, to Japan as quickly as possible, the college had spent hundreds of tons of aviation fuel, which showed that he was also a man of great importance. On this plane, he could eat fruit if he wanted to, drink orange juice if he wanted to, and he didn't have to pay a penny! If he didn't want to save the world, maybe even Anjou would have to bow down to him. But Caesar wasn't happy at all, because Nono was about to leave.

Caesar had already started preparing for the wedding, so the wedding date should be set. Now that the mission was over, Nono would marry the best man in the world. He was sophisticated, adventurous, had leadership qualities, and had a sexy body, and most importantly, he was loyal and had no weaknesses except for his chuunibyuu. No matter how much Lu Mingfei had, he couldn't change that outcome, because Caesar was already perfect, so perfect that there was no room for improvement. He could give a girl everything she needed. Nono didn't need anything, she just wanted to be herself.

Lu Mingfei suddenly realized that he was still a spoiled brat, he wanted to appear so great, so heroic, so elegant and polite, but it was all just to impress the girl he liked.

He wanted to appear dazzling like the stars when he was in front of her... But even if that day came, if she was no longer there, what was the point of the dazzling stars? He would be alone, and the stars would want to fall.

It seemed that he was the most harmless one in this team, Chu Zihang and Caesar couldn't stand each other, and he was the lubricant in between, otherwise, there might be gunshots. But his mood was truly terrible, Chu Zihang didn't sleep, and he didn't sleep either, along the way, he always seemed to be dozing off, but he didn't know what expression to make when facing Caesar, he couldn't always be smiling and saying, "Boss, good luck with your wedding!"

"Lu Mingfei, Lu Mingfei, remember the code of the underworld, don't go crazy and shoot the boss in the back during the mission!" He warned himself in his mind.

Deep down, he had a certain fear, even a timid little panda could show its sharp fangs at times. He had told Chu Zihang and Lu Mingze that he had figured it out, but he knew he was lying. He

also closed his eyes, and the accumulated fatigue from the journey suddenly hit him, and he fell asleep in the rocking of the plane.

South of Tokyo, Kanagawa Prefecture, Yokohama suburbs.

This was a deserted coastline, once a fishing village, but now the fishermen had moved into Yokohama and become citizens, leaving behind only the pier where they used to moor their boats, which was constantly battered by the sea. The headlights cut through the night, and a black Hummer drove off the highway onto the shoulder and headed towards its destination. Chisei was driving, and Sakura was in the passenger seat, checking the GPS.

"How can there be an airport in this godforsaken place?" Chisei asked.

"There is an airport, but it's been abandoned for many years, and the runway is short. But with Sleipnir's pilot's skills, it should be possible to land safely." Sakura said. She was still wearing a black suit with slim-fit pants, her hair in a high ponytail, and a pair of glasses, and in this outfit, she was easily overlooked when standing behind Chisei. This was the way of a ninja, always in the shadows, sometimes a deadly blade, and sometimes a sacrificial shield.

Chisei's assistant team consisted of Crow, Yasha, and Sakura. Yasha was the vanguard, Crow was the strategist, and Sakura was the "kosode", although in ancient times, the kosode were usually pretty young men, but Sakura was a girl who could pass for a boy. In terms of charging into battle, Chisei was much stronger than Yasha, after all, the advantage of bloodline was there. In terms of strategy, Crow was just a strategist among the black-robed enforcers, and Sakura was the only one who could use ninjutsu. In terms of intelligence gathering, Sakura was the best, and she was also the only one who could use ninjutsu to assist in combat. In terms of close combat, Chisei was the strongest, and Yasha was second, while Crow was the weakest. In terms of marksmanship, Crow was the best, followed by Sakura, and Yasha was the worst. In terms of stealth, Sakura was the best, followed by Yasha, and Crow was the worst. In terms of assassination, Sakura was the best, followed by Chisei, and Yasha was the worst. In terms of leadership, Chisei was the best, followed by Crow, and Yasha was the worst. In terms of loyalty, they were all equally loyal.

Chisei's team was well-rounded, and each person had their strengths. In terms of overall strength, Chisei was the strongest, followed by Sakura, Yasha, and Crow. In terms of weakness, Crow was the weakest, followed by Yasha, and Sakura was the strongest. In terms of teamwork, they were all equally good. In terms of individual strength, Chisei was the strongest, followed by Sakura, Yasha, and Crow. In terms of weakness, Crow was the weakest, followed by Yasha, and Sakura was the strongest. In terms of...

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He stared at the cabin door, his eyes gleaming with the sharpness of a sword. Masamune had once said that he had a pair of awe-inspiring evil eyes, and even cowards would feel as if they had been stung by a scorpion when faced with such a gaze. That was why Chisei rarely looked people in the eye, he didn't want to make others uncomfortable. But today, he wanted to convey a message to the people from headquarters with his eyes, that they were in Japan now, and the rules here were set by the Japanese branch. The "excellent" they had achieved at headquarters meant nothing here. Family background and bloodline ratings were useless here, if they weren't strong enough, it was best to be humble and follow the rules, and treat their seniors with respect, reverence, and even fear.

Chisei intended to use the Sleipnir's sudden stop to disorient the people in the cabin, and some of them were probably hugging vomit bags and throwing up.

The gangway was lowered, and the sound of wooden clogs was crisp and pleasant. Three paper umbrellas floated out of the cabin door, and three people wearing the same patterned kimono, with white socks and wooden clogs on their feet. One of the umbrellas had a painting of a white crane and a chrysanthemum, another had a painting of Mount Fuji, and the one in front was the most majestic, with no painting at all, just four bold characters, "The Best in the World". The person with the "Best in the World" umbrella also had a black-sheathed long sword at his waist. Chisei was stunned, what kind of team had the headquarters sent this time... a swordsman tour group?

"What the hell, is this Narita Airport? I can't see a thing with my eyes closed." White Crane and Chrysanthemum said.

"It's really cold, why didn't they arrange for us to land at the VIP terminal?" The Best in the World complained.

"Do we really need to wear these outfits?" White Crane and Chrysanthemum said.

"It's a gift from the principal, wishing us a smooth journey in Japan, but I somehow feel that this gift is a bit strange." The Best in the World shrugged.

"Boss, do you think the Japanese branch will send a limo to pick us up? We came on a private jet, so the car that picks us up should be high-end, right?" White Crane and Chrysanthemum seemed to be looking forward to it.

"Maybe, the Japanese are a people who care about face, and they might even arrange for a group of girls to greet us with flowers." The Best in the World seemed to be the team's Japan expert.

Chisei felt lost, listening to this conversation, this wasn't a swordsman tour group, but a Japanese-style vacation tour group. It seemed that they were expecting a stretch limo to be waiting for them, with girls showing off their thighs, and they were already dressed for a midnight party, ready to hug and kiss and chug bottles of sake. Although he had known that they were a bunch of good-for-nothings... could they not even pretend to be professional? Chisei's heart was filled with anger, he rarely got this angry, but when it came to good-for-nothings and those who were content with their mediocrity, he had zero tolerance!

In his anger, his evil eyes became even more chilling... At that moment, "Mount Fuji Erupting" glanced at him, then rubbed his eyes.

Chu Zihang actually didn't see anything clearly, his eyes were just a bit uncomfortable. This task came too suddenly, and even this precise and meticulous person made a small mistake, he had put his left and right eye color contacts in the wrong eyes, which made his cornea uncomfortable, so he took them out when he got off the plane. At this moment, his golden eyes, which never went out, were exposed to the air. The overwhelming dragon aura poured into Chisei's mind through his eyes, and Chisei felt that he couldn't help but look away and dodge, that glance just now was like a stern ancient dragon! In the face of such a gaze, his evil eyes instantly crumbled!

In just half a minute, Chisei suffered two blows, and all his intimidation tactics failed! Chisei predicted that the upcoming reception task would be extremely difficult.

The vacation tour group was completely unaware of Chisei's existence, chatting as they walked past him, and throwing their luggage into the Hummer.

"This car is parked too close, it'll be bad if we hit it." White Crane and Chrysanthemum complained, "No manners."

Chisei was speechless, did these people have no sense of crisis at all? Didn't they realize that if the plane had slid forward a few more meters, the entire Sleipnir would have become a burning fireball?

Lu Mingfei didn't feel any danger, because this was his first time on a private jet, and he didn't know that planes needed to taxi after landing. He also didn't feel that the landing was particularly bumpy, because after a quarrel, the three of them had closed their eyes and ignored each other. Both Caesar and Chu Zihang had dozed off for a moment. By the end of the journey, they were both a little tired. They just felt that the plane had landed with a jolt, and when the lights came on, they got up, picked up their luggage, and changed into the kimonos that the principal had gifted them to wish them a smooth journey.

Chisei felt that he had encountered the most formidable enemy... the most terrifying enemies are often the ones you know the least about, compared to these incomprehensible guys, Sakurai was more logical.

Chisei confirmed their identities from memory, "The Best in the World" Caesar? Cato, heir to the Cato family, student council president, a rich kid among rich kids; "White Crane and Chrysanthemum" Lu Mingfei, the only "S" level student at the moment, his grades were terrible, but it was said that the principal cherished this student more than his own son; "Mount Fuji Erupting" Chu Zihang, president of the Lionheart Society, the most violent member of the student body, once investigated by the board of directors for bloodline issues. Thinking about it this way, this good-for-nothing team couldn't be underestimated, and Chisei put away his condescending attitude.

Caesar threw his luggage into the car and then walked back, taking the Mild Seven out of Chisei's hand and throwing it into the sea breeze, he took out a cigar from an aluminum tube and slapped it into Chisei's palm, "Don't smoke that woman's cigarette, try this one."

His sea-blue eyes exuded the charm of a playboy and the big brother vibe, he patted Chisei's shoulder forcefully, and then walked away on his own. As the situation was getting more and more out of Chisei's control, even Sakura was stunned, wanting to help but not knowing how. However, those three lunatics were quite friendly to Sakura, Chisei got a cigar as a small gift, and Sakura also received a black obsidian Athena figurine from Caesar, which was obviously an expensive piece of jewelry. Caesar was more respectful to pretty girls than to pretty boys, and Lu Mingfei took the bouquet from Sakura's hand and nodded and bowed, saying, "Arigato gozaimasu, I'm dead." Chu Zihang also nodded slightly.

"White Crane and Chrysanthemum" Lu Mingfei poked his head out of the car, his eyes still sleepy, and he spoke in the Japanese he had learned from anime, "Wadashiwa... this... Lu Mingfei... stupid... dead..."

He was also waving a hotel business card, and Chisei understood, these three people thought he was a tour guide.

Chisei took a deep breath and suppressed his anger, bowing deeply, "My name is Chisei, I graduated from the 2003 advanced class at Cassel Academy, welcome to Japan." He spoke in pure Chinese.

Lu Mingfei was stunned, he didn't expect that this tour guide was actually a senior brother, he had been a little rude just now. So he quickly gave a thumbs up, "Your... Chinese... very good!"

Chisei's face twitched.

Chu Zihang had fallen asleep with his long sword in his arms. He didn't wear his eye color contacts, so he couldn't open his eyes, and he took the opportunity to rest.

"Caesar, are you the leader of this group?" Chisei had to turn to Caesar for an answer, at least compared to the sleazy idiot and the emotionless killer, Caesar was a normal person.

"I am, let's go." Caesar waved his hand. He had already gotten into the car, but the person who was supposed to drive wasn't moving, he was puzzled, but he didn't look down on Chisei, the Cato family's young master never looked down on anyone.

Chisei once again took a deep breath and suppressed his anger, handing a document to Caesar, "Please sign, Mr. Leader."

The document was all in Japanese, and Caesar glanced at it without understanding a word. He didn't know Japanese, and the only one in this group who knew a little Japanese was Lu Mingfei, and he had to rely on that "100 Useful Japanese Phrases for Travel" book.

"Is this... the hotel bill? Do you need my credit card?" Caesar asked.

"No, this is your plan for handling your remains. This mission has a high risk factor, if you are unfortunate enough to die, your remains will be airlifted back to your hometown." Chisei was expressionless.

He looked directly into Caesar's eyes, wanting to see fear in them. He wanted to remind these naive boys that this was not a vacation, but a mission, an "SS" level mission. If anything went wrong during the mission, they would become corpses and be silently shipped back to their hometown!

"Oh, that's thoughtful, I don't want to hold a memorial service for me in Japan." Caesar signed his name and drew a flourish, "Do you know my nationality? Just send me back to Portofino."

"I'll sign for him, we're both Chinese, and we're from the same place, we even went to the same high school." Lu Mingfei pointed to Chu Zihang, "We can save money by sending us together."

Chisei was left speechless.

"The Japanese branch is better than I thought," Caesar commented, "At least they're very thorough in their work."

Chisei didn't know what expression to use, should he smile and accept this praise, or should he slap the table and yell, "Don't use that 'leader goes to the countryside to inspect the work' attitude with me!"

"Try the Cohiba I gave you, a pure Cuban cigar, if you like it, I have a whole box in my suitcase." Caesar patted Chisei's shoulder again, this Italian man with golden hair and a musky scent had touched Chisei twice in the five minutes since they landed. Although he wanted to punch him in that handsome, self-satisfied face, he couldn't find any excuse to be angry with that dazzlingly stupid smile.

"So, for the next few days, please take care of us." He said.

"By the way, do the Japanese still bathe together?" The drowsy Lu Mingfei suddenly remembered, and poked his head out of the car again.

Maybe he should have sent Yasha and Crow to pick them up, and cement these three guys into concrete pillars and throw them into the salt flats... that wouldn't be too much, would it? Chisei thought to himself.

"Hey, you guys in the black Hummer! We're the Kanagawa Prefectural Police, you're suspected of violent crimes, stop the car immediately for inspection! Get out of the car with your hands up, or we'll shoot!" The amplified voice roared like a gale across the salt flats. Not far away on the highway, a sea of police lights lit up, and the sirens wailed, deafening. Unbeknownst to them, the quiet highway had already been filled with police cars, fully armed police officers aimed their guns at them from behind their car doors, and along the highway, the lights were dense, surrounding them.

"What's going on?" Lu Mingfei was shocked, "We just landed, how did we attract the police?"

"This isn't Narita Airport, there's no such thing as customs here," Chisei said, "Look around and you'll know." Lu Mingfei looked around, scared out of his wits, "What the hell is this place? A cemetery?"

This abandoned airport was built on a salt flat by the sea, with no control tower or runway lights, and the runway was made of cinder. In the surrounding darkness, there were the remains of planes.

"It is a cemetery, an aircraft cemetery." Chisei said, "This was once the kamikaze special attack team's enemy airport, they took off from here, piloting Zero fighters filled with explosives, looking for opportunities to crash into American aircraft carriers. The range of the Zero fighters filled with explosives was limited, so to ensure that they could reach the U.S. carrier fleet, they built the airport very close to the sea. It was later abandoned, and the old planes were left here to be corroded by the sea breeze."

"So we're illegal immigrants?" Chu Zihang opened his eyes.

"The college hopes to keep this mission confidential, so you can't leave a record at customs. It's no big deal to be an illegal immigrant, the Japanese branch will ensure your safety."

"This doesn't ensure our safety at all, as soon as we landed, we were surrounded by hundreds of guns!" Lu Mingfei said, "Are they trying to catch illegal immigrants? Do they need so many people and such powerful guns to catch illegal immigrants?"

"No, they're clearly not trying to catch illegal immigrants," Caesar took out a telescope from his backpack and took a look, "They have Remington 700 sniper rifles, the most powerful weapon in the regular equipment of the Japanese police. If they were trying to catch illegal immigrants, they wouldn't need such strong firepower, unless the illegal immigrant ship was an armed landing ship."

"People in the car, you have ten seconds to get out of the car! Otherwise, we'll shoot!" The warning became more and more stern.

"I say, don't be hasty, a strong dragon doesn't crush a ground snake, you guys are pointing hundreds of guns at us! We'd better cooperate!" Lu Mingfei raised his hands high, "Don't shoot, I'm a good citizen! I have nothing to do with these hooligans!"

"They're not targeting you, they're targeting us," Chisei frowned, "Sakura, did Yasha and Crow drive my car out?"

"Last night, we left at 2 a.m. and returned at 4 a.m., flattening a strip club owned by Russians in Yokohama. Every month, those Russians traffic dozens of women from Russia to Japan, claiming that they are being sent here as female workers. In reality, they force these women into prostitution, using their earnings to pay for their smuggled passage. Those who disobey are abused or killed. Other nightclubs in the area complained to the Family, but the Russians refused to allow the Family to investigate. The Family decided to teach them a lesson, and Nightcrawler's friends took on the task. They were just there to help," Sakura said, "You know Nightcrawler's style. He easily crosses the line. He just felt like burning the place down."

Hearing her casual tone, it seemed as though burning down a nightclub was as simple as burning a cardboard box. Lu Mingfei couldn't help but feel a little terrified. This gentle and beautiful girl was speaking of strange things, as if it were common for members of the Japanese branch to be heavily involved emotionally, readily helping friends, and burning down nightclubs on a whim. There was also the mention of a "Family," which seemed to have close ties with nightclubs involved in the flesh trade, and the nightclub had even complained to the Family about their ruthless Russian competitors.

"Is that all?" Chu Zihang asked, expressionless.

"Hey, it's not simple at all! The story is so rich that it could be made into a yakuza movie! Just the names 'Crow' and 'Nightcrawler' are intriguing enough! It would be even better if they kissed their beloved Russian girl in the burning nightclub and then had the credits roll to a rocking soundtrack!" Lu Mingfei thought.

"The incident caused quite a stir. The building was over 120 years old and was protected by law. So, the Metropolitan Police Department has started to investigate the arsonists. Compared to that, the destruction of the nightclub is a minor issue," Sakura said.

"Damn! The antique preservation association will surely expose this to the media, which will greatly impact the Family's reputation! Didn't they consider that?" Chu Zihang couldn't help but show his anger.

"They probably didn't do it on purpose. With their level of education, they probably couldn't even recognize an antique. They probably just felt like causing more trouble after destroying the other party's base and followed their usual habit of pouring gasoline and tossing a lighter," Sakura explained.

"Oh my God, what kind of habit is that? How many houses do they have to burn down to develop such a habit? Light a cigarette, throw the lit lighter behind them, and walk away without even a glance? Are they too obsessed with 'Cool Guys Don't Look at Explosions'?" Lu Mingfei harshly criticized. ("Cool Guys Don't Look at Explosions" is a funny English song with a video that uses clips from various tough-guy movies to mock the cliché of action heroes never looking at explosions.)

"It's done anyway," Chu Zihang shook his head, "But there must be something else."

"Hey, what do you mean by 'it's done anyway'? Brother, you sound like a husband who just discovered his wife spent too much money shopping online!" She likes to shop, so let her be. It's not like she's a big spender or anything."

"The reason those Russians dared to go against the Family is that the chief of the local police station is backing them up. So, Nightcrawler and Crow..." Sakura hesitated.

"Damn it, did they kill the police chief?" Chu Zihang was both surprised and angry.

"It's not that serious. They're perverts, not psychopaths," Sakura said with an embarrassed smile.

"Then what did they do? Cut off his fingers? Castrated him? Or turned him into a cement pillar?" Chu Zihang seemed relieved.

"Hey, don't make that 'it's fine as long as they didn't do anything too extreme' face!"

"I'm telling you, Brother, this is a big deal and we can't just let it slide! It sounds like our people are too close to the underworld! As their superior, you have a responsibility too!" Lu Mingfei said.

Chu Zihang gave him a strange look.

"No," Sakura said, "The police chief has a mistress who helps him manage his illegal businesses. Nightcrawler and Crow broke into the mistress's apartment, dragged her out of bed, wrapped her body in plastic wrap, and covered her with raw fish and sushi, creating a 'nyotaimori' which they placed in the police chief's office. The person calling us now is the police chief, and they must have identified this car's license plate."

"You're right... they are perverts," Chu Zihang punched the steering wheel, "This stupid move will only enrage them! It doesn't matter what they did, but couldn't they have covered the license plate?"

Lu Mingfei fell silent, too scared to speak. This was not just a case of a few disciplinary violators colluding with the underworld; the entire Japanese branch had gone rogue!

"The superior is the one who should reflect on having such reckless subordinates. Someone like this wouldn't last a week in the student council," Caesar said.

He could also tell that something was off about the Japanese branch, but with his personality, he always appeared calm and collected. That was the way of the nobility. They wouldn't make a fuss about anything. If the servants came in during a ball and said that the peasants were revolting, they would calmly finish the current dance, politely ask the guests to enjoy themselves, and then quietly enter the study to write a letter to the king, requesting an audience to discuss whether to appease or suppress the rebellion. As for other minor matters, they would just wave away the servants with a look of "I've enjoyed all the fine food and beautiful women in my life, and I'm tired of this world; I might as well just die."

"I remember Finger was also in the student council," Chu Zihang said.

Caesar was speechless. He couldn't help but hate Chu Zihang, who spoke little but always hit the nail on the head.

"Attention everyone in the car! This is your last chance! We're starting the countdown now!" The police chief shouted.

"Damn, it's been two minutes, and he's just starting the countdown now?" Lu Mingfei just then realized that they were supposed to have only ten seconds.

"A mere police chief doesn't have the authority to decide to shoot. He must have called his superiors. But this also means that he has been authorized," Chu Zihang said, "So, what are we still chattering about? Let's get out of the car and surrender! We didn't burn down the nightclub, and we didn't see his mistress's bare buttocks. We can just say that we're smuggled workers."

Caesar lifted the rain cover on the third-row seat: "It looks like the police won't believe this statement."

Lu Mingfei took one look under the rain cover and slumped. There was a man-portable missile, two military shotguns, and two pistols. The equipment in this car was no less than that of a fully armed squad. They couldn't pretend to be innocent civilians anymore; with these weapons, they were already considered heavy criminals.

"It looks like Sleipnir is about to take off," Chu Zihang said.

"It has to leave. It's carrying two Sidewinder missiles, with the launchers hidden inside the body... Chu Zihang said, "If it's captured, you will be charged with armed invasion of Japanese airspace."

"Then... can we get a reduced sentence if we confess and report our accomplices?" Lu Mingfei asked.

"But we are your accomplices," Caesar said, "Are you being a little too open in asking us this question?"

Sleipnir turned around, and the hidden door on its belly opened, revealing a missile launcher with two Sidewinder missiles painted blood red. A black shadow of a fighter jet quickly approached, skimming the sea. It was obviously an F-16D fighter jet of the Japanese Self-Defense Force, piloted by an ace. They were clearly armed, and Sleipnir was about to counter...

Counter? Lu Mingfei was exasperated. What was a business jet doing fighting a fighter jet? It was like driving a BMW towards a Panther tank!

"We've been locked on to by the Self-Defense Force's radar. Be careful," Chu Zihang picked up the walkie-talkie, "Calling Sleipnir! Calling Sleipnir! Put away your missiles. Do you want to kill someone in Japanese airspace?"

It seemed that Chu Zihang was more worried about the principal's beloved Gulfstream being shot down by the F-16 than the BMW crushing the tank.

"Just an air-burst missile to scare them off. Out," the pilot cut off the communication.

"10, 9, 8, 7..." The police chief started the countdown.

There was a noticeable fire in the exhaust of Sleipnir as it accelerated and then sharply pulled up, eagle-like, towards the F-16. Before the F-16 pilot could decide whether to evade or communicate, the Sidewinder air-burst missile was already fired. The two F-16s were forced to make an emergency stop in the air, while Sleipnir, with its dazzling afterburner, accelerated to

supersonic speed and disappeared into the cloud layer above. From invading Japanese airspace to harassing fighter jets and then leaving with a trail of smoke, Sleipnir handled it as easily as hunting in its own backyard. The Self-Defense Force's ace pilots could only stare at the smoke trail it left behind.

"Isn't that pilot an ace? How did he get shaken off so easily?" Lu Mingfei was stunned.

"There are different levels of aces," Caesar said, "The pilot of Sleipnir is a test pilot from the US Air Force, and he tested the first prototype of the F-22."

"This kind of person was recruited to our school?"

"It seems that he was dismissed from the Air Force for aggressive driving, causing the loss of a \$1.2 billion prototype. So, he had to become the principal's exclusive pilot."

"Damn! How terrible is this pilot's resume? Isn't the principal afraid that he'll crash Sleipnir too?"

"Oh, an old fox like the principal certainly has his ways," Caesar shrugged, "Test pilots do have parachutes, but the principal removed the parachutes from Sleipnir."

"Can he be any more inhumane?" Lu Mingfei said.

At this moment, their SUV was speeding wildly, and as Sleipnir ignited its engines, Chu Zihang floored the accelerator. The black Hummer roared like a beast. The two vehicles fled in different directions at top speed, and the police snipers lost their targets. The Hummer was almost jumping as it drove on the uneven salt flats, and the two people in the back row seemed to be floating in the clouds, occasionally bumping their heads on the roof. It couldn't get any worse, but the police cars pursued them along the highway.

So, they could only follow from a distance and shoot on the highway, which was a hunting ground for high-powered police cars. The police were used to chasing supercar street racers, and the modified police cars had acceleration that was no slower than a Porsche. The highway was not the strong suit of a heavy off-road vehicle like the Hummer. Chu Zihang zig-zagged, trying to use the Hummer's heavy body to push the police cars away. Lu Mingfei's ears were filled with the piercing sound of metal friction, and every collision sent him rolling around like a ball on the Hummer's spacious sofa-like seats. Thankfully, Caesar and Chu Zihang were on either side of him, or he would have been bruised and bloody by now.

"Damn! Your people really just stripped the police chief's mistress and made a 'nyotaimori' out of her, right? They didn't do anything to his wife, did they?" Caesar shouted, "This guy really wants us dead!"

"I'm not sure about that. Nightcrawler and Crow probably wouldn't have told Sakura if they had. But I don't think so. They're both lolicons and don't like older women!" Chu Zihang slammed on the brakes, and the police car behind them crashed into the Hummer's rear bumper.

The police car spun out of control, temporarily blocking the ones behind it. However, more police cars split into two groups and tried to surround the Hummer. The snipers kept firing warning shots, drilling holes in the Hummer's body. The side mirrors had been shot off, and the glass on Chu Zihang's side was shattered. If it weren't for Chu Zihang's constant S-shaped route, the snipers would have already blown out their tires. A flash of light streaked over the roof, exploding about ten meters ahead, illuminating the windshield with a fiery red and sending countless tiny shrapnel into the engine hood.

"They're using rocket launchers. This is military equipment, and the Self-Defense Force must be involved too," Caesar said as he examined a piece of shrapnel.

"That's too much! Give us a chance! Consider whether any of us want to surrender..." Lu Mingfei protested, feeling dizzy and nauseous.

"The F-16 has been locked on to by a missile, although it's just an air-burst missile, it's still enough to alert the high-ranking Self-Defense Force officers. This makes the trouble even bigger. If we're captured, we won't be taken to a police station, but to a Self-Defense Force prison. They won't give us the opportunity to ask for a lawyer, but they will send a group of soldiers to interrogate us as spies," Chu Zihang said.

"If you don't mind, I'd like to borrow that man-portable missile and take out the car with the rocket launcher," Caesar began to roll up his sleeves.

"We can't do that!" Chu Zihang said. Lu Mingfei was relieved that at least someone among them was sane and wouldn't resort to armed assault on the police.

"Just use the shotgun! The man-portable missile has too large a kill radius. Can you guarantee that no one will die?" Chu Zihang began loading the shotgun.

"Don't! Using a man-portable missile or a shotgun is still assaulting a police officer. Once we fire a shot, it's a violent crime, and the conviction will be the same either way!" Lu Mingfei at least had some legal knowledge.

"Don't worry, I told you that the Japanese branch will guarantee your safety, and we will definitely do so," Chu Zihang said calmly, "This is Japan, our turf, and we make the rules here."

"That's a big claim," Caesar raised an eyebrow, "I'm quite interested in seeing what the Japanese branch can do." Chu Zihang smiled, "Ever since you guys landed, you've been bothering me with your antics and derailing my usual rhythm. It's like a duel between a samurai and a true swordsman. One side solemnly draws their precious sword, assuming a fierce 'right

eye' starting stance, while the other side waves a small fan, dances, and even shakes their butt at the audience. As a result, the samurai is the one who ends up flustered." But now, with the situation at a critical juncture, the initiative had returned to Chu Zihang's hands. His forte was dealing with the worst-case scenarios, and he was much better at it than handling these clowns.

"According to Kaguyahime's intelligence, the entire highway has been closed off, and more police cars are on their way here, totaling over 300 vehicles," Sakura said.

"Who is Kaguyahime?" Caesar asked.

"It's Iwanyu Research Institute's independent cloud computing system, equivalent to Norma in the headquarters. But Kaguyahime and Norma operate separately," Chu Zihang said.

"So, this place is outside of Norma's monitoring range?" Caesar was surprised. He had always thought that Norma's monitoring range covered the entire world, even including small island nations like Fiji. But Japan was outside of this range.

"Kaguyahime and Norma are directly linked, so Norma can also monitor within Japan," Chu Zihang said, "It's just that Kaguyahime is an intelligent system independently developed by the Japanese branch."

The police cars kept ramming into the Hummer's sides and rear. In this situation, it was difficult for Chu Zihang to maintain the S-shaped route. This was their final warning. If Chu Zihang refused to surrender, the police cars could push him into the deep ditch between the two-way lanes, which would either cause the Hummer to flip over or explode on the spot.

"If we don't use firearms, it seems we can't get away," Chu Zihang loaded the shotgun, "I think your engine RPM is already maxed out, and this Hummer can't go any faster."

"Want to make a bet?" Chu Zihang smiled, "Give me 60 seconds, without using firearms, and I'll shake off these police cars."

"Sounds interesting. Let's make a bet!" Caesar was excited, "If you can shake them off in 60 seconds, you win. Otherwise, hand over the steering wheel to me, and I'll take over."

"52 seconds left. A bet should have a stake. What do you want to bet?"

Caesar thought for a moment: "If you lose, we'll have a wild party at the most luxurious bullfighter nightclub in Tokyo."

"Why at a bullfighter nightclub? We have bullfighters of our own," Lu Mingfei said.

"It's a Japanese specialty," Caesar shrugged, "There's no point in going to an ordinary nightclub. Since we're in Japan, we should experience the local culture."

"34 seconds left. Make up your mind and place your bet. Once it's done, there's no going back," Chu Zihang turned to look at Caesar.

Those were the eyes of someone who was confident of victory. Lu Mingfei and Chu Zihang looked forward, and the straight highway stretched ahead under the black sky, with nothing but the empty salt flats in sight. This was a place with no way out, and the Hummer was no 007 supercar. Chu Zihang was also unwilling to use firearms, and there were only about 30 seconds left.

"I'll take that bet. If I lose, I'll wear a bullfighter outfit and offer drinks to everyone!" Caesar stretched out his hand to the front seat.

"28 seconds left." Chu Zihang slapped his hand.

"Sakura, you know what to do, right?" Chu Zihang said calmly.

"I understand 100%." Sakura suddenly climbed over the passenger seat towards the back of the car. She was tall and slender among Japanese girls, and if you didn't see it with your own eyes, you wouldn't believe how agile she was in the limited space of the car. She crawled towards the third row, and Lu Mingfei smelled a cold, plum blossom-like fragrance on her. As she crawled, she took off her suit and shirt, revealing a tight-fitting black outfit with metal blades attached. Caesar whistled,

Lu Mingfei quickly covered his eyes, not because of the metal blades, but because Sakura's figure was completely exposed.

"A ninja?" Chu Zihang understood.

The Hummer's rear hatch opened, and Sakura pulled herself up, holding on to the hatch as if she weighed nothing. She stuck to the top of the car like a black spider. Chu Zihang and Caesar opened the doors on either side and looked up, curious to see what Sakura would do. Sakura stood up straight, with her legs apart, and waved her hands in the darkness. Caesar and Chu Zihang couldn't see the weapons she threw, but Caesar could hear the sound of the wind they cut through the air. One after another, the front tires of the police cars exploded as Sakura's thin but extremely sharp blades embedded themselves in the tires.

"Wow! That's amazing! Can I get a smile?" Caesar took out his phone, "Come on, give me your sharpest look!"

He wasn't frustrated about losing the bet, but Sakura's stance as she threw the metal blades caught his eye. Sakura didn't aim, hesitate, or hide like a sniper when she threw the lethal blades. She stood like a master, drawing hidden metal blades from different parts of her body and throwing them like a calligraphy master creating brushstrokes. With her as the center,

countless silver lights fluttered like butterflies, weaving a beautiful arc and forming a storm of metal blades. Caesar was reminded of the female ninja he had fought in the darkness. Compared to her memorable figure, it was Sakura's slicing technique, with her twin daggers dancing like butterflies, that was truly unforgettable.

Sakura turned her head and looked down, her long hair dancing wildly in the darkness. Caesar's phone flashed, and at that moment, a rocket flew over the roof of the car, and the explosion illuminated Sakura in a fiery red light.

"Bravo!" Caesar applauded.

The tires of seven or eight police cars exploded, and they crashed into each other, completely blocking the ones behind them. More police cars joined the pile-up, some falling off the road shoulder, and others crashing into the guardrail. The police could only watch helplessly as the Hummer sped away. It would take several hours to clear the vehicles and restore traffic flow. Chu Zihang threw his cigarette butt out the window, and the flickering butt seemed to mock the entire Kanagawa police force.

Sakura lightly flipped back into the car and sat in the passenger seat, turning to say, "My clothes, please."

Lu Mingfei quickly handed her the clothes, and within 10 seconds, Sakura was back to being an unassuming young assistant, wearing a suit and pants, with her long hair in a ponytail and black-framed glasses.

"Allow me to introduce myself, Sakura Yabuki, one of my assistants," Chu Zihang said, "Her 'utterance' is 'Kaguyahime', which controls the wind. In her eyes, the trajectory of the wind is clear and controllable. Although she can't summon a hurricane like 'Wind King's Eye', in her controllable breeze filled with metal blades, she can control a space with a diameter of 20 meters. Unless you're wearing impenetrable heavy armor, as long as there's a fatal gap, she can send the blades into it."

"Pleased to meet you, Miss Yabuki. May I have the honor of inviting you to dinner in Tokyo?" Caesar reached out his hand, "My 'utterance' is 'Kamaitachi', and it's of the same lineage as yours. You could say that we're fated to meet."

Chu Zihang was surprised: "Would you casually tell others about your 'utterance' at headquarters?"

"When he's impressed by a girl, he'll even tell her about his father's mistress," Lu Mingfei said.

"That's not really possible," Caesar shrugged, "I have too many to remember them all."

"So, I won the bet, right?" Chu Zihang said.

"Of course, you won, and you did it in style." Caesar waved his cigar, "With such a great assistant, you're always a winner. I've already booked a room at the top bullfighter nightclub in Shinjuku. Welcome all the seniors from the Japanese branch to join us, and it's all on me."

Chu Zihang was taken aback: "When did you make the reservation?"

"I made it on the plane through the Mint Club. If you want to book a room at a top nightclub, you have to do it in advance. It takes some time for the Mint Club to arrange it, and it would be too late if you waited until the last minute."

"So, you planned to go even before we landed?"

"Yes. I've heard that Japan's bullfighter nightclubs are the best in the world. Although I'm not interested in men, I won't miss out on anything top-notch."

"Brother, you still don't understand him. Going to a bullfighter nightclub for a wild party is a normal entertainment activity for him. We just need to worry about having enough champagne," Chu Zihang said, "No matter the outcome of that bet, he would have dragged you to the bullfighter club to drink with him anyway."

Chu Zihang fell silent. He felt again that he had made a mistake by personally receiving these people. No matter how hard he tried, he couldn't escape the rhythm of these lunatics. He gripped his knife, his eyes sharp as lightning, but these lunatics just waved their fans and danced around him. He had won the bet and felt that he had regained the initiative, but now he had to join these lunatics in their dance... From the moment these idiots landed, the elegance of a Japanese samurai in spring, the romance of summer, the sadness of autumn, and the solemnity of winter no longer mattered. A suffocatingly stupid atmosphere began to erode everyone's spiritual world. Caesar was adjusting the brightness and contrast of Sakura's photos on his phone and showing them to her, asking if she was satisfied... They all involuntarily joined the dance of these idiots.

"Kaguyahime has sent a message. A minute ago, the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department issued a wanted notice for the three commissioners from headquarters," Sakura said, "Fortunately, the photos are quite blurry."

"They're only wanted us three? When you were standing on top of the car, they didn't take any pictures of you, did they?" Caesar asked.

"You remember that I deliberately let my hair down to cover my face, right? I used my hair to hide my face," Sakura said.

"That's awesome!" Caesar nodded in appreciation.

"Brother Zihang, your focus is completely wrong! The important thing is that we're wanted now!" Lu Mingfei cried out, "We're fugitives now! And we didn't even do anything!"

"Being wanted is not a big deal. More than half of the Japanese branch has been wanted at some point," Chu Zihang said calmly, "Didn't headquarters brief you on what kind of organization the Japanese branch is before you left?"

"What kind of organization?" Lu Mingfei was stunned.

"When you get back, ask Norma. She's more suitable to answer this question than us,"

Chapter 7 The Road to Huaquan

Here is the text translated to English:

"I pulled up all the files on the Japanese branch from Norma's database, and there's one bad news and one good news. Which one do you want to hear first?" Caesar closed his notebook.

Lu Mingfei thought for a moment. "Let's hear the bad news first, at least then we'll have something to look forward to."

"The Japanese branch is indeed a criminal organization, and not just that, it's also the oldest criminal family in Japan, and has always been the supreme leader of the Japanese underworld."

"I knew it! I knew it! That Gen Chisei guy totally looks like a gangster!" Lu Mingfei's suspicions were finally confirmed, "So, what's the good news?"

"Now we are too."

"That's not good news at all! Are you out of your mind, boss?"

"At least we're in the same gang as the gangsters. This way, they won't cut off our hands, or bury us in cement, or send us to be male prostitutes." Caesar shrugged, "They have a lot of influence here, and it could be helpful for our mission, so it's sort of good news."

"But I have a clean record! I've never beaten up a classmate or peeped into the girls' bathroom! The only illegal thing I've done is download a few pirated MP3s. How can I be a gangster now?" Lu Mingfei was exasperated.

"Don't worry, let me first give you some background on the Japanese legal system. Japan is the only country in the world that allows criminal organizations to exist legally. For example, the Triads are known as the largest criminal organization in Japan, and they are a legal entity.

Japanese law only pursues individuals who commit crimes, not the criminal organization itself. Criminal organizations are very active in Japanese society, and during times of disaster such as earthquakes or floods, it's often the gangsters who arrive first to provide aid, even before the army or the police. Being a gangster in Japan is considered a legitimate occupation, and they even have social insurance and unemployment benefits." Caesar explained, "So, when we're in Japan, we are technically gangsters, but only because we are associated with a criminal organization, it doesn't mean that we are criminals ourselves."

"So, being a gangster in Japan is not like being a rat that everyone wants to beat to death?" Lu Mingfei started to understand.

"Not exactly," said Chu Zihang, "Even though it's legal, the general public still views gangsters with suspicion. The history of gangsters in Japan is very long, and they used to be guilds for various industries. Dock workers had their guild, and so did prostitutes. These guilds had their own rules, which often conflicted with the law, but the guilds also had their own unspoken rules. If the guilds were disbanded and left to the police to manage, some industries would fall into chaos. Eventually, some of these guilds evolved into criminal gangs, and the oldest and most powerful ones became what is known as the 'gangster nobility'. Their businesses are mostly legal, and they have close connections with politicians and big businessmen, which is why Japan allows these gangs to exist legally. Not all gangsters have a criminal record, for example, there was a case where a woman in Osaka called a gangster company and offered to pay them to chop off her husband's arm. The gangsters couldn't take the harassment and eventually reported it to the police."

"These Japanese gangsters sound a bit cowardly," said Lu Mingfei.

"In any case, Japanese gangsters are very restrained and will not resort to violence unless absolutely necessary. In recent years, they have been keeping a low profile, maintaining their own businesses, and no one dares to easily break the rules. But once someone does break the rules, the retaliation can be brutal. It is said that if the Japanese gangster clans were to go on a rampage of revenge and bloodshed, even the entire Japanese police force would not be enough to suppress them." Chu Zihang said, "So we really are lucky that the gangsters are our friends and not our enemies."

"How could the principal allow the Japanese branch to get away with this?" Lu Mingfei asked, "The principal is the kind of person who mingles with the upper-class society, drinking tea with European royalty. He seems totally incompatible with the underworld."

"We, at our level, have no way of knowing the specifics. Norma's description of the Japanese branch is also very vague. Basically, it says that the Japanese branch is not an agency of the Academy, but a cooperative establishment between the Academy and a mixed-blood family in Japan. This family is called the 'Snake Qi Eight Houses', divided into three major surnames and five minor ones, all of them mixed-blood, and they have been in control of the Japanese underworld for thousands of years. Any underworld boss who wants to establish their own turf

must personally go to the Snake Qi Eight Houses' shrine to 'burn incense', indicating their obedience to the underworld laws established by the Snake Qi Eight Houses. Only then can they develop their gang with proper authority. The power of the Snake Qi Eight Houses is so strong that even the European mixed-blood families respect them, so the Academy has no choice but to cooperate with them. That's why the Academy turns a blind eye when the Japanese branch mistreats the commissioners sent from headquarters."

"Their attitude towards us hasn't been too bad, though," Lu Mingfei thought. "They picked us up from the airport in a luxury SUV and even sent a pretty girl to greet us." He thought that Sakura and Gen Chisei were quite a handsome pair.

"Yes, they've been treating us well, and that's what makes me suspicious," said Caesar. "I went on the Night Watch discussion forum and found travelogues posted by commissioners who had been on business trips to Japan in the past. Every one of them described the Japanese branch as a hellish place where they were subjected to all kinds of abuse and had no dignity left..." Caesar suddenly cursed.

"What's wrong?" Lu Mingfei was startled by Caesar's sudden outburst.

"I just realized something," Caesar said. "Now I understand why the student council executives held a video conference with me to say goodbye when they heard I was going to Japan. One of them even got emotional and told me, 'Boss, let's go hunting again when you come back.' It gave me the feeling that they thought I might not return from Japan alive."

"No wonder..." Chu Zihang said, "Before I got on the train, Lancelot came to the train station to hand over the work of the Lionheart Society to me. He made me sign a document stating that if I couldn't be contacted for more than three weeks, he would automatically become the acting president, and if I couldn't be contacted for more than three months, the society would elect a new president."

"This is more than just a fond farewell!" Lu Mingfei exclaimed, "He was basically making sure that your will was in order before you left!"

"Anyway, from what I can find, Japan doesn't seem like an easy place to get by," Caesar said thoughtfully. "The commissioners who were sent to Japan in the past all developed some kind of compulsion, bowing to everyone they met and immediately shouting 'I'm wrong!' when criticized. They became very neurotic. The Japanese branch upholds a culture of strength, and only the strong among the strong are respected."

"What does it take to be considered strong?" Chu Zihang asked.

"In their eyes, there's only one strong person in the headquarters - Hilbert?" Jean? Anjou?"

"Are they considered strong? They're just perverted old lunatics," said Lu Mingfei.

"Compared to them, the Japanese branch's favorable treatment of us is indeed a bit puzzling," said Chu Zihang.

"Look at the hotel we're staying in, and the champagne, fruits, and attendants around you..." Lu Mingfei said, "As you Chinese say, 'No one offers a gift for nothing; he either wants your horse or your saddle.'" Caesar took out a bottle of champagne from the ice bucket. It was a 1998 vintage Moët & Chandon champagne, a rare find even for champagne collectors, but here it was just a small gift for VIP guests, along with fruits like Taiwanese wax apples, Thai mangoes, and a rare variety of lychees called 'Guaglu' specially flown in from southern China. The room was filled with the elegant fragrance of white sandalwood. Before their arrival, they had only known that they would be staying at the Peninsula Tokyo, one of the most luxurious hotels in the city. But it wasn't until the VIP elevator took them directly to the top floor, with attendants on both sides bowing deeply and greeting them, that they realized the extent of the Japanese branch's hospitality. When the white sandalwood doors of the presidential suite swung open, even Caesar was left speechless... The Japanese branch had booked them the presidential suite, and not just any ordinary one, but one with special additions. The general manager himself was waiting at the hotel entrance to greet them, and the executive chef was on standby, ready to prepare any midnight snack they desired. The attendants were all beautiful women with high buns, wearing tight cheongsam dresses with high slits, gracefully swaying their slender waists as they attended to their luggage, poured them hojicha tea, and turned down their beds. Even their bathrobes had been heated in advance.

"Please have a relaxing bath and a good rest. If you need anything, feel free to let us know," the attendants said as they took away their damp clothes for cleaning and ironing. Lu Mingfei couldn't help but admire the attendants' alluring waist and hip lines.

"I feel the same way," Lu Mingfei said, rubbing his chest, "The female attendants are all flirting with me with their eyes! Are they trying to seduce me, a man of strong willpower, and then take secret photos of me in compromising positions?"

"It's not that bad," Caesar said, "If they wanted to seduce you, beautiful women wouldn't work. They should put a naked female body pillow in your bedroom. Then you would definitely hug it and strike all sorts of weird poses that could be photographed."

"That's insulting!" Lu Mingfei protested, "I'm not the kind of otaku who fantasizes about body pillows of Asuna Yuuki!"

"You just said her name!"

"Is this the Asuna Yuuki you were talking about?" Chu Zihang went into Lu Mingfei's bedroom and came back with a life-sized body pillow of a maid-clad girl whose breasts were about to burst out of her outfit.

"They actually have this..." Lu Mingfei's face turned black.

Chu Zihang threw the body pillow to Lu Mingfei, "Each bedroom in this suite is different. Caesar's room is in the Rococo style, with velvet and crystal chandeliers, while my room is furnished with solid wood furniture. As for your room, Lu Mingfei, as soon as you turn on the TV, it plays the latest anime with Chinese subtitles. Besides the body pillow, there's also a large-screen computer. They obviously know our preferences and are trying to please us. But we're not the principal, so why are they treating us so well?"

"It's because of you, boss," Lu Mingfei said, "Your family has a position in the school's board of directors, so the Japanese branch is giving you face."

Caesar shook his head, "The Cataso family has businesses all over the world, but they don't have a single property in Japan. This shows that the Cataso family doesn't have a good relationship with the mixed-blood families in Japan."

"You're making me more worried..." Lu Mingfei said.

Caesar poured himself a glass of champagne, "There's nothing to be afraid of. When a man raises his cup, he should drink with gusto, and when he puts down the cup, he should be ready to draw his sword and duel. The Japanese are showing us hospitality, so let's drink to that. Let's see what they're up to and then we'll counter their moves. Perhaps we'll be able to conquer not just the shipwreck in the trench, but also a group of arrogant Japanese."

Caesar was pleased with the Japanese branch's reception, and with his arrogance, optimism, and long reaction time, he felt that he had already won the first battle as soon as he landed in Japan. The once proud Japanese branch had lowered their heads in submission to him, and this was his first step in conquering Japan. If Anjou was the only one in the Academy's history to have conquered the Japanese, then Caesar was ready to be the second, even if he was a step behind Anjou... But Anjou had established his reputation in Japan before Caesar was even born, so there was no way he could compete for first place.

"How about a champagne night?" Caesar raised his glass, "To our conquest of Japan!" Unfortunately, no one answered his call to ambition, as Lu Mingfei had already fallen asleep on the comfortable sofa, hugging his Asuna Yuuki body pillow.

Caesar had no drinking companions, and there was no bright moon in the sky to serve as his 'third companion'. The wine in his cup suddenly lost its taste. He hesitated for a moment, thinking of inviting the thin figure by the window to join him, but his hand stopped halfway through the motion... Eventually, he put the cup down and walked towards his own bedroom, decorated in the European style. He sent a text message to Nono, but as usual, he didn't receive a reply. It had been a long time since he had been able to contact Nono, and the only way he knew she was safe was by logging into the Norma system.

In the living room, Lu Mingfei was snoring softly, and Chu Zihang stood silently by the window, gazing at the rain outside.

At that moment, in the mountains on the outskirts of Tokyo, the pouring rain hit the roof of a shrine, creating beautiful parabolas as it fell from the eaves. Under the century-old sakura tree in the garden, the pink petals fell like sad snow. Men in black, with white-sheathed short swords tucked into their belts, walked past the charred torii gate, their footsteps crisp and uniform. They climbed the stone steps, strewn with sakura petals, and stopped in front of the vermilion stone wall of the main hall, bowing deeply three times. They then split into two rows, creating a path for the next group.

Following them was a group of seven people, all dressed formally in black montsuki haori for men and black tomesode for women, with white tabi socks and geta sandals. They walked with steady steps, their eyes fixed forward. As they passed through the charred torii gate, the men in black bowed deeply without a word, creating a solemn atmosphere akin to a funeral procession. The seven people also bowed deeply in front of the vermilion stone wall, and the silver-haired elder among them lit three sticks of incense and placed them in front of the wall, watching as the smoke mingled with the rain. He let out a soft sigh, "How perplexing."

After the seven people entered the main hall, a large group of people flooded into the shrine. These men, dressed in black suits, stood shoulder to shoulder, creating a sense of order despite the crowd. No one pushed or lagged behind, and everyone bowed deeply in front of the stone wall before placing their umbrellas in front of the main hall. Soon, the black umbrellas formed a dense cluster, like a gathering of crows. Outside the shrine, nearly a hundred cars blocked the road, with men holding guns or long swords standing in the shadows, ensuring that no one could get within half a step of the vermilion building.

This was a very classical shrine, meticulously renovated to maintain its original charm. The only parts that hadn't been repaired were the charred torii gate and the vermilion stone wall, still bearing the dried bloodstains from years ago. The main hall had tatami mats on the floor, but no shrines or Buddha statues. Instead, the inner walls were covered in ukiyo-e paintings, skillfully depicting a battle between demons and hybrids, with fiery clouds and dancing flames. The eyes of the ghostly creatures seemed to glow in the candlelight, thanks to the phosphorescent paint used. Several hundred men and women in black knelt in their designated positions, each aware of their place in the organization.

"Everyone is present, O Great Master," the black-clad secretary presented the attendance list to the silver-haired elder, "From the Strategic Department, we have Ishizukurai, Danjyu, and Kozukue elders, along with thirty-four members of their respective groups. From the Liaison Department, we have the department head and thirty-four of their members. From the five minor families, we have a total of one hundred and thirty-four members. From the Kantō and Kansai branches of the Cassel College Japanese branch, we have nineteen members from each, including the branch leaders and group leaders. From the Iwary Institute, we have fourteen

members, and from the Maruyama Construction Company, we have seven members. In total, four hundred and forty people are present."

"Please review the list, Lord Masamune."

"Where's Chisei? We can't start the meeting without him," Lord Masamune scanned the room, noticing the empty seat, "Yasha, where's Chisei?"

A man named Crow, kneeling in the back row, stepped forward, "Young Master arrived a while ago and has been inspecting the surroundings to ensure the safety of the family heads. He may not be aware that everyone has arrived yet. I'll go and inform him, along with Yasha."

The rain pounded against the glass, shattering into tiny pieces. From the mountain, the city of Tokyo looked like a mirage. In the worship hall behind the main hall, the lights were off, and Chisei sat alone by the window, drinking a bottle of 18-year-old Yamazaki whiskey and gazing at the rainy scene outside.

"Young Master, the Great Master and the family heads have all arrived," Crow sneaked into the room, whispering in Chisei's ear, "They're waiting for you. If you don't go now, they'll start gossiping!"

"I know, I'll be there after I finish this drink," Chisei frowned, "You and Yasha are here, so who's watching over the commissioners?"

"Sakura is there," Crow said, "Young Master, you're drinking too much. You said you can't trust me and Yasha, but Sakura might be a deep undercover pervert who's actually interested in male bodies."

"If Sakura likes male bodies, that doesn't make her a pervert," Chisei said with a slight wobble in his step.

"Hey, hey, easy on the drink there," Crow rushed to support him, "You'll be there after you finish this cup, right? And remember to use mouthwash!"

Crow stumbled out of the room, almost tripping over his own feet. He knew that his and Yasha's absence from the meeting would be noticed, as everyone present had a higher status than them. If they left as well, there would be consequences.

After closing the door, Crow peeked through the crack and saw Chisei still sitting alone by the window, his back exuding a sense of weariness, not towards any particular person, but towards the world itself. Crow let out a soft sigh.

Here is the text translated to English:

Sometimes, when drinking and chatting with Yasha, the two of them would worry about their future. They had both been elite members of the organization, earning their place by fighting and killing. They were fortunate to be able to serve the young master directly, and because of his noble status and sharp, capable, and commanding personality, the entire organization revolved around the Execution Department, which he had led for only three years. There was no doubt that Chisei would be the next leader of the Japanese branch, and within the family, he had already been established as Lord Masamune's successor, destined to become the emperor of the Japanese underworld one day.

According to tradition, Yasha and Crow would also rise to prominence, serving as the new leader's closest guards and becoming part of the new power group. However, Chisei seemed to be a man with little desire, fighting on the front lines of the Execution Department out of a sense of responsibility. Although his sense of responsibility was admirable, a man without desire could not lead the Snake Qi Eight Houses. The family collected over 30 billion yen in tribute from the Japanese underworld each year, and the industries under Chisei's name generated over 1,000 billion yen in revenue. The one who should be in charge was a man of decisive and ruthless action, a man who was feared and respected, a man whose very name struck terror into the hearts of his enemies.

When people heard his name, they would tremble! But Chisei's dream was to sell sunscreen in France, and at first, Yasha and Crow thought he was joking. It was only when they saw the photos of Montali Beach on his desk and noticed that he had been researching different sunscreens online, comparing their UV protection and cost-effectiveness, that they realized the young master was serious... To them, the idea of Chisei lounging on a nude beach, basking in the sun, was a devastating blow to their image of him.

Chisei poured the remaining alcohol from the bottle onto his blade, the hilt gleaming with a deep indigo light. The sword, named "Spider Cutter", had been passed down for over a thousand years, with each generation of its wielders leaving behind a colorful legend of the various fantastical beings they had slain. It was this sword that Chisei had used to pierce Sakurai Aki's heart, and ever since then, he couldn't stop thinking about the fallen one.

By the time of his death, Sakurai Aki could no longer be considered human. If he were to be depicted in a ukiyo-e painting, he would be a hideous monster, a "blue demon". In ancient times, the family's Shinto priests would have romanticized Chisei's slaying of the demon, portraying him as a heroic figure who traveled far and wide to hunt down a female-blood-sucking blue demon. But Chisei couldn't see Sakurai Aki as a demon, because as the long sword pierced his heart, Sakurai Aki had laughed. It was a cruel and mocking laugh, but it also carried a bone-chilling sense of ridicule.

In that moment, Chisei's grip on the sword tightened as he was shocked by the laugh. Fortunately, Sakurai Aki didn't counter-attack, and in the next second, he stopped breathing, his black heart's blood pumping out along the blade of the Spider Cutter. Chisei examined the monstrous face, no longer able to find any trace of mockery. As the newly formed scales fell

from Sakurai Aki's body, his youthful face was revealed once more. He sat on the dilapidated long chair, illuminated by the setting sun, looking like a sleeping child. Chisei, standing in the shadows, breathed heavily, his blade stained with blood.

The moth, born in darkness, had finally burned itself to death in the fire, finding redemption in its final moments... It was all so absurd.

Chisei covered his eyes with his hands, imagining himself as a moth, dancing in the eternal night, unable to discern direction or destination, flying towards what he perceived as the front, never reaching a boundary or knowing if there were other moths in the world... A cold feeling crept into his body, and once again, he heard Sakurai Aki's words in his ear: "A moth that has never seen light will rush towards fire. It doesn't matter if it burns others or itself, and even if it burns down the whole world, it just wants that light... That is a moth's hunger for light." Chisei had read Sakurai Aki's novels, with their simple grammar and vocabulary, but this sentence felt completely different. In that moment, it was as if a soul from the underworld had possessed Sakurai Aki, using his mouth to speak those haunting words.

Chisei was certain that those words did not belong to Sakurai Aki. He had a strange feeling that those words were meant for Sakurai Aki to hear, and for him to hear from Sakurai Aki just before his death... In other words, Sakurai Aki's death had been planned, and he was both a discarded test subject and a messenger. His journey on the long-distance train to the remote Hokkaido was, in fact, a journey to his own grave, and that train compartment was the stage set for his execution. The ending of this tragic play had been written in advance, and Sakurai Aki was destined to die, leaving behind those pre-planned final words... Chisei shuddered with fear.

He had a vague idea of who might be behind it all, a name he refused to recall, a name he had buried deep in his memory! Instinctively, he tightened his grip on the hilt of his sword, his body tensing like a hunting leopard.

There were no enemies or any unusual signs, only the sound of the raging storm outside, the electric snakes dancing in the clouds, casting Chisei's shadow on the ground.

Chisei stood silently for a while, sheathed his sword, put on his black montsuki haori, and turned to leave. The entire family was waiting for him, and this meeting would determine the future of the family, perhaps even ushering in a new era for the Japanese underworld. He couldn't afford to indulge in his own thoughts any longer.

A warrior must not overthink, for too much thinking leads to hesitation when the sword is drawn. A warrior's mission is simply to cut down anything that goes against the "way".

"Hadouken! Hadouken!" Ryu jumped twice and unleashed his Shoryuken, dealing heavy damage to Chun-Li's health bar.

When Crow and Yasha returned to the main hall, a white projection screen had been lowered in front of the ukiyo-e scroll. The elite members of the family watched in silence, their expressions grave as they witnessed the Street Fighter IV match on the screen.

In front of the screen were eight small tables, each bearing a different long sword, the hilts adorned with golden family crests: the sixteen-petal chrysanthemum of the Tachibana family, the gentian of the Gen family, the bamboo and sparrow of the Uesugi family, the red demon of the Inuyama family, the spider of the Fuma family, the horse head of the Ryoma family, the phoenix of the Sakurai family, and the yaksha of the Miyamoto family. The heads of the eight families were all present at this family gathering, and at that moment, only the Gen family's small table remained empty. The other family heads maintained a solemn silence, befitting the occasion of a gathering in the family's shrine, where the ancestors' spirits lingered. Any loud noises or casual behavior would be considered disrespectful to the ancestors.

The only one who seemed unaffected by the atmosphere was Uesugi, who was furiously mashing the buttons on her controller. Chun-Li leaped into the air, delivering a series of kicks to Ryu's head, but Ryu rolled away and countered with a powerful Hadouken, causing Chun-Li to leap again and finish with a heavy kick... Uesugi was a Street Fighter master, her movements with Chun-Li precise and her strategy well-balanced between offense and defense. However, the player controlling Ryu was also a skilled opponent, especially in their timing of the Shoryuken, Chun-Li's aerial maneuvers were her strength, but the Shoryuken was a counter to almost all aerial attacks. Every time Ryu shouted "Hadouken", he leaped and took a large chunk of Chun-Li's health bar.

This was an online match, and the player controlling Ryu could be anywhere in Japan. If they knew that their match was being watched by several hundred black-clad elites as if it were a movie, they might be so scared that their hands would shake.

Uesugi, the head of the Uesugi family, was a young girl, although her face was hidden behind a black veil and the wide sleeves of her black montsuki haori. The large sleeves couldn't hide her slender curves, revealing her to be a young woman in her prime. At first, she had been sitting quietly, almost like a student waiting for a teacher to arrive, rather than a family head at an important gathering. But when the meeting was delayed due to the absence of the Gen family head, she had quickly pulled out a game controller from her kimono and the projection equipment in the main hall had been activated. In just a matter of seconds, before anyone else had realized what was happening, the "fight" cry had sounded and the match had begun.

Describing her actions as "reckless" would not be entirely accurate, a better word would be "unconcerned". It was as if, in her mind, since they had to wait, she might as well play a few rounds, and neither the occasion nor the presence of the ancestors mattered.

"Erii! Erii!" Lord Masamune, seated far away, couldn't get up to stop her, so he could only shout in a low voice. But his voice was drowned out by the sound of the fighting on the screen, and Uesugi was completely focused on the game, her eyes glued to the screen.

The situation was a bit awkward. This was an important gathering of the black-clad leaders of the three major and five minor families, held in the family's shrine, where the ancestors' spirits dwelled. The atmosphere was solemn and dignified, and everyone was doing their best to behave in a manner befitting the occasion, kneeling with their knees behind their heels, hands resting on their knees, backs straight. In such a setting, no one dared to get up and move around casually, and Lord Masamune couldn't very well discipline a child in front of everyone, especially one who was also a family head.

"The young master has finished his inspection and is changing his clothes, he'll be here shortly," Crow and Yasha bowed and then quickly returned to their positions, running with their kimono sleeves fluttering to avoid creating any wind. No one in the room paid any attention to them, everyone's gaze was fixed forward, like samurai gathered by a feudal lord to discuss an upcoming battle, their minds made up, waiting only for the order to unsheathe their swords and mount their horses.

In fact, no one knew the purpose of this family gathering, it had been decades since the family had held such a grand assembly. Many of those present usually stayed in different cities, guarding the family's turf. Even during the New Year celebrations, the attendance was only half of what it was today. A gathering of this scale would cause unease throughout the underworld, as it signaled a potential reshuffling of the Japanese underworld's power structure or the complete eradication of a gang.

But here they were, watching a Street Fighter IV online match... Did this mean the family was planning to enter the gaming industry? Or had CAPCOM, the developers of Street Fighter IV, offended the family and were about to be wiped out?

Here is the text translated to English:

"I bet 200,000 on Miss Erii winning," Crow whispered.

"It's difficult, her health bar is half empty, and her opponent is good at positioning," Yasha whispered back, both of them moving their lips silently.

"Miss Erii's rage meter is full, Ryu has already used up his, just force him to the edge of the screen, heavy kick into EX Hundred Slash, finish him with the Fan Beauty - Ultimate Technique," Crow said.

"I'll take that bet. The opponent will definitely let Miss Erii push him to the edge. I say go with light kick, middle punch, and then cancel into the Thousand Slash, slowly whittle down Ryu's health, but while doing that his rage meter will fill up again, and he'll use another 'Metsu' Shoryuken', which Miss Erii won't be able to dodge," Yasha countered.

"Be grateful that you work for the young master, if you were working for me, I'd have all ten of your fingers chopped off as punishment," said Akasuya, the Kantō branch leader, who was sitting in the front row, his lips barely moving.

Yasha and Crow immediately fell silent, and Crow discreetly flipped Yasha the bird, a gesture that meant "OK, I'm in" between the two of them. Yasha responded with a middle finger of his own.

As expected, Erii used Yasha's strategy, repeatedly using the light kick, middle punch, and Thousand Slash combo. The advantage of this combo was its long range and minimal exposure to counterattacks, and when used skillfully, it left almost no opportunity for the opponent to fight back. Ryu's strategy was just as Yasha had predicted, he would rather lose a bit of health defending than be pushed to the edge of the screen. He still had enough health to withstand Chun-Li's attacks, but if he was pushed to the edge, he might be taken out by a single move. Each of Chun-Li's strikes increased Ryu's rage meter, and soon he would be able to use his terrifying "Metsu? Shoryuken" again. Yasha couldn't help but smile, among the three of them, Crow was the strategist, better at armchair generalship, while Yasha, with his street-fighting experience, had a better grasp of the essence of close-quarters combat.

Chun-Li leaped into the air once more, delivering a middle kick to Ryu's head. This was meant to 誘 him to use his Shoryuken, and this time, Chun-Li left a bit of distance, so Ryu's Shoryuken couldn't hit her, and she would land before him, near the edge of the screen... She was about to use the move that Crow had suggested, this was her last chance. But Ryu chose to defend instead, and as Chun-Li landed, Ryu backflipped into the edge of the screen, a position he had been avoiding. His rage meter was finally full, and he was ready to unleash his "Metsu? Shoryuken", a powerful wave of energy. Even if Chun-Li defended, she wouldn't be able to withstand the full force of the attack.

Yasha rubbed his fingers together, signaling to Crow that he was about to win the bet, and Crow glared at him, his heart aching at the soon-to-be-lost money. But Chun-Li used the wall bounce! This was a unique skill of Chun-Li and the ninja, allowing her to use the edge of the screen as a wall to bounce off of. In a dazzling cinematic move, Ryu planted his feet, clenched his fists, and unleashed the "Metsu? Shoryuken", a tidal wave of energy. But he had lost his target, as the wall bounce had delayed Chun-Li's landing, and although it was only half a second, the energy wave slid harmlessly past her.

Chun-Li landed, and Ryu's rage meter was depleted... Chun-Li went in for a close-range heavy kick, canceled into the EX Hadouken, dashed forward, followed by a close-range heavy punch, canceled again into the EX Hundred Slash... Fan Beauty! Perfect combo! The EX Hadouken, EX Hundred Slash, and Fan Beauty all connected, Chun-Li spinning and her legs becoming deadly blades that sent Ryu flying into the sky.

"Damn, he's left with a sliver of health!" Crow lamented inwardly.

The timing of this combo was perfect, and it could have been a stunning reversal, but Ryu still had too much health left. Although all the attacks connected, Chun-Li had to cancel the heavy kick and heavy punch to maintain the combo, leaving Ryu with that tiny sliver of health. Chun-Li landed, and so did Ryu, she stood up, and so did he. Both of them were left with a sliver of health, and at this point, any knockback would end the fight. In this situation, Ryu had the absolute advantage, as he had the Shoryuken, a move with invincibility frames. Yasha breathed a sigh of relief, when they weren't on missions, he and Crow often played Street Fighter IV to pass the time, and over the years, they had become quite skilled. He could easily imagine that Ryu's player had already inputted the Shoryuken, so as soon as Ryu stood up, the Shoryuken would activate, making him invincible in the air, and even if Chun-Li defended, the Shoryuken would chip away her last bit of health.

But instead of the expected Shoryuken, stars and birds flew around Ryu's head, he had been stunned by the combo! Yasha and Crow suddenly realized that although this combo might not do the most damage, it had the highest stun value!

Chun-Li walked over and stood face-to-face with Ryu, delivering a light punch, "K.O.!"

Chisei took the controller from Uesugi's hands, "That's enough, one win is enough, we have a meeting to attend."

He had entered through a side door, and after quietly kneeling behind Uesugi, he took the controller from her hands at the last moment. Uesugi's defeat was certain, but Chisei used the wall bounce to delay his landing, and then unleashed a rapid-fire counterattack. It only took him five seconds, and in those five seconds, he snatched victory from the jaws of defeat. His tone with Uesugi was neither harsh nor condescending, nor was it like he was talking to a child, it was more like an older brother speaking to his younger sister, with just a hint of sternness.

"I'll play with you some other time," Chisei added.

Uesugi nodded and put down the controller, meekly obedient in front of Chisei. The awkward atmosphere in the main hall finally came to an end, and Chisei stood up and bowed, his kimono and manners impeccable, "I apologize for being late, I've inspected the shrine and confirmed the security arrangements."

After a few seconds of silence, Tachibana Masamune was the first to clap, and soon everyone joined in.

"As expected of the young master," Crow praised.

"Indeed, as expected of the young master," Yasha whispered, "Lord Masamune's arrival didn't receive this much applause, truly the chosen one of Amaterasu."

"No, I mean his drinking capacity, he's so calm and composed even when lying, it's impressive."

"It's fine that you're here, please take a seat, it must have been tough for you to personally check the security arrangements in this heavy rain," Lord Masamune said.

Chisei sat down at the small table reserved for the Gen family, and the main hall fell into an eerie silence, the sound of the rain outside becoming more pronounced. Everyone's gaze turned to Lord Masamune, who adjusted his kimono and stood up, taking a few steps back and bowing deeply. This action surprised everyone, as the elders of high status in the family immediately prostrated themselves, and the younger members followed suit. The Snake Qi Eight Houses followed a very ancient family system, and the position of the leader was highly revered. Usually, the younger members didn't even have the opportunity to pay their respects to Lord Masamune, and if they were "summoned" to his office, they would feel grateful. Some of the usually arrogant group leaders would become as meek as lambs when entering Lord Masamune's office, and if he chose to encourage them instead of reprimanding them, they would feel a great sense of honor. But now, Lord Masamune was bowing to them, a gesture they didn't feel worthy of receiving.

Some of them realized that today's topic might be even more shocking than a reshuffling of the underworld's power structure. In the Warring States period, the warriors said that the art of conversation was like drawing a bow and shooting an arrow, the further back you pulled the bow, the more ferocious the released arrow would be. The more humble and polite you were before getting to the main point, the more startling and awe-inspiring that point would be.

"I have been the leader of this family for ten years now. In these ten years, I have had the honor of getting to know all of you, and it has been an honor to be recognized and supported by all of you. Together, we have endured this period of history, and these years have been fulfilling, without any regrets. Over the years, with your help, I have been able to maintain this family, and although there have been some imperfections and troubles along the way, I am grateful for your hard work." Lord Masamune said.

"It is we who are grateful to you, Lord Masamune," said the leader of the Fuma family.

"Yes, we are all grateful to you, Lord Masamune," everyone echoed.

"We are all family, and I have indeed tried my best to take care of all of you, hoping that you could live good lives. And you have indeed taken care of me, without all of your efforts, I would not be the leader I am today," Lord Masamune waved his hand, signaling for everyone to sit down.

"It's raining again, it really brings back memories," Lord Masamune سلطان said, "Many years ago, when I first arrived in Japan, it was raining just like this as the plane landed. The wind was cold and wet, chilling me to the bone."

He paused for a moment, "It has been an unexpected honor to be chosen as the leader by all of you, despite not being born in Japan. But in the past ten years, I have been remiss in my duties, and I think you all know that in the past decade, we have lost a lot of turf and many of our brothers and sisters. Every year, I attend funerals, wearing black kimonos and hiding my grief behind sunglasses. Although Japan has become more prosperous in the post-war years, and our family has flourished, our enemies have also grown stronger, and I have failed to crush them."

"This is not your fault, Lord Masamune, in the fight against the Oni Crowd, you have always led from the front lines. If not for you, our situation would be even more dire," said the leader of the Fuma family.

Lord Masamune waved his hand, signaling for him to stop comforting him, "Today, I want to tell all of you a story, a story about a young man named Sakurai Aki."

Chisei stiffened slightly at the name.

"He was born into the Sakurai family, and in all aspects, he seemed like a healthy child. But when he was five years old, he was diagnosed with unstable blood, in other words, he was a 'ghost'. After the diagnosis, he was no longer one of us, and instead became a target of our surveillance. He was sent to a boarding school in the deep mountains of Kobe, and from then on, he never left until he was twenty-three years old. He was a lonely child, and every year, only one person came to visit him, but it wasn't his parents, it was our enforcer. He never had a girlfriend, never had a birthday cake, never went to an amusement park, never had a graduation trip. I think you all understand how much he must have wanted these things, but because he was a ghost, he couldn't have them." Lord Masamune's voice was like a tolling ancient bell, "One day, someone gave him a drug, saying that it could purify his blood, give him strength, and set him free. Tell me, how could a young man like that refuse such a temptation?"

"He injected the drug into his body, awakening the dragon blood within him. He did gain strength and freedom, but only for fifteen days, after which he was eliminated by the Execution Department. The head of the department, Chisei, personally carried out the elimination." Lord Masamune sighed, "In those fifteen days, he raped and killed many women, he unleashed his desires like a starving man trying to make up for lost time."

"How do all of you view that young man who died?" Lord Masamune scanned the room, "Do you feel disgust? Hatred? Contempt? Or do you feel pity, sadness, or shame?"

No one answered, as this was a confusing question within the Snake Qi Eight Houses.

"I just feel sad," Lord Masamune said softly, "He was one of our family, he made a mistake and was executed. But he was still one of us, and as the leader, do I have the right to feel disgust or hatred towards him? I just feel... sad."

"Lord Masamune... This is a curse that has plagued our family since ancient times," said the head of the Sakurai family.

"Yes, we are all cursed, a curse that is passed down through our bloodline. To outsiders, the dragon bloodline may seem like something to be proud of, but it is also a curse, empowering some of us while destroying others. You are all here today because you have the fortune of having stable blood, but imagine if you were born like Sakurai Aki, then each of you would be on that surveillance list, waiting to be eliminated. But I cannot change the ancient rules, because we cannot allow the dragon bloodline to corrupt our family. The Snake Qi Eight Houses have existed since ancient times to guard the gate of the dragons, never allowing the dragon race to rise again in this world!" Lord Masamune said.

"Yes!" All the younger members bowed.

"Next, I want to ask all of you a question, who gave Sakurai Aki that dangerous drug?" Lord Masamune continued, "The analysis results from the Iwary Institute are out, and that drug does indeed have the effect of activating dragon blood, it was designed to help mixed-bloods evolve into true dragons. So, who has been wanting to give up their human identity and evolve into a dragon all these years?"

"The Oni Crowd?" After a long silence, the leader of the Ryoma family spoke softly.

"Then who has been competing with us in the underworld? Who has been inciting the gangs that once followed us to betray us? Who has been steadily encroaching on our turf?" Lord Masamune asked.

"The Oni Crowd!" said the leader of the Fuma family.

"Yes, the Oni Crowd, only those who share our dragon blood, the Oni Crowd, can challenge us. It is because of the Oni Crowd that we have never dared to relax our guard! Every gang that defies us has the support of the Oni Crowd, and it is the Oni Crowd that constantly incites those with unstable bloodlines, tempting them to fall. It is because of the Oni Crowd that we have no choice but to closely monitor those with unstable bloodlines. Our enforcers' blades are stained with blood, because we dare not take the risk of leaving any fallen ones alive! We fear that they will fall into the hands of the Oni Crowd!" Lord Masamune's voice thundered like crashing waves, "We have only one enemy in Japan, and that is the Oni Crowd! But why have we never been able to eradicate the Oni Crowd?"

Silence filled the room.

"Because the so-called Oni Crowd are actually our own kin," said the head of the Sakurai family after a long pause.

"Yes, the Oni Crowd are our kin, they have the same blood as us. Every ghost in the Oni Crowd was born from our family, your children could become hybrids, the purer their dragon blood, the more powerful their abilities, the more likely they are to become hybrids. The Oni Crowd is the shadow of the Snake Qi Eight Houses, we cannot kill our own shadow. As long as we continue to reproduce, there will always be new hybrids, and when the hybrids gather, they become the Oni Crowd. This has been our fate for a thousand years!" Lord Masamune said, and then he suddenly paused, "It's time to sever that fate, someone has to do it."

His voice had been strong and resonant, but when he said those last words, his tone became flat, as if he was merely making a casual remark. But those who knew this leader well would understand that the more casual his tone, the more firm his conviction. At this moment, he was like a seasoned warrior who had already drawn his sword, his killing intent hidden beneath a calm exterior.

"Lord Masamune, do you intend to wage war against the Oni Crowd?" asked the leader of the Inuyama family, "Regardless of our chances of victory, in the eyes of some within the family, this is akin to fratricide. Not all members of the Oni Crowd are fallen, they are simply mixed-bloods with unstable bloodlines, they still have a chance to be saved... Is it really right to do this, especially since they are our kin?"

"The Oni Crowd do share our blood, but can they truly be called our kin? They have chosen the path of the dragon, in their eyes, dragons are perfect beings, emperors of the world, and humans should be subservient to those perfect creatures, enslaved by them. This is the law of natural competition, the strong rule! But we have chosen the path of man. In our eyes, dragons are monsters, our sworn enemies that we must exterminate with our very blood! Servants of the dragons versus guardians of mankind, can they truly be called kin?" Lord Masamune raised his finger to the sky, "The Oni Crowd, they are the source of all evil! All sin! Only by completely eradicating the Oni Crowd can we bring peace and tranquility!"

The leaders of the other families were shocked, including Chisei. He had known about Lord Masamune's plan earlier than the others, but he had thought it would only be a heavy blow to the Oni Crowd, not their total annihilation. In the history of the Snake Qi Eight Houses, no one had ever considered completely eradicating the Oni Crowd, because it was simply impossible. The Oni Crowd was the shadow of the Snake Qi Eight Houses, as long as the Snake Qi Eight Houses existed, so too would the Oni Crowd. To eradicate the Oni Crowd, one would have to eradicate the Snake Qi Eight Houses as well.

"Eradicate them?" asked the leader of the Miyamoto family, "Can we really do that?"

"We can, but it won't be easy, so we need great determination!" Lord Masamune turned to the leader of the Fuma family, "Mr. Fuma, you should have heard of the term 'Road to Yomi'." The leader of the Fuma family pondered for a moment before nodding slightly, "Since that person burned down the family's archives, many of the old records have been lost, especially the more fantastical ones. Nowadays, the younger members rarely hear about the Road to Yomi, but to

the Oni Crowd, it is the path to salvation. They believe that there exists a path in this world that can allow mixed-bloods to evolve into pure-blooded dragons."

"Pure-blooded dragons?" The other family heads were shocked, all eyes on the leader of the Fuma family, except for Uesugi, who continued to play with her kimono sleeve. From start to finish, no matter what was said, she remained unmoved, clearly expressing her disinterest in the proceedings.

"The only outcome for those consumed by dragon blood is to become a Death Knight, I've never heard of a mixed-blood evolving into a true dragon," said the head of the Sakurai family.

"So I say it's a fantastical legend," said the leader of the Fuma family, "In mythology, the god Izanagi once traveled along a mysterious road to Yomi, the underworld, to save his wife. That was the so-called Road to Yomi. It was a path without light, winding deep into the mountains, a path that the living could take to reach the underworld. Because the path of evolution is so mysterious and dangerous, the Oni Crowd use the term 'Road to Yomi' to refer to the method of evolution. This is a forbidden path, even if one could find the road, out of a thousand people, nine hundred and ninety-nine would walk and walk until they entered an endless maze, only the one with the strongest will could discern the true path from the myriad possibilities. But even the most enthusiastic seekers have never found so much as a clue, they only know the name from ancient literature."

"But for a thousand years, the Oni Crowd have continued to seek the Road to Yomi, it is their faith," Lord Masamune said, "And now, they have finally found some clues."

The leader of the Fuma family's pupils dilated, "Is there truly a Road to Yomi? In history, there has never been a case of a mixed-blood evolving into a dragon!"

"I don't know if the clues they've found are correct, but the Oni Crowd are preparing to explore the Divine Burial Site!" Lord Masamune scanned the room, "In recent years, there have been three institutions in Japan researching deep-sea submersibles capable of reaching the bottom of the Japan Trench! And all three have received funding from the Oni Crowd! They believe that the beginning of the Road to Yomi is where the ancestors are buried, and at the end of the road is the 'Dragon Gate', beyond which they can evolve into pure-blooded dragons! And the key to opening that gate is the bones of the god in the deep well!"

"They want to excavate the Divine Burial Site? That's impossible... No one can return to that place! It is sealed by Amaterasu and Tsukuyomi!" said the leader of the Fuma family.

"What use is a seal? As long as the Divine Burial Site still exists in this world, the seal will eventually weaken and break," Lord Masamune said softly, "So the decision to go to war is not ours to make, the war has already begun without our knowledge."

"Then, Lord Masamune, what is your plan to permanently eliminate the Oni Crowd?" asked the head of the Sakurai family.

"Destroy the Divine Burial Site, along with the god's remains, sever the Road to Yomi, destroy the Oni Crowd's hope! Then, we will launch a full-scale purge of the Oni Crowd's influence, their followers, the gangs that support them, their businesses, we will leave none alive! We will use this war to end it all!"

"Once the war begins... I fear rivers of blood will flow," said the leader of the Fuma family.

"Sometimes, the blood of the righteous must be shed," Lord Masamune said, "However, as the leader of this family, I cannot force all of you to follow me into battle. I know the path ahead is difficult, and some of you may already have the resolve to die, but I do not know how many will support me, how many will follow me. The future of the family should be decided by everyone in the family, so I have gathered you all here, please tell me what you think."

He clapped his hands, and the side door opened. White-robed Shinto priests carried in two white screens and placed them behind Lord Masamune, with a pen rack and ink-dipped brush on the lower part of the screens. Lord Masamune stood up and wrote the character "war" in bold, dripping ink on the left screen, and the character "endure" in a graceful style on the right screen. Despite being written by the same person, the two characters were starkly different, the "war" character exuded killing intent, while the "endure" character was understated, each with the style of a master calligrapher.

"Those who believe the family should go to war with the Oni Crowd, please pick up the brush and write the character 'right' on the left screen. Those who believe the family should continue to endure and bide our time, please write the character 'right' on the right screen." Lord Masamune said, "As the leader of this family, although I am determined to go to war, I cannot force all of you to follow me, so I will not cast my vote. I, Tachibana Masamune, swear upon my honor as the head of the Tachibana family, that no matter what is said tonight, there will be no punishment. Whether you support me or oppose me, I am truly grateful."

He took a white cloth and blindfolded himself, sitting upright between the two screens, "Please give me your judgment, dispel my murderous thoughts or lend me your fighting spirit!"

"Lord Masamune, this way of deciding things has never been done in our family before. How can the younger members make such a judgment on such a matter? If you truly intend to go to war with the Oni Crowd... We can only accompany you to our deaths." The leader of the Fuma family sighed.

"Kotaro, you and I are old men. This family, in the end, belongs to the younger generation, why can't they decide their own future? If this war truly begins, I hope that your blood and mine will

be the first to be shed, for we have lived long enough." Lord Masamune smiled, "If my life can end this family's curse, I will have no regrets."

The room fell silent, the wind howled like hybrids, and the falling sakura petals outside reminded them of the impermanence of life. No one stood up, not even the family heads, as it was a difficult choice to make, no matter which screen they wrote on. The brush seemed to be dipped in the blood of the young. The silence lasted for five minutes, and then the leader of the Inuyama family stood up, walked to the right screen, wrote a character, and then threw the brush onto the pen rack before turning and leaving, pushing away the attendant who tried to hold an umbrella for him as he rushed out into the wind and rain.

Some of the others wavered, as the attitude of the Inuyama family head was shared by many. They wanted to maintain peace as long as possible, and the Oni Crowd were still their kin. Although they had rebelled against the family, they still shared the blood of the Snake Qi Eight Houses.

More people stood up and wrote on the screens, some under "war", some under "endure", and more chose "endure". After writing, they bowed deeply to the blindfolded Lord Masamune before leaving the main hall.

None of the three major family heads, except for Inuyama, had expressed their stance, as they knew that their decision would influence the younger members of their families. In Western democracy, voting should be anonymous, but in Japan, those who made a decision should have the courage to announce it to others.

Chisei looked at Lord Masamune sitting between the two screens, and suddenly thought of Saigō Takamori, the man who died fighting to protect the interests of the lower-class samurai and the spirit of bushido. He was so stubborn, yet so lonely. In reality, by the time he led the samurai in their uprising, Japan was no longer a nation of samurai, a new class had risen, and politicians and businessmen were leading the country's future. People admired his courage, but they only watched as he died like a falling sakura blossom.

"Chisei, I'm sorry," Lord Masamune said with a smile.

Chisei was taken aback, "Why do you say that?"

"I promised you that I would do my best to eliminate violence, yet I am now determined to use violence to fight for a better future. Isn't that ironic? To prevent bloodshed in the future, we must shed more blood today. But it is difficult for us, as a black-clad family, to give up violence. It's like an undefeated swordsaint, his dojo is filled with students, and no enemies dare approach the gate. But if he decides to sheath his sword and no longer kill, the students will disperse, the dojo will become desolate, and enemies from years past will come one after another to visit. So, when a student first holds a sword, the teacher warns them, the moment you let go of the sword hilt is the moment you die." Lord Masamune said softly.

"I know you've tried your best, old man," Chisei used their private term of address, "But you're not the kind of person who gives up easily."

"There is a violent side to human nature, and where there are people, there is violence. To control violence, one must possess greater violence." Lord Masamune said slowly, "To end violence... One must first become the greatest violence."

Chisei shuddered, and he straightened up involuntarily.

Before the meeting, he had been drinking, as he had been resisting the idea of attending. Lord Masamune had said that this family gathering would usher in a new era for the family, but Chisei felt that he couldn't bear the weight of it. The Execution Department was the most feared institution in the Japanese branch, some even called it a killing institution. In the eyes of those below, Chisei, as the head of the Execution Department, should be a man of strong determination and iron will, but in reality, Chisei was a man who disliked making decisions.

Every new era is ushered in with the blood of the innocent, many years ago, the revolutionaries of the Meiji Restoration smelled the bloody air of Edo's moonlit nights, and spoke of it as "the wind of the new era, a wind that is stained with blood". But the man who fell in that bloody pool never got to see the new era that was built with his white bones and fresh blood. Lord Masamune had given him a biography of Okubo Toshimichi to read, perhaps to encourage him to become a man capable of wielding power, but after reading it, Chisei returned the book, implying that he couldn't become that kind of man. He had the firm grip of a swordsman, but his hold on power was far from strong. If he had lived in the turbulent Edo period, he wouldn't have been the steadfast Saigō Takamori (1), nor the resilient Kido Takayoshi (2), and he certainly wouldn't have been like Okubo Toshimichi (3), firmly grasping the reins of power in the midst of bloody turmoil, he would have fled to France to sell sunscreen. But at this moment, he couldn't just turn and leave this shrine, he looked at Lord Masamune's aged face and straight back, remembering how many years ago this man had taught him how to wield a sword. The young Chisei had asked him, "Uncle, when will you be able to forge a good sword?" Lord Masamune had smiled gently and said, "The sword I forge is actually myself, one day I will磨 myself into a treasure sword, I will make a stunning slash, and the demons will retreat!"

Was this the day that Lord Masamune had been waiting for, the day his sword would finally leave its sheath? A sword that had been forged for decades, Chisei couldn't bear the thought of it unsheathing to find that he was alone, without a famous sword to sing in harmony with his.

Chisei abruptly stood up, walked past Lord Masamune, picked up the ink-dipped brush, and wrote a bold stroke under the "war" character on the left screen! Then he threw down the brush and left without looking back,

Chapter 8: The Elysium

In the mountains on the outskirts of Osaka, there lies a place called the Gokuraku-kan.

It is a large house in the mountains, with a mountain stream and a delicate bridge in front of it. Beautiful girls in kimonos welcome and send off guests by the bridge, Samba dancers with flamingo feather headdresses shake their chests to the beat of the drums, and waiters with Indian headscarves scurry back and forth, attending to the guests' luggage. Despite the chilly spring weather, a man gets out of the car and wraps his arms around a voluptuous woman in a fur coat. The click-clack of the women's high heels on the stone pavement echoes as they strut, accentuating the tightness of their bodies beneath their skirts and the tautness of their buttocks and thighs.

Men in suits loiter both in front of and behind the house, their jackets open to reveal the handles of their guns—heavy-tactical pistols produced by "HS Precision, Inc." of Israel, using large-caliber Magnum ammunition that can even penetrate police bulletproof vests. However, the esteemed guests feel no unease because as long as they abide by the rules of this place, they are absolutely safe, protected by these men. But should anyone dare to cause trouble at the Gokuraku-kan, these men will swiftly transform into ferocious beasts.

The Gokuraku-kan is a newly opened large casino that has been in business for just the past two months. Despite being labeled as a large casino, it can accommodate only half the number of gamblers compared to other establishments. There is no limit to the amount one can bet here, so the gamblers bring ten times the amount they would usually wager at other casinos. The gamblers are aware of the Gokuraku-kan's connections to the underworld, but they consider it normal for casinos to have ties to the criminal underworld. The Gokuraku-kan sets itself apart from other casinos by claiming to fulfill any desire of its winning patrons. Those who win big are respectfully invited to a VIP room, where they are offered aged fine wine and attended to by a young and beautiful female manager. After a slight intoxication, the guests are asked if they have any wishes, no matter how extravagant or outrageous. For example, they may wish to spend the night with the leading actress of a popular Japanese drama or have dinner with the Prime Minister. Of course, guests could also request to have dinner with a popular actress or spend the night with the Prime Minister... These wishes are still considered respectable, but what about the darker desires, such as buying a young virgin from Thailand for good luck or even wishing for the ruin of a business rival? As long as the winning guest is willing to transfer an adequate amount of their winnings to the Gokuraku-kan's "Wish Fund," any desire, no matter how immoral, illegal, or bloody, will be granted without question, and all risks will be borne by the Gokuraku-kan. This place is a lawless wonderland where money speaks louder than any rules or regulations.

Those with slight connections to the Japanese underworld regard the Gokuraku-kan with a mix of awe and fear. This casino is like a妖花, a flower of ill omen, blooming in the mountains of

Osaka, defying the seasons and never withering, reminiscent of the legendary red lotus that brings destruction.

However, those who have experienced the Gokuraku-kan find it hard to resist its allure. They become obsessed, driving from far and wide with boxes of cash, ready to gamble extravagantly. Since only those who win big are allowed to make wishes, casual gambling for fun is rare here. Regardless of whether they are winning or losing, the gamblers push more and more chips forward, their faces contorted with anticipation. Each one hopes to see the alluring female manager kneeling by their side, inviting them to the VIP room for a drink. That lucky guest becomes the focus of everyone's gaze—a mix of envy and jealousy—until the door to the VIP room closes. These high-rollers have a net worth of several billion yen, and their goal is not to win small change but to experience the thrill of consecutive victories. Their desires escalate with their wagers, reaching heights akin to the tower of Babel in the Bible... and eventually, their wishes are granted. The Gokuraku-kan has skillfully tapped into the psychology of these big spenders, positioning itself as a dream-fulfilling paradise.

Makoto Naka pushes open the heavy, ornate bronze door with his bandaged hand, and his vision instantly expands.

The clattering of steel balls pouring out of pachinko machines fills the entire space. Roulette wheels spin, dice tumble in cups, dealers shuffle Pai Gow tiles, and girls shout excitedly... Every sound here stimulates the blood. Complementing this are the beautiful dealers, dressed in black suits from the waist up, but when you walk around to the other side of the table, you see they are wearing bunny girl outfits, with their thighs wrapped in black fishnet stockings and a small, white cottontail. The female attendants, on the other hand, wear bright pink swimsuits, their ample cleavage on full display, as they walk with swaying hips in their stish high-heeled fish-mouth shoes. They give a coquettish glance to every man who gazes at them.

Half of the vast hall is dedicated to pachinko machines, while the other half houses various gambling tables. Pachinko is a game enjoyed by people of all ages in Japan, and one can play with just a few coins. The girls in front of the pachinko machines sip cola and feed the machines with steel balls, each one beautiful enough to grace the cover of a magazine. Some are young and innocent, dressed in school uniform skirts and white tube socks, while others exude a cold, seductive charm in their red-soled high heels and high-slit cheongsams. There are also those with explosive, busty figures, wearing sheer evening gowns that barely contain their ample bosoms. These pachinko girls are employed by the Gokuraku-kan to accompany and entertain the guests as the sound of the pachinko machines adds to the lively atmosphere of the casino. Should a guest wish to invite one of these girls out for a drink, she would gladly accept.

On his first visit, Makoto Naka was overwhelmed by the extreme luxury and opulence of the place, and his initial instinct was to flee. Everywhere he looked, he saw temptation—the deep red Italian marble floors, the translucent red crystal glass walls, and the delicate beauty of the girls' skin. He felt that if he took one more step, he would be trapped in this labyrinth forever. But

today, his eyes are fixed solely on the bright red glass door of the VIP room. He shuffles towards it, his steps unsteady from not having eaten in several days.

The click-clack of high heels sounds behind him, and a young, beautiful female manager takes his arm. "Mr. Naka, we've been expecting you. Tonight is the night your wish will come true."

The female manager, Miss Sakurai Kogure, is dressed in a form-fitting black skirt suit, her hair piled high, accentuating her slender figure. Her clear eyes shine with intelligence. It's hard to believe that someone so young has risen to the position of casino manager. Her beauty surpasses that of the scantily clad dealers and attendants, yet she intentionally dresses conservatively. Makoto Naka remembers her name now. That day, as if the goddess of fortune was smiling upon him, he dominated the Texas Hold'em poker table, sweeping away his opponents with just seven million chips. In the end, he had over twelve billion yen worth of chips stacked in front of him. That was when he noticed the delicate fragrance, and a warm body leaned gently against his leg. Miss Kogure, in her black dress, knelt before him. "May I invite you to the VIP room? I'm the manager here, Sakurai Kogure. You can call me Kogure."

Unlike other lucky guests who would excitedly hug and passionately kiss the female manager, Makoto Naka heard those words and slumped back into his chair, unable to move for a long time, his tears flowing like a torrential rain.

Makoto Naka is thirty-nine years old, and his family owns a plastic factory that manufactures disposable tableware. Despite his wealth, he didn't originally have the qualifications to gamble at the Gokuraku-kan. Aside from running the plastic factory, his main concern was using the family's savings to start another business and having a child with his wife. His wife, only twenty-eight years old, is a fairly popular second-tier celebrity. After several failed relationships with wealthy suitors, she eventually married Makoto Naka, the owner of a small enterprise. Makoto deeply adores his young wife and often accompanies her to gambling outings. She used to live in Tokyo for a long time and knows some influential people. Through these connections, they became acquainted with a young man from a prestigious family. This man suggested that with Makoto's wealth, investing in a large project might not be enough, and it would be better to use the family's ancestral mountain land as collateral to borrow more money for the investment. That way, their circle of friends would also be more willing to include Makoto in their activities. Makoto hesitated because the plastic factory was located on that mountain land, and the family cemetery was there as well. If he lost the land, he would be disgraced in the eyes of his family. However, his wife announced that she was already pregnant, and the profits from the plastic factory were dwindling year by year. She persuaded him that for the sake of their child's future and the opportunity to develop their careers in Tokyo, he should make a firm decision. Caught up in his happiness, Makoto went to the financial firm recommended by the young man and mortgaged the mountain land. He then invested all the money he borrowed into the large project suggested by the young man.

The truth came crashing down when Makoto's childhood friend spotted his celebrity wife and the young man from the prestigious family holding hands as they exited a love hotel in Tokyo. Soon

after, Makoto received the news that the project he had invested in had gone bankrupt, and the operator had absconded with the investors' money. While Makoto was still questioning his wife about her relationship with the young man, the financial firm began pressing him for repayment, threatening to seize his mountain land. It was then that Makoto discovered the financial firm had underworld connections and that their primary business was loan sharking. His dream shattered, and on the day his wife packed her bags to leave, he received a divorce petition from the court. As Makoto begged his wife to consider their child, she smirked and asked if he could be sure the child was his.

On the day the financial firm came to take possession of the land, Makoto's mother suffered a heart attack. As the ambulance passed by the family cemetery, the loan sharks blew up the plastic factory that the Naka family had operated for generations.

Makoto Naka knelt before his mother's spirit for three days and then went to the bank to withdraw the private savings his mother had left for him to start a small business. With this last seven million yen, he came to the Gokuraku-kan. He is not a good gambler, but when one is in a desperate situation, they will gamble everything on that one glimmer of hope.

"That's quite a big wish you have there," Miss Kogure said after hearing Makoto's wish in the VIP room. "Although your luck has been good today, twelve billion yen may not be enough."

"How much more do I need? I can go out and gamble some more!" Makoto was desperate, almost pleading.

Miss Kogure held Makoto's hand, her fingers brushing against his left ring finger, still bearing the mark of his wedding band. "Add this finger to the wager, and it will be enough."

Makoto shuddered, but he didn't pull his hand away. "They are underworld, and you are too... Won't you join them in harming me?"

"The underworld is not a monolith," Miss Kogure said with a light laugh. "Compared to those who are high above, ruling the underworld with their laws, perhaps we 'hybrids' are more trustworthy?" She turned and walked towards the door, leaving a small dagger on the table.

If there is no one left in this world to trust, most people would put their faith in hybrids, Makoto thought.

Miss Kogure did not lead him back to the VIP room, with its walls adorned with red crystal glass. Instead, she guided him through an inconspicuous emergency exit and down a whitewashed staircase, floor by floor, into the depths of the casino.

Makoto Naka never imagined that this casino had such an extensive basement. Aside from their footsteps, he couldn't hear any other human sounds. A massive fan slowly turned, blowing warm air that added to the stifling atmosphere. If it weren't for Miss Kogure's warm grasp on his

hand, Makoto doubted he would have the courage to descend to the very bottom. This hidden path beneath the Gokuraku-kan felt like a direct route to the underworld.

"Miss Sakurai, is it Mr. Naka?" A man in black, wearing sunglasses, appeared at the staircase landing.

In this near pitch-black place, the man's choice of eyewear seemed odd, and Makoto stole a glance at him, sensing a strange golden glow emanating from behind the dark lenses... a gaze that, for some reason, Makoto associated with a cold-blooded animal.

"B431. Mr. Naka's wish is already there. Please follow me." The man turned and led Makoto and Miss Kogure to a black iron door, which he unlocked with a magnetic card.

This was a small room with iron plates covering the walls, floor, and ceiling. Being underground, there were no windows, only small vents for air circulation. The room was sparsely furnished, with four chairs, each occupied by a person with their arms bound behind their backs and a hood over their head. They trembled, emitting muffled whimpers. The man closed the door and took out a prepared file folder.

He lifted the first hood and compared the face to a photo in the folder. "Fujita Jotaro, the president of the financial firm that provided your loan. A veteran of the Triads. Please confirm."

"It's him," Makoto Naka said hoarsely.

The man drew out a pistol with a silencer, pressing it against Fujita Jotaro's forehead. There was a soft "puff," and the corpse, along with the chair, toppled over.

"Yamaguchi Satoshi, he was the one who planned that real estate project, and you were his investor. He colluded with your friend Akamatsu Shikei. Yamaguchi initiated the project, and Akamatsu convinced investors to join him. Then Yamaguchi fled with the money to a country in East Africa that has no extradition treaty with Japan. Akamatsu also pretended to be a victim, but Yamaguchi will launder the money and send it to him. Since there is no extradition treaty, we sent people to bring him back from Africa. There was an accident along the way, and the goods are a bit damaged, please forgive us, esteemed guest." The man explained that the "damage" referred to Yamaguchi's ears, which had been cut off. They were not bandaged but merely dusted with yellow powder to stop the bleeding.

"Please confirm." The man pointed the gun at Yamaguchi's forehead.

Naka nodded, and Yamaguchi's head was blown back by the bullet, spraying blood on the ceiling.

"Akamatsu Shikei, your wife's close friend. He pretended to be from a prestigious family, but he was actually an underground boxer and a part-time gigolo. He has been your wife's lover, and it

was his idea to scheme against you and take your wealth. Additionally, as per your wish, we forcibly induced labor on your wife's pregnancy, and the DNA test confirmed that the child was indeed Akamatsu's." The man said, "Please confirm."

Naka stared at the man, much younger and more handsome than himself, and nodded slightly, tears streaming down his face, his expression contorted with rage and grief.

"As for your wife, we have also brought her here as per your request. You didn't insist on us getting rid of her, so we'll leave her to you to deal with." The man indicated the last person in the chair, their body trembling under the hooded bag. Although their face was covered, the voluptuous curves of their body beneath the white skirt left no doubt that they were a stunning beauty.

"If you don't want to keep her, rest assured that cleaning up the mess is also part of our service, free of charge. If you can't bear to let her go, we have reserved our best VIP suite for you on the upper floor. You can take her there and stay as long as you like, until she changes her heart and devotes herself to you completely. This is also complimentary." Miss Kogure opened the redwood box and took out the dagger that Naka was familiar with. Three weeks ago, he had used this dagger to cut off his own finger, leaving it behind at the Gokuraku-kan as part of the payment for his wish.

"You're right-handed, so holding the knife in your right hand should be more convenient." Miss Kogure whispered in Naka's ear, simultaneously placing the unsheathed dagger in his hand.

Naka stood there, staring at the woman he had once loved so deeply that he would have died for her. She was also the woman who had caused the ruin of his family. His face contorted with rage one moment and looked like a hurt child the next. Miss Kogure and the black-clad man left the room, locking the door behind them. Naka listened to the crisp click-clack of Miss Kogure's high heels fading away, and he was truly alone with his wife. His mind was a mix of red and white—the red of his mother's blood coughed up on her deathbed and the white of his wife's "Shiromuku" wedding kimono.

"I really want to leave that coward, Makoto Naka, in that room as well." The man muttered behind Miss Kogure.

"There's no need to lay a hand on the guests! They are our golden geese." Miss Kogure's voice was stern.

"Yes, I will control myself. It's just disgusting to see such a spineless man, ruined by a woman. He's willing to risk his life to take revenge on all his enemies, yet he can't bear to part with the one who caused all this. If there was no love to begin with, then the only thing he could be attached to is her body." The man said, "After we leave, will he throw down the knife, tear off her clothes, and beg for her affections?"

"No, he will kill that woman, definitely." Miss Kogure smiled.

"Are you that confident, Miss Sakurai?"

"When he made his request, he was still a cowardly man. But now, he has seen the beauty of power. He used to be like a groveling slave before that woman, but when he realizes that she is now his slave, her life in his hands, he will no longer cherish her." Miss Kogure said calmly.

They walked a few more steps, and the dying wails of the victims echoed down the long, narrow corridor, lingering for a long time.

"Oh, Mr. Mitsui, it's been a while since your last visit. I hope you'll be lucky again tonight."

"Mr. Daida, you're here too? The winnings you took from here last time weren't enough to satisfy you, I see. It looks like you've brought an even bigger box of money this time."

"Prepare a double portion of Shirakawa whiskey for Mr. Ichimura, with ice."

As soon as Miss Kogure stepped out of the elevator into the casino hall, she became the center of attention. She hurried forward, greeting various familiar guests with a sweet smile. Here, she was like the owner of a bar, a young and charming madam. The guests all knew that getting on the madam's good side might earn them special treatment. Moreover, Miss Kogure's beauty and charm were irresistible. The guests often said that Miss Kogure was like chilled sweet wine—impossible to dislike and easy to become addicted to.

"There are many female celebrities from Tokyo here tonight. Is there anyone who catches your eye? If sushi is what you desire, the Gokuraku-kan will make it happen." Miss Kogure whispered with a light laugh to Masao Andou, the executive director of Mitsubishi Heavy Industries.

Masao Andou stroked Miss Kogure's hand. "I'm not interested in celebrities. It's the madam herself who's hard to come by."

"Me?" Miss Kogure smiled coquettishly. "I'm just a backstage worker. How could I possibly be worthy of a guest's wish?"

"But I have a particular fondness for women in uniforms." Masao had already drunk some alcohol, and his boldness had increased significantly.

"We work until the wee hours of the morning. If you're still sober by then, I'll treat you to a midnight snack in the 'Senbonzakura' room on the second floor."

"Miss Sakurai, you're as cunning as a vixen." Masao let go of Miss Kogure's hand, noticing the veins popping on the temple of the black-clad man behind her.

There were a few wishes that no one dared to make at the Gokuraku-kan, one of them being "to spend the night with Kogure." Everyone wondered how such a young woman could be in charge of this extravagant casino. A woman like her would surely come with a hefty price tag. If someone were to make this wish, they might receive an astronomical quote or simply disappear from this world forever—no one knew which.

"Miss Sakurai, an urgent fax from the General." A secretary pushed through the crowd and handed Miss Kogure a black file.

Miss Kogure glanced at it and suddenly composed her smile, politely apologizing to the esteemed guests before excusing herself and heading towards the elevator in the center of the hall, its doors adorned with gold foil. It was an elevator that required a card to operate. Some said it led to the most luxurious suite in the casino, while others speculated that it led to the Gokuraku-kan's vault or even Miss Kogure's private bedroom.

As the elevator doors opened, Miss Kogure stepped inside and removed her high heels, walking silently on the tatami-matted floor of the top-floor Japanese-style suite.

This suite featured traditional tatami flooring and was divided by simple white paper screens. The windows were open, letting in the moonlight. Next to a white wood screen was a small table with a white porcelain vase, holding a single spring peach blossom that had not yet bloomed. A hand as white as translucent porcelain picked up the blossom, and long, lustrous hair was swept up, revealing a graceful neck.

"Weary, weary, a hairpin as proof, a gift from the Emperor long ago;

The man in the moonlight sang as he walked, his voice evoking the image of an ancient, faded painting. He wore a blood-red wide-sleeved kimono, embroidered with large blooms of red spider lilies, also known as "higanbana," a flower that seemed to drip with fresh blood, contrasting starkly with his pale white skin. Surprisingly, the performer of this Chinese-themed play, "Yang Guifei," was a man, but when he danced, his waist was as slender as a willow, and his shoulders were delicate, causing the audience to forget his gender entirely. This was authentic Japanese Kabuki, and the renowned Kabuki actor, Bando Tamasaburo, played the role of Yang Guifei.

Contrary to what most foreigners might think, true Kabuki can only be performed by men, and those who portray women in Kabuki are known as "onnagata" or "female roles." This art form, created by the Izumo priestess Okuni, did originally include women. However, during the Edo period, the "yujo kabuki," or "prostitute kabuki," was associated with prostitution, and the "wakashu kabuki," or "adolescent kabuki," was linked to homosexuality. It was only with the emergence of "yarō kabuki" that Kabuki became a true art form, and from then on, only adult men were allowed to perform on stage. The onnagata dedicate their lives to observing, studying, and imitating women, and they understand the beauty of women better than women themselves. It's similar to how some viewers can appreciate a painting more deeply than the

painter themselves. The onnagata captivate their audience with their voices and graceful movements, without relying on their physical beauty.

Sakurai Kogure was one of those captivated souls. Whenever she watched this man, his face powdered white, singing and dancing, she couldn't bear to interrupt him. In the eyes of the casino's guests, Sakurai Kogure was a rare beauty, but in front of this man, she felt her own beauty was as thin as the dust on a leaf. Compared to him, she seemed dull and plain, and in his presence, women felt like superfluous beings.

The man sighed softly and knelt down, slowly closing the white paper fan in his hand. The spring peach blossom in his hair fell, and his long, black hair tumbled like a dark waterfall.

For a long time, Sakurai said nothing, so he knew that the contents of the file were urgent beyond measure.

"What a beautiful night. Fine wine, beautiful women, gold, and decadence—it's all so intoxicating, like a heady brew." The man spoke softly.

The bustling voices of the crowd downstairs rose like steam from a boiling pot, seeping in through the open windows, carrying with it the scent of women's perfume and the alcohol on the men's breath, like a surging tide.

Sakurai knelt behind the man and began massaging his shoulders and back. "Something has come up. The test subject died on the train from Tokyo to Hokkaido. He was eliminated by the Execution Bureau."

"I told Sakurai Akira that Hokkaido is a good place to bury oneself, and he actually went there... Sakurai Akira is your half-brother, and he's dead, yet I see no grief in your eyes."

"He made his choice, and he must accept the consequences. At least he lived freely, and he doesn't need my pity."

"It's a shame to lose such a good test subject. Kozou Takamura's drugs are still unreliable. That pervert is of no use to us, so killing him is like a tribute to your brother."

"Understood." Sakurai said, "If you still need test subjects, since Sakurai Akira and I share the same father, our bloodlines must have some similarities."

"Woman, don't be in a hurry to leave me." The man spoke softly, "I haven't grown tired of you yet."

His words carried a musical lilt, like a dream-like murmur. Sakurai didn't dare say more, only increasing her efforts to massage the man's shoulders and back. To please this man, Sakurai had specifically gone to Thailand to learn massage techniques. Her teacher was an old man

who was a master of acupressure points. He worked in a nightclub in Pattaya, massaging female guests. His tongue was long, like a lizard's, and his gaze when looking at women was lustful, like a lecherous hound in heat. However, he possessed a divine pair of hands. He offered to massage female guests for a price of 10,000 Thai baht, and if they allowed him to massage their shoulders and back for a few minutes, they would receive the same amount as a reward. Those women who initially despised him would find themselves floating on cloud nine, their bodies feeling weightless under his skilled touch, and they would fall into a deep, relaxing sleep. At this point, the old masseur would kiss their cheeks and necks and make obscene gestures, taking advantage of the women in their vulnerable state, all in full view of the male guests. After ten minutes, he would ring a bell to wake the woman up, and she would be surprised to find herself thanking him profusely, claiming she had never slept so soundly and felt so refreshed.

Sakurai Kogure had wagered herself as the price to learn the old man's techniques. In the beginning, the old man demonstrated on Sakurai, and she would always fall asleep, waking up to find purple-red marks on her body. Sakurai neither feared nor complained; instead, she doubled her efforts to serve the teacher diligently. When it was her turn to massage the old man, he would always laugh heartily, as if she were tickling him. Through constant exposure and practice, Sakurai gradually learned to mimic those divine hands. Finally, one day, as she massaged him, the old man, having let down his guard, fell into a deep sleep. That was when Sakurai snapped his neck... The old man paid for his transgression with his life, never knowing what kind of person he had offended.

Now, Sakurai Kogure possessed the ability to hypnotize anyone with her hands, yet she couldn't hypnotize this man. She could only make him slightly more relaxed, easing the tension in his body.

The man picked up the glass of strong liquor and drank it in one go, then wrapped his arm around Sakurai Kogure's neck and kissed her lips. Instinctively, Sakurai straightened her body to reciprocate, and the man's kiss was fierce, like that of a wild beast. Every time he kissed her, it was sudden and intense, like a storm or a wolf biting into its prey's throat to suck their blood. Yet, in the midst of this savage kiss, Sakurai's body softened, and her mind grew hazy, as if she were falling into the clouds. He held her petite frame tightly in his embrace, burying his head in her chest, remaining silent for a long time before letting her go. Sakurai adjusted her clothes and knelt respectfully to the side.

"You're tired." The man said softly, "As tired as I am."

Sakurai remained silent. Indeed, she had been working tirelessly for the Gokuraku-kan, and if it weren't for the dragon blood sustaining her, she would have collapsed long ago. However, she had no complaints, as she was happy to be in such a position. The Gokuraku-kan was a significant strategic move by the organization against the Yagami Eight Families, and it would bring about a complete reshuffle of the underworld-controlled gambling industry. Her standing within the "Makai-gumi" would rise with the success of the Gokuraku-kan, and only then could

she continue to stay by this man's side. In her eyes, this man was her entire world, yet he belonged to no one. Sakurai had seen him kiss other women, and she had been kissed by him, but his kisses never seemed to be about love; they were about desire and taking.

After being kissed by him, Sakurai's heart was filled with joy, knowing that she had once again offered herself to bring him temporary peace.

"There's one more thing you haven't mentioned." The man said.

"The General sent a fax. The ace team from Cassel College arrived in Tokyo tonight and checked into the Peninsula Hotel." Sakurai's heart skipped a beat as she realized that the man's kiss had made her forget this crucial piece of information.

The man, for once, turned serious, his eyes gleaming in the moonlight. "Are they going to explore there?"

"Yes, tonight, all the top members of the Yagami Eight Families are gathering at the shrine for a meeting. It's been decades since there's been such a grand assembly, but unfortunately, we don't have any scouts among the attendees. As of now, we're not sure what the meeting is about. However, the fact that the ace team from Cassel College arrived in Tokyo on the same night as the meeting suggests a significant move, and it's likely related to the Shinso."

"There's no need for investigations. I know what Tachibana Masumune is thinking. The Yagami Eight Families are going to wage war against us. With the involvement of Cassel College, the surface calm won't last. 'It's time to end the Makai-gumi once and for all with a war.' If I were Tachibana, I'd probably say something like that to boost the morale of my subordinates, right?" The man said nonchalantly.

"These are photos of the ace team." Sakurai handed over the faxed photos, "They're just kids."

This was probably one of the rare group photos of Caesar, Chu Zihang, and Lu Mingfei—taken after they had escaped from the Berlin Nibelungen. In the photo, they were leaning against a cracked wall, exhausted from the sun. It was only on such special occasions that Caesar and Chu Zihang wouldn't mind being in the same frame. They were likely mistaken for injured individuals rescued from an earthquake, with police emergency blankets draped over their shoulders and free breakfast buns provided. Since Caesar and Finger were foreigners, they were given beef horn pastries instead of the regular buns. Finger leaned against the wall, his arm around Nora, who wore a bright red qipao, her beautiful legs and red patent leather ankle boots on display. She leaned back, hugging herself, her face a mix of welcome and reluctance... It was actually Finger trying to trade his beef horn pastry for Nora's bun, but she had refused. Caesar had his arm around Nora's shoulders, frowning as he devoured the beef horn pastry. It wasn't that he minded Finger flirting with his girl, but the pastry was a bit tough for him without his usual freshly ground coffee. The severely injured Chu Zihang lay on a stretcher, wrapped up

like a dumpling, waiting for the ambulance, his eyes staring blankly at the sky. Lu Mingfei sat alone in a corner, gobbling down the hot buns, glancing at the others with a sidelong look.

The man gently caressed the faces in the photos with his pale white fingers, a smile blooming on his face. "How interesting, I like these people!"

"Yes, it's surprising that Cassel College sent the heir of the Gattuso family to Japan. This lineup is certainly intriguing." Sakurai said.

"No, I'm not talking about Caesar Gattuso. I'm talking about this boy, Lu Mingfei." The man stared intently at the least noticeable boy in the corner of the photo, as if still immersed in the previous performance of "Yang Guifei." He seemed to be captivated by the boy's gaze, which was so pitiful, sad, and yet, there was a hidden lion within.

He stood up, took the long sword with the scarlet scabbard from the rack, and slung it over his shoulder. "Woman, I'm going to Tokyo. You take care of things here while I'm gone."

"Hai!" Sakurai responded with a sharp cry.

The man strode towards the window, bathed in the silvery moonlight, and suddenly leaped into the night. In Sakurai Kogure's clear pupils, the black helicopter blocked out the moonlight as the man, clad in the scarlet kimono embroidered with higanbana, sat in the cabin. A new, alluring woman sat by his side, respectfully offering him iced liquor. Sakurai lowered her head and noticed a small wooden box on the small table next to the screen, filled with rainbow-colored vials.

Chapter 9: Genji Heavy Industries

"When did you become so diligent, Lu Mingfei? You've been reading since morning." Caesar asked.

Lu Mingfei was flipping through a booklet titled "100 Lectures on Japanese Mythology and History." To be honest, he wasn't particularly interested in this book, but Lu Wenzhe had insisted on giving it to him, indicating that it would be useful. From past experiences, Lu Wenzhe's items were never one short or one extra; every single thing had its use. It was like in a game where you pick up a can of dog food, and you know that there will be a dog in the quest that can be lured and defeated with that can. If you throw away the can of dog food along the way, then too bad, you'll have to go back and pick up another one. With the wisdom Lu Mingfei had gained from games, he knew that the content of this small booklet would come in handy.

"To learn about Japanese culture, so I can brag about it when I get back." Lu Mingfei blurted out nonsense.

The booklet covered only the most basic aspects of Japanese mythology, and Lu Mingfei had already learned much of it from watching anime. However, it was still necessary to study and reflect on it. The professors said that the myths of each nation were rewritten based on their history, and those seemingly absurd mythical stories often had their prototypes in history.

The most classic example was the Great Flood. According to the Bible, only Noah and his family, along with the animals on the ark, survived the flood that engulfed the entire world. Before the 20th century, non-religious scientists believed that the Great Flood was entirely fictional, as they couldn't imagine a flood that submerged the entire world. If one were to look down from space, wouldn't the Earth appear as a blue water ball? Even if there was such a flood, there would be towering waves hundreds of meters high on the water's surface, and even aircraft carriers would be unable to survive, let alone Noah's wooden boat. A flood of this magnitude could only have occurred hundreds of millions of years ago, when the Earth was likely in the Cambrian period, dominated by trilobites. Not to mention humans, but even dinosaurs had not yet evolved.

However, gradually, mythologists discovered that the Great Flood was not unique to the Bible. From Mesopotamian mythology to ancient Chinese mythology and Indian mythology, the myth of a world-engulfing flood was present across the Eurasian continent, from east to west, with only the savior figures differing. The Chinese believed that a powerful figure named Yu the Great managed the flood, while the ancient Indian text, the Manusmriti, stated that mankind survived the Great Flood because Manu, the progenitor of mankind, was guided by a giant fish to the Himalayas. Subsequently, scholars calculated that around 12,000 to 14,000 years ago, the last ice age of the Quaternary period ended, causing massive glaciers to melt and sea levels to rise, resulting in a geological phenomenon known as the "Great Flood." The memory of this world-encompassing flood remained in the ancient peoples' memories, and thus, various ethnic groups had flood myths. Nowadays, people are searching for Noah's Ark all over the world. They are looking for traces of a large ship in the Black Sea and the Greek mountains, as during the time of the flood, both the Black Sea and the Greek mountains were submerged underwater.

Since Japan has had hybrids since ancient times, there should be some traces of the Dragon Clan civilization in Japanese mythology. However, Lu Mingfei couldn't find any clues, and to him, Japanese mythology seemed rather insignificant and had no connection to the grand Dragon Clan civilization.

The booklet mentioned a pair of divine siblings, Izanagi and Izanami, who stirred up mud from the seabed, and the sediment settled to form the land of Japan. Next, the brother and sister, due to the lack of other suitable partners, engaged in an incestuous relationship. They were elevated from brother and sister gods to husband and wife gods, and they procreated to create Japan's entire pantheon—the fire god, the thunder god, the mountain god, the water god... They went about creating gods with great enthusiasm, even to the extent that a large bowel movement could result in the birth of a god. Japanese mythology is essentially the family history of Izanagi

and Izanami, and all the gods are their family members, and all the events are their family affairs.

"Are you trying to find a connection between Japanese mythology and the Dragon Clan civilization?" Chu Zihang asked. "That might be difficult. The professors have tried to decipher Japanese mythology, but they've encountered significant obstacles. Japanese mythology doesn't align with the known history of the Dragon Clan at all. For example, the gods in Japanese mythology don't have arch-enemies. They're like an extended family that continues to procreate, and the professors can't decipher any conflicts or wars from it. War is the central theme of Dragon Clan history."

"This book says that the Imperial Family is descended from the gods." Lu Mingfei flipped through the booklet, "The first Emperor, Jimmu, is said to be a descendant of Amaterasu, the Sun Goddess. That's quite a scam, isn't it?"

"That's a characteristic of Japanese mythology. It has a very consistent timeline. The descendants of each generation of Izanagi and Izanami are recorded in a book called the 'Kojiki.' From Emperor Jimmu onwards, each generation of descendants became the Emperor, and the previous generations were deified. In this sense, the Japanese Imperial Family is the only existing divine lineage in the world."

"The historians are their retainers, so they can write whatever they want. If I strike it rich, I'll have a family tree made too, claiming that my ancestors were all heroic figures, like that person and that person..." Lu Mingfei trailed off as he began scratching his head.

"Are you talking about people with the same surname?" Caesar asked.

"Damn, the Lu family hasn't produced any notable figures in history!" Lu Mingfei sighed.

"The genealogy of the Japanese Imperial Family is indeed unreliable. The first ten Emperors are only mentioned in texts and cannot be verified. The Japanese write their history like mythology, and until before World War II, many Japanese believed that the Emperor was a descendant of the gods. You could say that Japanese mythology and history are one and the same, or that the Japanese have been living in a world of mythology, with the Emperor as their nominal divine ruler." Chu Zihang said.

"Has there ever been an incident of ancient dragons awakening in Japan?" Lu Mingfei asked.

"Not at all. I've already checked with Norma, and there have been no awakening incidents in Japan, nor are there any traces of Dragon Clan civilization. Japan is the 'cleanest' region in the world, completely free of dragon activity. The cases handled by the Japan Branch are all trivial matters, like the auctioning of a Dragon Clan-related artifact from Europe in Japan."

"If there has been no Dragon Clan civilization in Japan, then where do the hybrids come from?" Lu Mingfei asked.

"No one knows. The origin of the hybrids in Japan is as much a mystery as Japanese mythology itself, and it is said that even the hybrids themselves don't know." Chu Zihang turned his head to look out the window.

The black Lexus sedan made its way through the streets of Tokyo. After a night of rain, the air in Tokyo was fresh, with a hint of seaweed-like fragrance. The news reported that a warm, humid air current from the Pacific was controlling the climate over Japan, and there would be consecutive rainy days ahead. The Caesar team sat in the back of the luxurious car, and as expected, Chu Zihang and Caesar chose the window seats on either side, leaving Lu Mingfei to sit between them. From their arrival the previous night to that morning, Caesar and Chu Zihang hadn't exchanged many words. They mostly spoke to Lu Mingfei, and even when they disagreed on something, they conveyed their opinions through Lu Mingfei. Lu Mingfei had a feeling that, as the patriarch of this three-person family, his two concubines were in a cold war, and he was caught in the middle.

Lu Mingfei's current situation was quite delicate. Nominally, he was a lackey of the student council, but privately, he had a life-and-death relationship with the president of the Lion Heart Society, and he also had designs on his future sister-in-law... If he were in a gangster movie, his fate would be to be riddled with bullets and left to die on the street. In any case, although the Caesar team only had three people, the complex relationships among them were like ticking time bombs, ready to explode at any moment.

Nighttime Tokyo was completely different from daytime Tokyo. The night lights of the city were colorful and alluring, like a kimono-clad mature beauty, while daytime Tokyo resembled a sporty girl, with a simple color scheme that blended seamlessly with the sky. This was a well-ordered city, where salarymen in a hurry scurried in and out of the subway, and pedestrians walked at a brisk pace. However, their actions followed predictable patterns, as if they were running on invisible tracks. Rarely did anyone deviate from their path. At the crosswalks, people silently waited for the light to change, and as the crowd grew, no one became impatient or spoke loudly. Then, as the red light turned green, the cars on the street came to a complete stop within a second, and the tide of people crossed the street, dispersing along their respective paths. When the red light came on again, the traffic resumed, and a new group of people quietly waited at the crossing.

Chu Zihang turned his head and saw that Lu Mingfei was also gazing out the window, his pupils reflecting the bustling street scene.

"This is a country governed by rules, a complex machine where everyone is a part, constrained by regulations and running at high speed. Such a life is truly frightening when you think about it." Chu Zihang said softly, "Aren't you thinking the same thing?"

"No... I was just thinking that Japanese girls have thick calves..."

Chu Zihang silently turned his head back. Even with the same serious eyes observing the same scene, the thoughts behind them could be vastly different. Seeing Lin Daiyu, Jia Baoyu's heart stirred, thinking that he had seen this sister before... Seeing Lin Daiyu, Xue Pan thought, 'Lolis have three good points—they're easy to push over, their bodies are soft, and they're good to bully.'

The car came to a stop. A girl in a black suit opened the door, her hands pressed against the trouser line as she bowed deeply. "Welcome, honored guests from the headquarters, to the Japan Branch."

After breakfast, a car from the Japan Branch was already waiting for them downstairs at the hotel, ready to take them on a tour of the Japan Branch's base in Tokyo. Breakfast had been served directly to their suite by a food cart, along with a freshly prepared meal by the head chef and a faxed document detailing their itinerary for the day. The itinerary was planned down to the minute, from 9:00 am to 6:00 pm, with no room for freedom. They were expected to visit the Japan Branch's office in the morning, followed by a visit to the Imperial Palace arranged by the Imperial Household Agency. They would also pay respects at the 1400-year-old Senso-ji Temple and go shopping in Ginza. Lunch was scheduled at a Michelin three-star French restaurant, and dinner would be prepared by the head chef himself, featuring the finest Japanese cuisine. The fresh fish to be used for dinner had been shipped from the Tsukiji fish market at 6:00 am that morning, including an 1.86-meter-long deep-sea tuna. This itinerary was so detailed that even Chu Zihang was surprised. In case of traffic jams, backup plans were in place, and from 9:00 am to 6:00 pm, they had no free time at all. They, too, had become parts in this giant Japanese machine, moving along with its rhythm.

"I thought there would be men in black suits lining the path and bowing." Caesar said as he stepped out of the car, gazing up at the black skyscraper.

In the midst of the elegant gray buildings, this tower, wrapped in black glass, stood out starkly. It was like a black iron monument, hinting at the immense power of the organization within. "If we were visiting the family shrine, they would have maintained the tradition of lining the path and bowing. However, we have to be low-key in the city center to avoid disturbing the neighboring residents. Please forgive us, esteemed guests." The person waiting by the car door to greet them was Yayuki Sakura, Gen Chisei's assistant, whom they had met the previous night. She was a rare slender and tall type among Japanese girls, with long, black hair styled in a high ponytail like a kendo girl.

"Due to traffic congestion, you are four minutes behind schedule, but it's fine. We have checked the traffic conditions along the route, so your meeting with the masters has been delayed by 15 minutes. Let me take you on a tour of the office area instead."

"This building was completed in December 2004 and is the headquarters of the Gen Heavy Industries Corporation, as well as the College's office center in Tokyo." Sakura led the Caesar team into the spacious lobby.

The lobby was filled with the sound of rapid, forceful footsteps, as employees carrying file folders hurried back and forth. The air was scented with subtle perfume, and the ding of the elevators arriving and departing echoed throughout the space. At first glance, this building seemed no different from the top-class business centers in Ginza, except for the nature of their work...

"Chief! A fax from the Numakawai Association, their relationship with the Hiromiya Group has rapidly deteriorated in the past three days, with four clashes resulting in two minor injuries and one hospitalization. Please ask the headquarters to mediate." A young man with thick-framed glasses rushed out of the elevator behind a middle-aged man, reciting the contents of the fax in his hand.

"The Numakawai Association's influence in the local area is decreasing. Their scale has shrunk by 22% compared to the same period last year, and their offerings to the headquarters have decreased by 11.2%. At this rate, we'll have to downgrade their credit rating from 'C' to 'D'! In this situation, it will be difficult for the headquarters to make a decision that favors the Numakawai Association when mediating their conflict with the 'B'-rated Hiromiya Group!" The chief frowned, "But if we don't resolve the Numakawai Association's problem, it will affect the year-end bonuses of the Hiromiya Group!"

"Yeah, yeah, I'm still paying off my mortgage... Chief, why don't we just eliminate the Numakawai Association? Then we can get rid of this burden!"

"Last night, our ship carrying the Tomahawk missile combat units sank off the coast of Nagasaki, and the coast guard has blocked off the area where the accident occurred. If they salvage that ship..." Two men in black suits paced in the corner, their faces grave.

"Bribe the coast guard commander? Ask him to suspend the salvage operation. Damn, those combat units are worth 120 million dollars. If the coast guard gets their hands on them, won't we have to commit seppuku in front of the masters?"

"The person in charge there seems to be very upright and incorruptible. Bribery won't work on him. I say we resort to threatening his wife and daughter! We have to take drastic measures now!"

"The new family rules prohibit the use of kidnapping for extortion. If we do that, we'll have to commit seppuku too!"

"We don't necessarily have to kidnap them. What about using a pornographic video of his wife?"

"Forcing unrelated women to film pornographic videos for blackmail is also prohibited by the new family rules, I think it's in Chapter 6, Section 4, Article 3. The new family rules are too strict. Are we still a yakuza organization? Even the CIA can do more shady things than us!"

"We don't have to force her. According to the files, his wife was a contracted artist for the family's AV studio before they got married."

"Great! Let's get our hands on her work and see if she's any good!"

"Everything is settled. I took care of the license issue through Congressman Aoki. You guys go ahead and make a fortune in Yokohama! You are my most valued students, and I believe that one day, you will surpass me! Remember to give back to the family when you've made it big. Set an example for your younger brothers!" A white-haired, well-dressed elderly man was giving a pep talk to three young men who were constantly nodding and bowing in the lounge area.

"If it weren't for the teacher's help, how could we have our own nightclub and casino? Teacher, you are as loving and majestic as a father in our hearts! We really don't know how to repay you, but here, please accept this—the nightclub's lifetime honorary gold card. All expenses are free, so please visit us when you have time, and we'll make sure to arrange the youngest and cutest girls to serve you! Do you still like schoolgirl uniforms, Teacher?" The leader of the students was filled with gratitude, kneeling and presenting a pure gold card to the teacher.

"Ah, there's nothing more gratifying for a teacher than receiving gifts from students! You've all grown up, and you're the pillars of the future! I'm very pleased, but I can't accept this gold card... It's not that I've lost interest in schoolgirl uniforms, but recently, my wife has been very strict with me. She said that if I really love schoolgirl uniforms, she can wear them too..." The teacher's white eyebrows twitched. "You guys are... very energetic." Lu Mingfei's eyes twitched, "Is this the new generation of yakuza?"

"It's more like a management organization for the yakuza. The Gen Heavy Industries machine room stores information on all the yakuza in Japan, and every yakuza member is registered here. To manage this massive organization, the family has thirteen departments with over two thousand people working in shifts. There are six hundred operators who take calls around the clock, listening to requests for help from all over Japan. These calls are all from yakuza members recognized by us." Sakura explained, "You can think of this place as the information center of the Japanese underworld."

"A society that operates in the shadows," Caesar said, "When yakuza members encounter trouble, they seek help from you before going to the police, right?"

"Yes, as long as they acknowledge the Yagami Eight Families as the headquarters and pay their membership fees on time, the headquarters has an obligation to provide assistance. When young people join these yakuza groups, they receive an identity card at the same time they sign the contract, indicating that the family recognizes their status in the yakuza. They can directly

call the headquarters for help. The family also has a foundation that provides medical and retirement benefits for its members."

"They even have medical and social insurance?" Lu Mingfei exclaimed, "That's quite generous!"

"Most insurance companies are strict when it comes to providing medical and retirement insurance for yakuza members, so the family has set up a fund of 160 billion yen, investing it worldwide and using the returns to provide benefits for the members. The fund operates similarly to the Canadian Teachers' Retirement Fund. If a member passes away, the family will also cover the education and living expenses of their children until they turn eighteen."

"I really want to join too!" Lu Mingfei said.

"In that regard, I can try to contact the Human Resources department for you, but to be honest, the family rarely recruits foreigners." Sakura swiped her card to open the VIP-only observation elevator, "Please."

As the observation elevator ascended, Lu Mingfei could look down on the bustling city through the black glass walls. A snake-like elevated highway appeared between the skyscrapers in the Shinjuku area, with a constant stream of traffic. Surprisingly, one of the elevated highways even passed through the Gen Heavy Industries building. The 5th and 6th floors of this building didn't exist, replaced instead by a tunnel for the highway, with tens of thousands of vehicles passing through the building daily, while the other floors remained unaffected.

"The Tokyo Metropolitan Government decided to build that elevated highway when the building was almost complete. They had to pass through here, but after negotiations, the government couldn't accept the family's asking price, so they gave up on demolishing the building and instead signed a 100-year lease, renting the 5th and 6th floors of this building for the highway, while the upper floors are suspended, supported by pillars." Sakura explained.

Caesar was also impressed. With the financial might of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, they could afford to build this expensive elevated highway but couldn't buy this building, which spoke volumes about the staggering value of the building and the Yagami Eight Families' influence in Japan.

"With the weight of the six floors above, totaling several tens of thousands of tons, resting on twelve supporting pillars, is the structure stable? I heard that Japan is prone to earthquakes and hurricanes." Chu Zihang asked.

"The design and construction of this building were handled by the Tachibana family's Maruyama Construction, and in the Japanese construction industry, no one would doubt the work of Maruyama Construction. They have a 500-year history, and their founder built the Tenshu-kaku for Toyotomi Hideyoshi in the Edo period. The Tokyo Metropolitan Government trusted Maruyama Construction, which is why they allowed the important elevated highway to pass

through the Gen Heavy Industries building. In the nearly ten years since its completion, there hasn't been an earthquake or hurricane that has affected the tunnel's passage."

"Impressive!" Lu Mingfei exclaimed.

"Ding," the elevator stopped at the 28th floor. As the elevator doors opened, the view suddenly expanded, revealing a large office hall. Hundreds of girls sat in cubicles, answering phones and searching on their computer screens, their crisp "Hai, hai" filling the air.

"These are the operators of the family. The hotline is open 24 hours a day, and there are always hundreds of operators ready to listen to the yakuza members' requests for help. When setting up this hotline, the family required the service to be better than the police emergency number, with a friendly attitude and tone. During earthquakes and tsunamis, we also take calls from civilians, and over 50,000 family members have participated in disaster relief efforts." Sakura said.

"The family is truly the savior of the Japanese people!" Lu Mingfei said.

Passing through the call center, they climbed the stairs to the 29th floor, where Lu Mingfei first saw a huge map of Tokyo covering an entire wall. Unlike the 3D projection map in the headquarters' central control room, this map was printed on paper, with colorful darts pinned to it. The staff took notes on small pieces of paper while answering calls, then rolled up the paper and threw it onto the colorful darts. Another group of people faced the map, deep in thought. Occasionally, someone would get up, pluck a dart from the map, and return to their desk, whereupon a group of black-clad subordinates would gather around them.

"It's like an operations command center." Lu Mingfei said.

"We call this the Liaison Department. Every hour, even every minute, there are conflicts among the yakuza groups. If it's a minor matter, the operators will directly hand the task to the relevant department to handle, but if the operator feels that the situation must be reported, they will inform the Liaison Department. The leaders of the Liaison Department are elders with status and experience in the yakuza world. Some have good relationships with the police, some have personal connections with gang leaders, and some are experts in specific industries. They take on tasks based on their strengths, as the elders are not used to working with computers, so the family allows them to stick to their traditional methods." Sakura explained.

"Throwing darts?" Caesar asked.

"In the Edo period, they used to write notes and pin them to the ribs of messengers to send them out."

Unlike the fast-paced 28th floor and the solemn 29th floor, the 30th floor had a relaxing atmosphere. This floor was designed in a Japanese style, with elderly people in kimonos sitting on tatami mats, drinking tea, and chatting quietly.

"Is this the activity room for your senior executives?" Lu Mingfei asked.

"This is the Strategic Department. Only the most respected elders in the family are allowed to enter the Strategic Department. They used to be leaders of yakuza groups, but now they rarely need to take action themselves. Their main task is to drink tea and chat, but their presence here solidifies the building's status in the Japanese underworld. They are the pillars that support this place." Sakura said, "Only in extremely difficult situations will they be called upon, as they are all wanted by the police and have been in hiding for over a decade."

"Like the Senate in ancient Rome." Caesar said, "How interesting."

"Are we going to meet with them?" Lu Mingfei asked.

"No, although they are respected elders in the family, the ones qualified to meet with esteemed guests like you are the leaders of the Yagami Eight Families." Sakura said, "At this moment, the leaders of the Eight Families are already waiting for you at the Wakamiya Shrine. Please follow me."

"The leaders of the Eight Families?" Lu Mingfei imagined eight old men with hunched backs, dressed in black kimonos, exuding an air of gloom.

Sakura slid open a concealed door, letting in the sunlight. Surprisingly, there was a spacious terrace on this floor, hidden in a corner of the building, invisible from the ground or the sky, only accessible by opening this door.

Named the Wakamiya Shrine, it was indeed a shrine, but not a Buddhist temple, but a Shinto shrine. There was a small, vermilion "torii" gate, and the granite walls were carved with various gods and demons from Shintoism, from the majestic Amaterasu and Tsukuyomi to the fierce Susanoo, as well as hideous-looking monsters. Some had lion-like faces with bared fangs, while others sat cross-legged on a pile of skulls, surrounded by wind and clouds, as if they were on a night parade. Surprisingly, there was also a clear stream on the terrace, with white stones and green grass arranged in the style of a dry landscape garden, exuding a Zen-like tranquility.

Sakura presented a copper basin filled with clear water. Lu Mingfei quickly washed his hands and rinsed his mouth, grateful for the book recommended by Lu Wenzhe, as it had taught him about the "temizu" ritual of purifying one's hands and mouth before visiting a shrine. The black and white stone tables were arranged in a circular pattern resembling the yin-yang symbol, and the six people waiting by the table stood up and bowed.

"You've already met Gen Chisei, the head of the Gen family..." Sakura introduced them one by one.

Caesar was surprised. He hadn't expected that the young man who had picked them up at the airport was one of the highest-ranking members of the Yagami Eight Families. This showed how friendly the Yagami Eight Families were being to them.

"Ryoma Senichi, the head of the Ryoma family and the current head of the Japan Branch."

Ryoma Senichi, the head of the Ryoma family, didn't look like a hunched-over old man exuding gloom and doom. Instead, he seemed to be going through a mid-life crisis, dressed in a meticulously tailored suit, with carefully combed hair, but lacking any vigor. His face seemed to scream, "Work pressure is high, the boss is harsh, no hope for promotion, my wife is cheating, my daughter is dating too early, why don't I just die?"

Is this guy really the most terrifying person in the yakuza? Or the current head of the Japan Branch? He's just a typical middle-aged loser, isn't he? Lu Mingfei thought to himself.

"Inuyama Keiji, the head of the Inuyama family." Inuyama Keiji, with his white hair, looked kind and smiled warmly, "Ah, because I couldn't kill Anjou, I had no choice but to befriend him. What a pity."

"Sakurai Nanami, the head of the Sakurai family, who also serves as the Inspector of the Japan Branch." The head of the Sakurai family was a stunning young woman, and although her outfit was intentionally conservative, her curves were accentuated by the suit skirt. The deep red, thick-framed glasses she wore added color to her already beautiful face.

"Fuuma Kotaro, the head of the Fuuma family and the 'Wakashu' of the Yagami Eight Families. When the leader is absent, the Fuuma family is in charge of the family's meals. Mr. Fuuma is not part of the Japan Branch, but for this task, we borrowed the ninja group from the Fuuma family, so Mr. Fuuma is also present at today's meeting."

Finally, the head of the Fuuma family fit Lu Mingfei's mental image of a yakuza boss. This elderly man, dressed in a black kimono, was like forged iron, his gaze as sharp as a knife. Standing before him, one felt as if they were being pointed at by a knife to their brow. However, the name was a bit odd, Fuuma Kotaro? It sounded like a stage name or an online nickname. Was this old man obsessed with the 'Nobunaga's Ambition' series or the 'Sengoku Musou' series? Surely he wasn't the historical Fuuma Kotaro, the legendary ninja from over 400 years ago.

"Finally, Tachibana Masumune, the head of the Tachibana family and the leader of the Yagami Eight Families."

"You probably didn't expect that the so-called yakuza members would be people like us, did you?" Tachibana Masumune, dressed in white, smiled as he shook hands with the Caesar team, "In fact, we didn't expect the ace agents from the headquarters to be such outstanding young people."

Although he was already an elderly man with white hair, Tachibana Masumune's smile immediately established his status as the "leader among leaders" in the guests' minds. Even the sharp-eyed Fuuma Kotaro lacked the natural confidence that exuded from Tachibana's demeanor.

"The Miyamotoke family is making some preparations, and you will meet them soon. As for the Uesugi family, she is unwell. Something happened in the latter half of the night, and she is still resting. Please forgive her for her absence." Tachibana Masumune said, "I won't be present at the meeting in Takagun, so I'll take my leave now." Sakura bowed deeply.

"No rush, let's wait for Inuyama, Fuuma, and me. Although I used to be the head of the Japan Branch, I'm retired now, so it's not appropriate for me to attend such a confidential meeting. We can chat with these excellent young people from the College, and then we can go have tea with the old folks in the Strategic Department." Tachibana Masumune smiled.

"The tea smells wonderful." Caesar commented casually.

There was a charcoal brazier on the table, with a Kansai iron teapot on top. The teapot was black and heavy, with a design resembling a durian on the upper half, studded with numerous blunt spines. The lower half was carved with the image of a red-faced, long-nosed tengu, its wings spread as it flew amidst the flames and clouds. The charcoal fire heated the bottom of the teapot, causing the tengu's face and wing edges to glow faintly. The water was about to boil. A gentle breeze blew by, causing the water in the teapot to gurgle. At this height, they could directly overlook the sea of Tokyo Bay, and the white sails of boats dotted the sunlight. "To receive the approval of the heir of the Gattuso family, this tea is indeed fortunate." Tachibana Masumune said, "I don't have much to offer, so please accept this Japanese tea ceremony."

"Are you Japanese?" Caesar asked, his eyes scrutinizing Tachibana Masumune.

Tachibana Masumune had a straight nose, deep-set eyes, and sharply defined facial features, which set him apart from typical Japanese elders. However, he had pure black irises, and his every movement exuded a strong Japanese flavor.

"I'm half Japanese and half Russian." Tachibana Masumune said.

Caesar frowned slightly, which made him involuntarily think of the Soviet icebreaker.

"I've been in Japan for many years, and many people can't tell that I'm half-Russian. How did you figure it out, Mr. Gattuso?" Tachibana Masumune asked.

"Your accent. Your accent has characteristics of the Slavic language group, and you distinguish between hard and soft palate sounds, which is typical of Russian pronunciation." Caesar said, "You're not only of Russian descent, you've also lived in Russia."

This was something Lu Mingfei and Chu Zihang had no say in, as their mother tongue was Chinese. Chu Zihang's English pronunciation was only slightly better than Lu Mingfei's due to his reticence. However, Caesar had noticed it from Tachibana's first sentence. From a young age, Caesar had a talent for languages, and in addition to Italian, he could speak English, French, and Spanish fluently, and he could distinguish the languages of every country in Europe.

Even Fuuma Kotaro and Gen Chisei showed surprise, indicating that the other family heads were also unaware of this fact.

"I didn't expect that after so many years, this matter would still be discovered." Tachibana Masumune smiled, "Yes, I lived in Russia for about 30 years, back when it was still the Soviet Union. Everyone wore allocated clothing, and children took pride in wearing military uniforms."

Caesar hesitated for a moment but didn't pursue the topic further. Tachibana Masumune's time in Russia didn't necessarily imply a connection to the Lenin, and there had been many Japanese-Russian mixed-race children after Japan and Russia fought in Northeast China during World War II. Moreover, Tachibana Masumune was quite open about it, not seeming to hide anything.

The water boiled, and Tachibana Masumune picked up the iron teapot, pouring the boiling water into the tea bowls and then discarding the water. This was a standard procedure in the Japanese tea ceremony, where the first round of hot water was used to warm the tea bowls. He then used a wooden tea spoon to scoop two spoonfuls of tea powder into the tea bowls and added a large spoonful of hot water from the iron teapot. With a tea whisk, he gently stirred the mixture. His movements were light and graceful, and his expression was solemn. The wide sleeves of his hemp and cotton kimono fluttered in the breeze, like a musician playing an invisible instrument, the silent melody filling the room like a vast ocean.

"Check the reference book, how do we counter this move?" Caesar whispered to Lu Mingfei, leaning close to his ear.

"Got it, got it! There's a section on tea ceremony etiquette in the appendix of my book, '100 Lectures on Japanese Mythology and History!'" Lu Mingfei whispered back, flipping through the pages under the table.

"Found it! The person making the tea will turn the tea bowl so that the patterned side faces the person drinking the tea... Then... we should use an ancient white silk cloth to rotate the bowl twice clockwise, showing respect to the tea maker by having the pattern face them... Then, um,

drink the tea, turn the tea bowl counterclockwise three times, and admire the pattern on the bowl, expressing appreciation. You can also praise it." Lu Mingfei whispered. Fortunately, the table was wide and large enough that their conversation was mostly inaudible to those across the table, who only saw the three of them huddled together.

Caesar and Chu Zihang remained silent, memorizing the procedure in their minds. From the moment they entered this building, they had realized that the Japan Branch was a dragon's lair, but unlike Lu Mingfei, who kept exclaiming how amazing it was, Caesar and Chu Zihang wouldn't be easily impressed by the Japan Branch's show of power. Both the Student Council and the Lion Heart Society were also organizations, and their leaders didn't want to be easily intimidated by the other side's aura. So, they paid extra attention to their every move, knowing that it was a game of wits. When faced with the tea ceremony, they chose to counter it with their own knowledge of tea-drinking etiquette, showing the Japan Branch that the headquarters was not all brawn and no culture.

As expected, Tachibana Masumune took out a golden ancient white silk cloth from his waist and gently rotated the tea bowl, presenting the side with the bamboo sparrow pattern towards Caesar. Caesar, who had already noticed the golden cloth in front of him, bowed slightly and accepted the tea bowl, also using the cloth to pad the bowl and rotate it twice clockwise in his palm, presenting the bamboo sparrow pattern towards Tachibana Masumune. As Lu Mingfei's book mentioned, this was a sign of respect for the tea maker. Caesar was meticulous in his movements, aware that the Japanese tea ceremony was a solemn ritual, and making a mistake would be embarrassing.

Tachibana Masumune then served tea to Chu Zihang and Lu Mingfei, and the two of them also carefully followed Caesar's example.

The three of them tilted their heads back and drank the tea, pausing slightly before returning their bodies to their original positions. They then rotated the tea bowls counterclockwise twice, turning the bamboo sparrow pattern back towards themselves, and lowered their heads to admire the pattern on the bowls, their faces showing appreciation.

"Making tea is one of my few specialties. I offer this tea as a token of respect to our esteemed guests. I won't take up any more of your precious time. I'll take my leave now, along with Mr. Fuuma and Mr. Inuyama, and leave the College's matters in the capable hands of Chisei and Ms. Sakurai, as well as Ryoma-kun." Tachibana Masumune stood up to bid farewell, "I hope you enjoy your time in Japan and that your mission goes smoothly."

The Caesar team stood up to return the farewell, and Tachibana Masumune left the terrace with Fuuma Kotaro and Inuyama Keiji.

As the sliding door closed behind them, Fuuma Kotaro took a step forward and lowered his voice, "Mr. Masumune, do you think they are up to the task?"

"Although Chisei said they are unreliable kids, I believe in their excellence. Caesar's bloodline is top-notch even among 'A' grades, and Anjou values him not just because he is the heir of the Gattuso family. As for Chu Zihang, he's not as uncontrollable as his file suggests. When I met him face to face, I didn't sense any killing intent leaking from him, which indicates that although his dragon blood ratio is high, his self-control is even stronger, allowing him to restrain the dragon blood. Such a quality is rare. The only one I can't be sure about is Lu Mingfei, but if Hilbert Jean Anjou trusts him, the whole world should believe in him too!"

Tachibana Masumune spoke in a low voice, "Their arrival is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for us, and we must not miss it!"

"I have a similar feeling. They know we're yakuza, but they show no fear, and their response is measured. They even understand tea ceremony etiquette," Fuuma Kotaro frowned, "But, Mr. Masumune, you poured boiling water, and they drank it right away. Weren't they... burned?"

On the terrace, the Caesar team sat silently in the wind, their backs straight. Gen Chisei took out a notebook, a nautical chart, and various documents.

"I see tears in your eyes." Caesar said softly.

"But it's not because my heart is filled with deep emotion." Lu Mingfei also lowered his voice, "Didn't your damn book say that you should let the tea cool down before drinking it?"

"It didn't say a word... Not a single word..."

"But at least we broke their move..." Chu Zihang licked his tongue, which was still burning from the hot tea. He didn't dare agree with Caesar that they had won this round, but as someone with a strong sense of pride, he didn't want to complain about Caesar's competitiveness either.

"The mission details have been sent to the group leader by Norma, and I believe you are all clear on your task, which is to investigate the Lenin icebreaker that sank in 1992. I will now give you a detailed task briefing." Gen Chisei spread out a nautical chart on the table and circled a location, "This is a sea chart of the Sea of Japan, and the Lenin's last distress signal was sent from this position, 120 nautical miles from the Japanese coastline."

"Mhmm." Caesar nodded.

"Although there aren't many routes passing through that area, it is indeed a safe sea zone, with no reefs, icebergs, or currents. For a ship like the Lenin, which was designed to conquer the most dangerous seas, to sink in a safe zone is extremely unlikely. It could withstand a direct torpedo hit without sinking. But this ship somehow sank in a safe zone, and it's one of the biggest unsolved cases in the Japan Coast Guard's archives."

"Mhmm." Caesar nodded again.

"They don't know why the Lenin sank or why it was passing through the Sea of Japan, but it didn't invade Japan's territorial waters, so the matter couldn't be pursued. That ship may have been carrying cargo related to the Dragon Clan, according to an alumnus working in the Russian intelligence department. However, he couldn't find more evidence to support this conclusion. He said that the sinking of the Lenin is a taboo within the Northern Fleet and the KGB, and no one wants to talk about it. It's hard to find anyone who truly understands what happened, as if everyone believes that getting involved with this incident will bring bad luck, and there's something unclean about it, like a ghost." Gen continued, "The College has been trying to search for the sunken ship in recent years, but the work has been slow because it's one of the deepest seas in the world."

"Mmhm." Caesar continued to nod.

"Do you want some ice cubes to suck on?"

"Did you figure it out?" Lu Mingfei was a bit embarrassed, having endured the hot tea until now, only to have his cover blown.

"Regarding the tea ceremony, I don't think you need to be so serious with Mr. Masumune. In fact, he doesn't really understand tea ceremony, he's just a half-Japanese." Gen Chisei said casually.

"Damn it, I knew he was just pretending to be a Japanese! I want ice cubes too!" Lu Mingfei couldn't hold back.

"Because he really wants to become Japanese, with his sword, tea ceremony, kyudo, kendo, and flower arrangement, and all that."

Gen Chisei turned and gazed into the distance, "Don't all wandering souls long for a place to call 'home'?"

Sakura entered with a bucket of ice, and Caesar and Chu Zihang also set aside their pride and grabbed some ice cubes to suck on, soothing the burning sensation in their mouths.

"It's just hot tea, no big deal. Now, let me continue. If you have any questions, feel free to ask." Gen Chisei returned to the table and pointed to the nautical chart, "The location where the Lenin sank is directly above the Japan Trench. You may have heard of this trench, which, along with the Chishima Trench, the Ogasawara Trench, and the Mariana Trench, forms a single entity. It's an abyssal trench at the bottom of the sea, stretching for thousands of kilometers, and from a geological perspective, it's the boundary between the Eurasian Plate and the Pacific Plate. The Pacific Plate subducts beneath the Eurasian Plate, creating an extremely deep fissure at the junction. The deepest part of the trench is the Tuscarora Deep, at a depth of 8,513 meters."

"Before the Challenger Deep in the Mariana Trench was confirmed as the deepest point in the world, the Tuscarora Deep was believed to be the deepest." Chu Zihang mumbled through the ice cube in his mouth.

"Indeed, such abyssal trenches are also called 'abyssal zones', and they are the most mysterious regions on Earth. Almost no one has ever reached there, and our understanding of the abyssal zones is mostly based on speculation. Based on the sinking location, the Lenin could be in the Tuscarora Deep. The best tool for exploring the abyssal zones is sonar, and we use specific frequencies of sound waves to scan the depths. However, what we found was not a shipwreck but a heartbeat signal. There's a huge creature in the depths of the Tuscarora Deep, and its heartbeat is strong and getting stronger."

Chu Zihang's face changed, "That place should be a forbidden zone for life."

"Do you mean there's a dragon in the abyssal zone?" Caesar asked.

"A dragon embryo, and the strengthening heartbeat indicates that it's hatching."

"The secret cargo on the Lenin was a dragon embryo?"

"Yes, the Lenin passed through a nameless port in Northern Siberia and took away a precious dragon embryo. That port was then destroyed by a fire. No one knows where the embryo was supposed to be delivered, and the final destination could have been Japan, or it may have just been passing through. However, it's clear that it didn't reach its destination, and the dragon embryo fell into the depths of the trench. Over the years, the embryo has been slowly hatching, but we were unaware of it."

"If it's a dragon, it should be able to withstand the harsh environment of the abyssal zone, right? For a dragon, it's the best hatching ground and refuge." Chu Zihang said, "The seawater acts as a protective layer."

"Indeed." Gen Chisei said.

Lu Mingfei shuddered. Standing in this bustling city, he couldn't help but think about the dragon slowly hatching 120 nautical miles away, beneath the sea. When it finally emerges from the water, the students and office workers on the streets will be scared out of their wits, and the whole world will tremble at its dragon roar.

"Now that we know there's a dragon hatching in the abyssal zone," Caesar said, "Why don't we just drop a nuclear bomb and blow up the trench?"

If the lunatics from the Equipment Department were present at this meeting, they would have cheered for Caesar, as lunatics tend to think alike.

"If we just throw a nuclear bomb into the trench without careful planning, it could cause a continental shelf landslide, affecting Japan, as well as tsunamis and nuclear pollution, among other uncontrollable consequences. We can only use precise blasting to eliminate the embryo, but with just sonar, it's difficult to pinpoint the exact location of the embryo. So, for this mission, we will send a manned submersible to the bottom of the abyssal zone for reconnaissance, and if we find the embryo, we'll deliver a mail bomb to it. The mission code name is 'Dragon Abyss', and you will be heading into the dragon's abyss."

"What the hell? Is this mission reliable? Weren't you just saying that the abyssal zone is a forbidden zone for life?" Lu Mingfei was startled.

"It is indeed a forbidden zone for life, and that's why the mission is rated 'SS'." Gen Chisei said.

"I'm not discussing the mission rating with you. What I mean is, how are the three of us supposed to dive to such a deep place? I need to take breaks three times during a 5-kilometer run, and you want me to dive to a depth of 8 kilometers? I'll starve to death before I even get halfway there."

"That's not the key issue. The key issue is the high pressure in the deep sea," Chu Zihang said, "At such depths, you can't dive in a diving suit. You need a deep-sea submersible. But as far as I know, most manned deep-sea submersibles in the world can't even reach a depth of 6,000 meters, and the pressure in the abyssal zone is hundreds of times that of the surface, enough to crush a submersible into a flat piece of metal."

"Indeed, the abyssal zone is an environment more extreme than outer space, and without the most advanced equipment, it's impossible to reach."

"So, the Equipment Department has prepared equipment for you that is unparalleled in human history. It is currently undergoing final checks by the Iwanyu Research Institute, which is under the Japan Branch. Please follow me." Gen Chisei stood up and placed his palm on the wall, and the two granite slabs engraved with Amaterasu and Tsukuyomi slid open silently, revealing a black passageway.

In the passageway, black-clad, armed men bowed deeply, "Young Master."

Gen Chisei didn't return the greeting but led Ryoma Senichi and the Caesar team through the passageway. This passageway was blocked by dense infrared laser beams, and any attempt to infiltrate would trigger an alarm, not to mention the black-clad, armed men. Chu Zihang showed a vigilant expression, and Caesar released the "Kamaitachi," hearing countless heartbeats and the sound of machinery. The Kamaitachi swarm rushed forward like bats, splitting up at every intersection and flying further and further, their flapping wings echoing back from the end of the passageway. At the same time, a map of the passageway was expanding in Caesar's mind, a web of interconnected tunnels.

"These passageways can lead to all the floors." Ryoma Senichi explained, "This construction technique dates back to the Warring States period, when daimyos built secret passages in their castles to prevent assassinations by ninjas and rebellions by their subordinates."

Gen Chisei entered a password to open a hidden elevator in the wall, "Please."

The elevator descended rapidly, and Caesar suddenly heard the sound of water, not the gurgling of water in pipes, but the crashing of waves.

"Welcome to the Iwanyu Research Institute." The elevator doors opened, and a man in a white lab coat bowed deeply, "I am Miyamotoke Munemitsu, the director of the institute and the head of the Miyamotoke family."

Their ears were filled with the sound of waves, and they indeed saw white-capped waves. They were already underground, but this was not a typical basement. They were inside a tunnel with a diameter of over 12 meters, half of which was submerged in water.

The rushing water flowed along the metal walls of the tunnel, and the xenon lights on the ceiling receded into the distance, disappearing into the darkness. Giant engineering machinery slid along the tunnel walls, automatically checking the water level and flow rate.

"Damn!" Lu Mingfei exclaimed. His voice echoed in the vast space, and this astonishing tunnel could rival the undersea tunnel between England and France. It was wide enough for trains to pass through, and if a highway were built inside, it could accommodate at least six lanes of traffic. The torrent of water beneath their feet was a mighty river.

"This is Tokyo's underground drainage system." Miyamotoke Munemitsu explained, "Tokyo is often hit by hurricanes, which bring heavy rainfall, and the rainwater from the surrounding mountains also flows here. Therefore, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government built a large-scale drainage system underground, including these tunnels, giant underground reservoirs, and giant turbines. During heavy rains, this system can store the water of a lake underground and then use the turbines and pipes to discharge it into the sea. Since the entire underground space is constructed with corrosion-resistant special steel, we call it the 'Iron Dome Sanctuary.' The project was undertaken by the Maruyama Construction, which is under the Gen family, and thanks to them, Tokyo hasn't experienced flooding since its completion. The Iwanyu Research Institute's secret factory is located here, and there's also a dry dock where small submarines can directly access the Gen Heavy Industries facility through the waterways."

"That must make it convenient for transporting contraband, right?" Caesar asked.

"That's also one of the reasons why Maruyama Construction was willing to take on this government project." Gen Chisei said.

An alarm blared through the tunnel, accompanied by a rumbling sound like thunder.

"The next wave peak is approaching, so let's go to a higher spot to avoid getting our clothes wet." Miyamotoke Munemitsu said.

This family head was still in his twenties, with delicate and handsome features, wearing old-fashioned tortoiseshell glasses, and his hair was neatly combed. He didn't look like a yakuza member at all but rather like a young teacher at some college.

They had just climbed to the top of the white wave crest when the tunnel began to shake, and the water splashed and surged, like a white dragon forcibly restrained by the tunnel, struggling forward while roaring in anger. When the wave crests passed by, they couldn't hear each other's voices over the roaring, only seeing the shapes of their mouths.

"There was a heavy rain last night, so there will be several consecutive wave crests today. However, when it's not raining, the surface is calm, and you can consider it a river. Sitting by the water, brewing tea, and enjoying the view can be quite Zen-like. During the sakura season, the water is covered with a layer of petals, and we call it the 'Sakura Nagare Sea.' If you stay a few more days, you'll be able to see it." Miyamotoke Munemitsu said, "We're busy testing the equipment delivered by the Equipment Department, and since the Equipment Department refused to send anyone to assist with the testing, it took a little longer. But we're nearing the end, and it won't delay your mission."

They walked along the iron suspension ladder and suddenly turned a corner, and Lu Mingfei's eyes were illuminated. A downpour of sparks rained from above, like fireworks in the night sky. A huge shadow was suspended at the top of the tunnel, and dozens of engineers hung in the air, surrounded by the shadow, working with welding guns in their hands, creating the sparks.

"That's the deep-sea submersible you'll be using, the Trieste. It's a legendary piece of equipment in the history of diving, reaching the bottom of the Mariana Trench at a depth of over 10,000 meters in 1960. This is not a replica but the original vessel. The requirements for the craftsmanship of a deep-sea submersible are extremely high, and even a pinhole-sized leak in the hull could cause the entire submersible to be torn apart by high pressure. Even if the Equipment Department were to hastily build a new one according to the Trieste's blueprints, there would be no guarantee of safety. The most reliable option is this proven prototype." Miyamotoke Munemitsu said, "Although it set a world record in 1960, in the half-century since then, humanity has not built another submersible that can match it."

"Such a legendary thing must be quite valuable, right?" Lu Mingfei exclaimed.

"Isn't this my family's property?" Caesar was a bit confused.

"Indeed, it's a treasure of the Gattuso family, donated by Patriarch Pompeii to the College, and then modified by the Equipment Department."

Miyamotoke Munemitsu explained.

"Your family has such treasures?" Lu Mingfei's understanding of the wealthy and powerful was refreshed. Compared to this, luxury cars and yachts were nothing. This level of collection was one-of-a-kind in the world, and it would be a prized exhibit in any museum. Yet, someone bought it just to keep at home for their own amusement.

"I bought it together with the Apollo lunar module," Caesar shrugged, "My father was a playboy who liked to collect all sorts of weird stuff."

"Playboys should collect luxury watches, cars, and women, but he seems to love science."

"Playboys collect everything ultimately to collect women. Some women like luxury watches and cars, and some women love science, so he sometimes had to pretend to be a science geek to get close to those women. That time, he set his sights on a female doctor at the United Nations Space Agency, so he had to buy some interesting things to attract her to his home for dinner."

"Did he succeed?" Lu Mingfei was curious.

"I think he did. Anyway, they made quite a ruckus inside the Trieste, and I locked them in from the outside. They were stuck in there for 48 hours before the fire department rescued them. As his son, I could only help him up to that point. If nothing happened in such a long time, he would be a disgrace to the name of Gattuso." Caesar's face was full of contempt, "We might even find the female doctor's stockings inside."

"Nothing was found. We checked it as soon as it arrived in Tokyo." Miyamotoke Munemitsu said.

"If we find it, it's yours to keep. I don't think it's part of the collection." Lu Mingfei said, "When it comes to that kind of collection, he has even more..."

"Stop! Old man! We need to maintain our dignity! We can't be proud or arrogant. Having a playboy father who loves science isn't necessarily a bad thing, and we shouldn't be arrogant about it." Lu Mingfei quickly stopped this topic, which was heading down a dangerous path, "Let's get back to the deep-sea submersible."

Miyamotoke Munemitsu clapped his hands, and a beam of light illuminated the huge shadow. After being forgotten for half a century, a legend of diving history reappeared, shining with its original paint. This oddly shaped submarine was painted white, with a giant red dot in the middle.

"This paint job looks familiar..." Lu Mingfei said.

It couldn't be more familiar, as the Trieste was painted like a膏药旗, a traditional Chinese medicinal plaster.

"Oh, it's so ugly." Caesar was a bit taken aback.

"This was your father's request. He said that he would donate the Trieste to the College for free, but he insisted that it be painted like a Japanese flag. He said that the sunrise in the east is a good omen, wishing me a smooth and successful trip to Japan." Miyamotoke Munemitsu said.

"I knew he would find a way to get back at me when I locked him in there." Caesar said.

"This thing looks like an antique. Are you sure it can still challenge the abyssal zone?"

"It should be said that it's the only one in the world that can," Caesar said, "Although he bought it to seduce a female doctor, it's indeed a miracle of human technological history."

"But this thing is older than my dad, I admit it was a legend in its time, but a hero like you shouldn't rely on an antique to challenge the abyssal zone, right? What if it suddenly develops a hernia?" Lu Mingfei was worried.

"It has been well-maintained. It's been stored in the submarine museum that my family funds, and there's a dedicated person in charge of its maintenance every year. The paint job is also refreshed annually." Caesar said, "Every year, it gets a new paint job."

"A new paint job?" Lu Mingfei was puzzled.

"The year China and Italy established diplomatic relations, they repainted it with the five-star red flag; when Picasso died, the museum replicated his masterpiece, 'The Avignon Girl', on the Trieste's hull; and in 2006, during Madonna's world tour, it was painted gold and taken around the world, with Madonna emerging from it covered in gold powder for the opening act." Caesar tried to recall, "I think it was also used in a Jackson performance, but I can't remember."

"So, in the past half-century, it has completely and thoroughly become a prop, right? Your family treats it like a work of art or an antique, with regular maintenance, right? Just oiling, painting, and taking it around the world for exhibitions, and it hasn't even been in the water!"

"The Equipment Department has made modifications," Miyamotoke Munemitsu said, "According to the instructions, they have installed several new systems and reinforced the interior with memory metal. Director Akatura repeatedly assured me that 'the quality is guaranteed.'"

"But they're the ones who make bombs! How can their guarantee be trusted? Brother, what do you think?" Lu Mingfei turned to Chu Zihang for help, hoping he would say something fair to calm down these two lunatics. Riding a half-century-old antique from a museum to challenge the abyssal zone? And it was modified by the Equipment Department? That's just asking for trouble!

"Indeed." Chu Zihang nodded slightly.

"What do you mean?" Lu Mingfei blinked.

"I mean that the slang you used earlier was quite interesting." Chu Zihang said.

"Damn, brother, you're practically foaming at the mouth, ready to die for the party!"

"When will we dive?" Caesar asked.

"Tomorrow evening. We've applied for a prohibition order from the Maritime Safety Agency under the pretext of scientific research. From 6 pm tomorrow, all civilian vessels will be prohibited from passing through the nearby waters for 12 hours. In other words, we only have a 12-hour window to operate." Gen Chisei said.

"That's quite urgent. The time frame is quite tight." Caesar said.

"Operating a deep-sea submersible isn't complicated, and you'll have enough time to master it in a day. Here's the operation manual for the Trieste."

Gen Chisei handed over a thick operation manual to Caesar, "We'll take care of the other matters, and while the time frame is tight, it's sufficient."

"I also booked several specialty restaurants and wanted to visit a few attractions and buy some souvenirs. I have a few pages of shopping lists."

"I want to go to Akihabara." Lu Mingfei said.

"You were just scared out of your wits, and now you want to go to Akihabara?" Chu Zihang asked.

"If you haven't been to Akihabara, you can't call yourself an otaku. Now that we're facing certain death, shouldn't we seize the chance to go there? If I could, I'd even have my tombstone erected on the main street of Akihabara, so that passing girls could take pictures with it."

Gen Chisei silently watched the white waves surging in the giant drainage pipe... These idiots were at it again, dancing around him! Being on a mission with these idiots was like a knight riding a donkey into battle. Even if you brandished your sword and roared like thunder, ready to sacrifice your life for your country, you couldn't be sure if you would even make it to the enemy lines... because your donkey might suddenly kick up its heels and carry you off into the sky.

Chapter 10: Every Turtle Has a Warm Puddle In His Heart

As night falls on Tokyo, the neon lights along the long street turn on one by one from east to west, and the night view of Tokyo changes from a plain-clothed sports girl to a seductive mature woman, with the atmosphere of a bustling red-light district gradually thickening.

On the terrace, known as the "Wakeup Temple," tatami mats are laid out, and a 200-kilogram deep-sea bluefin tuna is displayed on the long table. Using a bright and mirror-like Honwuyaki kitchen knife, the chef slices open the fish, revealing pink marbled tuna belly that is enticing. Accompanying this main dish are dishes such as teriyaki blowfish, grilled ayu fish, botanshrimp sashimi, and blue lobster sashimi flown in from France, along with a pot of chilled, thick, and fragrant sake.

Tonight, the head chef of the main house is personally handling the cuisine, which is a much higher standard than the Michelin three-star restaurant at noon. The head chef used to serve the Imperial Family and has repeatedly conquered foreign ambassadors with delicious sashimi at state banquets. His students can be found in the Japanese kitchens of five-star hotels across Tokyo. To entertain the honored guests from the headquarters, the head chef takes charge of the meal himself, naming the cuisine "Life is Like a Summer Flower," after a poem from Tagore's "Flying Bird Collection." He presents the most grand and splendid aspect of Japanese cuisine to the diners. However, in Gen Chisei's opinion, this is purely a gimmick, and the three idiots sitting across the table have no appreciation for the splendor of the summer flowers. Instead, they are immersed in the joy of their shopping spree during the day.

Chu Zihang managed to buy the Kansai iron teapot and the baked goods that Susan asked him to bring. Lu Mingfei bought the limited-edition figurine of Asahina Mikuru, while Caesar's purchases are parked downstairs—it's a box truck. Caesar walks into a lacquerware store, flips through the product catalog, and says, "Three of each, please. Give them to me, too." Then, his hired box truck arrives, and he proceeds to a Kyoto silverware store, saying, "Start loading the silver tea sets. Thirty sets." Afterward, he enters a "Shippo-yaki" store... He posts in the Night Watchmen's discussion area, saying that he will bring gifts for everyone in the student council, and he always keeps his word when it comes to this.

Gen Chisei has been a tour guide and shopping assistant for the entire day. He watches as Caesar goes from one store to another with the box truck, swiping his card repeatedly; as Lu Mingfei takes pictures with Cosplay girls on the streets of Akihabara, posing with one after another; and as Chu Zihang strolls alone, his gaze sweeping over everything yet appearing indifferent to it all. It isn't until dark clouds cover the sky and raindrops as big as soybeans start falling that Lu Mingfei and Caesar join the scattered crowd running for cover. Chu Zihang, on the other hand, is well-prepared. He opens his Burberry umbrella and walks leisurely in the rain, with cherry blossoms gently falling onto his umbrella. Gen Chisei can't figure out if these three men are too carefree or overly confident. After all, they will be executing a highly dangerous "SS"-level mission tomorrow night, yet they don't seem to exhibit any signs of tension.

"This strippable doll is the Asahina Mikuru that you like? What a pervert toy," Caesar comments curiously as he watches Lu Mingfei fiddle with the figurine. "But once you take off her clothes, she's just an average-looking plastic doll."

"First of all, this is not a strippable doll; it's a figurine. Secondly, it's not a pervert toy, and the reason it can be undressed is for costume changes, not for you to admire the naked body!" Lu Mingfei retorts.

"I saw a store selling similar ones, but life-sized, and they could also change clothes," Caesar says as he drinks to sober up.

"You must have stumbled into some weird adult product store. That's not a figurine; it's an inflatable doll!" Lu Mingfei exclaims.

"Oh, it is inflatable... I also wondered why the Japanese would make life-sized dolls as life buoys," Caesar remarks.

Gen Chisei finds this meaningless conversation utterly uninteresting, and he really wants to get up and leave immediately. However, he can't, so he lowers his head and wipes his spider-cut knife instead.

"Can I take a look at your knife?"

Gen Chisei looks up and meets Chu Zihang's eyes, remembering that his customary weapon is also a Japanese sword. Gen Chisei holds out the spider-cut knife with both hands, and Chu Zihang accepts it, examining the blade by the faint light of the candle on the table. He blows out the candle, and after the light source disappears, the spider-cut knife seems to glow, as if an invisible cold moon in the night sky illuminates it.

"Hey, don't blow out the candle! It's dark, and I might eat wasabi up my nostrils," Lu Mingfei complains.

"Is this an ancient sword? It's so expensive, yet you use it as a weapon?" Chu Zihang inquires as he returns the spider-cut knife.

"In a sword museum, it would be considered an antique," Gen Chisei replies lightly. "However, a knife is only worthy of the name if it is used. If it's put into a museum, it's just a dead knife."

"It exudes a bloody aura," Chu Zihang observes.

"A knife is made to be dirty. The more it's used, the dirtier it gets. While the blood can be washed away, the fishy smell remains," Gen Chisei explains. "I see that you also use a Japanese sword."

"It's something my father left behind, but it broke later. The one I use now is a replica," Chu Zihang says lightly. "Can I ask you for a favor?"

"Please go ahead."

Chu Zihang takes out a box from his backpack and opens it in front of Gen Chisei, revealing a one-finger-long broken sword fragment. "This is an alchemical product. Whether it's an antique or a contemporary piece, not many people can forge a sword like this. I've heard that the lineage of Japanese swords is very clear, and it should be possible to trace the origin of this sword from the fragment."

Gen Chisei relights the candle and examines the pattern on the blade in the light: "This is an antique, made with Pak Chui iron. This type of blade pattern is called 'inazuma,' with a lightning-shaped folded pattern. This sword is at least 300 years old and could fetch a price of over one billion yen at auction. The person who uses it as a weapon should have considerable financial resources. Does it have a sword signature?"

"No signature, but it has a strange characteristic. If you wave it for a long time, dew will condense on the blade, as if sprinkling water with each swing," Chu Zihang explains.

"This is a characteristic of the 'muramasa' mentioned in the 'Nansō Satomi Hakkenden.' It is said that after this sword kills, it will automatically condense dew to clean the bloodstains. However, Muramasa is a fictional sword, and the dew condensation is an attribute of certain alchemical swords. The dew comes from the moisture in the air. Based on these clues, we should be able to find out who forged this sword and even trace its lineage. Let's leave this matter to the Japanese division; they should be able to provide a satisfactory answer," Gen Chisei suggests.

"Thank you," Chu Zihang says. "Is your sword also a family heirloom?"

"No, I've never met my father, and he didn't leave anything for me. I'm an orphan and was adopted with my younger brother when we were young. It wasn't until we grew up that our lineage to the Gen family was confirmed," Gen Chisei reveals. "Just like Lonely George. Do you know who Lonely George is?"

"I've heard of him. He's quite famous, and some say he's the loneliest animal in the world," Chu Zihang replies.

One of Chu Zihang's few hobbies is reading, and since he reads whatever he picks up, he knows a lot of esoteric knowledge, such as the story of Lonesome George, the Pinta Island tortoise. Tortoises are the largest land tortoises in the world, and the largest can grow to nearly two meters in length and weigh over 200 kilograms. The Galapagos Islands in South America used to be a habitat for tortoises, and these clumsy giants lived peacefully away from human

settlements until they were discovered by sailors exploring the New World. The sailors loaded the giant tortoises onto their ships, as these creatures could survive for a long time without food or water and served as a non-perishable meat supply. Sometimes, the sailors would throw the tortoises, who couldn't swim, overboard due to the heavy load.

The number of tortoises in the Galapagos Islands gradually decreased, and the rarest among them was the Pinta Island subspecies. According to records, only one male tortoise remained on Pinta Island, found alone and desolate on the barren island, its vegetation already devoured by invasive wild goats. In the following decades, scientists never found another purebred Pinta Island tortoise, so this male tortoise, named Lonesome George, became the last of his kind.

"The Gen family is an ancient clan, but since the Edo period, the number of members has dwindled. At one point, the elders believed that the Gen family had no descendants, but they found me and my younger brother in the mountains, and our lineage to the Gen family was confirmed. I was recognized as the head of the Gen family, but I am the only one left. So, I feel like that tortoise," Gen Chisei shares. "It's in the Galapagos National Park, and if I ever get the chance to travel the world, I want to go and see it."

"You mentioned you have a younger brother," Chu Zihang says.

"He's probably dead," Gen Chisei replies lightly.

"I never thought that everyone had such difficult childhoods," Lu Mingfei sighs as he finishes the clear sake, feeling deeply moved. "My parents went abroad when I was in junior high school, and now I'm already a second-year university student, but they haven't come back to see me. Sometimes, I wonder if they've secretly had another child, a younger brother or sister, and are hiding them abroad without telling me. Otherwise, why would they leave me with my uncle's family and not care at all?"

"I also thought that the four of us had nothing in common, but it turns out that we share similar parental issues," Caesar chimes in as he finishes the sake in his cup and refers it. "I think I can join your 'parents deceased' group."

Chu Zihang's face darkens at the mention of this topic.

"Hey, hey, my parents aren't deceased; they're just unreliable! They're still alive and well somewhere in the world! Your master's mother is also alive and well!" Lu Mingfei exclaims. "As for you, Senior Brother, I've considered your father dead for many years."

"I've treated him as dead for a long time," Caesar shrugs.

"Do you like to travel?" Chu Zihang asks, ignoring the drunken duo.

"I do, but I rarely get the chance. I want to go to France the most. There's a famous nude beach there, and I want to find a job selling sunscreen," Gen Chisei says.

When Chu Zihang mentions his father, his tone is slightly, but a slight twitch at the corner of his eye betrays his inner emotions. Gen Chisei's first impression of Chu Zihang is that he is a completely cold-hearted person who doesn't seem to care about anything. However, when talking about his father, Chu Zihang's hard exterior shows a slight crack, and Gen Chisei wants to seize this opportunity to learn more about this so-called ace of the headquarters. Based on his intuition, Gen Chisei doesn't like these three people, but 橘政宗 is right; if they are considered aces by Anjou, they must have their strengths.

"Switching from the head of a criminal organization to selling sunscreen? That's quite a career change," Caesar refills his cup and rejoins the conversation.

Although he can't appreciate the Zen meaning of "Life is Like a Summer Flower," he can tell that the food is delicious. Outside, there is a thunderstorm, but they sit barefoot on the slightly cool tatami mats, enjoying the Japanese cuisine and overlooking the rainy Tokyo skyline. They are slightly drunk and feel a sense of exhilaration. Gen Chisei has already consumed quite a bit and wants to find someone to chat with. Moreover, if Chu Zihang is the only one deeply engaged in conversation with the Japanese division members, it might affect his position as the team leader.

"Managing the criminal organization is the responsibility of the Gen family head. As for me," Gen Chisei says, "I want to leave Tokyo and find a warm and comfortable city to live a carefree life."

Caesar smiles contemptuously: "My uncle, Frost, also often says that he wants to live a peaceful life. He is currently the acting head of the Catuzo family and is often sought after by bankers. When he's overwhelmed, he complains, 'Damn it, if only I had a month with an empty schedule, I could go back to the old house in the countryside, enjoy some fine wine, read a good book, and catch up with the old neighbors.' But as soon as his phone is silent for half a day, he gets anxious, feeling that things are slipping out of his control."

"Are you saying that I'm as hypocritical as your uncle?" Gen Chisei asks calmly.

"I'm not trying to mock you, but people are like this. They call you 'Young Master,' and in this family that controls the Japanese underworld, you are second only to the patriarch. You are the one who calls the shots in this city, and you can do whatever you want. But once you leave here, you're no longer a big shot," Caesar says as he lights a cigar. "It's not a pleasant feeling to go from being a big shot to an ordinary person."

Gen Chisei ponders for a moment: "Catuzo, if you were Lonesome George, what kind of life would you choose?"

"Boss, I'm not being suspicious, but he's calling you a tortoise. I don't know what your temper is like, but if it were me, I couldn't tolerate this!" Lu Mingfei says with a treacherous look on his face.

"What do you mean?" Caesar thinks about it but doesn't understand Gen Chisei's implication.

"As the last Pinta Island tortoise, everyone hopes that George will reproduce and have offspring, even if it's with a female tortoise of another subspecies. At least, they want to preserve some of the Pinta Island tortoise genes. In the news, they said that zoologists had found female tortoises of other species for him, but George didn't want to get close to them. The zoologists were anxious, unsure of what type of female tortoise George preferred," Gen Chisei explains. "When I read that news, I suddenly had a strange thought. Perhaps George didn't dislike the female tortoises chosen by the zoologists; maybe he simply didn't want to mate with any female tortoise. The presence or absence of offspring was unimportant to him; he just wanted to leave the national park and roll in the mud of his old watering hole. So, Catuzo, if you were George, would you choose to stay in the national park and work hard to reproduce with the female tortoises, or would you bite through the national park's iron fence and crawl back to your old watering hole?"

"Bite through the iron fence," Caesar replies without hesitation. "It's like saying that if I were the last human on Earth, no matter how many female gorillas you brought me, I wouldn't fall in love with them. My ideal would be to crawl back to Portofino as the last human in history and gaze at the sea."

"Boss, you said crawl back... You've already successfully imagined yourself as a tortoise," Lu Mingfei teases.

"George is the last Pinta Island tortoise, and I am the last descendant of the Gen family. The last Pinta Island tortoise should strive to reproduce for the survival of its subspecies, and the last descendant of the Gen family should work to restore the family's influence in the underworld. However, George just wants to return to his watering hole and roll in the mud, and I just want to go to the nude beach and sell sunscreen. I am this kind of person. To me, the underworld business of the Snake Branch and the secret society's mission are not important. My life's ambition is to sell sunscreen. I am not the same as your uncle," Gen Chisei declares, staring into Caesar's eyes.

"Then why don't you go? If you board a plane at midnight, by the time the mission starts tomorrow evening, you'll be feeding pigeons in the South American sun," Caesar suggests. "We can handle the mission ourselves."

"Is this a challenge?" Gen Chisei's eyes sharpen, and a cold smile plays at the corners of his lips.

"Yes," Caesar stretches out, leaning against the wooden railing. "If you accept this challenge and board a plane tonight to leave Tokyo, I promise I won't tell anyone. After the mission is completed, I'll also board a plane to find you, and I'll bring all the girls from the student council. We'll have them wear white lace skirts, and we'll drink on the beach."

"What do you mean?" This time, Gen Chisei is the one who doesn't understand.

"The most memorable trip in life is when you jump into a car with a full tank of gas with a lunatic who shouts under your window, waving a map and rushing into the night without even knowing which direction to go in. The only goal is to get as far away as possible," Caesar explains, raising his eyebrows. "The world should not cage a real man, with only one exception: the woman he loves."

"Do you have a girl you love?" Gen Chisei asks.

"To be precise, I have a fiancée!" Caesar gazes at the pouring rain outside. "I fell in love with her on a rainy night like this. She was like a little crazy person, driving a convertible around the dormitory building, shouting, 'I want to go to Chicago! I want to go to Chicago! Who wants to go to Chicago with me?' She was a freshman at the time, and every window in the dormitory building was lit up as all the upperclassmen looked down at her. I bet everyone fell in love with her at that moment. She opened the convertible, and her hair and skirt were drenched in the rain, outlining her beautiful figure. Her eyes sparkled."

"So, you were moved?" Gen Chisei asks.

"Do I even need to ask? The first thing I'd do is draw my Desert Eagle and fire a few shots in the air before jumping out of the third-floor window!" Caesar exclaimed.

"I can understand why you jumped out of the third-floor window to save time, but why did you fire the guns?" Lu Mingfei asked.

"To scare off the other lunatics so they wouldn't beat me to it," Caesar said, scratching his head. "But as soon as I jumped into her car, I was surrounded by dozens of guns. It was the guys from the Student Affairs Department, and they said that except for Free Day, firearms were not allowed on campus. Then, the two of us, soaking wet, were taken to the Disciplinary Committee to be reprimanded by Professor Manstein... If you really don't want to stay in this city as the head of a criminal organization, you should just leave without hesitation. Think about it—maybe there's a girl waiting for you on that flight, and if you don't go, the seat next to her will be taken by some bald, perverted old man. If you rush there now, you can point your gun at the pervert's forehead and tell him to give up his seat to you. Then, you can fly off to the nude beach in France with the girl you like! How awesome would that be?"

"Awesome," Gen Chisei said, raising his cup. "Let's drink to this awesome idea."

The four of them finished the drinks in their cups. It was indeed an idea worth toasting to. Caesar was like that; usually, he maintained some restraint, but once he was drunk, he exuded positive energy. Even if he spouted cheesy lines like, "Come on, guys, let's run towards the sun!" it would still move people's hearts. Lu Mingfei was also touched by the image of Caesar jumping out of the window with two Desert Eagles in hand, announcing his intention to claim the passenger seat with kingly demeanor. With the gunfire illuminating the scene, Caesar would undoubtedly look stunningly handsome, and even a girl like Nono would be unable to resist him. Lu Mingfei wished he could be the protagonist of that moment, shining like a morning star.

"But I can't do it," Gen Chisei said, placing his porcelain cup on the table.

"Can't let go of your position as the head of the family?" Caesar frowned.

Gen Chisei did not answer. Instead, he stood up and walked to the edge of the terrace, gazing at the rain-shrouded Tokyo. "This city used to be called Edo^①, and when it rains, I feel like Tokyo transforms back into the old Edo, illuminated by candlelight and flickering shadows. Back then, it was Japan's most fashionable and trendy city, where the Shogun established his headquarters. Portuguese traders sold muskets and red-clothed cannons at the port, and girls carrying baskets walked through the streets selling imported goods in small iron boxes. In those days, samurai had the right to carry swords and always walked proudly in the middle of the street. If a commoner blocked their way, the samurai would draw their swords and threaten to cut them down. At night, the assassins of the reformists were very active, and the officials of the shogunate lived in constant fear. The underworld of Edo was formed during that time, consisting of fallen samurai, artisans, dock workers, and prostitutes. They relied on their skills to make a living and formed guilds to protect themselves from being bullied."

(^① Edo is the former name of Tokyo and is actually a relatively young city. In 1457, Ota Dokan, a retainer of the Uesugi clan, built Edo Castle, and it was not until Shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu established his headquarters there that Edo Castle prospered. Before the Meiji Restoration, during the late shogunate period depicted in many Japanese novels and anime, the Shinsengumi and the Tengu assassins, including the famous Himura Kenshin, who was modeled after the ninja leader Fuma Kotaro, were active in Edo. Due to its location on Edo Bay, now known as Tokyo Bay, Edo accepted a lot of foreign cultures and has been one of Asia's most fashionable cities since the Meiji Restoration.)

"I thought the Japanese underworld was established by the eight Snake Branch families," Lu Mingfei said.

"No, the underworld didn't exist until after the Edo period. Before that, the Snake Branch families were all noble clans, and in ancient Japan, only mixed-race people had surnames, which indicated their noble status. In the past, the Snake Branch families served different rulers, including the Emperor, the shogunate, and various warlords during the Warring States period. The ninja leader Fuma Kotaro, whom I mentioned earlier, was a member of the Snake Branch families. The heads of the Fuma family have all been named Fuma Kotaro." Gen Chisei

explained, "The underworld gangs were initially formed by the weak. Those who could live a decent life and earn a good income were not interested in joining the underworld. The Snake Branch families used to be above such things, but they lost their land and property during the reforms and could no longer support themselves. That's when the eight families intervened in the underworld, dirtying their hands to make a living. They used their mixed-race talents and physical strength to establish their dominance in the underworld, protecting the guilds formed by the poor and collecting tributes from them. It wasn't until then that the Snake Branch families began to establish themselves as enforcers in the underworld, and it hasn't been that long."

"So what?" Caesar didn't quite understand.

"You probably know that Japan is a country that allows underworld organizations to register legally. This is because some of the long-established underworld gangs were initially guilds formed by the weak to protect themselves. In the past, they were the weak, and even now, most of them are still the weak. Just visiting this building won't give you a true understanding of the Japanese underworld. The real underworld exists in the corners and alleys that the light doesn't reach—it is a shadow society of the weak." Gen Chisei continued, "The underworld is not condoned by society, but it cannot be eradicated because there will always be weak, insignificant, and dark individuals in the world. They are the lower class compared to the successful and kind-hearted people, but as long as there are upper classes, there will be lower classes. Within the lower classes, the black organizations emerge."

"Are you saying that the Snake Branch families are the leaders of the weak?" Caesar asked, "It sounds a bit hypocritical to position yourselves as saviors of the weak."

"We are not saviors, nor do we intend to lead the weak to establish a society free from oppression. We are businessmen who deal with the underworld. We collect tributes from the guilds and maintain balance within the underworld. But it's true that we are leaders of the weak." Gen Chisei said, "Many people associate the underworld with powerful bosses who hold the power of life and death. They imagine these bosses enjoying the company of alluring women, casually throwing around stacks of cash to reward their subordinates, and eliminating anyone who displeases them. However, most of the people in the underworld are those who cannot find a place in mainstream society—the small-time thugs who go around demanding protection money with knives, many of whom come from single-parent families, have been expelled from school, or couldn't afford to go to college. As for the women who work in nightclubs, many of them are single mothers, have experienced domestic violence, or have even been raped by their stepfathers. To these women, their bodies are not something precious, and they don't think about what will happen when they get old and can no longer attract men. They live only for the present, and they can only live in the present."

"They can only live in the present?" Caesar pondered these words.

"There was a man named Cao Cao in your country, China, during the late Han dynasty. He was the biggest force of violence at the time, and he once said," Gen Chisei looked into Lu

Mingfei's eyes, emphasizing each word, "If there were no Cao Cao in this world, who would be the king, and who would be the emperor?"

At that moment, a gust of wind blew, causing his black coat to flutter like a grand flag, and the young head of the underworld exuded an air of majestic dignity, commanding everyone's attention.

"So, I haven't made up my mind to crawl back to my watering hole yet. I can give up my power and status, but I can't shake the foundation of my family." Gen Chisei returned to the table and sat down. "Enough of this meaningless talk. You don't have any evening plans on your itinerary, so do you have any ideas? Our family has a permanent box at the Kabuki Theater, the Yamazoe Club run by the Inuyama family is said to have the most beautiful women in Tokyo, or how about a Turkish bathhouse? Or we could go to a temple to pray for your mission tomorrow?"

Caesar slowly finished the drink in his cup: "It sounds so interesting, why did you suddenly stop? The places you mentioned don't appeal to me at all. I'd rather experience the real Japanese underworld."

Gen Chisei frowned slightly: "Those places are not exactly high-end, and I can't guarantee your safety in such places."

"We can handle our own safety. I'm not interested in high-end places anyway. The local flavor is found in the small shops on the street." Caesar shrugged, "We like the local underworld."

Chu Zihang nodded: "Sounds interesting."

After a moment of hesitation, Gen Chisei pressed the intercom on the table: "Sakura, prepare uniforms for the three VIPs, and get a throwing dart from the Liaison Department, targeting Shinjuku."

"Young Master, the situation in Shinjuku is quite tricky tonight," Sakura's voice sounded hesitant, "The Numakaras and the Hi-toguwa groups are in conflict, and several hundred people have gathered in Kabukicho, with the potential for a shootout at any moment. The elders of the Strategic Department are divided into two groups, visiting the Hi-toguwa group and the Numakaras to try to calm the situation. It's not advisable for you and the VIPs to get close to Kabukicho at this time."

"Then isn't this perfect? Let the headquarters' ace agents witness the real shadow society. As for safety..." Gen Chisei said lightly, "...Are those who are considered aces in the Secret Party afraid of small-time thugs with sticks on the street?"

The red Ferrari FF roared on the elevated highway, its high-displacement engine roaring.

Sakura, who was not drinking, drove, with Gen Chisei in the passenger seat and the Caesar team in the back. Sakura looked gentle and low-key, but her driving style was like a racecar driver's, the Ferrari weaving through traffic, leaving other cars in its dust.

"Your assistant is amazing!" Caesar exclaimed. He admired any girl who drove fast because it reminded him of Nono.

Gen Chisei passed a throwing dart to Caesar from the front seat, which Sakura had obtained from the map in the Liaison Department. Each throwing dart represented a problem that needed to be dealt with. This dart was aimed at Shinjuku's Kabukicho, Tokyo's most famous red-light district and the most likely place for friction.

"A store in Shinjuku asked for our help, saying that the street gang suddenly demanded a 15% increase in protection fees. If they don't agree, the gang will smash the store. The gang members have been sitting in the store for three days, scaring away all potential customers." Gen Chisei explained.

"That's a small matter?" Caesar was a little disappointed. "It's just a change in the rate. I was expecting a meeting between the leaders at a shrine, with black-suited bodyguards standing outside."

"It's not as simple as smashing a convenience store," Gen Chisei said, "Shinjuku is a gold mine for protection fees, especially in Kabukicho, where many nightclubs and bars pay protection fees regularly. The protection fee is 20% of their profits, and strip clubs and hostess bars pay even more. If the protection fee rate for the entire Shinjuku area is increased, the gangs will collect hundreds of millions more each year. The family can't ignore this. Moreover, strip clubs and similar establishments usually have their own bodyguards, and if there's a conflict, there could be casualties. It's not a small matter."

"So, you're saying we'll rush into a nightclub full of short skirts and thighs? The gang members will be sitting on the sofa with their weapons on the table? That does sound interesting." Caesar snapped his fingers, "We'll point our guns at the boss's forehead, hand him a cigarette, and tell him to finish smoking and leave through the front door. We'll warn him that if we see him in Shinjuku again, we'll shoot off one of his fingers."

"That's the kind of thing a chuunibyuu-level gangster would do," Gen Chisei said, "Usually, there's no need for such drastic measures. We just need to sit on the sofa opposite them, and they'll understand our identity from our uniforms. Then, we'll shake hands, make small talk, and tell them that according to the rules, any changes in the rate will be discussed at the family's New Year meeting. We'll ask them to take care of business for now and not cause trouble in public places."

"That tone doesn't sound like a gangster at all. It's more like a banker managing investments," Lu Mingfei commented.

"But if they show any sign of disobedience after I finish speaking, I'll pull out my gun and shoot them in the leg. Bankers don't do that, do they?" Gen Chisei said, "However, it's rare to need to use a gun. Once they understand your identity, they'll stand up one by one, saying they need to use the restroom, and you won't even have time to finish talking to them. There's one thing I need to remind you: please stay with me at all times, because unfortunately, the Numakaras and the Hi-toguwa groups are currently in conflict in Kabukicho, and these two gangs control the logistics system in and out of Kabukicho. The Hi-toguwa group is gaining more power, while the old gang, the Numakaras, is unwilling to give up their turf. Several hundred people from both sides have gathered in Kabukicho. Messengers from the family have already stepped in to mediate, and the Metropolitan Police Department is closely monitoring the area."

"As long as we're with you, Young Master, we're under your command," Caesar said, puffing on his cigar, "We're more interested in the local underworld anyway."

"You really know how to flatter, don't you? You're more like the young master than I am, and you even smoke such manly cigars." Gen Chisei teased.

At 7:30 pm, Asano Mako glanced at the liquid crystal alarm clock on the shelf. Every night, the thug who came to collect the protection fee was punctual to the minute, rain or shine, for the past week.

Tonight's rain was particularly heavy, and the water on the street was ankle-deep. Maybe that scary guy wouldn't come tonight? She couldn't help but hope for that.

Asano Mako was eighteen years old and had not gone to college after graduating from high school. Instead, she found a job as a toy store clerk. She didn't have the money to continue her education, and after her parents' divorce, she lived with her grandmother, relying on her grandmother's pension for their livelihood. However, Mako had not given up on her dream of going to college. She was determined to work hard and save money for her tuition. She had never been in a relationship and wondered what kind of boy would be waiting for her in college. But her luck was terrible. How could a toy store be targeted by gangsters for protection money? The thugs claimed that the store used to pay them protection money, and now that it had become a toy store, it still had to continue paying. If they refused, the gangsters would smash the store. Before smashing it, they would send someone to sit in the store every night. How could customers come to a toy and comic book store with intimidating thugs sitting in the middle, brandishing a baseball bat?

For the past few weeks, Mako had been working the night shift alone, facing the thug every evening. She hid behind the counter, keeping an eye on the cash register, while the thug sat in

the middle of the store playing with his bat. The store couldn't even call the police because it was legal for the thug to play with a bat in a toy store.

"Ding-a-ling," the small bronze bell above the door rang. That guy had arrived, as usual, wearing a flashy white trench coat, with an oversized bat hanging from his waist that was disproportionate to his height.

"You're working the night shift again tonight." The thug greeted her casually.

"Welcome," Mako replied with a trembling voice.

She felt like her life was over. With only a high school education, she could only find a job that didn't require any technical skills. The job market was not doing well lately, and now that her dream of going to college was ruined, she wouldn't be able to save up for tuition. Her grandmother would have to carefully calculate their monthly pension to make ends meet.

Noda Hisashi, wearing his white trench coat with the family crest "Tatsumi" on the back, entered the store. In the Shinjuku underworld, the Noda group was not particularly large, but they were known for their bravery. Hisashi had grown up watching the older brothers with the Tatsumi crest on their cuffs strutting down the street, and people naturally made way for them. To Hisashi, these men were the epitome of masculinity, and he dropped out of school to follow in the footsteps of his cousin, Noda Kozo, the head of the Noda group. Kozo greatly admired his cousin's spirit and entrusted him with the management of seven stores in his territory. His job was not complicated; he just had to collect protection money. From that day on, whenever Hisashi visited the stores in his white trench coat, the owners would bow deeply and greet him respectfully, saying, "Your Grace, thank you for your protection. Business has been good lately, and we'll deliver the protection money to your apartment as usual at the end of the month. No need to remind us." His former classmates also sought his favor, introducing him to the cutest girls in their class. Some even said that Kozo intended for Hisashi to take over the Noda group because he admired his cousin's ambition.

But as the saying goes, a man is destined to walk a thorny path. One of the seven stores, an adult goods store, suddenly closed down, reducing Hisashi's territory to six stores and shrinking the protection money he collected. A new toy store had opened in its place, and they refused to pay protection money, claiming that toy stores had limited profits and were still in the red due to being a new business. Moreover, they had never heard of toy stores having to pay protection money. Hisashi was determined to use this opportunity to establish his authority and teach the store owner a lesson for daring to defy the Noda group.

Hisashi had a few small-time thugs working under him, but he didn't need to personally come to the store to collect protection money. However, Hisashi was a manga enthusiast, and this toy store had a great selection of manga. With nothing better to do in the evenings, he decided to kill time by reading manga in the store. He had gone to bars where the Noda group hung out a few times, drinking and being served by red-light girls, but he quickly lost interest in that kind of

adult entertainment. Manga was much more appealing, especially the hot-blooded ones that depicted a man's world without all the bowing and scraping. In those stories, men with firm grips on their sword hilts could live proudly in the world.

Hisashi started re-reading the first volume of "JoJo's Bizarre Adventure." Mako was crouched behind the counter, doing the accounting, while Hisashi sat in the middle of the store, flipping through manga. The entire store was eerily quiet, with just the two of them.

"I understand! Making mistakes is not a big deal for a man in this world! The key is to be able to take responsibility for them! Even if I lose a pinky finger, I can still hold a baseball bat, and a man who can hold a bat can stand tall on the streets of Kabukicho!" Noda Hisashi said resolutely.

"Being able to stand tall in Kabukicho doesn't guarantee that you can still be the third-generation leader of the Noda group."

Noda Hisashi's cheek muscles twitched: "A man who can't admit his mistakes is not worthy of being the third-generation leader of the Noda group!"

"Did you threaten Mako and demand an increase in protection fees?"

"It's all my fault! Every word came out of my mouth. A man's words are as solid as iron once they're spoken, and they can't be taken back!"

"Damn, is this what they call the 'yakuza culture'?" Lu Mingfei lowered his voice, "Why does it sound like something out of a Hong Kong comic?"

"Stronger logic?" Caesar also lowered his voice.

"It's probably the whole 'weakness is a sin', 'even if I die, my soul will stand on the battlefield', and 'a man's friendship is as solid as gold' thing."

"I actually quite agree with the last one... It sounds pretty cool." Caesar said.

Gen Chisei, who was standing by the bookshelf, couldn't bear to listen anymore. It was embarrassing enough that a small-time thug was lecturing the main family's VIPs about the yakuza culture, and he, as the head of the family, couldn't even hold his head up. One of the long-standing issues the Snake Branch families had to face was that while the upper echelons of the families were as noble and composed as aristocrats, the lower ranks were often uneducated thugs and hot-blooded youths who dyed their hair in garish colors. They believed in the logic that 'a man stands tall in the world, and his knees will never bend unless he meets someone worthy of his respect'. It was impossible to reason with them, and the only way to control them was to borrow the Confucian theory of loyalty and righteousness. Therefore, every year at the year-end underworld gathering, Tachibana Masamune had to talk about loyalty,

righteousness, and 'a man's honor' to the gang leaders. After each gathering, Masamune would sip his tea and muse, 'It seems like we've lost... some IQ points.'

"So, now I officially announce your punishment from the main family. Are you Noda Hisashi of the Noda group?" Sakura asked.

"Yes! Noda Hisashi, from Kabukicho, Shinjuku, Tokyo, and I work under the group leader, Kozo!" Noda Hisashi asserted, raising his head proudly.

"You're eighteen years old, right?"

"Yes!" Noda Hisashi tightened his grip on the knife handle, his blood boiling with passion.

"Do you have a crush on Mako?"

"Pfft," Lu Mingfei spat out his tea onto Noda Hisashi's head, who jumped up like a startled animal, his eyes flashing with fear and then a fierce light.

"No, no... I don't!" he stammered.

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"As the future third-generation leader of the Noda group, you spend your evenings lurking in a toy store, reading manga, and staring at Mako for over twenty hours a week. Not only that, you even buy your own coffee. Your clothes are too neat for someone like you, and you clearly changed your outfit before coming here. You even styled your hair." Sakura threw the aluminum bat at Noda Hisashi, "And you even carved Mako's name on the bat."

"Oh! You did a great job carving it!" Lu Mingfei picked up the bat and praised it.

"Ah!" Mako covered her face in embarrassment after seeing the name on the bat handle.

"We men..." Noda Hisashi tried to argue.

"Shut up, you high schooler!" Sakura struck Noda Hisashi's forehead with the edge of her hand, leaving a mark on his carefully styled hair.

"Oh, nice one, Sakura! I didn't even notice he had a bat in his hand." Lu Mingfei said.

"Actually, these are just supporting evidence. The most important thing is a woman's intuition," Sakura said lightly, "I've had someone pay attention to me like that before, and I found out later. So, I can sense it."

Gen Chisei's heart stirred slightly. Although he had worked with Yaksha, Crow, and Sakura for a long time and saw them around him every day, he had never really gotten to know them.

He knew nothing about their past, and he never would have imagined that someone could have a crush on Sakura. He had become so accustomed to Sakura's low-key and agile demeanor that he hardly noticed her beauty, seeing her more like a ninja shrouded in black, only needing a codename and not an identity. It was only when he overheard Caesar and Lu Mingfei privately discussing Sakura that he realized that his assistant could be attractive to men.

"Go and apologize to Mako, and work here as a part-timer for three months. There is no protection fee for toy stores, so this fee is waived. During your part-time work, follow the store's rules." Sakura sheathed her short knife, "That's the punishment. Now, go."

Mako, with her face covered, ran back to the counter. Sakura lowered her voice and asked Noda Hisashi, "Why would you like someone like her? I would have thought you'd prefer a more voluptuous type."

"A man needs a wise and virtuous wife to support him as he ventures into the world!"

Sakura struck him with the edge of her hand again.

"Sorry for the inconvenience," Gen Chisei said, "There are some nice nightclubs nearby. Do you want to go and sit for a while?"

Lu Mingfei reluctantly tore his gaze away from the neatly arranged manga on the shelves. When he was in high school at Selan, there was a small comic book store behind the school. Most of the manga they sold were pirated, but there were also a few genuine Taiwanese versions, which were translated from the original Japanese editions and were of much higher quality than the pirated ones. At the back of the store, there were separate shelves with premium genuine manga, and only the older students who spent money in the store were invited to the back to browse the latest releases. Lu Mingfei, as a pure otaku, could only admire the premium manga from a distance, as he didn't have the money to buy them. On the other hand, Zhao Meng Hua, a true rich and handsome elite, never wasted time on the pirated manga at the front of the store and went straight to the back to buy the genuine ones, which sometimes even came in boxes. Holding those premium manga gave off an air of sophistication.

Lu Mingfei really wanted to spend more time in this store, but as he had no status within the group, he could only wait for Caesar to make a decision.

"Then let's stay here and have some coffee since it's raining so hard," Chu Zihang suddenly said, "We can leave when the rain lets up a bit."

Gen Chisei looked at Caesar.

"Isn't tonight supposed to be our 'underworld night'? But here we are, drinking instant coffee in a toy store. Is this what you call 'commoner coffee'?" Caesar sipped the instant coffee that Mako had made.

Mako brought over some sakura-flavored biscuits.

"Arigato! Good coffee!" Caesar smiled at the girl and raised his coffee cup. Since Mako couldn't understand his Chinese, he didn't need to pretend to be polite to a commoner girl.

"You're so two-faced." Lu Mingfei grumbled. He put the sakura biscuit in his pocket and prepared to leave.

"Then let's just have some commoner coffee here." Caesar continued, "Although the taste is thin and the sugar content is high, it's quite relaxing to chat over coffee on a rainy day."

Lu Mingfei was taken aback, unsure why Caesar would want to spend time in such a mundane toy store.

"Can I have a look? Arubelu! Arubelu!" Caesar pointed at the model on the shelf and asked Mako. Surprisingly, his pronunciation of "Arubelu" was quite standard.

The model on the shelf was Arubelu from "Star Ocean III," and Lu Mingfei was surprised that Caesar could recognize such an obscure character.

Sakura came in from outside and whispered to Gen Chisei, "The Numakaras and the Hi-toguwa groups are heading this way, and there might be a conflict. To avoid disturbing the VIPs, we should probably leave now."

"Looks like the conflict is really happening." Gen Chisei frowned, "Let's ask the VIPs for their opinions."

"Arubelu," Caesar said to Gen Chisei, pointing at the model, "I'm playing Arubelu, and this small matter should be something the main family can handle, right?"

"No problem," Gen Chisei handed his sword to Sakura, "Go and tell the Numakaras and the Hi-toguwa groups that I'm here with the VIPs, and ask them to restrain themselves."

"Should I use the name of the head of the Gen family?"

"Yes, use the name of the head of the Gen family." Gen Chisei took off the ring with the dragon胆纹 from his finger and also gave it to Sakura.

"Understood." Sakura left with the spider-cut knife.

"No problem. Your safety in Japan is under the full responsibility of the Snake Branch families, and I will be in charge of entertaining you tonight," Gen Chisei said, "Feel free to do whatever you like."

"Is that really okay, Boss?" Lu Mingfei was still a bit anxious.

"I guarantee it."

As expected, the noisy voices outside suddenly disappeared, leaving only the sound of raindrops hitting the roof.

"Boss, you actually know about Arubelu?" Lu Mingfei asked.

"I also know that his Infinity Double Break is very strong. Back then, I even replayed the game over and over to get his 'Joyful Evil Claw.' Caesar, don't you say that I have no childhood at all?" Caesar said.

Lu Mingfei's heart sank as he thought, Boss, you hold grudges for so long... You must be a sentimental person too... But then he thought of Nono, and his heart sank further.

"But that was the last game I played. After that, I never touched a game console again." Caesar shrugged, "I was only twelve years old then, and I was obsessed with getting a PS2. But my butler wouldn't allow any game consoles in my room because I would play games non-stop. So, I bribed the gardener to bring a game console and discs into my room from outside. I hid it under my bed and played it late at night, putting everything back in place before dawn. But the cleaners found the game console when they were vacuuming, and my butler smashed it in front of me, saying that he would break any game consoles he saw me playing."

"He dared to threaten you?" Lu Mingfei said, "Then why don't you fire him?"

"The ones who hired him are the old guys in my family, not me." Caesar leaned back in his chair, "Whether I'm happy or not doesn't matter to him, and I'm just a kid with no financial power."

"Isn't that Ao Bai?" Lu Mingfei clenched his fist and placed it on his chest, his expression serious. "Once I ascend the throne, I will surely punish this traitor!" Boss, weren't you thinking the same thing back then?"

"I didn't have the patience to wait until I grew up to take revenge. That very night, I came up with a plan. I put a genuine Matisse painting from my family up for auction online and made a lot of money. Then, I called the electronics store and ordered 200 PS2 consoles to be delivered directly to my estate. A whole truckload of PS2 consoles piled up on the lawn like a small mountain. I took an axe and went to find the butler, handing him the axe. I told him that I was going to start playing games, and he could start smashing them. The butler was furious, but I sat on the lawn and played games. Every time he smashed a console, I opened a new one and continued playing. In the end, he stood next to me, watching me unpack the boxes, panting with

anger and his eyes red, like a serial killer. My family's elders rushed over and were shocked to see the butler acting strangely, so they had the guards drag him away. In the end, the butler was fired, and the new butler wanted to compromise with me, allowing me to play games for two hours a day in addition to horseback riding." Caesar said, smiling proudly.

"So, you won the right to play games?" Chu Zihang sat down across from Caesar.

Caesar was surprised that Chu Zihang took the initiative to talk to him and paused for a moment: "Yes, but that night, I suddenly didn't feel like playing games anymore."

"Why?" Lu Mingfei was puzzled, "After defeating Ao Bai, you should have stayed up all night to grind levels."

"Because I no longer felt the thrill of secretly playing games," Caesar shrugged, "I suddenly realized that I didn't really want to play games. I just wanted to go against the butler. I liked seeing his red-eyed, panting expression, like a hunter admiring an enraged wild boar."

"It's not easy being a rich, handsome, and talented guy," Lu Mingfei sighed, "When I was a kid, I could go to the arcade for an all-nighter with just 20 Gen."

Caesar glanced at Lu Mingfei: "It's a pity we didn't know each other back then. Otherwise, I would have lent you a few thousand Gen, and you can pay me back with interest now."

Lu Mingfei's heart stirred slightly. Yes, if he had had a few thousand Gen in his pocket when he was younger, he would have been as happy as a little emperor, secretly taking 20 Gen from the iron box where he kept his savings every day. After his uncle, aunt, and Lu Mingze fell asleep, he would climb out of the window like a night wanderer, stealthily passing through the shadowy paths under the trees, and rushing to the arcade like a gust of wind. He had also wanted a PS2, so he saved up for three years, but once, he accidentally knocked his uncle's valuable plum blossom watch to the ground, stopping it. Lu Mingze threatened to tell his aunt, so Lu Mingfei decided to buy his peace and gave all the 900 Gen he had saved to Lu Mingze, who bought a pair of couple's MP3 players and gave one to the girl he liked. That was three years' worth of savings, just a hundred Gen short of buying a second-hand PS2... Now, he was flying across the Pacific in a top-of-the-line business jet, and the academy had spent hundreds of tons of aviation fuel to get him to Japan as quickly as possible. But he wasn't happy at all. After this mission, Nono would marry Caesar, becoming the wife of the most outstanding young master. She had bravely stood up to her butler since childhood, and as an adult, she had become a master of martial arts, with no weaknesses other than her chuunibyoutendencies. She would be the happiest girl in the world, and there was nothing more he could give her. Even if he had all the money in the world, he couldn't change that outcome because she lacked nothing and wanted nothing. People only realize how precious those small happinesses from childhood are when they grow up.

"I'm sorry." Chu Zihang said.

"What do you mean?" Caesar frowned.

"When I said you didn't have a childhood, I wasn't mocking you. In fact, I didn't have much of a childhood either." Chu Zihang said, "I just wanted to talk to you and not have us be on guard against each other during this trip. I know we're not friends, and I appreciate your support during the investigation committee's hearing, but I'm also aware that you were expressing goodwill towards me more than towards the Catuzo family."

Caesar nodded: "Yes, that's the kind of person I am. To make my family uncomfortable, I'd do anything. You're on my 'dislike' list, but you're far better than those old guys in my family."

"Actually, I wanted to say that although we're very different and didn't get along well in the past, we may still have some common ground. For example, neither of us had much of a childhood, although for different reasons." Chu Zihang said, "I just wanted to talk to you, and I don't mind if we can't be friends. Perhaps we can be partners, at least for the duration of this mission."

Caesar nodded slightly: "It's impossible for us to be friends."

"But we can be partners," he looked into Chu Zihang's eyes, "until this team disbands."

Chu Zihang didn't say anything but extended his hand. They shook hands, their eyes locked, and both of them applied just the right amount of force. It was enough to convey their sincerity without causing pain. If the girls from Cassel College had seen this scene, they would have probably blushed, their hearts fluttering, and pretended to faint, saying, "I believe in love again!"

At the counter, Noda Hisashi was apologizing to Mako, his words earnest and mixed with strong language, sounding more like a confession. Mako was flustered and stammered a response, saying that her father was abroad making friends and that she needed to ask his opinion first. Her grandmother was old and a bit afraid of the underworld, so Noda Hisashi didn't need to bother visiting her. The people in the store were all eavesdropping, while Caesar played with the Arubelu figurine, Lu Mingfei and Chu Zihang flipped through manga, and Gen Chisei drank coffee. The ceiling fan turned slowly, and the sound of the rain outside was clear.

"Is this what you call Japanese underworld-style love?" Caesar asked softly.

"Japanese manga-style love, where a guy tries all sorts of methods to pursue a girl and get her attention," Gen Chisei said, "There are many young people in the underworld who lack knowledge and education, and they learn how to pursue girls from manga."

"Have you ever pursued a girl like that?"

"I was rejected."

"You're good-looking. Why would you be rejected?"

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"She said I looked like a woman, and she preferred manlier men."

Caesar and Gen Chisei both laughed softly. Caesar made a gesture to indicate that they could leave, and he slipped a few bills under the coffee cup before taking the Arubelu model. To avoid startling Mako and Noda Hisashi, Sakura removed the bronze bell from the door and placed it on the umbrella rack, an easy task for a female ninja.

Caesar walked in the rain with a cigar in his mouth, followed by the others, each holding a black umbrella.

"I feel like I'm getting old," said the 21-year-old student council president, exhaling a puff of smoke, "Seeing young people so passionate about love."

"It's natural to have such thoughts when you're about to get married," Gen Chisei said.

Lu Mingfei and Chu Zihang remained silent.

Turning the corner, they encountered hundreds of people standing silently in the pouring rain, divided into two groups, each holding steel pipes or baseball bats. It was like two armies facing off, and at the sound of a command, they would all rush forward, brandishing their weapons. But in the middle of the street stood a Japanese sword—Gen Chisei's spider-cut. It forcefully put an end to the impending clash between the Hi-toguwa group and the Numakaras. Gen Chisei walked to the middle of the street, sheathed the spider-cut, and the hundreds of men from both groups bowed simultaneously.

"Let's go." Gen Chisei said lightly.

"Will they really start fighting?" Lu Mingfei asked anxiously, staying close to Gen Chisei.

"Yes, it's inevitable. Both gangs rely on logistics for their livelihood, but the territory for logistics is limited, so someone has to go hungry. Sometimes, they have to resort to violence to solve problems. Although it may seem like a small matter to you high and mighty people, it's not trivial to them, and it's worth fighting over. Violence is inevitable in the underworld. Compared to that, I prefer the story between Mako and Noda Hisashi, but if Noda Hisashi continues to be part of the Noda group, he may one day lead his men with swords in hand. I once asked Mr. Masamune if there was a better way for the main family to manage the underworld, and he said that he was already old and could barely maintain the organization, let alone reform it. If someone truly wanted to reform the organization, I could try to inherit the family."

"So, you're still unable to crawl back to your watering hole and roll in the mud?" Caesar asked.

"Yes," Gen Chisei said softly, "The family probably expects something grand and majestic like a dragon, but I'm just a tortoise. It's tiring to have a tortoise shoulder the responsibilities of a dragon."

A deafening roar erupted, and the stomping of hundreds of feet shook the street. The long-suppressed conflict between the Hi-toguwa group and the Numakaras finally began, and in the distance, the piercing sound of police sirens could be heard.

Caesar held out an aluminum tube containing a cigar to Gen Chisei: "Thank you."

"Why are you thanking me?" Gen Chisei was puzzled.

"For the hospitality. The food was great, shopping was smooth, and the after-dinner entertainment was quite interesting. It's been a long time since I've been able to relax and space out like this, and I even got Arubelu." Caesar took out an acetylene lighter and lit Gen Chisei's cigar, "I also got to see the Japanese underworld, and today has been pretty good... To be honest, I used to find you and Chu Zihang disgusting."

"Hey, Boss, don't start saying a few decent words and then hit people with a stick!" Lu Mingfei muttered in his heart.

"It's not disgusting," Gen Chisei said lightly, "I don't like those indifferent and self-important people, but now I see that you're an exception."

"You have good alcohol tolerance, a beautiful assistant, good taste in cars, and a sense of responsibility as a man. That's what a man should be like. Even if we carry the weight of the world on our backs, we should still speak lightly and fulfill our responsibilities as men." Caesar said.

Boss, you're starting to use strong language too! Don't be influenced by the yakuza culture so quickly!

"I think we can call ourselves friends from now on, and after the mission, I'll invite you to drink and attend my wedding." Caesar said.

"Suddenly, I seem to be quite a VIP in the Catuzo family." Gen Chisei's tone was still lightly.

"You're more than a VIP, my friend. A man's friendship is as solid as gold!" Caesar said.

Gen Chisei's heart stirred slightly. So, this was how he gained the friendship of these neurotic people. Their friendship seemed quite cheap.

Chapter 11: Shadow of Greenland

Dark clouds hung low, and the sea heaved restlessly. A black ship cut through the black water, leaving a white trail in its wake.

"You actually disguised it as a fishing boat!" Caesar shouted to be heard over the gas turbine.

"No, it's a scientific research vessel!" Gen Chisei also shouted back, "We are a research vessel engaged in studying the convergence routes of precious sea fish! We are now in the high seas, but this is Japan's exclusive economic zone. We have applied for a 12-hour channel control, and no ships will pass through that sea area in the next 12 hours!"

The Japanese branch had disguised the Moniah as a fishing boat, with the words "Moni Maru" painted in white on the bow and a trawler hanging from the crane at the stern. They had set sail from Pier 4 of Tokyo Port three hours ago. The evening weather forecast had predicted 8-level gales and 2-meter-high waves in the nearby sea area, which was not suitable for going out, but the rare channel restriction was only for 12 hours tonight. They couldn't possibly dive to explore the dragon's embryo while other ships were passing by on the sea surface. When they left the port, the sun was setting, and a gale was blowing on the sea. A large number of fishing boats returned to the port to 避风, and when the ship's sides were connected, the sailors on the fishing boats waved to them, giving Lu Mingfei a sense of sorrow and heroism. Caesar, however, was very relieved and wore the white uniform of the ship's captain. Leaning against the railing on the ship's side, he gazed into the distance and waved to the fishermen. He even jumped onto their fishing boat to buy a fresh king crab, as if the Moni Maru were his yacht and he was about to set off with a whole boat of supermodels to enjoy the sun in the Gulf of Genoa.

The searchlight shone into the air, and the black clouds rolled with distant thunder, indicating that there would be not only a strong wind but also a heavy downpour tonight. Lu Mingfei felt a chill, as the technology of the Moniah was advanced, but it was only a medium-sized ship. The stability of a ship at sea depended mainly on its self-weight, and no matter how advanced the technology was, it would be useless without a heavy enough hull. He was a little doubtful that this ship could withstand the storm.

"Don't worry." Gen Chisei saw his worry and said, "The Japanese branch always makes thorough preparations, and you'll know soon enough."

Caesar lifted the lid of the steamer, and the whole orange-red king crab came out. He picked up Di Ketuiduo and tore apart the crab, placing the white crab meat on the ice. There was wasabi paste and seafood soy sauce on the side. He had jumped onto the fishing boat to buy this crab for tonight's supper. Although the task was about to begin, he still wanted to take the time to

enjoy life. In addition to the king crab, he had also bought a silver-red wild red sea bream. At the bow of the Moniah, he set up a steamer to make fish soup, using bamboo shoots and plum to remove the fishy smell from the sea bream. It took him a full three hours to stew the snow-white fish soup. All the way, Caesar sat at the bow of the ship, flipping through the thick operation manual and taking care of the steamer with the fish soup.

"He's very patient." Gen Chisei leaned against the ship's side and said to Chu Zihang as he smoked.

"He's very patient with some things, like waiting a long time for a girl to fall in love with him, and then waiting a long time for her to marry him." Chu Zihang wiped the long knife in his hand, "But there are also some things that you can't stand to wait even a minute for."

Lu Mingfei looked up at the sky in boredom, thinking, "Can you really wait for a girl to fall in love with you? Don't be silly. While you're waiting foolishly, she's walking in the moonlight with someone else, you just don't know it."

For no reason, he thought of Lu Mingze. The little devil pretended to be mysterious and met him on the ice sea under the white moon, as if there was some kind of hint. As a result, he was indeed sent to sea to carry out the task, but now, with the clouds pressing down and the ship rocking in the wind and waves, it was completely different from the quiet ice sea and white moon. It felt like something was wrong, but he couldn't put his finger on it.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," Caesar raised his hand and clapped, "Come and taste the Hokkaido-style king crab. When it comes to cooking seafood, Japan is the best in the world."

"I thought you would say the second best, just a little worse than the Italians." Lu Mingfei put the crab leg meat he had pulled out into his mouth, and the natural and original taste of the sea spread in his mouth, with a hint of sweetness.

"Italian men are born chefs, but when it comes to cooking seafood, they are still not as good as the Japanese. Japan is an island country, not suitable for herding, and before the Meiji Restoration, it relied entirely on fisheries for protein. Only at the banquets of the daimyo would there be beef, and the common people could only fill their stomachs with seafood. So they concentrated all their cooking skills on seafood because they had nothing else to cook." Caesar was happy to show off his understanding of cooking.

Gen Chisei was expressionless. He couldn't be bothered to figure out whether Caesar was praising or mocking Japan. Every time he tried to understand this group of singing and dancing idiots, he was wrong, so he might as well not try to understand them.

Caesar opened a bottle of noble red wine and poured the golden liquid, as sweet as honey, into four glasses.

"The noble red wine from Egan Castle, the first choice to go with lobster and crab." Caesar raised his glass, "This time our team is complex, and some people's positions are not consistent. But I hope that before the task is completed, we will not have internal strife. After the task is completed, we can fight and kill each other to our heart's content, there will be plenty of opportunities. Let's drink to the success of our joint mission."

It was a bit of a strange toast, but it still conveyed good wishes. Lu Mingfei, Chu Zihang, and Gen Chisei clinked glasses and drank up.

"Young Master, we're about to arrive at Sumeru Seat." Crow walked up to Gen Chisei.

"Send a light signal to let Sumeru Seat open the dry dock." said Gen Chisei.

He turned to Caesar's group: "Now allow me to invite you to admire the project of the Institute of Rock Flow and the Maruyama Construction Institute, the 'Unsinkable Sumeru Seat'."

Following the direction of his finger, the sea level hidden in the dark clouds suddenly lit up as if it were on fire, and the line where the sky and sea met was especially bright, as if the sunlight was shining on the sea. Then, like a palace rising from the sea, the exquisite pavilion was brightly lit, more magnificent than any mirage, and the space between the sky and the sea was illuminated by those palace-like buildings into a dazzling white. The Moniah began to slow down, and the palace of the sea opened its welcoming gates.

"A floating platform?" Caesar understood.

"Yes, that's a family-owned project. These floating platforms are suitable for long-term work at sea, such as oil exploration or seabed mining. Although they move slowly, because of their huge weight, they can resist 12-level gales and even tsunamis at sea. In Buddhism, the 'Sumeru Seat' refers to the pedestal for placing Buddha statues or pagodas and treasure halls. We call them Sumeru Seats because they are truly unsinkable seats. The family has gathered all six 'Sumeru Seat' floating platforms here as a base for this deep-sea exploration. It is far more reliable than the Lenin, which sank here, so please rest assured that there is no need to worry about the storm." said Gen Chisei.

The Moniah turned off its gas turbine and hung traction chains on both sides of the ship, which was then pulled into the dry dock of the floating platform, large enough to accommodate the entire Moniah. The ship lock closed, and the lights on both sides of the dry dock lit up one by one. Men in black stood in rows on both sides of the dry dock and bowed deeply: "Welcome, Young Master, for your inspection of the Sumeru Seat!" Their voices echoed in the huge enclosed space, making one's scalp numb.

The gantry crane moved over and lowered the drawbridge, and Gen Chisei led Caesar's group, guarded by Crow and Night叉, onto the elevator to the upper levels. Lu Mingfei felt that his ears were full of the whirring sound of the wind machine, and the huge floating building was filled with

the smell of seawater. He didn't know where the accumulated water was flowing, but it was being pumped away by the ubiquitous pumping system. The floating platform swayed with the waves, and even walking on the flat road paved with steel plates felt like walking on soft slopes. Lu Mingfei held onto the railing and dared not let go, worried that a big wave would roll in and he would roll down the stairs.

"Don't worry, the Sumeru Seat is fully digitally controlled. If the waves get too big, the diversion valves at the bottom will open to reduce the push of the waves." said Gen Chisei.

"The depth of this sea area exceeds 8 kilometers. How did you anchor these Sumeru Seats?" Caesar asked.

"We still use anchors, but the anchor chains are not 8 kilometers long. The Japan Trench was formed by the collision of two plates, and only the depth at the junction of the plates is extremely great. Beyond that, the seabed is not so deep." said Gen Chisei, "A total of 16 iron anchors fix this floating platform to the seabed."

They arrived at the top of the Sumeru Seat, and from here, it was like standing at the top of the Shingon Temple and looking down at the Shinjuku district. Layer upon layer of waves beat against the bottom of the Sumeru Seat, occasionally sending up white water. The Sumeru Seats were also connected by steel cables, which were tightened like guitar strings in the wind and then slackened and drooped when the wind passed. Men in white combat uniforms stood at the top of each floating platform, and the rotor wash from the all-weather helicopters was no less than the sea wind, blowing their hair tight against their scalps. It was like an army waiting for inspection.

"So many people?" Lu Mingfei was surprised, "Does the logistics team need to be so big?"

Gen Chisei took the loudspeaker from Crow and climbed to a higher place: "I'm counting on you all tonight!"

His voice carried out over the sea, and all the men on the floating platforms responded in unison: "We will do our best to complete the task entrusted to us by the family!" The voices of a thousand men overlapped, momentarily drowning out the sound of the sea.

"In this operation, the Kansai branch forms the Wind Group. Their job is to inspect the entire sea area from the air. If someone wants to disrupt the deep dive, the Wind Group will counterattack, and they will also drive away unrelated ships." said Gen Chisei.

Crow fired a blue signal flare, and the all-weather helicopter group took off, with the black birds flying in different directions, shining their searchlights on the sea.

"The Kanto branch forms the Fire Group, and their job is to provide fire support. We have equipped them with small patrol boats, but we have also installed twin-mounted large-caliber

machine guns, man-portable missiles, and a 97-style light torpedo on the boats. With them guarding us, even a cruiser would be held back."

A red flare rose into the air, and the ship locks on each floating platform opened, with the patrol boats moving up and down on the sea, the twin-mounted machine guns at the bow sweeping the sea.

"The Wind Demon family's elite forms the Forest Group, and they have already set up a defense perimeter around us. They are driving fishing boats, which are equipped with underwater listening devices and climate monitoring equipment. They are responsible for monitoring the conditions of the nearby sea area, and if the weather deteriorates to a dangerous level, they will warn us in advance."

Crow fired a green flare, and lights flashed in all directions, as the Forest Group, stationed far away, responded to Gen Chisei's call with their searchlights.

"As for the floating platform we are on, it is the Mountain Group, which I am personally responsible for. All the members are elites from the Rock Flow Institute. The job of the Mountain Group is to provide direct support for the deep-diving vessel. Throughout your dive, the Mountain Group will float at this position, ready to rescue you at any time, and also ready to welcome you back. That is the meaning of the Mountain Group, as steady as a mountain." said Gen Chisei, "The family has deployed a thousand-man team to escort you on your dive, so besides manipulating the deep-diving vessel, you can rest assured and leave the rest to us!"

"Is that necessary?" Caesar asked, smoking a cigar, "It's just a dive, why are you making such a big deal out of it, as if you're going to war?"

"Someone once told me that the master of the killing sword would always say to the student holding the sword for the first time, 'Are you ready to grip the hilt? Once you grip it, hold on tight and don't let go, because the day you let go is the day you die.'" said Gen Chisei, "You can take this as the Japanese way of doing things. Every matter is treated as a battle, always pushing oneself to the edge of a cliff, because taking a step back would mean falling into an abyss. That's the only way to survive. This is not about collecting coral or shellfish, it's about a dragon-level monster. If it were to float to the surface, even if the Wind, Forest, and Fire Groups worked together, they might not be able to kill it."

The seawater parted, and the crane lifted the heavy refined sulfur bomb, which was painted a conspicuous yellow and shaped more like a short, fat cigar than a typical bomb, with small tail fins that seemed out of proportion to its bulky body.

"It's actually a Q version." said Lu Mingfei.

"This shape is more pressure-resistant. You don't want the sulfur bomb to be crushed by the water pressure halfway through, do you?" said Gen Chisei, "Its propulsion system and guidance

function are quite limited, and it can only move about 1 kilometer underwater. But within a 1-kilometer distance, detonating it is absolutely safe for you, after all, it doesn't rely on explosive power to kill the dragon-class creatures, but on the penetrating corrosion of refined sulfur and mercury. Oh, by the way, its code name is 'Momotaro'. Now, there are 30 minutes left until the scheduled time. The Rock Flow Institute will complete the final checks and preheating of the Trieste within 30 minutes. These 30 minutes are your free time, you can chat or take a nap, but my suggestion is to go to the bathroom, there's really no space to build a toilet in the deep-diving vessel."

He took out his cell phone and dialed: "Professor Schneider, this is Gen Chisei from the Japanese branch reporting. The diving team has arrived at the designated location, and we are waiting for instructions from the headquarters."

A terrible wheezing sound came from the other end of the phone, a sound that made one's hair stand on end, as if a broken bellows was being forcibly pulled open. That person's lungs were riddled with holes, and the students of Kassel Academy described his wheezing as "like hearing a dried-up corpse come back to life".

"Wait until I finish this cigarette." Professor Schneider said faintly.

Kassel Academy Headquarters, Central Control Room.

Today, Schneider was alone in the large hall. He took out a small tin box from his pocket, containing golden-yellow tobacco. For Schneider, tobacco was like poison. Everyone at the academy knew that due to some strange disease, Schneider's respiratory organs were severely damaged and he had to rely on assistive devices to breathe. So he always had to drag an oxygen tank cart with him wherever he went. But now, Schneider was skillfully rolling a beautiful hand-rolled cigarette, his movements smooth and skillful, like a veteran smoker. But as soon as he took a deep puff, he started coughing violently, as if he was about to cough up his entire lung.

"Are you trying to kill yourself?" someone asked from behind him.

Schneider was startled: "It's not your turn to be on duty today, Professor Manstein."

Manstein put a medicine box on the table, "If you really want to smoke, take this, it has a calming effect, at least you won't cough like that. What you're using to breathe isn't even a windpipe anymore, it's a plastic tube."

"My windpipe has been removed 2/3, and I'm using a soft plastic tube as a replacement." Schneider took a pill and sucked in a few breaths of oxygen, "But the plastic windpipe is quite useful, at least I won't get a sore throat."

"I've seen your medical report, you won't die of a sore throat, your cause of death will definitely be lung failure." Manstein said.

Schneider took another puff, and this time his reaction was much milder. He narrowed his eyes slightly, savoring the taste of the tobacco.

"Why did you come to see me at this time? Surely it's not just to bring me medicine." Schneider asked.

"The Board of Directors has sent a document requesting the immediate termination of the Dragon Abyss operation." Manstein threw a fax on the table.

"The Executive Department doesn't need the old men of the Board of Directors to manage it," Schneider said, "We're just small people doing small things, they should just take care of the big picture."

"But your dive team includes the precious heir of the Gattuso family, and when the news reached Frost in Rome, he went crazy and was about to rush to the headquarters, but he had a heart attack because of his agitation, otherwise he might have already torn down your Executive Department."

"But wasn't the deep-diving vessel donated by the master of the Pompeii family? And didn't he change it to the lucky sunrise in the east, heaven bless my son paint job?"

"Every person knows that the master of the Gattuso family is a weirdo, and his personal opinion has nothing to do with the family's opinion. His seat on the Board of Directors is fully represented by Frost, and when Frost says no, it's the Gattuso family saying no."

"The principal decided on the dive list, Frost should go talk to him. After I finish this cigarette, I will activate the Dragon Abyss plan, unless the principal orders me to stop, otherwise Frost coming himself will be of no use."

"You won't be able to do it," Manstein threw a black card on the table, "I have this Gattuso family black card, and my authority is the same as the principal's. I can order Norma to forcibly terminate the Dragon Abyss plan, without her help, you are powerless."

"I didn't know you were loyal to the Gattuso family," Schneider raised an eyebrow, "Your perverted father used to love going against the Gattuso family."

"It's not about loyalty, I'm the head of the Disciplinary Committee, and I have the authority to investigate professors. In their eyes, I'm a person worth winning over, unlike you, who is the principal's die-hard follower. The Dragon Abyss plan is indeed very strange, an 'SS'-level mission that was decided by only you and the principal, and you are in a hurry to send the three most excellent students with the best bloodlines into the deep sea. This is not your style."

"You're wrong. This decision has nothing to do with me, it was made by the principal alone, I'm just executing it." Schneider said, "This is a gamble, but some risks have to be taken."

Manstein inserted the black card into the card slot of the control console, and the large screen displayed the Gattuso family crest. "Welcome, Professor Manstein. The black card you hold has passed the system verification, and you are now logged into the Norma system with the authority of the head of the Disciplinary Committee and the special envoy of the Gattuso family. How can I help you?" Norma's voice echoed in the central control room.

"I can immediately call a halt to the Dragon Abyss plan, or I can stand on your side, but you have to tell me why you are in such a hurry to start the Dragon Abyss plan?"

"Have you seen my face?" Schneider asked.

"Your face?" Manstein was taken aback.

Schneider took off his oxygen mask and moved his face into the light. He had always been careful to hide his face in the shadows when he took off his oxygen mask, so this was the first time Manstein had seen Schneider's face, a face that would make any horror movie lover have nightmares. Below his eyes, the flesh was completely dried up, leaving only a layer of dried skin stuck to the bones, and his lips and nose had shrunk, exposing his front teeth.

"It's ugly, isn't it? In fact, I'm only 37 years old this year, but I have the face of a century-old mummy. The students hear my wheezing and think I'm a man in my 50s, but I'm actually younger than you." Schneider said self-deprecatingly.

Manstein shuddered: "How did this happen?"

"This is the mark left by a mission 11 years ago," Schneider said, "That was in Greenland, where we found a similar embryo."

"This wasn't the first time we discovered an embryo in the sea?" Manstein was surprised.

"No, it wasn't. Eleven years ago, in Greenland, we discovered a similar embryo." Schneider blew a perfect smoke ring, "You should have guessed it by now, I'm talking about the Greenland Ice Sea case, where the entire dive team perished, but the Board of Directors sealed all the files and forcibly terminated the investigation. If you want to hear this story, you'll have to be patient, because it's a long story, and please order Norma to leave the room. You now hold the black card, you can do it."

"Why should Norma leave?"

"Because Norma doesn't know. Top secret information can't be stored in the system or on hard drives, it can only be stored here." Schneider tapped his forehead, "After hearing this story, you can't write it down in any form, not even a memo for yourself. This is a hard rule of the academy, you can only try your best to remember every detail I tell you, if you forget, there's no way to retrieve it."

"Can you still remember every detail of what happened 11 years ago?"

"Of course I can," Schneider said, "That was the only time I went to hell, how could I forget?"

Bone-chilling coldness emanated from Schneider's words. Manstein felt that the man in front of him, who was ugly and powerful, was burning with anger, an anger that had not gone out for 11 years.

"Norma, leave this room, and leave us alone for 15 minutes." Manstein said.

"Understood, for the next 15 minutes, the central control room will be outside of my monitoring range." Norma said,

All the equipment in the central control room stopped operating, the cameras and recording equipment locked up, and the lights went out one by one. Norma left, the monitoring was lifted, and at this moment, the central control room was independent of the campus, with the shadows of the trees swaying in the high windows, making the place look like the depths of an ancient church.

"It was autumn in 2001..." Schneider began to tell the story slowly.

"It was autumn in 2001 when someone with the ID 'Crown Prince' posted a message online saying that his tugboat had caught strange bronze fragments in the deep waters of the Greenland Sea. He released photos, and from the photos, it could be seen that there were complex ancient characters on the fragments that perfectly matched the 'Ice Sea Bronze Pillar Table' secretly collected by the academy.

"The Ice Sea Bronze Pillar Table is believed to be a rare ancient artifact from the Dragon Age, once standing in the cities built by the dragon race, who were accustomed to using pillars to record their history, with a giant pillar standing in the center of the city. But the Ice Sea Bronze Pillar Table is just a fragment of a broken pillar, and it is estimated to be less than 1/3 of its original length. It is the most detailed dragon text material that humans can find today, recording the war history of the dragon race, but we have not been able to decipher it because we do not have any text to compare it with, and those words are just meaningless patterns to us. At that time, I was a young assistant professor who was keen on deciphering dragon texts. I thought that if there was another pillar in the deep waters of Greenland Sea, then by comparing the text on it, we might be able to decipher the true history of the dragon race. So I contacted 'Crown

Prince' anonymously, saying that we were a research institute of ancient texts and hoped to buy those fragments.

"At that time, someone offered an astonishingly high price, but Crown Prince indicated that he was willing to donate the fragments to a research institute instead of selling them to a merchant. He sent us the fragments without taking a penny, along with the coordinates of where he had caught them. We immediately sent an elite team to that sea area and scanned the seabed with sonar. We had originally hoped to discover a giant pillar-like object on the seabed, but we captured a strange heartbeat signal instead.

"The Greenland Ice Sea is not as deep as the Japan Trench, and large animals such as white whales and tiger sharks live there, so at first, we did not think that it was a dragon embryo. But we observed for several months, and the object on the seabed did not change its position at all. We had to shift our attention from the pillar to this heartbeat signal, which was too mysterious and enticing. If that thing was a whale or a shark, then it should be foraging around. If it was an unknown species of giant sea turtle in hibernation, then its heartbeat should not be so strong. Someone came up with a startling idea that it was a dragon embryo. The seabed was its burial ground, and it had gone through death and cocooning to transform back into an embryo, undergoing a long incubation.

"This idea was too bold, but the heartbeat signal was too mysterious and enticing, and each of us was fascinated by this guess. Since the founding of the Secret Party, we have only obtained one dragon embryo, which was a weak dragon species outside the third generation, and its bloodline had already weakened. If we could obtain a powerful embryo, we could analyze it to learn more about this ancient life."

"So you decided to dive?" Manstein asked.

"No, we were not so rash. Because everything was just a guess, the most prudent thing to do was to use a remotely operated underwater robot to investigate. But every time the underwater robot approached that area of the seabed, it would lose control, and when we recovered it, we found that its circuits had been mysteriously burned out. This added to the evidence that there was a dragon embryo on the seabed, because it was said that during the incubation process, ancient dragons would unfold a certain field to protect themselves, and anyone who entered their field would experience deadly hallucinations. From a biological point of view, hallucinations are ultimately caused by stimulation of the cerebral cortex, and the easiest way to stimulate the cerebral cortex is with electricity."

"Was it the embryo's field that caused the underwater robot's circuits to burn out?" Manstein asked.

"That's what we thought, but we still didn't want to send people down. If it really was the embryo's field that burned out the underwater robot's circuits, then the stimulation it caused to the cerebral cortex would be quite terrifying. Although my students were all 'A'-level bloodlines, I

still couldn't be sure that they could resist the embryo's field. In the Secret Party's archives, there were records of people being overwhelmed by the dragon's illusions as soon as there was a crack in their psychological defenses.

"But at this point, the Board of Directors intervened and ordered us to dive as soon as possible to confirm the target, their reason being that we couldn't just wait for the embryo to hatch, and that even if it was a risky move, we had to take action.

"The dive was the decision of the Board of Directors?"

"Yes, today they sent you to stop the Dragon Abyss plan, but back then they were the ones who formulated the Greenland plan."

"Under pressure, we formulated the dive plan. We procured the most advanced diving bells from Germany at the time, which were made of metal and could form a static electricity barrier to weaken the influence of the embryo's field. The dive team members were all wrapped in fine metal mesh, and they took nerve-stabilizing drugs. They were all excellent hybrids, and we thought that with all the equipment, they should be able to resist the embryo's field. Moreover, there were six people in the dive team, so if one person had a problem, the other five could force him to evacuate. In order to kill the dangerous embryo, we also specially made underwater rifles for the dive team, using bullets made of the Philosopher's Stone, which would be deadly to the dragon race.

"Although it was a dangerous mission, the students were still excited. Young people are fearless, and they had the opportunity to get close to a dragon embryo, which was as exciting as visiting the divine kingdom.

"On the day of the dive, the weather was surprisingly good. The six members of the dive team boarded three diving bells and descended, while I provided support on the ice surface. At first, everything went smoothly, the currents were calm, and the marine life was peaceful, they even saw a white whale. But when the depth reached 170 meters, the leader of the dive team suddenly exclaimed excitedly in the communication channel that they had seen a door. This was very strange because the seabed in that area was 300 meters deep, and their depth was 170 meters, which meant that they were still 130 meters above the seabed. The visibility at the bottom of the sea was very low, so how could they see a door? Was the door suspended in the middle of the water?"

"I became alert and worried that they had already entered the embryo's field and were starting to hallucinate. They excitedly discussed the door in the communication channel, which was a complete violation of the communication rules. They were not supposed to talk in the communication channel, and underwater communication had to be brief and clear to avoid misunderstandings. I shouted at them not to go near the door. I didn't know if the door really existed, but my intuition told me that the door must not be opened. But they completely ignored my calls, and all I could hear was their rapid breathing, along with strange noise, like someone

in a deep well chanting a mantra and sighing. Then the leader exclaimed in amazement, 'The door is open! The door is open!' But suddenly, the leader said, 'No! Don't go in!' Then there was gunfire, obviously from the underwater rifles carried by the dive team. There were also splashing sounds and breathing apparatus sounds, indicating that the dive team had left the diving bell and was fighting something. The situation was very chaotic, with someone shouting loudly in the channel, but due to the interference of the electric current, I couldn't hear clearly.

"I had previously instructed the dive team not to leave the diving bell under any circumstances, as the static electricity barrier provided by the diving bell was their important protection. But they ignored my orders, and to this day, there has been no perfect explanation for their actions. Five minutes later, the communication was cut off, and we no longer received any signals from the depths of the ice sea. I decided to forcibly recover the diving bells, which were connected to the safety ropes and the icebreaker. But when we retrieved the safety ropes, we found that they had been cut, cut by a diving knife, and from the fibers at the cut, it was one of the diving knives we had issued to the dive team. They had cut the safety ropes themselves.

"I went crazy and decided to dive down to rescue them myself. There were no extra diving bells, but I was confident in my physical condition, and I could dive to a depth of 300 meters without any protective gear. I dived straight down to a depth of 170 meters and reached the site of the accident, but I didn't see any doors or bodies, and the seawater was very clean, with no trace of blood. But in the communication channel, I clearly heard gunfire. At that time, the water temperature had dropped below zero, and the seawater was supercooled. This kind of water would quickly freeze as soon as it was stirred. Suddenly, I felt that there was something right behind me, silently swimming!

"Normally, such a cautious predator would not have been discovered by me, but the supercooled seawater had been stirred and was freezing quickly. In just a few seconds, I saw thin ice forming in front of me, reflecting the light from the diving helmet's headlamp. In the ice, I saw a black shadow, like a totem from an ancient mural! It was so agile, its slender tail slowly swaying in the seawater, like a butterfly flying silently. Suddenly, the headlamp stopped working due to the low temperature, and everything went dark. I thought I was going to die, the embryo had hatched, and it was the one that had killed my students! It was right behind me, so close, yet I was powerless to do anything. In desperation, people become bolder, and I suddenly remembered that I still had an APS underwater assault rifle in my hand.

"The specially made underwater rifles had all been given to the dive team. The one in my hand was just an ordinary APS, loaded with ordinary bullets. But since I had an APS, I couldn't just wait to die. I turned and blindly fired into the darkness, and I smelled a strong bloody smell. I had actually injured it!"

"How could an APS possibly injure a dragon? That thing is only useful against frogmen, it can't even kill a big shark." Manstein said, "And a depth of 170 meters is far beyond the applicable depth of an APS."

"I don't know, but there was a strong bloody smell seeping into the oxygen mask, and I had no wounds on my body, so the injured one must have been the dragon." Schneider said.

"I could clearly feel it right in front of me, and I faced the injured dragon in the darkness, very close, but I couldn't see it.

"It breathed on me, and in an instant, my oxygen mask shattered. The cold current carrying dragon blood rushed into my respiratory tract, as if it had rushed straight into my soul, and I lost consciousness. At that moment, my companions on the ice surface noticed that I was no longer responding to their calls, so they activated the recovery system, and the safety ropes pulled me out of the water. When I broke the surface, I was sealed in a block of ice several tons in weight, like a frozen fish sold in supermarkets.

"Fortunately, the rescue helicopter arrived a few minutes later, and when I woke up, the doctor said that I had encountered extreme cold. I had danced with death, inhaling the cold air it exhaled, at a temperature of minus 200 degrees, cold enough to almost liquefy. Instantly, half of my face was ruined, and the temperature of my brain had dropped to zero, freezing my blood. The odds of survival were one in a thousand. The doctors did their best, but they only managed to save my tongue. During the surgery, my respiratory tract was as fragile as the skin of a mummy, crumbling at the slightest touch. I had to wear an oxygen mask at all times, and every two or three years, I had to replace the plastic respiratory tract, otherwise, I would die from respiratory failure.

"I used to love hand-rolled cigarettes, but this box of tobacco is what I had left over from 11 years ago, and I still haven't finished it. I only roll one to smoke when I recall that incident, and the pain of the smoke entering my respiratory tract helps me remember the details more clearly. I assure you that every detail I have told you is true, because I dare not forget, these memories are etched into my brain with pain."

"We failed to capture or kill that dragon, and it is still alive, hiding in the deep seas of the world, looking for a chance to surface. A few hours after the incident, we explored the area again with a remotely operated underwater robot, and the ice sea was quiet, with even the fish gone, leaving no trace. We explored the seabed but found no embryo or bronze pillar, as if everything we had experienced was just a nightmare that disappeared when we woke up. Several years later, an ocean mining company found rich manganese nodules on the seabed and built an offshore mining platform, and now there are thousands of ocean miners working there. No supernatural incidents occurred until recently, when we detected an identical heartbeat signal in the depths of the Japan Trench.

"The story is over, and here is a document that I think you will be interested in." Schneider pulled out a dusty file bag from under the table and pushed it towards Manstein, "I had guessed that the Board of Directors would send someone to stop the Dragon Abyss plan, so I took this file out of the archives in advance, but I didn't expect them to send you in such a hurry. Go

ahead and read it, you don't have to worry about the 'SS' red stamp on it, I'll forge one on it after you're done."

"How did you get your hands on this?" Manstein's face turned pale, "Even as the head of the Executive Department, doing this would get you impeached by the Board of Directors!"

"SS"-level archives could only be accessed by members of the Board of Directors, and they were all paper archives, with no backups in Norma's system. These files were sealed in the top-secret archives of the Watt Alheim, and the keys were in the hands of the principal and the directors. The Equipment Department guys were crazy, guarding the files but unable to see them, and even the principal and the directors had difficulty accessing these files because Watt Alheim was rarely open to outsiders, and even the directors might be denied access.

"Of course I couldn't get my hands on it, and those guys in the Equipment Department don't like me." Schneider said, "But someone can get it, and since that person doesn't care about being impeached by the Board of Directors, why should I?"

Schneider's implication was obvious. Anjou didn't care about being impeached by the Board of Directors, and the Board of Directors wanted to impeach him, but the problem was that they couldn't find a suitable replacement for him.

The cover of the file bag was printed with the words "Kalaallit Nunaat", which means "Greenland" in Greenlandic. The Greenland incident 11 years ago had caused a huge shake-up in the upper echelons of the academy, but those who knew the truth never spoke of it, and Manstein had joined the Kassel Academy after that. Now, by opening this file, he could unravel the hidden mystery. The temptation was great for Manstein.

"This may be your only chance to uncover the truth of what happened back then, and it's not too late to back out now." Schneider said with a hint of sarcasm, "After reading this file, you may not even have the chance to be a fence-sitter, and the Gattuso family will see you as another lapdog of the principal, just like me."

Manstein sighed and opened the sealed file with his thumb. He read through the documents from 11 years ago, one by one, with the signatures of the people involved clearly visible. The more he read, the more terrified he became, his eyes twitching uncontrollably, and his hands began to tremble.

"What the hell were they thinking!" he shouted.

"Yes, this is why the Board of Directors doesn't want to look back at the Greenland incident." Schneider said, "As you can see, the Board of Directors was well aware of the risks of approaching a dragon embryo. The Secret Party has always known that even in the embryonic stage, dragon-kind are aggressive, and hybrids with violent bloodlines can tear apart their mothers to come into this world, let alone a true ancient dragon? But they were too eager to

obtain that embryo, so they didn't care about risking people's lives. As a result, an accident occurred. They were in a hurry to cover up the truth of the incident, replacing most of the school administrators and sending the original administrators to various branches around the world. They also compromised with the principal, giving him more management authority. Before that, the principal wasn't as unfettered as he is now."

"The Board of Directors has no right to send a document demanding that I terminate the Dragon Abyss plan. What I'm doing now is just a repeat of what they did 11 years ago. It's just that because the heir of the Gattuso family is also in the dive team, the Gattuso family is in a panic. They can't bear to risk their own lives, but they don't care about the lives of others, even those lunatics in the Equipment Department are not as disgusting as them." Schneider said.

"What if the embryo from 11 years ago suddenly hatched, will this one do the same?"

"Of course it's possible, we know very little about the dragon's incubation process, so we don't know when it will hatch."

"Don't Caesar's team know about this?"

"There's no need for them to know, knowing this will only increase unnecessary fear. We are just borrowing their bloodlines, only those with the most excellent bloodlines can resist the interference of the embryo's field."

"Then what's the difference between you and the Board of Directors? Caesar's team is like a flock of lambs going to the altar! And the shepherd leading them to the sacrifice is a devil!"

"A devil? Who are you talking about?" Schneider lifted his head.

"Who else? I finally understand what that saying means! The guys in the Equipment Department are crazy, but the people in the Executive Department are lunatics, the guys in the Equipment Department don't understand the value of human life, and the people in the Executive Department are indifferent to it!" Manstein shouted, "All you care about is that damn task! Do you not care about how many people die for your damn task? You sit here looking sad, smoking a cigarette, and talking sentimentally about your dead students, but you're sending a new generation of students into hell! If I were your mother, I would regret giving birth to a bastard like you!"

"You can't be my mother, you're a man." Schneider said coldly, "Manstein, sometimes I really envy you. Because you and Gutenberg live in a clean world, not like me and the principal, who are sin-eaters."

"Sin-eaters?"

"Yes, those who devour sin. Not everything that is right is just, and not everything that is just is right. There's a tricky question, at a railway junction, one set of tracks has a warning sign because a train will pass through, while the other set of abandoned tracks has none. Now, the train is coming, and you're standing at the junction. There are a hundred children playing on the tracks the train will pass through, completely ignoring the warning sign, while there's a lone child playing on the abandoned tracks because he follows the rules. Can you switch the tracks? If you don't, a hundred children will die, a hundred disobedient children; if you do, the train will pass through the other set of tracks and only one child will die, but he's an obedient child." Schneider stared into Manstein's eyes, "My dear Professor Manstein, would you switch the tracks?"

Manstein was stunned. He couldn't answer this question, it was a damn trick, was it more important to be obedient or to save lives? If he didn't switch the tracks, the parents of the hundred children would be devastated when they arrived at the scene, how could he face their grief? Was it because those children were disobedient that they deserved to die? But if he switched the tracks, how could he bear to let that lone, obedient child die? He was innocent, and he may have even pointed to the warning sign to remind the others not to go near those tracks... How could he let that innocent child die?

"Time's up, while you were thinking about whether or not to switch the tracks, the hundred children have already died." Schneider said calmly, "You didn't make a choice, you just watched it happen."

"What would you have done?" Manstein asked hoarsely.

"I would have switched the tracks, even though I would have killed one child, I would have saved a hundred. This way, I would be a sin-eater, I would have done the right thing, but I would have done evil. I would have devoured the sin, so that others could be innocent."

"You're just making excuses!" Manstein said.

"There's no need, if you weren't my friend, I wouldn't have even told you this." Schneider shook his head, "It's true that I'm sending Caesar's team on a dangerous mission, but it's a necessary choice, we can't let the embryo hatch in the abyss. The sooner we act, the better, before it gains self-awareness. At this point, waiting is just hesitation, and hesitation only gives your opponent more time to prepare, this is what the principal said. If Caesar's team perishes, I will bear the sin."

"I thought you would at least consider Chu Zihang, you've always cared about his safety." Manstein said helplessly.

"Chu Zihang, Lu Mingfei, or Caesar, in the eyes of the Executive Department, they are just different weapons. We care about whether the weapons are intact, but if we don't unsheathe the sword, then the weapons lose their value! Do you remember the transmitter I implanted in Chu

Zihang's molar?" Schneider pushed his phone towards Manstein, the screen showing a map of Japan with a red light flashing regularly.

Manstein nodded.

"It was me who brought him into the Kassel Academy, but from the day he enrolled, I've been monitoring his every move. If he loses control, I will not hesitate to put him on the danger list and have an agent eliminate him. Only a devil can manage the Executive Department, and those who work with me are all lunatics. What binds us is not emotion, but a common goal. Since ancient times, the Secret Party has been such an organization, and our opponent is the incredibly powerful dragon-kind. If we still have weak emotions, we will surely die!"

"If you can really sacrifice anyone for the sake of killing dragons, why don't you get into the deep-diving vessel yourself?"

Schneider looked up at Manstein, picked up a white porcelain plate from the side, and placed it between them, with only a silver knife and fork left on the empty plate. He suddenly grabbed the dinner knife and stabbed it into his heart, then slammed the handle to push the whole knife in!

Schneider silently smoked, staring into Manstein's eyes, saying nothing. The penetrating wound on his chest seemed to not exist, and Manstein was dumbfounded. A minute later, Schneider pulled the dinner knife out of the wound, which had already started to heal, and when Schneider pulled out the knife, the muscles tightly gripped the blade. Schneider was expressionless, as if he couldn't feel any pain.

"You're contaminated!" Manstein said hoarsely.

Schneider threw the knife into the porcelain plate, the blade stained with blood, "Yes, I'm contaminated by the blood of the ancient dragon." The wound quickly stopped bleeding, and the muscles grew at a visible rate.

"Only one in a hundred thousand people can survive after being contaminated by the blood of an ancient dragon, and I happened to be that lucky one in a hundred thousand. I was able to survive in the depths of the sea because the dragon blood had already started to activate my potential as I inhaled it. But I wasn't fully qualified to receive the dragon blood, it tore me apart as it strengthened me, and I've been suffering in excruciating pain for 11 years. The person most likely to fall into a Death Knight in the academy is not Chu Zihang, but me. It's not that I'm afraid to dive, it's that my body can't take it. The person sitting in front of you now is a dying patient, if it weren't for the contamination of dragon blood, I would have died long ago."

"Does the principal know?"

"He knows. The academy has developed a special medical program for me, and I have a blood transfusion every year, but the dragon blood can never be completely cleansed, and the

time I have left is an unknown." Schneider tapped his chest, "I have a bomb the size of a pacemaker installed next to my heart, and if I lose control, it will explode, and I will suddenly collapse with a slight explosion, without causing any trouble for any of you."

"Are you that cruel to yourself?" Manstein said softly.

"To be cruel to others, one must first learn to be cruel to oneself, otherwise one is just a coward." Schneider said slowly, "Many people thought that after the Greenland incident, I would never take on another mission, but would just shrink back and do research, because I lost six students in that incident, and I became what I am now. They thought that a person who had been rescued from hell should cherish life, but I chose to become the head of the Executive Department. I was the last one left of the Greenland team, all those young people with blooming lives died, and I survived, if I were a coward, wouldn't that be too ridiculous?"

"What if Caesar's team repeats the fate of the Greenland team? How many more students can you bear to see die in front of you?" Manstein asked.

"This is the battlefield between humans and dragon-kind. That's how battlefields are, unnecessary kindness will only harm more people. When the first comrade in front of you falls, you don't have time to be scared or sad, let alone be so scared that you throw down your weapon and curl up, you can only shout and roar, urging the others to charge forward with you. Every inch of ground under your feet was bought with the life of the man who fell in front of you, if you stop now, he will have died in vain. The second person falls, you continue to roar... The third person falls, you still roar... Once you start the charge, there's no turning back, there are only two outcomes, total annihilation or breakthrough! But for cowards, there's only one outcome, total annihilation!"

Manstein stared into Schneider's fierce eyes and was silent for a long time: "Friend, you're becoming more and more like the principal. I have a feeling that it's the principal roaring in front of me, saying, 'I am the last one of the Lionheart Society, as long as I'm still fighting, the original Lionheart Society is not over yet!'"

"He didn't say that?" Schneider frowned.

"No, he wouldn't say that, but that's the feeling I get. Because of the Hamburg Port accident, the first generation of the Lionheart Society was annihilated, and he was the only one who survived. He must have been holding on by his hatred to make it to today, right? On the surface, he's a flamboyant old man, but inside, he's an injured tiger, always sharpening his teeth. He wants to exterminate the dragon race, and anyone who stands in his way will be removed. If the Board of Directors becomes an obstacle, he will flatten them too, he can do it."

"You're becoming more and more like dragons, with less and less human flavor."

"What do you mean?" Schneider asked coldly.

"Firmness, persistence, cruelty, and sharpness, these are not so much human virtues as they are innate attributes of dragons. As warriors, dragons are perfect, but humans are inherently weak, prone to hesitation, fear, and giving up. But you and the principal can't tolerate having human weaknesses, you force yourselves to be as cold and ruthless as dragons. People like you will become stronger and stronger, but also lonelier and lonelier, lonely and strong like dragons."

"To fight the devil, you must first become a devil yourself."

"But what's the point of winning like that? That's not your victory, it's the devil's victory." Manstein said, "You told me a story, do you want to hear mine now?"

"Caesar's team is still waiting for my order."

"It won't take long. It's not a secret, and there's no twist to the plot, it's about me and my wonderful old man."

"I wouldn't have guessed that the vice-principal was your father if you didn't bring it up." Schneider said.

"Yeah, as father and son, we have nothing in common, and it's a bit awkward to stand together for a photo. I've started to go bald, and he's still like a cowboy, with a bandana tied around his neck." Manstein said slowly, "Actually, I don't have much of a relationship with him, and there's no father-son affection. He abandoned me and my mother when I was young, he's been a cowboy all his life... to be precise, he's a bull, going from place to place to knock down little heifers. I don't know how many women he's had, and my mother certainly wasn't the one he loved the most. I must have been the result of a failed birth control attempt. It wasn't until I came to this academy that I acknowledged him... or rather, he claimed to be my father and wanted to have a drink with me, and I poured the drink on his face."

"Because he didn't fulfill his responsibilities as a father?" Schneider asked.

"The specific details of our acknowledgement are like this," Manstein pulled out a well-worn gold cross from his collar, "This is my mother's heirloom, and I've always worn it with me. At the welcome party for our batch of professors, that old guy suddenly put his hand on my shoulder and stared at my cross, oh, isn't this the pendant of that busty Martha? How do you know my mother's name? He said, is that your mother? Wow, what a coincidence! If Martha didn't fool around with other men during those days when you were getting to know each other, then you must be my son! What a surprise to get to know each other in this situation, we should have a drink! What would you do if you were me?"

"You didn't break the glass in his face, you really have good manners." Schneider said.

"Yeah, I remembered how my mother and I used to drive around in a second-hand 1963 travel car, moving from place to place, and we didn't even have a place to live. In order to earn money to support me, my mother had to endure the teasing of some men. Because we moved around a lot, I didn't have any friends, and I was often bullied by the local bad boys, they even pushed me into an alley and peed on me. At that time, I should have had a father to teach those punks a lesson, but I endured it and didn't tell my mother, because my mother was already tired, and I wanted her to have a good sleep after work. But at that time, the vice-principal was rolling around in some heifer's bed. I waited for him for 30 years, expecting him to stand up for me, and this bastard actually said, what a coincidence to get to know each other in this situation, we should have a drink!" Manstein said, "I not only poured his drink on him, but also pushed and shoved him, and in the end, it was the principal who pulled us apart, it was the laughingstock of the welcome party."

"I don't think I can stay here anymore, I poured wine on the vice-principal on my first day of work. Even if he doesn't hold a grudge against me, I don't want to face him every day. The next day, I was going to go to the principal to resign, but unexpectedly, I saw a large cardboard box at the door, filled with various game consoles, game discs, remote control off-road vehicles, small bicycles, and a set of 'Skary's Golden Childhood'. There was a letter in the box, which said, 'Dear son, I know you lacked fatherly love when you were young, and this is my fault. To make up for the scars of your childhood, I've made up all your birthday gifts at once. Cheer up, love from your dear father', and on the back were a few lines of small print saying that he would bring a few pretty girls to celebrate with me in the evening. It turned out that the bastard had gone to Chicago's Anti-Fight City overnight to buy a box of toys to make up with me."

"Wow... that's quite a surprise." Schneider said.

Although he wasn't quite sure why Manstein suddenly brought up these things, Schneider was very interested in hearing about the vice-principal's embarrassing stories. The vice-principal was a mysterious man, and probably only Anjou knew his background.

"The principal returned my resignation letter and asked me to reconsider, and then someone knocked on the door of my apartment. The old guy had a bottle of whiskey in each hand, hugging the prettiest girls from that year's freshmen, happily patting my chest and saying, hey girls, doesn't he look a lot like me? Then he put a yellow paper cup on my head as a birthday hat, asking the girls to take photos with me, saying that he was going to make up for my 18th birthday party tonight, and that the indispensable part of a coming-of-age ceremony was pretty girls showing their thighs, and it would be perfect if there was a 'love shot'! I took the bottle from his hand and poured the whole bottle of wine on his head."

"Oh." Schneider said, it was really too embarrassing, and Schneider didn't know how to express his feelings.

"But he still didn't give up. It's said that he doesn't give up on a woman he can't get, but he's very patient with me. Sometimes I would find a double-sided fried egg in my breakfast, and

when I asked the chef, I found out that it was made by the vice-principal when he was inspecting the kitchen. He wrote an email to the Board of Directors, saying that young teacher Manstein was really excellent, and that he should be promoted from assistant professor to associate professor right away... The Board of Directors knew that he was my father, but they still approved it. In the eyes of the Board of Directors, that pervert was too hard to please, but he was a useful alchemy expert, and if they could buy him by promoting his son, it would be a very good deal. Someone anonymously paid my rent for the school housing, and when I called the finance department to ask, they said it was the vice-principal who paid for you, and they specifically instructed us not to tell you."

"If they specifically instructed you not to tell me, why did the finance department tell me?"
"I guess the pervert's old man's instructions were something like this, 'Tell my dear son that it was the vice-principal who paid for you, and he specifically instructed us not to tell you'."

"I understand."

"He also invited me to be a judge for the swimming class with him, he really enjoys being a judge for the swimming class, because the girls all wear three-point swimsuits. Imagine your father sitting behind you, exuding an old man's hormones, excitedly pointing out, look at that busty one, that one with the nice butt, son, you should pursue girls like that, they're the top-notch women."

"I thought fathers would like their sons to find gentle and kind women." Schneider said.

"But my perverted old man said, a thousand pounds of affection is not as good as four ounces of breasts." Manstein said, "His attempts to please me were so stupid, how could he possibly make up for the suffering I went through? I was once institutionalized in a children's psychiatric hospital because of my strange behavior, and it was there that I met Gutenberg. No one came to visit me, and my mother was very ill. Because no one came to visit, the nurses treated me and Gutenberg badly, and Gutenberg often took food from them. I swore that I would never forgive the man who abandoned me and my mother, and if I ever had the chance to see him, I would kick him in the crotch like a fierce Thai boxer."

"Hmm." Schneider said.

"But one night, the pervert old man wrote me a long letter," Manstein said, "In the letter, he said, son, I know that what I've done can't make up for your wounds, but please allow me to explain one last time why I left you and your mother back then, because I didn't love your mother at all, and my life back then was just about fooling around with women, and you were an unexpected pregnancy..."

"Is this to fill your anger slot?" Schneider paused.

"He went on to say how beastly he was, listing the women he had seduced and the heartless things he had done to them, watching the women he liked jump to their deaths from tall towers without batting an eye... But he said, you know, I've always had a fear, and that is that I'm not really human." Manstein said, "He said that as he walked among people, he felt like a wolf walking among a flock of sheep, with his superior bloodline, he could easily conquer anyone, and no rules could bind him. This is a planet full of sheep, and he is the only wolf, he can eat any sheep he wants, he can do whatever he wants, he doesn't love women, because in his eyes, no matter how beautiful or charming a woman is, she's just a sheep he's enjoying."

"But after he found out that he had a son, he suddenly became cautious, he said he cared about my likes and dislikes, he carefully observed me, and he would even humble himself for me. He said he finally understood that no matter how powerful a father is, he would crawl on the ground and make horse sounds with his mouth to amuse his son. At the end of the letter, he said, I have felt bound for the first time in my life, not by some rules, but by my son. I actually have a family, even if it's just a bald son, and after so many years, my fear suddenly disappeared, and I felt happy."

"Happy to be bound?" Schneider thought for a long time.

"After the Greenland incident, you didn't take on any students for so many years, but you still became Chu Zihang's supervising professor. Is it just because of his excellent bloodline?" Manstein asked, "Or is it because he's too stubborn?"

"No, it's because he's too stubborn." Schneider recalled Chu Zihang's lonely golden irises in the rain, "I couldn't refuse."

"What kind of stubbornness?"

"He's a rare hybrid who found the academy himself, rather than the academy finding him. I decided to go to Chicago to interview him in person, but I still had my suspicions, so I asked to meet him under a railway bridge, where there were few passersby, and if he seemed suspicious, I could subdue or even kill him without anyone knowing. I had a Beretta pistol wrapped in my overcoat. It was pouring rain, and I saw the boy standing under the red light, carrying his only luggage. We stood on opposite sides of the street, staring at each other. He clearly knew who I was, but he didn't approach me, we were like two lone wolves meeting, we would never come together to sniff each other, but would keep a safe distance and observe each other. The traffic lights changed three times, and we didn't say a word to each other. His eyes were stubborn and lonely, and I could tell that he wanted to come to my side, because I was the one he had been looking for for many years, but as long as I didn't show an inviting attitude, he wouldn't take a single step."

Schneider sighed softly, "In the end, it was I who waved to him, I was forced to the point of no return by a boy's gaze, and at that moment, I felt that I could either kill him or invite him, there was no other choice."

"So are you inviting him as a sword or as a boy?"

Schneider was silent for a long time: "What nonsense are you talking about? Do I really see a person as a lifeless weapon? Sometimes I also thought that I hoped he would grow up as an ordinary person... but I met him on the battlefield, and I could only teach him how to use weapons."

"You're not the kind of person who can be completely cold and ruthless, you cleared the central control room and smoked here alone because you're anxious. You're worried about the safety of the dive team, so why are you in such a hurry to organize the dive? Schneider, tell me the truth. You should know that I would rather believe you than the Board of Directors, you may be a madman, but the Board of Directors has more tricks up their sleeves."

"Crown Prince, it's the Crown Prince." After a long silence, Schneider said softly.

"Crown Prince?"

"After the Greenland incident, the person with the ID 'Crown Prince' completely disappeared from the internet. No one has seen him, they only know that he's an excellent hunter. The academy suspects that the bronze fragments and coordinates he sent us were a bait, and he released those photos to lure us to the Greenland Ice Sea to find the embryo. Until recently, the ID 'Crown Prince' came back to life, and he released photos of a portion of the KGB's secret documents, which were about the Lenin. The KGB believed that there was once a research institute for unknown creatures and supernatural powers in northern Siberia, and just before the Soviet Union collapsed, this institute was suddenly destroyed. And just before the institute was destroyed, the Lenin happened to be carrying out a scientific expedition in the nearby sea, and it was highly likely that the Lenin took away something important from the institute, and after that, this Northern Fleet warship fled all the way to Japan as if it were escaping." Schneider said, "That's why we became interested in that sunken ship."

"If this is another bait, why did you bite?"

"As long as we confirm that it's an embryo, we can't let it hatch. We don't have time to hesitate anymore, the more time passes, the higher the chances of the embryo hatching, and once it gains self-awareness, it will be too late. The dive team will encounter the same thing that happened to the Greenland team. In the Greenland Sea, we failed to capture that young dragon, but we should have interrupted its incubation, so it hasn't been able to reach adulthood yet. It must be hiding in another unknown corner of the world, re-cocooning itself. The Crown Prince seems to have always been doing one thing, he can find the incubation sites of ancient dragon embryos, and then lure us to clean up the embryos. We have to pay a high price for this, risking our lives, but this is the mission of the Secret Party. Knowing that the Crown Prince is throwing out a bait, we still have to bite. We guessed that we were too late 11 years ago, and it was probably during the months we were observing it that the embryo gained self-awareness.

That young dragon could break out of its shell at any time. If we had been a little earlier, a little faster, perhaps the Greenland team would have succeeded."

"Does the Crown Prince get anything out of this?"

"Yes, he doesn't get anything out of it. To some extent, he's our hidden ally in the shadows, although he never shows up to fight." Schneider said, "So we can't afford to wait. To reduce the risk, the principal ordered the Equipment Department to provide the highest level of technical support, and also asked the Rock Flow Institute, whose technical capabilities are no less than that of the Equipment Department, to provide on-site support. According to the Equipment Department, even if the embryo hatches, there's a high chance of evacuating from the seabed. In addition, I made this little thing myself, it's a warning system."

Schneider turned on the power of the screen, and a prominent progress bar appeared in the center of the screen, with complex calculation formulas flowing from the bottom up: "I analyzed the heartbeat signal of the Greenland embryo, and as the incubation progresses, the strength and frequency of the embryo's heartbeat show significant changes. Based on this result, I designed a software that calculates the incubation rate of the embryo by monitoring its heartbeat signal. The current incubation rate is 32%, shown in green, which is the safe stage. If the embryo becomes aware, it may forcibly accelerate its incubation, and once the incubation rate rises significantly, the Moniah will use the safety hooks to pull the Trieste out of the seabed."

"Did you design this yourself?"

"This kind of thing is better left to the lunatics in the Equipment Department," Schneider said, "Let them do their job as technicians."

Manstein pulled out the black card from the card slot and pushed it towards Schneider: "If you put the safety of the dive team before the attack on the embryo, if you agree, I won't just stop the Dragon Abyss plan, I'll also give you the black card, which will give you 100% access to Norma."

"You came here on the instructions of the Board of Directors, if you don't stop the Dragon Abyss plan, you'll be implicated, won't you?" Schneider said.

"I'll eat this sin, then. I know that in your eyes, I'm just a civilian who can only handle small matters like finances and student discipline. Indeed, my bloodline and abilities are quite ordinary, and I can't compare to my perverted old man at all. But as a sin-eater, I'm qualified, and I'll find a way to swallow this sin." Manstein extended his hand.

"In fact, the reason you came here is to find out the inside story of this matter, isn't it?" Schneider stared into Manstein's eyes, "From the beginning, you just wanted me to give you a

reason, as long as I could find a reasonable explanation, you would suppress the order of the Board of Directors."

"I just wanted to confirm that you do care about the lives of those young people, that your decision is not a rash and irresponsible one, that you've done your best but have no choice." Manstein sighed, "If there's no other choice, then I, as a civilian, am not afraid to pay the price."

"Then we have a deal."

Chapter 12: Subspecies

The loud hissing of the respirators filled the air as the Rock Flow Institute performed the final tests on the Trieste in the dry dock. Technicians shouted loudly, with thousands of cables connected to the Trieste, and dozens of instruments flashing around it. This dry dock was adjacent to the power room of the Sumeru Seat, and the heat from the boilers in the power room was too much for the concrete insulating walls to block, the dry dock was over 40 degrees, the air was completely stagnant, but during the pressure test, the Trieste would blow out air like a level 12 hurricane, and the hot air in the dry dock would flow at high speed, along with the terrible ultrasonic noise, but none of the Rock Flow Institute technicians showed any signs of discomfort, they were all focused on their work, completely shutting out irrelevant things.

This scene reminded Lu Mingfei of "Sakura Wars", in the early 20th century, the Taisho period, that all-female Imperial Assault Force, which performed Shakespearean plays in the theater during peacetime, and when demons attacked, the streets would split open, and the flying warships would fly out from the docks under the theater, carrying the girls in their magical armor to the battlefield.

Lu Mingfei sat cross-legged in a corner of the dry dock, next to Chu Zihang, who was also sitting cross-legged. The light from the middle of the dry dock cast long shadows of the two of them on the concrete wall.

They had already changed into waterproof combat suits, the surface of which was a very thin metal mesh, this kind of thing formed a static electricity barrier that could help them resist the spiritual shock of the embryo.

Chu Zihang was wiping the knife in his hand, applying oil, then wiping it off, and repeating the process. In fact, he didn't need to do this, because his original knife had broken, and the one he had now was a replica made by the Equipment Department. The Equipment Department, of course, didn't have the mood to use traditional craftsmanship like Japanese swordsmiths, who would forge the steel thousands of times and then hand-grind the blade. The Equipment Department used a new type of superalloy to cast the shape, then used a machine tool to cut the blade, and finally polished it with a diamond wheel. This kind of knife didn't need to be

maintained at all, the superalloy itself was far stronger than steel, the blade was not easy to damage, and with the hardness of ordinary grinding stones, it was impossible to polish the blade of the superalloy knife. Even if the blade was damaged, it didn't matter, the Equipment Department could make a new replica in less than a day, and could even mass-produce them. Even if Chu Zihang was like Tokugawa Katorin in "Samurai Spirits 4", a master of the seven-sword style, the Equipment Department could still ensure that he always had a knife to play with and a spare knife to change to.

He was just used to doing this, listening to the sound of the whetstone on the knife, he could gradually calm down, just like doing yoga, listening to the sound of the mountains and rivers, and feeling at one with the world.

Caesar didn't sit with them, Caesar was inspecting the steel platform of the Trieste. When he got on the ship, he was wearing a white captain's uniform, but now he had taken off his shirt because of the heat, revealing his muscular chest, the spotlight shining on him, making him sweat profusely, his golden hair as red as fire, and the sweat flowing along the crevices of his muscles. He shouted loudly to the technicians, most of whom were not proficient in Chinese, so Caesar spoke to them in a mixture of English, Chinese, and a few Japanese catchphrases he had recently learned. This kind of language was like a hotchpotch, Lu Mingfei couldn't understand a word, he just saw Caesar frowning, giving thumbs up, or smiling and patting the shoulders of the technicians.

"He likes that feeling, team cooperation, sweating profusely, and being important in a group." Chu Zihang looked at Caesar's back, "But we can't give him that feeling."

"You're the head of the club, and you're also the head of the club, but you're so different from him. You don't mingle with people at all, how do you manage the Lionheart Society?"

"I never manage the Lionheart Society, it's Lancelot's job." Chu Zihang said indifferently, "Lancelot often reminds me of one thing, which is to speak less during club activities, because no matter how hard I try, I can't speak as well as Caesar. He was born to be a leader, you randomly flip through the Bible and he can speak eloquently. Lancelot said that if I don't speak, it will give people the impression that I'm aloof, but if I do speak and I don't speak as well as Caesar, then the Lionheart Society will lose points in this regard."

"That's really clever, but as the president, to be evaluated by the vice-president like this, don't you feel hurt?"

"Because it's the truth, so I don't feel hurt. In fact, sometimes I really admire Caesar, he always has a goal, rarely fears, never despairs, and is always the one who boosts morale in a group." Chu Zihang said, turning to look at Lu Mingfei, "People can choose how to live their lives, Caesar is the kind of man who demands that he live like a hero. It's not just because he was born into the Gattuso family, a rich man among rich men, but also because of his will."

"Alright, alright, Master, you're educating me again. Lately, you've been talking so inspiringly, are you trying to encourage me, or are you trying to improve your leadership skills so you can PK with the boss? I know, I understand, character determines destiny, a man must be strong, I'll work hard to live a meaningful life." Lu Mingfei paused, "Even if that cute girl doesn't like me, I can still hang on for a few more years, and then I'll go and trick a little junior sister."

"Do you have a question, can I ask?"

"About the cute girl? Don't ask then." Lu Mingfei said, "It's not a big deal, anyway, I'm all happy and carefree, and I don't have a long face."

"Hmm, okay." Chu Zihang lowered his head and continued to wipe the knife.

The good thing about talking to Chu Zihang is that if you say you don't want to talk about something, he'll immediately cut off the topic, but it's hard to find another topic to talk about with him.

Lu Mingfei actually wanted to talk to him more, he just didn't want to talk about Nono. For a while now, he had been feeling like his soul and body were separated, sometimes his body would move forward, but his soul would still be lazily trailing behind; sometimes his face would smile, but his heart would still be numb. Perhaps the circuit that controls his smile has successfully declared independence, he has split into two, one who is happy and carefree, and one who is cold and numb. He didn't know if this was a way of curing himself.

The two of them had been acting strangely, and Gen Chisei had always felt that their behavior was illogical, they were a group of lunatics who would dance and sing around him at any time, and they didn't feel any pressure about the upcoming dangerous mission. However, he hadn't figured out one thing, which was that the three lunatics had completely different sources of madness, they just happened to show similar symptoms. Caesar was fearless because he was confident, and he felt that he was surrounded by the pink "wedding blessing" halo, and all misfortune would stay away from him; Chu Zihang was calm because he had a perverted amount of self-control, even if the knife was close to his brow, he would force himself to stare at the blade, only the calmness of life and death could increase the chances of a successful counterattack; as for Lu Mingfei, he had split into two, the happy and carefree Lu Mingfei who was always blabbering and being surprised, and the cold and numb Lu Mingfei who was wandering aimlessly nearby, detached from the whole world, not feeling much sadness or joy, and not caring about anything, just feeling a little tired.

Lu Mingfei imagined that there was actually another Lu Mingfei sitting next to him, cold and numb, hugging his knees and gazing into the distance at the lights on the inspection platform, not saying a word. He really wanted to talk to that Lu Mingfei, but what would he say? At this point, who could comfort whom?

He took out the iPhone that Lu Mingze had given him and looked at the short list of contacts for a few seconds, but he couldn't find anyone to text. In the end, he pulled up a photo from the album of last night's "Life is Like a Summer Flower" and posted it on Weibo, he had originally written only the four characters "Life is Like a Summer Flower" in the Weibo post, but after thinking about it, he deleted it and changed it to "Tokyo's top-notch cuisine! I'm just being humble and not saying that I'm rich and handsome!"

At this moment, he seemed to hear the cold and numb Lu Mingfei next to him let out a cold, emotionless laugh.

A crackling sound of electricity came from the headphones, indicating that the communication channels were being tested, the Norma system was connecting with the Himegami system of the Japanese branch, the command headquarters in North America, the Sumeru Seat, the Trieste, and the dive team were assigned to different channels. This was the signal for the start of the mission, Lu Mingfei and Chu Zihang sat up straight, and Caesar, who was on the inspection platform, also pressed the right ear of the wireless earbud.

After a heavy breathing sound, Schneider's hoarse voice sounded: "Caesar's team, attention, Caesar's team, attention, the Dragon Abyss plan is about to begin. Before the mission begins, there are some things I must tell you, I am now using an encrypted channel, and what I am about to tell you is something that only the three of you are authorized to know, and this matter is also confidential to the Japanese branch. Acknowledge."

"Acknowledged!" The three of them said in unison.

"You are about to dive into the abyss to destroy a dragon embryo, this mission may be very simple and smooth, you just need to locate it, press the launch button for the sulfur bomb, and then surface. But there may be unexpected situations in any mission, you already know that there are no more than 10 people in human history who have reached the bottom of the abyss, so the abyss is still a mystery to humans. In the deep sea, you may encounter all kinds of unexpected situations. All of you are excellent students, especially Caesar and Chu Zihang, you can already be considered veteran agents, in most situations you can make your own judgments, there is only one exception - if you see a door or something similar to a door, do not approach it! Even more so, do not enter! Unconditionally return!" Schneider said sternly, leaving no room for discussion.

"A door?" Caesar asked, "How could there be a door in the abyss?"

"Don't ask questions, just remember. The word 'door' is a taboo in this operation, if you see a door or something similar to a door, unconditionally return! Did you hear me?" Schneider said sternly.

"I heard you, but I still don't quite understand." Caesar said.

"You don't need to understand, just remember. During the dive, the head of the Japanese branch, Gen Chisei, will be in contact with you, he has studied at the headquarters and has rich diving experience, he is an excellent field commander, you can trust his judgment in most cases. There is only one exception, and that is if you see a door, abandon the mission and return immediately. This is an unshakeable principle! Good luck." Schneider paused, "Chu Zihang, before you dive, remember to write an email to your mother, she wrote an email to Norma yesterday, saying that she hadn't received your email for a few days and couldn't get in touch with you, she was a little worried. She thought that Norma was a real woman, and she even offered to send her cosmetics and ask her to help find you in the dorm."

"She really reads the emails I write to her every day?" Chu Zihang was a little surprised, "I thought she just looked at the email titles."

"Adults shouldn't think that they've seen through their children, and children shouldn't think that they've seen through their parents." Schneider cut off the communication.

Caesar jumped down from the inspection platform with one hand on the railing, and walked to Chu Zihang and Lu Mingfei: "The inspection is almost done, are you ready? I still need a few minutes to change into my combat suit."

"We're ready," Lu Mingfei said, "But what was that warning about? I didn't understand it at all, how could there be a door in the deep sea?"

"He said a door or something similar to a door, maybe he meant a door in a broad sense." Caesar said.

"A door in a broad sense could be too many things, the cockpit has a door, the air valve has a valve, and there are at least thousands of parts in the deep-diving vessel that could be called a door." Chu Zihang said.

"If all of these count as doors, then what about the scandalous photos?" Lu Mingfei said, "Should I delete the photos on my phone?"

"That's it, Chu Zihang, go write an email to your mom, Lu Mingfei, go delete the photos, I'll go change my combat suit, we'll meet in the deep-diving vessel in 15 minutes." Caesar draped the captain's uniform over his shoulder, "Before we dive, one last principle, I'm the leader of this team, your job is to assist me. I don't want people in my team to do their own thing, we're a team, a team needs a core. Gather around me, OK?"

Chu Zihang nodded slightly.

"Boss, I'm not just going to gather around you, I'm going to be your lapdog, if you crack the whip, I'll 'woof woof woof' and charge forward, don't worry!" Lu Mingfei said, "I want to do my own thing, I can't even understand that operation manual."

Caesar nodded in satisfaction, turned and left, with Chu Zihang and Lu Mingfei following behind him. After walking a distance, Lu Mingfei turned back and looked, he felt that the cold and numb Lu Mingfei was still sitting in the same place, the light from the inspection platform shining on his face, he was hugging his knees with his chin on his knees.

A long "whoosh" sound drowned out the sound of the waves, the six Sumeru Seats lit up with yellow lights at the same time, these yellow lights rotated and swept the surrounding sea, the helicopters in the sky, the patrol boats on the sea, and the fishing boats of the Lin Group far away all flashed their lights.

"The dive team has entered the Trieste, the inspection is complete, the deep-diving vessel is in good condition, the seawater is stable. Headquarters has ordered the Dragon Abyss plan to begin, you can take your position and the deep-diving vessel can enter the water." Sakura came to stand behind Gen Chisei.

Gen Chisei was looking at the sea from the top of the Sumeru Seat, the long windbreaker fluttering in the wind. His gaze went past the nearby patrol boats to the fishing boats in the distance, their lights illuminating the sea and sky, like a string of pearls floating on the sea.

"Sakura, have you heard of ama divers?" Gen Chisei asked.

"I've heard a little, not much. Ama divers are girls who used to dive for pearls, they could dive hundreds of meters deep without equipment, using knives to pry open large clams to collect pearls. Only girls could do this job, because women have more subcutaneous fat than men, and are more resistant to the cold. If it was a man, the low temperature of the deep sea would cause their joints to become diseased and deformed, and they would become disabled in a few years."

"I've heard that the ama divers would tie a rope around their waists before they dived, the other end of the rope was held by their family on the boat. If they encountered danger in the sea, they would pull the rope hard, and their family would pull the rope back, maybe they could save them, if not, they could at least recover their bodies. The rope could only be held by family members, because the ama divers only trusted their family. But the husbands of the ama divers said that if you're tired of your wife, take her to a distant sea to dive for pearls, and then throw the rope into the water." Gen Chisei said indifferently, "So trust is really the most unreliable thing in the world, isn't it?"

He took the earphones that Sakura handed him and put them on: "Field commander Gen Chisei in position, Caesar's team, are you ready?"

"You're late, Gen, I don't like wasting time waiting for people. When this mission is over, we can still go for supper in Tokyo if we're early enough." Caesar's voice came through the earphones.

"The time is 10:15 p.m., the coordinates are 122 degrees 56 minutes east longitude and 35 degrees 33 minutes north latitude, the Dragon Abyss plan is activated, I am field commander Gen Chisei, I order the release of the Trieste." Gen Chisei said, "Good luck."

The dry dock at the bottom of the Sumeru Seat opened, and the Trieste, loaded with heavy objects, fell into the black sea, white bubbles could be seen rising from the Sumeru Seat, those were the air released by the Trieste. The frogmen dove into the sea and hung the safety ropes on the safety hooks at the top of the Trieste, the other end of the safety ropes were connected to the large wheel on the top of the Sumeru Seat. This large wheel was wrapped with safety ropes up to 12 kilometers long, this kind of metal safety rope was resistant to bending and wear, it could lift five Trieste, and the Equipment Department's specially designed recovery system could recover the deep-diving vessel from the abyss in 20 minutes.

The frogmen surfaced and gave Gen Chisei a thumbs-up, indicating that the job of hanging the safety ropes was done. The wheel started to turn, indicating that the Trieste was slowly descending into the abyss.

Sakura understood why Gen Chisei suddenly brought up the ama divers.

Gen Chisei took off one of the earphones and dialed a number: "The deep-diving vessel has entered the water, tell Erii to get ready, they'll be at the Shinso in 80 minutes."

"You've worked hard, Himegami has successfully invaded the military satellite systems of the US and Russia, no satellite will be able to take photos of the nearby sea area tonight." On the other end of the phone, Tachibana Masamune said, "Show your stuff! Chisei, the history of the Snake Branch House will be rewritten by you and me."

"How's Erii doing? Can her body take it?"

"It doesn't matter how she's doing, she's the sword that points the way, everything else is just things to be cut down." Tachibana Masamune paused, "She's our... Tsukuyomi!"

A rubber duck floated in the pool of bubbles. This was a huge square bronze bathtub, as luxurious as the equipment used by the ancient Roman emperors, soft light shone from the top of the bathroom, illuminating the girl's fair skin. She poked the rubber duck into the water with her fingers, watching it float back up, sometimes blowing on it to blow it far away, and then reaching out from the bubbles with her feet to hook it back. The head of the Uesugi family had been taking a bath for an hour, most of which was spent playing with the rubber duck. From her soapy body, it could be seen that she was developing normally and had a good figure, but as an adult girl, she obviously shouldn't be interested in rubber ducks, her mental age seemed to be stuck at the level of a young girl.

Footsteps could be heard outside, followed by Tachibana Masamune's coughing: "Erii, stop playing, hurry up and get dressed, we're about to leave."

There was no answer, and after half a minute, Tachibana Masamune saw words appear on the glass door: "I understand."

The bathroom glass was one-way, and Uesugi could write on it with water, leaving transparent traces. After her bath, she turned and left, and from those transparent words, Tachibana Masamune could vaguely see a captivating silhouette.

"Remember to put on a bath towel when you get out of the water!" Tachibana Masamune sighed.

This wasn't the first time he had reminded Uesugi to pay attention to this issue. Because her mental age was low, she seemed to not know how to distinguish between the sexes, nor did she know that exposing herself in front of the opposite sex would attract certain kinds of gazes. One year, the family had a hot spring gathering, and in front of the elders, Uesugi, wearing a kimono, suddenly opened the door and leaped into the air, people only saw a kimono fall to the ground, the next moment, she had already jumped into the outdoor hot spring, her long hair floating in the water. Her natural and captivating beauty shocked everyone, for a moment, they forgot to avert their eyes, Tachibana Masamune had to use the hilt of his knife to knock on the ground to remind these people to pay attention to etiquette, and Gen Chisei quickly ran out of the room to pick up the kimono and cover the people's sight.

"If I die one day, only Chisei will be able to protect you, right?" Tachibana Masamune shook his head.

Uesugi took off her headphones and put them aside, walked to the shower and turned on the bronze faucet, washing the foam off her hair. Her hair color was a rare dark red. She opened her luggage and put the rubber duck away, taking out a red and white miko outfit. This traditional outfit consisted of a kosode, a white kimono, and scarlet hakama, with red silk ropes woven into the cuffs and collar. After putting on the miko outfit, she put her headphones back on, thought for a moment, and then took out the rubber duck and secretly put it into her skirt. Her skirt was full of pockets, stuffed with all sorts of small things.

The white yacht rocked in the rising tide, with a silver "Tachibana" badge on the bow. Tachibana Masamune and Fuuma Kotaro sat opposite each other drinking tea, while black-clad bodyguards were scattered at the bow and stern, with short knives with black sheaths at their waists.

Uesugi boarded the deck, still smelling of her nice-smelling shampoo. Fuuma Kotaro immediately stood up and bowed, although she was a girl, the status of the Uesugi family was slightly higher than that of the five small families, and the Uesugi surname was of higher status in the family than the Fuuma family, which was known for raising ninjas.

"Come over here and let me see." Tachibana Masamune said.

Uesugi knelt in front of Tachibana Masamune on the cushion, but she didn't look at him, instead, she looked left and right, like a child being forced to sit there and do her homework.

"It's hard on you." Tachibana Masamune patted her head, "I really wish I could go in your place, but I don't have your ability. All you have to do is cut off everything, including the road to the underworld, understand?"

Uesugi stretched out her finger and drew a circle in Tachibana Masamune's palm, indicating that she understood, then put her hand back into her wide sleeve, leaving only her slender fingers exposed. She took off her wooden clogs and put them aside, wearing only white socks, she jumped onto the small boat next to the yacht, alone in the small boat. The black-clad bodyguards untied the mooring ropes, and the waves pushed the small boat away from the yacht. Tachibana Masamune suddenly stood up and walked to the ship's side, reaching out to Uesugi. Uesugi lowered her head and ignored him, but Tachibana Masamune grabbed the mooring rope and wouldn't let the small boat leave. After half a minute of stalemate, Uesugi took out a PSP from her skirt and handed it to Tachibana Masamune, turning her head away from him.

"This is a big deal for the family, don't always think about playing." Tachibana Masamune admonished helplessly.

The small boat left a white water trail as it sailed towards the brightly lit area at the end of the sea, where the lights shone like a palace floating in the sea, and the Sumeru Seat was operating with a loud rumble.

"Depth 30 meters, stable flow rate, the Trieste is functioning normally." Caesar reported the situation to the surface commander, Gen Chisei, while manipulating this antique-level deep-diving vessel.

Lu Mingfei looked up through the observation window at the top, the last light bag was in the center of his field of vision, surrounded by dark blue seawater, a line of faint light as if shining down from a well that had been turned upside down from the sky, the deep-diving vessel was sinking as if in a well, and when it was completely engulfed by the darkness, Lu Mingfei shivered slightly.

Gen Chisei had said that the abyss was a special place, 8 kilometers of seawater isolated it from the world, the bottom was less than 1 kilometer from the mantle, and the liquid rock in the layers flowed like fiery rivers, almost no life could survive there, it was the loneliest hatching ground in the world. But only by riding the deep-diving vessel down, feeling the lights of the Sumeru Seat above gradually dimming, and finally being engulfed by the darkness, could one truly understand the loneliness of being far away from the world. Their journey had only covered 1/3 of the distance, and Lu Mingfei already wanted to return, it was too lonely, he couldn't help but want to say something to warm himself up.

Suddenly, the area around them lit up, Chu Zihang turned on the external light source, and the Trieste was surrounded by high-intensity searchlights on all four sides. These so-called "gas rays" could emit dazzling white light, illuminating the space about 10 meters around the deep-diving vessel. But beyond this range, the brightness would quickly diminish, and the thick darkness would always be encroaching on the light. Lu Mingfei was surprised to see unnamable silvery little fish swimming in formation, rubbing against the outer shell of the deep-diving vessel, the "gas rays" illuminating their bodies, they were as bright as a galaxy. This seemingly quiet and dead place was actually teeming with life.

"According to a certain calculation, the total biomass of land-based organisms accounts for less than 1% of the total biomass on Earth, and the remaining 99% of the biomass is in the oceans." Chu Zihang said, "This is the birthplace of all life on Earth, in the first few billion years after the Earth solidified, the seawater was warm and rich in organic matter, biologists call it the primordial soup. This pot of soup has been boiling for billions of years, and after billions and billions of collisions between organic molecules in the seawater, after countless failed reactions, a successful reaction finally occurred, and microorganisms were born, this was the origin of the tree of evolution."

"So the dragon race was also born in the sea?" Lu Mingfei asked.

"It's possible, there was a view that the dragon race was originally a sea-born race, and finally stepped onto land. So choosing the seabed as a hatching ground is like going back to their homeland, right?" Chu Zihang said.

Caesar released more compressed air, and the deep-diving vessel sank into deeper water. The sound of machinery and airflow whistling filled their ears, and they could even hear each other's breathing and heartbeat, in normal life, even in a completely quiet room, there would be about ten decibels of background noise, such as the sound of heavy trucks passing by on the ground and the sound of water flowing in the air conditioning pipes, but people usually didn't notice these sounds. At this moment, the background noise was reduced to zero, although the noise of the deep-diving vessel's operation was loud, the sound of their breathing and heartbeat was unusually clear.

Caesar also became serious, his hands rhythmically switching between different valves and knobs. It was obvious that he had stayed up all night to memorize the operation manual, but now he was like an experienced captain, caressing the familiar water quality rudder wheel. Lu Mingfei couldn't help but admire Caesar, he was indeed a man who could be strong, he looked carefree and indifferent on the surface, but in private, he was probably working hard to memorize the operation manual. Caesar was that kind of person, no matter how tired and exhausted he was in private, once he put on his formal wear and stood in front of people, he would be spirited and indifferent, with a noble air of not caring about anything.

So-called blue-blooded nobles are born to be awesome, blue-blooded nobles never emphasize hard work, if you become awesome through hard work, you're just a nouveau riche.

Caesar took out an aluminum tube of high-quality Havana cigar from his combat suit, usually he would use a silver cigar cutter to carefully cut off the head, but now he could only bite off the cigar head to light it.

"The cockpit is so small, and the oxygen is limited, boss, you're still smoking a cigar." Lu Mingfei sighed.

"The Trieste has an air circulation filtration system, the cigar smoke will be quickly vented." Caesar said, "We're going to be in the sea for four hours, do you want to just stare at each other and be bored? As for the small space, didn't someone bring their knife down?"

Chu Zihang had a long knife at his waist, the hilt of the knife pressing against Lu Mingfei's lower back. From the outside, the Trieste looked like a 15-meter-long behemoth, but the cockpit was about the size of an elevator, surrounded by water-tight compartments, air-tight compartments, air pumps, and various pipes. There were valves and instruments all over the small cockpit, and there was hardly any room to turn around, Lu Mingfei and Chu Zihang were sitting back to back, and they had to hunch their heads to avoid bumping them.

"I always feel like I can hear strange sounds, boss, are you sure this antique won't fall apart?" Lu Mingfei asked.

"After all, it's an old piece of equipment, restarting it is like asking a 70-year-old former world mountain climber to climb Mount Qomolangma again, the old bones are bound to creak." Caesar said, "But the Equipment Department has added a layer of memory metal to the outer shell of the deep-diving vessel to reinforce it, as long as the outer shell doesn't have a problem, it doesn't matter if the other equipment has minor malfunctions."

"In your Italian, the word for 'thing' is probably the same as the word for 'life', right?" Lu Mingfei adjusted the "gas rays", looking through the thick, 10-centimeter-thick resin glass at the outside.

In a moment, their depth had reached 300 meters, they were no longer in the shallow water layer where most organisms lived. At this moment, there was only darkness outside, as if at the beginning of the universe, they were suspended in the center of a world that was empty.

"How much pressure is there at this depth?" Lu Mingfei asked.

"According to calculations, it's about 30 atmospheres, which is equivalent to 200 kilograms of girls standing on your body." Caesar calculated.

"A 200-kilogram girl? Are you talking about a pig from a pig farm?"

"When you reach the bottom of the abyss, you'll have 20 pigs from a pig farm standing on your body." Caesar laughed.

Gen Chisei was eavesdropping on the dive team's conversation through the communication channel, imagining this group of lunatics singing and dancing in the small cockpit. It was indeed strange, originally their hearts were heavy, but listening to this group of lunatics chatting nonsense, they actually felt a little more relaxed.

"Potato chips, potato chips, if you hear me, please respond."

"Long legs, long legs, I can hear you clearly, but you need to lower your voice, if Caesar releases the Kamaitachi, he'll hear that there are two women chatting next to the cockpit."

"There's only one pretty sister talking, and the other one eating potato chips is a slovenly girl hiding on the ground and operating remotely!"

"I've put on weight, I can't fit into that small space, so I have to put up with it, but even if I hadn't put on weight, I couldn't stand the high pressure of the deep sea, I'm such a boring spirit, I can't be a vanguard, I'm just a wet nurse."

"Who isn't a wet nurse?" Jute De麻衣 sighed, "We've become wet nurses for these kids."

Next to the cockpit, in the narrow space between the third and fourth water-tight compartments, Jute De麻衣 was curled up in a very sexy position. This place was full of pipes, fortunately, she was a well-trained ninja, when necessary, her body was soft and boneless, that's how she could fit into this narrow, twisted space. In order to take this ride, she hadn't eaten for a whole day, and now it seemed that this decision was very correct, because the front and back pipes were pressing against her waist and abdomen, if there was anything in her stomach, she would probably have to vomit. Her tight-fitting outfit was tighter than Sakura's armor, the surface was as smooth as fish scales, and after putting on this tight-fitting outfit, her already slim waist was even narrower, like the whalebone skirts of the court ladies in ancient France, her breathing was not smooth. If it had been Potato Chip Girl here, she would probably be stuck in the pipes and unable to move.

However, it was precisely because this space looked impossible to fit a living person that the Equipment Department and the Rock Flow Institute didn't check it.

Jute De麻衣 turned on the high-intensity flashlight, illuminating the space above her head. On the black metal outer shell was a yellow and black symbol, the radiation symbol, there was a nuclear fuel chamber in this deep-diving vessel. She took a deep breath, making her waist even tighter, and with some difficulty, she crawled around the nuclear fuel chamber, and stuck a Geiger counter on the surface of the nuclear fuel chamber, this was a device specifically used to measure the level of nuclear radiation.

Jute De麻衣 looked at the reading on the Geiger counter: "Alpha particles are seriously exceeding the standard, this is not a nuclear fuel chamber, it's a nuclear bomb, the Snake Branch House is planning to blow something up, this deep-diving vessel is a manned nuclear bomb. The three idiots don't realize that the mission they've accepted is a suicide mission. What should I do now? Dismantle the bomb? I warn you in advance, I studied liberal arts at East University, dismantling bombs is not my forte, although I used to have a boyfriend who was a nuclear physics doctor."

"It's not that difficult, this bomb is made by modifying the nuclear fuel chamber, the overall technology is not complicated. You just need to disable the detonation circuit, there's no need to touch the main body of the bomb, the method of disabling the detonation circuit, I've already written it in a file and sent it to you." Potato Chip Girl said, "But once the detonation circuit is disabled, it will be noticed by the people on the Sumeru Seat, the self-check of the circuit will find the problem, so you have to pretend that the detonation circuit failure is an accident. The method of creating an accident, didn't I also write it in a file and send it to you?"

"But that would require me to go outside the deep-diving vessel! And I'm 500 meters underwater!"

"So I told you to bring the drugs, after the injection, you won't be afraid of 800-meter depths. But remember to take the locking agent after 4 hours, if you don't lock it, your bloodline will go out of control, and no one in the deep sea can help you." Potato Chip Girl said.

"I understand, I understand, you're so long-winded, like an old mother." Jute De麻衣 took out a finger-thick air needle from her waist, the needle tube containing a blood-red agent. She stuck the needle into her wrist vein, and the compressed air automatically injected the agent into her veins.

The agent flowed through her bloodstream to every corner of her body, and a violent chemical and physiological change occurred silently, a substantial force like vines extending to the ends of her limbs. Jute De麻衣 raised her head and took a deep breath, as if she wanted to suck in the sky and the earth. Unparalleled will, unparalleled strength, unparalleled dignity, her already queen-like aura increased tenfold and a hundredfold, in this narrow space, she looked around, like a queen looking down on her trembling subjects who dared not speak.

"Long legs, long legs, have you become a queen now?" Potato Chip Girl asked in an encrypted channel.

After a long silence, Jute De麻衣's queen-like, solemn, and beautiful face showed a crack, she helplessly sighed: "Is this the way to talk to a queen? You little slave, get out of here and wait for me, your queen is going to do some bomb-disarming work."

Disabling the detonation circuit was indeed not difficult, the Rock Flow Institute originally had various ways to add anti-disassembly devices to the detonation circuit, but they never expected

that someone could enter this narrow, pipe-filled space. This was like leaving the door unlocked on a moon landing module, if someone knocked on the door, it would be scary. Jute De麻衣 peeled off the insulation and nanocoating from the two exposed wires of the detonation circuit, and connected a heat-melting resistor between them. This was the smallest type of timing detonator, as the current flowed through the heat-melting resistor, it would gradually melt, and the two exposed wires would touch each other, without the resistor, the strong current would burn out the circuit. And at that time, the heat-melting resistor would be gone, leaving no evidence behind.

"It takes about five minutes for the heat-melting resistor to melt, let's take a deep-sea walk during those five minutes." Potato Chip Girl said.

"So this conversation is over, little slave, go home and wait for me, your queen is going to do some bomb-disarming work." Jute De麻衣 said.

"Hmm, okay, I'll wash myself clean and wait for you, remember to take the locking agent, the bloodline enhancement only lasts for four hours!" Potato Chip Girl's voice suddenly became unusually serious, "Otherwise, I'll wash myself clean and smell nice, but no one will come to visit me."

"Peh! Even if I like girls, I wouldn't like a woman with a little fat on her waist like you!" Jute De麻衣 turned off the earphones.

At this depth, radio waves were useless, the only thing that could be relied on was the communication cable. She had actually tapped into the communication cable between the Trieste and the Sumeru Seat, that cable was parallel to the safety rope. But now, this last means of communication had to be cut off, because she was going to go for a deep-sea walk without diving equipment. She opened the valve, and the sound of the rushing seawater was like thunder, half a minute later, this pipe cabin was filled with seawater. Jute De麻衣's body shook, and she swam out from the exhaust port. The "gas rays" illuminated her clearly, but the people in the cockpit didn't notice her, she was just in the blind spot between the observation ports.

Although she wasn't wearing a gold-embroidered royal robe, she walked slowly on top of the deep-diving vessel, as if inspecting her territory, her seaweed-like long hair floating silently in the pitch-black seawater.

Her heart was beating extremely slowly, the weight of a mountain pressing down on her, she moved as if she were on a super-planet with ten times the gravity of the Earth. But the enhanced bloodline helped her bear the high pressure here, a new spirit was released, the surface of her black tight-fitting outfit had a scaly sheen, the high pressure of the seawater was weakened by her invisible field. She removed a piece of hard pressure-resistant armor from the outer shell of the deep-diving vessel, found the air valve hidden underneath, and then took out the quartz-encapsulated perfluorosulfonic acid resin from her backpack, this was the strongest solid superacid known to man, its acidity was several million times stronger than sulfuric acid.

Jute De麻衣 stuck the perfluorosulfonic acid resin to the neck of the air valve, then lightly leaped up and left the top of the deep-diving vessel, her body sliding down the outside wall between the observation ports to the bottom of the deep-diving vessel, where she found the interface of the oxygen chamber, and used a steel pipe to connect the oxygen chamber to her own oxygen cylinder. She used metal hooks and safety ropes to secure herself, and slowly lay flat on the outer shell of the deep-diving vessel, looking around at this pitch-black world, with only the "gas rays" sweeping back and forth.

"It's really like going to the underworld at this depth." She said softly to herself.

Schneider sat in the center of the hall, Norma projected different images in front, behind, left, and right in the form of holograms, sonar scans, underwater footage taken by the Trieste, weather conditions in the Japanese sea area... All the information was gathered in front of Schneider, he finished dealing with the matters on one screen and casually swiped to the right, the holographic screen disappeared instantly, but a new screen was projected, and a new matter was added to the "pending" queue. On the surface, it looked like the field commander, Gen Chisei, was in charge, but he was just Schneider's spokesman. Schneider firmly controlled the Sumeru Seat, the Moniah, and the Trieste, the Norma system and the Himegami system's transoceanic direct link made it as if he was on the scene, and the black card provided by Manstein gave him 100% access to Norma's resources.

Manstein had no intention of helping, he was a civilian, his specialty was attending meetings, giving speeches, and writing reports, he sat at a table in the corner and wrote furiously.

"What are you writing?" Schneider didn't even look up.

"A report, explaining that I'm not disobeying the Board of Directors, but standing on the side of the Disciplinary Committee, after good communication with the Executive Department, I think that at this time, calling a halt to the Dragon Abyss plan is not in line with the relevant regulations of the academy. Although the resolution of the Board of Directors is very important, it is not in line with procedural justice, so the Disciplinary Committee cannot execute a resolution that is not in line with procedural justice." Manstein didn't look up, "I know you don't understand what I'm saying, and you don't need to understand, this is the business of us civilians."

"I now understand why you've risen to the position of Director of the Disciplinary Committee in less than 10 years since you entered the academy." Schneider quipped, "Every hero needs a minstrel to sing of his exploits, and the minstrel is a civilian."

Manstein said, "If it weren't for me writing reports and appeasing the Board of Directors all these years, with your and the principal's style of doing things, the conflict with the Board of Directors would have surfaced long ago."

"I have a feeling that I don't quite understand," Schneider said, "Frost isn't stupid, he knows what you've been doing all these years. Although you're not a member of the principal's faction,

you're definitely not a lackey of the Gattuso family, why would the Gattuso family entrust their heir's life to you, and at the same time give you this black card? Given Frost's character, he should have sent an investigation team to forcibly intervene, as he did the last time."

"I didn't say I came here at Frost's request," Manstein lifted his head, "The one who sent me here was Pompeo Gattuso, the head of the Gattuso family."

"Pompeii?" Schneider was surprised.

"Yes, because according to the school rules, the Board of Directors cannot directly manage the Executive Department. The Executive Department has the right to send students on missions, and Caesar himself has no objections to this arrangement. The only one who could call a halt to this matter was Caesar's father, it had to be Pompeo himself, not Frost, who was acting as his proxy on the Board of Directors. The reason given by the Board of Directors for questioning the Executive Department was that in the case of parental opposition, the Executive Department should not send students on high-risk missions. But when Caesar flew to Tokyo, Pompeo was said to be meditating in the deep mountains of Tibet, Frost forcibly intercepted Pompeo at the mountain pass by sending a team of horses to pick him up from his ancient temple. Basically, it could be seen as Frost forcibly kidnapping Pompeo, demanding that he come out and call a halt to the Dragon Abyss plan. So it turned out that Pompeo first donated the Trieste to support you, and then asked me to come and call a halt to the Dragon Abyss plan, a contradiction."

"So Pompeo knew that you would give this black card to me?"

"Yes, it seemed that he didn't care at all about his son's life or death. But what I don't quite understand is," Schneider said, "Pompeii seems to know something. He knows what's at the bottom of the abyss, and he's willing to risk his own son's life to send people into the Japan Trench."

Manstein was taken aback: "Why do you think so?"

"Shortly after the Crown Prince reappeared, Pompeo's secretary came to the academy, because he was the secretary of the Board of Directors, he had the authority to access the confidential files of the Executive Department. The secretary didn't express any opinions on other matters, but on the matter of the Lenin's sinking, he indicated that Pompeo had a legendary deep-diving vessel, the Trieste, if the academy needed it, they could have it directly delivered. At the time, I didn't know that the Equipment Department couldn't build a qualified deep-diving vessel right away, so I casually indicated that if we needed it, we would contact them. But a few days later, they really hired a courier company and used an entire cargo plane to transport the Trieste to Chicago. Before it was sent to the Equipment Department, the Executive Department inspected the deep-diving vessel, on the surface, it looked like it had only been used as a collection piece, put on display in a museum, used for public welfare activities, and as a backdrop for large-scale performances, but in fact, it had been carefully maintained, all the parts were as new as the day it was built. It was obvious that Pompeo wanted to reactivate this deep-diving vessel, because

the maintenance cost was an astonishing figure. I wrote an email to Pompeo to express my thanks, and at the same time mentioned that we might include Caesar in the dive team. In fact, I was testing him, if Pompeo was just thinking of providing equipment for us to take the risk, he should have immediately refused. But to my surprise, Pompeo indicated that he was very happy that his son had the opportunity to pilot his collection on a mission, and asked that it be painted like a Japanese flag."

"So Pompeo thought that the dive was safe?" Manstein said.

"What's strange is the Japanese branch. Because the Japanese branch is not directly affiliated with the academy, the Executive Department rarely requests their assistance. This time, we had to ask for the Japanese branch's assistance, and the Japanese branch was very enthusiastic. They put the entire Rock Flow Institute into action, the high-level executives came out in full force. They showed an unusual enthusiasm for the thing in the abyss, constantly asking us for information. But they have consistently denied that the thing is a dragon embryo, the Rock Flow Institute has given all sorts of reasons that further research is needed, but they haven't given any research results. We were originally going to send a support team from the Equipment Department to Japan, but the Equipment Department refused to send people to Japan, and just before this, the Japanese branch, which had been insisting on observing the embryo, suddenly expressed their full support for the Dragon Abyss plan, and within two days, they obtained a government ban, controlled the sea area, and quickly assembled six floating platforms to build a sea surface base. They showed an unusual enthusiasm for the embryo in the sea trench, I always felt that they knew something."

"It seems that everyone knows something, except for us, who are in charge of the Dragon Abyss plan." Manstein said.

"Indeed, to reduce the risk, I included Caesar in the dive team, and also asked the head of the Japanese branch to personally serve as the field commander. His status in the Snake Branch House is very high, if there's an accident, he can't shirk responsibility."

"So far, everything has gone smoothly." Manstein looked at the embryo's incubation rate on the large screen, which was still at a safe 32%.

"Depth 2100 meters, the Trieste is functioning normally." Schneider said.

His words were interrupted by a harsh alarm, overlapping holographic screens appeared in front, behind, left, and right, with data scrolling up. The 1, 2, and 3 air chambers of the Trieste were marked in red and flashing.

Schneider's face changed: "Air chamber leak?"

He had been carefully guarding against the dragon-kind, but the Trieste, which had undergone rigorous inspections, had a mechanical failure.

The Trieste was shaking violently, Caesar's face was pale: "Deep-diving vessel malfunction! Deep-diving vessel malfunction! Call the Sumeru Seat! Call the Sumeru Seat! Air chambers 1, 2, and 3 are all losing pressure, we're losing buoyancy! Repeat, we're losing buoyancy!"

There had been no prior abnormalities, suddenly the deep-diving vessel jerked, and all the instrument readings were violently changing. The Trieste had four air chambers, and the failure of the three air chambers at the same time meant that compressed air was escaping at a rapid rate. The feeling of weightlessness came immediately, the depth gauge was spinning, they were falling at high speed towards the deep sea.

"2400... 2680... 3260..." Chu Zihang quickly reported the numbers, in just one minute, they had sunk a kilometer.

The Trieste used old-fashioned dial gauges, the depth gauge had a unit, ten, and hundred digit plates, the unit and ten digit plates were spinning so fast that Chu Zihang couldn't even read the ten digit plate.

"Slow down! Find a way to slow down! The water pressure will damage your outer shell!" Gen Chisei shouted.

"We can't slow down! We're like a stone falling to the bottom of the sea!" Lu Mingfei's voice was trembling, "How can a stone slow itself down?"

Lu Mingfei felt like his soul was about to be shaken out of his body. The deep-diving vessel was both sinking and rolling, for the people in the cockpit, it felt like being on a roller coaster, but the roller coasters of the world would only last for three minutes at most, they had been rolling for several minutes. If this roller coaster ride continued, it would only end in hell.

"Try to cut off the air valve! Keep the air in the air chambers! You have to find a way to increase buoyancy!" Gen Chisei said.

"I've tried, the problem is with the air valve, I've lost control of that valve!" Caesar struggled with the air valve knob.

Massive bubbles rose around the deep-diving vessel, the sound was like thunder, Lu Mingfei looked out of the observation port, his field of vision was filled with the silver reflection of the bubbles. Chu Zihang quickly opened the design blueprints of the Trieste, the problem should be with the air valve at the top of the deep-diving vessel, it was the pressure relief valve of air chambers 1, 2, and 3, it was usually not opened, only in very rare cases would it be used, it was hidden under the thick pressure-resistant armor, and it was troublesome to inspect. But it was precisely this deeply hidden small valve that had a problem, instead of the commonly used valves.

"This is a design flaw, if the pressure relief valve leaks, all the other valves will be closed and it won't stop the air from escaping." Chu Zihang said, "We can only try to slow down the rate of air escape as much as possible."

"I can try to cut off the three-way pipe to block the pipe leading to the pressure relief valve, but that kind of operation takes time! Damn it! The Equipment Department guys said that this was a masterpiece they built, didn't they?" Caesar's forehead was covered in cold sweat.

"I can try to open the balance rudder first to stop the rolling, so that we can stop rolling and do something." Chu Zihang said.

"Call the Trieste! Call the Trieste! The Rock Flow Institute has provided an emergency plan, if you can turn on the strong power source of the Trieste, with the help of the stabilizing fins and the balance rudder, you can enter a underwater gliding state! This will slow down the rate of descent. But be quick, otherwise, you'll fall into the trench and smash to pieces on the seabed!" Gen Chisei's voice came through the headphones.

"Are you talking about the nuclear power cabin that the Equipment Department added?" Caesar grabbed the handrail on the cockpit wall and stood up, he used his elbow to smash the glass cover of the control panel, and tightly gripped the yellow wrench inside.

Lu Mingfei now noticed the nuclear symbol on the wrench: "Are you kidding me? This thing is nuclear-powered?"

"The original version was just an ordinary acid battery power, but the Equipment Department felt that the power was too small to complete a large-scale survey, so they added a nuclear power cabin. So this deep-diving vessel has two power sources, the weak power source is lithium battery-driven, and the strong power source is the nuclear power cabin." Caesar said, "But can you trust the nuclear power cabin built by the Equipment Department?"

"They're not... very good at nuclear technology, are they?" Lu Mingfei stammered.

"There are a few experts from Oak Ridge, they built the world's first atomic bomb."

"Isn't that a team of experts? Can't they be trusted?"

"Their specialty is atomic bombs! If the nuclear power cabin explodes, it's equivalent to a thousand-megaton-class nuclear bomb, it could cause an undersea earthquake or tsunami, in the worst case, it could sink Japan."

"Depth 6400 meters, we still have two kilometers to fall to the bottom of the abyss, the rolling has stopped, the deep-diving vessel has returned to its upright position!" Chu Zihang tightly gripped the steering rudder and stabilizing fin control rods, "If we have power, we can perform underwater gliding."

"What's underwater gliding?" Lu Mingfei didn't understand what they were talking about, every term was profound and mysterious, and unfortunately, all these profound and mysterious terms were related to his life.

"The Equipment Department added stabilizing fins to the Trieste, similar to the wings of an airplane, with strong power support, it can cruise underwater at a speed of 12 nautical miles per hour, with the stabilizing fins providing lift, simply put, it's like an airplane flying in the sea."

"Was it necessary to make it so advanced? But as long as it can save our lives, that's fine! Anyway, falling into the trench is a dead end, so we might as well trust the Equipment Department and bet that the nuclear power cabin won't explode."

Caesar tightly gripped the yellow wrench, his body trembling slightly. There were two possibilities after pulling the wrench, either the Trieste would gain power and cruise lightly in the deep sea, or it would explode, and the three of them would be finished, and there might even be a tsunami and earthquake to hit Japan. If the wrench had been in Lu Mingfei's hand, he would have pulled it long ago, at this point, this was the only way out, and whether Japan sank or not had nothing to do with him. He was so anxious that he was scratching his heart, but he didn't feel right about asking Caesar to do such a heartless thing, he could only stare at Caesar in a daze. Caesar's eyes were sharp and his lips were tight, the lives of hundreds of millions of people were in his hands. At the moment of life and death, Caesar was actually hesitating, showing his respect for innocent lives, he didn't want to drag hundreds of millions of Japanese into this. Lu Mingfei felt a little ashamed, the education of the blue-blooded nobility was indeed different.

He remembered a post he had read online before, "What is a noble?" which said that during World War I, a young British lord served as the executive officer of a warship, and was hit by a German warship's broadside, the ship was about to sink, the young lord raised a white flag and asked the German warship to rescue the sailors who had fallen into the water, the German warship's captain was also a noble, ignoring the brother ship still firing, he ordered the lowering of the lifeboats to pick up the British sailors. After all the sailors were rescued, the British lord expressed his thanks to the German captain, but he did not walk across the gangplank, following the noble family's teachings, he and his ship sank together. Lu Mingfei's level of thought couldn't even compare to his.

Lu Mingfei couldn't hold back anymore: "Boss, if you can't make up your mind, I'll do the bad thing!"

"What does that have to do with being ruthless?" Caesar was taken aback.

"Aren't you worried about the nuclear power cabin exploding and causing an undersea earthquake?" Lu Mingfei was astonished.

"No, I forgot the startup password I set." Caesar tapped on the keyboard, "No matter how I enter it, it's wrong!"

Jute De麻衣 was facing downward, fixed to the surface of the deep-diving vessel, she felt the change in depth more acutely than the three people in the cockpit. The deeper the depth, the greater the water pressure, and finally, the pressure increased geometrically, she was pressed into the metal outer shell of the deep-diving vessel! The enhanced bloodline gave her a new spirit, if it wasn't for this new spirit, she would have been crushed by the high pressure, first her lungs would be squeezed to the point of bursting, then her blood would penetrate her skin and shoot out, her bones and flesh would mix together, becoming a lump of unrecognizable organic matter. During the deep-diving mission to the Mariana Trench, the Trieste had shortened by 5 cm due to the high pressure.

She was in total darkness, this feeling of falling endlessly into the darkness was truly terrifying, if it wasn't for the drug enhancement of her bloodline, she would probably have been scared to tears. This feeling reminded her of her first ninja training, when the teacher brought her to the edge of a cliff and said, jump down, if you jump down I'll teach you what you want to learn. But the teacher didn't give her a safety rope or a parachute, there was a mist below the cliff and she couldn't see anything. She thought she had heard wrong, and stared at the teacher. The teacher repeated, jump down, if you jump down I'll teach you what you want to learn, if your determination to learn this ancient technique isn't big enough to make you risk your life, then you might as well not learn it.

Jute De麻衣 jumped down, resolutely and decisively. She lay on the safety net in the mist, staring up at the sky and smiling. The teacher asked her why she was smiling, out of ten people who wanted to learn ninjutsu, only one dared to jump down, that person would be scared to tears after surviving the test. Jute De麻衣 said she didn't think about anything, she smiled because it was comfortable lying there, the clouds were flowing above and below her, she was gazing at the sky. The teacher was silent for a moment, then said, it seems that your wish is even bigger than mine, you will become an excellent ninja... but one day, you may die because of that big wish.

Because of that big wish, she was fearless, and she was willing to die for it.

At this moment, she suddenly saw light.

A harsh sound of metal bending came from above the cockpit, the feeling of weightlessness suddenly disappeared, followed by a feeling of super-weight. Lu Mingfei was pressed hard into the seat, almost unable to breathe. The feeling of weightlessness and super-weight alternated, the Trieste was slowly braking.

The depth gauge stopped at 7900 meters, the Trieste was suspended in the deep sea, slightly tilted. The lights on the instrument panel flashed for a moment and then went out, the cockpit was pitch-black, Lu Mingfei's ears were full of the "whoosh" sound of the air, that was the

high-speed airflow and hydraulic oil flowing in the pipes. The Trieste was like an old man, its dense pipes were like his blood vessels. This old man had just finished running a marathon, his blood pressure was about to burst his blood vessels, but he had managed to hold on.

The three of them were exhausted and slumped in their seats, their hearts filled with the joy of escaping death. Although they didn't know what had happened, it seemed that some emergency plan had worked.

Caesar grabbed a flashlight and checked the instrument panel: "The circuits and pipes are still normal, the number four water-tight chamber is still working, it's really a prototype."

"Your family's prototype almost killed us," Lu Mingfei panted, "By the way, how did we brake?"

"It was the safety hooks that worked," Gen Chisei's voice came through the headphones, "I remotely activated the safety hooks, using the safety ropes to slow down in sections, and pulled you back. Are the systems still working?"

"The circuits and pipes are fine, but the power is out." Caesar said.

"This is a power cut protection, check the systems, if there's no problem you can manually restore the power."

"There's a problem, the oxygen supply is only 44% left." Caesar said, "Damn, the air chamber is leaking, why is the oxygen supply decreasing so much?"

"Boss, come and take a look, are those two things floating up our oxygen tanks?" Lu Mingfei pointed to the observation window above.

Illuminated by the "gas rays", two bluish steel cans were slowly floating up, and slowly flattening as they rose. The steel walls of these deep-sea oxygen tanks were several centimeters thick, but they couldn't stand the high pressure here, and eventually became flat steel sheets, with oxygen escaping from the cracks. The steel sheets floated up about ten meters before losing their buoyancy and falling towards the seabed. Lu Mingfei finally understood what was meant by extreme high pressure, if the outer shell of the deep-diving vessel collapsed, the three of them would only have one way out, and they obviously weren't as tough as those oxygen tanks.

"That's half of our oxygen supply, the bolts fixing the oxygen tanks must have broken loose during the shaking." Caesar muttered, "We can only stay underwater for another 50 minutes at most."

"I'll call the Executive Department and ask them if we should return immediately to repair the deep-diving vessel or adjust the survey plan." Gen Chisei said, "Please wait."

"I think we can't return yet, as for the reason, you'll understand when you see the video we sent back." Caesar's voice was strange.

Caesar suddenly felt that something was wrong.

The Trieste was in a state of power cut protection, the cockpit should have been pitch-black, but they could clearly see each other's faces without the help of a flashlight. There was light coming in from the porthole, a warm red light, but at a depth of 7900 meters, it should have been pitch-black.

This sea was teeming with life, the color of the water was like the sunset, countless schools of fish swam in the sunset-colored water, some swam in spiral ascending arcs, some dove into the seabed in whirlpools, some were silvery white, some were almost transparent, and some emitted a faint blue bioluminescence, occasionally a giant devilfish fanned its wing-like fleshy fins, tearing through these schools of fish, the schools of fish split into gaps and then returned to their original state, giant sea turtles swam with the schools of fish, clumsily flapping their wing-like fins. Most of these fish were unfamiliar to them, even if they were similar to certain fish species, there were still significant differences, for example, the devilfish's head had black and white patterned exoskeletons, which made it look like a helmeted dragon from a fantasy novel; the sea turtle's carapace was not hard, but fleshy, like cracked red basalt.

The scene before them was magnificent and magnificent. The beauty was beyond the limits of imagination, making them mistake the sunset-colored seawater outside the porthole for the sky at sunset, and the schools of fish were swimming in the sky.

Lu Mingfei looked up, there were gray-white clouds flowing above the deep-diving vessel.

"This is too unscientific, right?" Lu Mingfei rubbed his eyes, wanting to make sure he wasn't dreaming.

The clouds suddenly turned, their long tails stirring the seawater, leaving a transparent vortex with a diameter of about ten meters, the giant body hitting the seawater, making a thunderous sound. It was a giant whale with a body length of over a hundred meters, the gray-white clouds were its belly pattern, there shouldn't be such a huge whale in the world.

"From its shape, it should be the already extinct Dragon King Whale." Chu Zihang said softly.

"I guess so, we've almost found the embryo, right?" Lu Mingfei said.

"It should be, there shouldn't be large marine animals at such a deep depth, but we can actually see the Dragon King Whale here. The ecological environment is too abnormal, indicating that there is something unusual nearby that has rebuilt the ecological environment." Chu Zihang said, "Look down, we're right above the abyss now."

Lu Mingfei leaned on the observation window and looked down, finally understanding why the seawater here was sunset-colored. They were right above the Japan Trench, to the left was a gently sloping seabed, to the right was a rugged cliff, the left side belonged to the Eurasian Plate and the right side belonged to the Pacific Plate, they collided here to form a deep undersea canyon. At the bottom of the canyon was a north-south oriented golden crack, the crust was split open here, and the red-hot rock layers were exposed. The magma intermittently erupted, the seawater and magma formed a water-milk-like wonder, and there was a rumbling sound below.

"I rely! My vocabulary is a bit lacking! I thought the abyss would be a pitch-black, quiet, ghostly place." Lu Mingfei exclaimed in admiration.

"That's the wound of the Earth." Chu Zihang said, "The crust is split open here, the mantle layer is directly exposed, below the abyss is a warehouse storing tens of billions of tons of magma. It's because of this wound that Japan has become the country with the most earthquakes in the world, and it's possible that one day it will sink into the sea like Atlantis. The dragon chose such an incredible place as its hatching ground."

"We're lucky, we've fallen right into the dragon's territory, saving us the trouble of looking for it." Caesar said.

"Is that lucky? You went hunting, drove your car into a lion's territory, and shouted that you were lucky, the lion thought it was lucky too, dinner was delivered, and it was delivered by car." Lu Mingfei said, "Why are these marine organisms here? Are they waiting to be eaten by the dragon?"

"I think they're here to eat." Caesar said, "This place reminds me of the waters near Norway, the cold current brings a lot of microorganisms to the fishing grounds in Norway, if you dive there, you'll see a similar scene, schools of small fish swimming, either mating or migrating, or there are tiny microorganisms in the water for them to eat."

"How could there be microorganisms in this hellish place?"

"We can collect some water samples to study, in any case, there must be a special reason for these fish to gather in the deep sea." Caesar said, "There's also a possibility that the embryo is releasing information that attracts these schools of fish, luring them here as food reserves."

"So you're saying that the dragon is ready to eat, and we're here to deliver takeout? We're twisting in front of it, saying, master, which one do you want to start with? Fish? Submarine? Or... me?" Lu Mingfei said.

"If it was you twisting, it would spit it out, it wouldn't be able to eat anything."

"Strange! The schools of fish suddenly disappeared!" Chu Zihang said.

The surrounding sea suddenly became empty, the schools of fish that had been swimming happily suddenly left, leaving only the sunset-colored seawater.

"Damn, something's coming!" Caesar said.

"What is it?" Lu Mingfei was scared out of his wits.

"We'll know when we see it, but it won't be a small thing." Caesar seemed very confident.

"Is that it?" Chu Zihang pointed to the right observation window.

A long, black shadow swam in the sunset-colored seawater, its long tail slowly swaying, it was moving leisurely, but anyone could see that it could burst into incredible speed at any time, like a torpedo rushing towards its target. It was a giant hammerhead shark, this kind of shark had a flat head, with two eyes on either side, the distance between the two eyes was about two meters.

"It should be the most ferocious predator in this sea area," Caesar said softly, "As soon as it appeared, the other organisms instinctively avoided it, this often happens in fishing grounds, once the schools of fish change the direction of their swimming, it means that a big predator has come."

Lu Mingfei scratched his heart: "Scared me to death, I thought it was a dragon, but it turned out to be a shark."

The hammerhead shark suddenly accelerated, with just a few flicks of its tail, it came near the deep-diving vessel. It seemed to be interested in this strange thing, and moved one of its eyes to the center of the observation window to observe.

"I rely on it! What are you doing here? We're all cholesterol and fat, we're not good for your health, and we're not to your taste, you can't eat junk food!" Lu Mingfei didn't think he could read the shark's eyes, but at this moment, he felt that the shark was admiring the main course of its dinner.

"Don't worry, it can be basically confirmed that there are no species in the ocean that like to eat people, just like you said, the nutritional composition of humans is not tasty to the hammerhead shark. What it likes to eat should be the giant squid, which has a big enough head and is fresh and healthy, it should have the texture of sashimi when eaten." Caesar said.

"What's a giant squid?" Lu Mingfei asked.

"A giant squid, it should be the largest cardiac animal on Earth, the largest giant squid caught by humans was 15 meters long. Its natural enemy is the sperm whale, they hunt each other in

the deep sea, the sperm whale drags it from the deep sea to the shallow sea, it becomes the sperm whale's food, and the sperm whale is dragged to the deep sea, it becomes its food. People have found large sucker marks on the bodies of captured sperm whales, and it is estimated that there are giant squids with tentacles over 60 meters long that have fought with the sperm whales."

"At this point, you're still interested in discussing giant squid?" Caesar said.

"No, I'm not interested in marine organisms that can't be eaten, but I occasionally care about marine organisms that can eat me. Look at the other observation window, isn't that the giant squid you were talking about?" Lu Mingfei's face was pale.

Caesar and Chu Zihang froze, and in unison, they slowly turned their heads. Outside the window was a giant, blue ice-like eye, next to it in the seawater, a bucket-thick arm with a half-meter-wide sucker gracefully swaying.

"It's a giant squid." Caesar said in lip language.

"Its body length is over 60 meters." Chu Zihang also used lip language.

"Why are you speaking so softly? Those two outside can't understand." Lu Mingfei said, but he couldn't help but lower his voice.

"The giant squid can sense the vibration of sound waves, it has its own biological sonar." Caesar cut off the power and closed all the valves.

"Are you trying to save energy for the sake of society at this point?" Lu Mingfei also used lip language, "They don't need to rely on sound wave vibrations, they have eyes, they're looking at us!"

"They're not looking at us, they're confronting each other. The deep-diving vessel has no temperature or smell, they don't know what we are, so they don't see us as prey." Caesar said, "What we need to do now is to stay calm and not move. We're being suspended by the safety ropes, if we move, the deep-diving vessel will sway, and if they think we're something edible, even if they just try to bump us, it will be a big problem. Hunters in Siberia say that if you encounter a brown bear, don't move, the rifle won't kill it, you can't outrun it, if you want to live, just lie down and don't move."

"How long can they confront each other? I wonder if I can hold my breath."

"Predators confront each other to gauge each other's strength, it can be a few minutes, or it can be a whole day." Caesar said.

"I don't have a problem, I used to meditate in high school." Chu Zihang said, "The teacher said that if you encounter a life-or-death situation, a Zen master can sit for three to five years, a day is no problem."

Caesar stood in a delicate balance pose: "I've practiced Pilates, I can stay still for three hours, what about you, Lu Mingfei?"

"I... I don't understand Zen or Pilates, but I can lie down and sleep like a dead man." Lu Mingfei carefully lay flat on the floor of the cockpit.

The deep-diving vessel shook violently, the safety ropes made a teeth-grinding sound. The surging water flow hit the outer shell of the deep-diving vessel, the entire sea area was stirred up by these two giant organisms. Lu Mingfei had just opened his eyes a crack, the primitive, bloody, violent beauty rushed in like a thousand horses. In the sunset-colored sea, the giant predators entangled with each other, madly twisting. The giant squid wrapped its ten snake-like arms around the body of the hammerhead shark, and the hammerhead shark's sharp teeth sank into the head of the giant squid, the red blood of the hammerhead shark and the blue-green blood of the giant squid mixed together and spread out. The giant squid tore the hammerhead shark's skin with its sucker-covered arms, and the hammerhead shark bit off half of the giant squid's head, along with an eye and an arm.

"It looks like the shark is going to win." Lu Mingfei said.

"Not necessarily. The giant squid's head injury looks fatal, but the squid's brain is small, only the size of a baseball, the shark can't hurt the squid's nervous system." Caesar said, "The hammerhead shark's situation is not good, it's about to suffocate."

"Because the squid is strangling its neck?" Lu Mingfei said, "But its neck is so thick, the squid shouldn't be able to strangle it."

"It's not a problem with the neck. Look, the squid's two arms have probed into the shark's gills, if the gills are injured, the shark is finished."

Before the words were finished, the giant squid's arms suddenly withdrew from the hammerhead shark's head, along with two trails of red blood. It pulled out the hammerhead shark's entire set of gills! The hammerhead shark, which had been raging just now, suddenly lost its strength, convulsing violently for half a minute before slowly turning over, its belly facing up and floating in the seawater. As the hammerhead shark made its final struggle, the giant squid did not relax its vigilance, constantly tearing at its skin, embedding its suckers into the muscle tissue. At this point, the winner was decided, the giant squid loosened its arms and swam around the dying hammerhead shark, spitting out a black smoke, and disappeared at the end of the field of vision.

Lu Mingfei's heart, which had been hanging, finally fell back into place, just in terms of weight, the metal Trieste was no less than the hammerhead shark or the giant squid, but if these giant marine organisms broke open the outer shell of the deep-diving vessel with even a crack, the deep-diving vessel would completely collapse.

"Call headquarters, call headquarters, we're already close to the location of the embryo, although the oxygen supply is sharply reduced, we still have about 50 minutes of underwater activity time. The surrounding marine ecological environment is bizarre, but the other conditions are normal, this is a rare opportunity, we request to continue the survey, repeat, we request to continue the survey." Caesar put on the headphones.

After a moment of silence, Schneider's voice sounded: "You've made an amazing discovery, I agree to your request to continue the survey, please pay close attention to the operation of the equipment, and put safety first when necessary."

"Did my family put pressure on the Executive Department?" Caesar smiled.

"It's said that your uncle is about to take the next flight to headquarters, carrying a double-barreled hunting rifle, one barrel of gunpowder to blow up my head, and one barrel of gunpowder to blow up Professor Manstein's head."

"Don't worry, I won't give him the chance, I won't do what he says, but I will inherit the Gattuso family!" Caesar ended the call.

"Look! Look! What is that? It's so beautiful!" Lu Mingfei suddenly shouted.

Caesar and Chu Zihang looked down, at first glance they mistook it for a swarm of fireflies rising from the depths of the trench. They were countless, their bodies shimmering with a pale blue light, swirling around the dying hammerhead shark, like a vortex of stars. This scene should be accompanied by Kuricorder music, like a battlefield under the night sky, fireflies swirling around the corpse of a warrior, as if to mourn his heroic soul. When they got closer, they saw that they were slender, small fish, their bodies covered in beautiful silver-blue scales, the light coming from the top of their heads, where there was a long, slender tentacle.

"What kind of fish is that?" Lu Mingfei asked.

Chu Zihang's face was grim: "Salmoniformes, Viperfish, Viper Snake!"

Lu Mingfei felt that the word had a fierce aura, which was completely out of place with the beautiful appearance of these small fish, at this moment, a small viperfish happened to pass by the observation window, Lu Mingfei shuddered. That little thing was more like a snake than a fish! Its body was slender, its tail and pectoral fins were small, its mouth was huge and ferocious, its transparent teeth like daggers protruded from its mouth, as if an angry spectacled cobra was about to spit out venom.

"What the hell is that fish?" Lu Mingfei subconsciously wanted to avoid it, even though there was resin glass in between, Lu Mingfei felt that it was a venomous snake that was about to pounce on him.

The starry viperfish swarmed towards the hammerhead shark, like the sound of a bell, the feast began. They inserted their dagger-like teeth into the hammerhead shark's body, biting and tearing with their powerful jaws. The dying hammerhead shark suddenly straightened its body, the intense pain squeezing out its last bit of strength, this once predator madly twisted its body, but it couldn't break free of the snake-like little fish. They drilled into the hammerhead shark's body, biting through the chest and abdomen and all the muscles, the hammerhead shark, which was still struggling, gradually revealed its white bones in Lu Mingfei's eyes, the viperfish had started to eat its fat-rich liver.

A few minutes later, the white bones slowly sank. The viperfish swam away, far away, they looked like a galaxy, they came and went with utmost elegance, only when they were eating did they resemble the most savage beasts on land.

The three of them understood that the giant squid hadn't left gracefully after killing the hammerhead shark, it had fled in fear.

Because the blood smell of the battle had attracted the viperfish from the depths of the trench, they were the true rulers of this sea area, they could eat living things like a lynx. No wonder the hammerhead shark and the giant squid fought so frantically, because they didn't dare to linger too long, once the blood smell spread out, the viperfish would leave their nest, the two sides of the battle would become food for the viperfish.

"This is more vicious than the Amazonian piranha!" Lu Mingfei wiped his sweat, "Thank goodness we're in this iron shell!"

"No, they can bite through steel, because they're not ordinary viperfish." Chu Zihang and Caesar looked at each other, obviously the two upperclassmen had figured something out.

"I thought this species was extinct." Caesar said.

"The last record of the Ghost-tooth Dragon Viperfish was on the Sumerian clay tablets, wasn't it?" Chu Zihang said.

"Yeah, the Sumerians used them to refine iron ore." Caesar said, "Biological iron refining, a thousand years earlier than high-temperature iron refining. If I'm not mistaken, the shark and the giant squid are both subspecies, right?"

"They should both be subspecies, no wonder they can adapt to the extreme environment here."

"What the hell are you two talking about? I don't understand a word." Lu Mingfei said.

Chu Zihang turned to look at Lu Mingfei, as a killer, he rarely showed a frightened and uneasy expression, but now his pupils were dilated and his face was pale, he looked like he had just seen a ghost.

"Those things are called 'Ghost-tooth Dragon Viperfish', they're legendary creatures. The dragon-kind used them as punishment tools, noblemen who committed fire crimes were tied to bronze pillars and sunk into the deep sea, where they were eaten by swarms of dragon viperfish along with the bronze pillars. Since all the historical records about the dragon-kind are inferred from ancient texts, the existence of the Ghost-tooth Dragon Viperfish has always been in doubt. But the development history of ironware suggests that the Ghost-tooth Dragon Viperfish did exist, most historians believe that the Hittites invented ironware around 1500 BC, however, the academy once bought a much older ironware, which was made by the Sumerians, but in the Sumerian era, humans should not have had such high-temperature flames to melt iron ore. The result of technology restoration is that the Sumerians used biological iron refining, they raised dragon viperfish to eat iron ore, the iron content in their bodies became more and more concentrated and pure, and then the Sumerians burned the viperfish with low-temperature flames to obtain iron with a better texture, this kind of iron can be found transparent crystal-like substances, which are the teeth of the dragon viperfish." Chu Zihang said.

"Damn, eating iron ore is going against the heavens!"

"Because they carry the genes of the dragon-kind." Caesar said, "All the organisms here carry the genes of the dragon-kind, look over there, the giant squid is back."

The giant squid was hovering next to the white bones of the hammerhead shark, its nine arms with large suckers swaying, the suckers on the central mouthparts sucking in the red seawater.

"The giant squid is tearing the hammerhead shark to pieces, the tissue fragments are left in the seawater, the giant squid can swallow the seawater to eat the shredded meat." Chu Zihang said, "Pay attention to its arms."

After the seawater was filtered by the giant squid, it became clearer, and Lu Mingfei finally saw the arms. The thick arms, more than half a meter in diameter, were covered with scales, like nine snakes twisting in the sea, there shouldn't be any giant squid in the world with scales on their bodies.

After enjoying the leftovers, the giant squid gracefully left, the schools of fish returned to this sea area, the peaceful and harmonious atmosphere returned, the sea turtles with giant sea anemones on their backs slowly swam by, the devilfish flew by in a flying posture, but in Lu Mingfei's eyes, the beautiful and harmonious scene had completely changed its flavor, at this moment, the peacefulness and harmony were hidden with bloody and violent rules, in this sea

area, the rule of blood and violence was in force, every organism here was half-dragon, including themselves.

"The embryo should be in the abyss below, and it's an extremely powerful ancient species. During the incubation process, it constantly releases gene-carrying secretions, which attract various marine organisms and rewrite their genes, turning them into dragon-kind subspecies." Chu Zihang said, "We've entered the territory of that ancient dragon."

"It's strange." Caesar said, "As far as we know, the dragon-kind like to choose a hatching ground far away from humans and any other organisms, they don't need to attract these schools of fish as food, and they wouldn't easily release gene-carrying secretions. In history, there are only examples of humans evolving after coming into contact with the blood of the dragon-kind, and the emergence of a large number of dragon-kind subspecies due to the influence of the embryo's secretions is hard to understand."

"The best way to understand something you don't understand is to see it for yourself." Chu Zihang said.

"I think they're already close to the Shinso, the video footage has been sent." Gen Chisei said.

"I've seen it, it's truly a miracle." Tachibana Masamune marveled, "Far beyond my expectations, I only know about the Shinso from ancient texts, what the burial place of the gods should be like, I don't know. Without a doubt, something is nourishing that sea area, it's not the embryo, but the corpse of a god. Success is not far away, get rid of the Shinso from the world, the Snake Branch House doesn't need to keep the remains of the gods. No, that's not the remains of a god, it's a devil!"

"Old man, I've been thinking lately, are we trying to master the greatest violence in order to live a peaceful life?" Gen Chisei was silent for a few seconds, asking a question that seemed completely irrelevant.

"Are you doubting?" Tachibana Masamune asked.

"I wouldn't say I'm doubting, but I can't be completely sure. Blowing up the Shinso, ending the Onryo, this is going to cost a lot of blood, I don't know if it's worth it. Maybe we're trying to use violence to exchange for peace, but when we master the greatest violence, we become the ones who should be eliminated." Gen Chisei said softly, "Old man, are you sure you want to do this?"

"I'm sure." Tachibana Masamune said slowly, "I'm sure. If I'm wrong, I'll take responsibility for it myself. Chisei, you don't have to think too much, you're just a kind child who doesn't want to see me alone."

"How could the head of the Snake Branch House be alone? There are many people around you, and they're honored to be scolded by you."

"A warrior is not alone because there are hunting dogs around his warhorse, what can make a warrior not alone is another warrior."

"In fact, I'm just an old man's hunting dog, and I'm just a hunting dog that wants to leave him and go far away."

Gen Chisei hung up the phone and put his headphones back on.

Chapter 13: The Tomb of the Gods

The bottom of the rock layer was as if it had been split open by an unimaginably huge weapon, leaving a wound thousands of miles long, and golden blood flowing out. Lu Mingfei could hear the muffled sound of explosions, the magma river was like a giant sword immersed in the seawater, but it didn't boil.

"I think I hear thunder." Lu Mingfei said.

"It's the sound of seawater vaporizing." Chu Zihang said, "At such high pressures in the abyss, the boiling point of seawater is over 500 degrees. When the magma and seawater come into contact, the seawater vaporizes, the sound you hear is the steam explosion caused by the vaporization of seawater. But when the steam cools down a little, it is turned back into a liquid by the high pressure, and the bubbles don't even have time to leave the surface of the magma."

After the minor malfunction, the Trieste was running very smoothly, the airflow through the valves made a soft "whoosh" sound, the needles on the instrument panel were jumping, and all the values were within a reasonable range. Caesar was controlling the Trieste as it descended, the momentum was very strong, the old machine was getting closer and closer to the magma surface. Because they had lost some oxygen, Caesar wanted to save some time, so he drove in a violent style.

"Boss, don't do that, if you keep going like this, we'll fall into the magma." Lu Mingfei reminded him.

"Don't worry, you know my driving skills."

"What does that have to do with driving skills? If we get any closer, we'll fall into the magma!"

"We won't be so unlucky, will we? Japanese proverbs say, a Saint Seiya won't be defeated by the same move twice. So the Trieste won't have the same malfunction twice." Caesar was very confident.

"Boss, now I'm even more convinced that your logic has died!"

In fact, Caesar wasn't that relaxed either, in such an incredible place, if he didn't say something to relax himself, the psychological pressure would crush him. The depth gauge read 850 meters, the Trieste had turned on the weak power source, relying on lithium batteries to drive the propeller to cruise steadily, the bottom of the seabed was like a burning abyss, with the Trieste like a mayfly illuminated by the flames.

"I think I can hear the sound of thunder." Lu Mingfei said.

"It's the sound of seawater vaporizing." Chu Zihang said, "In this extremely high-pressure abyss, the boiling point of seawater is over 500 degrees. When magma and seawater come into contact, the seawater vaporizes, the sound you hear is the steam explosion caused by the vaporization of seawater. But when the steam cools down a little, it is turned back into a liquid by the high pressure, and the bubbles don't even have time to leave the surface of the magma."

The scene in the cockpit was a little chaotic, Caesar's team was almost naked, everyone was sweating profusely, their buttocks seemed to be melted and stuck to the seats. This was a mistake, because few people had reached the bottom of the abyss, the Equipment Department had no data to refer to, and mistakenly thought that the bottom of the abyss was a low-temperature environment, so the combat suits still had an insulating function, but now they continued to wear the combat suits, they would definitely get heatstroke. But Chu Zihang still had his belt on, with his long knife, Caesar was shaking his chest muscles, and the sweat was flowing out in small streams from the crevices between his muscles.

"Do you mind if I take off my underwear too?" Lu Mingfei said. His wet underwear was like a roasted toad stuck to his buttocks, in this extremely hot environment, even a thread on the body felt hot.

"Go ahead, anyway, we're all men," Caesar said, biting on a cigar, "The temperature outside has risen another 15 degrees, and we have 38 minutes of oxygen left."

Lu Mingfei took off his underwear and threw it into the corner, feeling as if he had taken off a down jacket, his whole body relaxed.

"Damn! What's that thing sticking up?" Caesar exclaimed.

Lu Mingfei hesitated for a moment, then silently lowered his head to look at his crotch... He raised his head and saw that Chu Zihang was also looking at the same place in doubt.

"Boss, pay attention to your virtue! I'm not interested in men!" Lu Mingfei said, a little embarrassed.

"No one cares about that thing of yours," Caesar slowly turned his head, his expression wooden, "Look outside, nine o'clock direction."

Lu Mingfei had never seen such an expression on Caesar's face, he was shocked, bewildered, shocked, and terrified. He seemed to have seen a ghost, or a god descending in front of his eyes.

Lu Mingfei hurriedly looked towards the nine o'clock direction, and immediately forgot about the heat, he shuddered, and his whole body was covered in goosebumps. He actually saw a tower! A giant tower! It stood on the slope next to the abyss, with the magma tide rising and falling next to it, the black tower body was illuminated, like a melting iron embryo. No one spoke, at this moment, all words seemed powerless, all emotions were left with awe, shock, and fear.

From the dive team to Gen Chisei on the Sumeru Seat, to Schneider and Manstein at the academy headquarters, everyone was looking at the tower, it seemed to have been standing there for millions of years, majestic and lonely like a god, seeing it made one want to worship.

"That can't be a human thing." Caesar said hoarsely.

"Impossible." Chu Zihang said, "Humans could never have built such a giant tower at a depth of 860 meters."

"Dragon city?" Lu Mingfei said, the words coming out of his mouth, but it didn't sound like his own voice.

As the Trieste moved forward, a majestic city unfolded at the end of their field of vision, majestic like a god country!

Beyond a seabed mountain ridge, the ancient city was revealed, with the high tower at its center, and the magma river as its neighbor, it had endured for thousands of years. The Trieste cruised above the ancient city, like a flying boat sailing between the skyscrapers. Half of the city had slid into the magma river, and the other half was just a pile of ruins, only the central tower stubbornly stood, symbolizing the city's former glory. Even from the ruins, one could still see its former grandeur, the buildings with overlapping roofs, the black iron tiles on the roof, the tiles engraved with coiled clouds and dragon beasts, hundreds of meters long metal chains hanging from the corners of the buildings, the chains with black wind chimes, the chains swaying in the sea current, thousands upon thousands of black wind chimes swinging, playing a silent music.

Everyone was overwhelmed by the grandeur and solemnity of the city, the sight of it took their breath away, no one spoke, all emotions were left with awe, shock, and fear.

Chu Zihang was drawing a quick sketch, drawing a map of the city. One could vaguely see the layout of the city as it once was, with wide avenues dividing the city into different areas, the ruins in the center were like a Roman Colosseum-like circular plaza, with four royal roads leading to the southeast, northwest, north, and south.

In the center of the plaza stood the first discovered tower, with intricate relief carvings on its body, and sharp spikes dozens of meters long on the top. Other buildings also had similar spikes on their tops. Looking out, the bottom was full of sharp spikes, like a field of iron thorns.

"The city radiates out from the central plaza, with the southeast, northwest, north, and south royal roads as the main thoroughfares. If there are roads, it means that the city was built on the ground, and then sank into the seabed."

Chu Zihang said, "The huge plaza indicates that the dragon-kind often had grand religious activities."

"What religion do the dragon-kind believe in? The Dragon God religion?" Lu Mingfei asked casually.

"At this point, don't be a slot king." Chu Zihang said.

Caesar was driving the Trieste as it circled above the ancient city, "There's still enough oxygen, we'll try to draw a map of the city, and then descend to the buildings to take some samples with the mechanical arms."

"Why did the dragon-kind build such tall towers?" Lu Mingfei looked up at the towering tower, suddenly feeling dazed.

"The dragon-kind are accustomed to recording their war history on pillar-like objects, standing in the open, if they win, they record their glory, if they lose, they record their hatred." Chu Zihang said, "Another use of the tower is for execution. The dragon-kind are accustomed to nailing the sinners to the tower to dry them, it takes hundreds of years for a dragon-kind to dry out, and during those hundreds of years, the sinner is endlessly humiliated by all the clansmen."

Chu Zihang was still doing a quick sketch, not noticing Lu Mingfei's silence. Lu Mingfei pressed his hand to his forehead, his mind filled with images, as if some beast was about to rush out of his skull.

The sinner nailed to the pillar, the endless humiliation, the sad wind and mottled blood, all of this seemed to have been seen before. In the Beijing subway Nibelungen, he had spent a quarter of his life summoning Lu Mingze, at that moment, his mind was like a rising sea, countless images rushing out. Among them was a scene, he had walked into a ruined church, along a long passage into the deepest part of the church, where he saw a white cross, a golden-decorated

sword piercing Lu Mingze, the little devil was covered in scales, his blood staining the lower half of the cross, his black clothes torn, with humiliating marks carved into his body by someone.

"You finally came to see me, big brother." The dying little devil lifted his head and looked at him, his eyes were two bloody holes, "I heard your footsteps, I knew, there's only you in this world, you must have come to see me."

"All the sins and punishments in this world, we will bear them together." He smiled faintly, his smile full of sadness.

Chu Zihang's words were so similar, the pillar, the sinner nailed to it, the endless humiliation... yes, this scene seemed to have been reenacted countless times, in different times and places, and the first time, it seemed to have been on such a towering tower. He looked up at the clouds, the devil's blood flowing down the black iron tower like a red ribbon.

"Lu Mingze, Lu Mingze, Lu Mingze..." He was calling out that name in his mind, wanting to summon the little devil to ask him.

No one answered, he suddenly remembered that the little devil was on vacation, the train carrying the little devil might be running through the Inca country of South America, the little devil might be flirting with the occasional female devil. At a depth of 860 meters, Lu Mingze's call couldn't be heard by the little devil.

The Trieste passed by the side of the tower, Chu Zihang was copying the relief and those strange hieroglyphs. Those hieroglyphs, which looked like pictographs, were made up of snake-like curves. The hieroglyphs and the relief were integrated, like a ferocious beast coiling around the four-sided pillar-like tower. Looking closer, the tower had a metallic quality, although most of the surface was covered with rust-like small shellfish, there were still some places that were bright as a mirror, so the surface of the tower body strongly reflected the light.

If it weren't for it as a landmark, separated by a seabed mountain ridge, Caesar wouldn't have discovered this city on the seabed.

"A metal tower, soaking in seawater with a high salt content, and yet there's no rust at all." Caesar said.

"Such a tall tower, the tower body is actually a single piece, there are no joints, with today's technology, we couldn't do it." Chu Zihang said, "This is not only a dragon city, it may even be a royal city."

"Maybe it's the embryo's homeland, it's returning here to hatch again." Caesar said, "It's time to activate the sulfur bomb. We're lucky, not only did we find the remains of the dragon-kind city, but the embryo has been quiet so far. The rest is to find the embryo and throw the bomb at it."

"Call the Sumeru Seat, call the Sumeru Seat." He connected to Gen Chisei's channel, "Did you see it? Did you see it?"

"We saw it, Norma and Himegami are saving the video and pictures you sent back, and are analyzing them. What you need to do now is to point the camera in different directions, the video you shoot every second is priceless, this is the first time we've directly observed a dragon-kind city. This is first-hand material for our research on dragon-kind history and culture, Professor Schneider is writing an email to the principal and the Board of Directors to report this discovery. According to the oxygen supply, you still have 30 minutes of underwater activity time, please hurry up and find the embryo." Gen Chisei said.

"The embryo should be in the ruins, but the city is so big, where should we start looking?"

"The Trieste has a sonar system, you can try to use sonar to search for its heartbeat."

Caesar turned on the sonar system, the Trieste began to receive sound signals from all directions. Seawater is a good medium for sound, sound waves are the most powerful tool for exploration in the water, with the Equipment Department's technical capabilities, they could capture the embryo's heartbeat signal on the sea surface, so the Trieste, with the help of sonar, should be able to accurately locate the embryo nearby.

"It's strange, there's a lot of noise." Caesar frowned, "It seems like there's an echo, we can detect a regular heartbeat in all directions."

"It can't be dragon-kind embryos all around, can it?" Lu Mingfei thought and felt his liver tremble.

"If that thing could also produce energy, then we're done for, no one could stop the dragon-kind from dominating the world." Caesar said, "But it's really strange, it seems like the embryo's heartbeat is coming from below the ruins, but not from a single point, the whole ground of the ruins is shaking."

It seems like... it's the heartbeat of the ruins."

"Then let's just throw the sulfur bomb down there?" Lu Mingfei said, "Hit wherever, I don't want to stay here any longer."

"No use, the embryo can't be as big as the whole city, it should be that its heartbeat is causing resonance in the ruins." Caesar said, "Let's keep looking."

"Look at that thing in front, it looks like a torii." Chu Zihang pointed forward.

A tilted building in front of the deep-diving vessel, it really looked like a torii in front of a Japanese shrine, like the small torii in the Wakamiya Shrine. This thing was actually a very

simple structure, with two pillars supporting the crossbeam and the tie beam, worshippers would pass under the torii.

But in the eyes of the priests, the torii was actually a symbol of the boundary, once they passed through the torii, they entered the world of the gods. Torii are usually made of rocks or vermilion-colored wooden pillars, but the surface of this building was emitting a bluish-black light, it looked like a metal, and although the tallest torii in the world, the Senbon Torii in Kyoto's Fushimi area, was no more than ten meters high, this torii-like building was nearly fifty meters high, making one feel that the giants who once passed through this building must have been huge.

Perhaps it was when the underwater volcano erupted, high-temperature magma had invaded here, the black volcanic rock was filled in the road below the building, and the building itself had melted halfway, the molten iron flowed down, solidifying into rugged iron teeth. Chu Zihang adjusted the zoom of the underwater telescope, the ancient patterns on the surface of the building appeared, those were realistic style carvings, this kind of detailed information was extremely valuable, Caesar took out his camera and took pictures.

A few seconds later, the photos were transmitted to the central control room and displayed on the large screen. Schneider and Manstein were people who had come into contact with many dragon-kind artifacts, but they were still shocked by the intricate carvings. Paintings, carvings, and texts were the most valuable artifacts, from which one could infer the extinct ancient civilization, from lifestyle to faith, from craftsmanship to political system.

Archaeologists had once discovered a mural of Egyptians rowing a raft in the tomb of the Pharaoh, but today's Egypt is a desert, with only the Nile River, so archaeologists believed that this was the Egyptians' fantasy, because they lived in a dry area and longed for the next life to be born in a place with rivers. But ancient meteorologists discovered that ancient Egypt was a wet and rainy place with a network of rivers, Egyptians did indeed need to use rafts often, this was not a fantasy but a real way of life for the ancient Egyptians, the Egyptians believed that after death, the Pharaoh would ride the sun boat to the underworld, at that time, the boat was actually the only means of communication between Egypt's north and south.

The carvings depicted countless demons fighting, these demons with human bodies and snake tails were never seen in any civilization, if that war had really happened instead of being fictional, then one could imagine how fierce it was.

"The image of a human body with a snake tail is rare." Manstein said.

"In ancient civilizations, the only ones I can remember with a human body and a snake tail are the Indian goddess Nüwa and the Greek Medusa." Schneider said, "In the literature, there has never been a record of the dragon-kind appearing in the form of a human body and a snake tail."

The carvings depicted various demons with human bodies and snake tails, because it was a realistic style, one could imagine the demons with snake tails entwining each other's necks, spitting venomous flames, and wielding deadly swords. The scene of that war was depicted so vividly and bizarrely that it seemed to have a lot of imaginative elements.

"Is it really a dragon-kind city?" Manstein said, "We guessed that it was a dragon-kind city just because humans couldn't build such a tall tower."

"It's incredible, there's too much to take in at once." Schneider said, "Although it's a rare opportunity, I have a very uneasy feeling, it's about time to return, since we've already located the city, there's still a chance to dive down and solve the problem of the embryo."

Manstein stared at the photos on the large screen, his face suddenly changed: "The door... the torii is a kind of door! See, they really saw a door underwater!"

A huge fear exploded in Schneider's heart. Yes, the torii was actually

a door, but it was like a triumphal arch, a symbolic door, not connected to a wall, but it was indeed a door, because it distinguished the inside from the outside! They were immersed in the amazing discovery and forgot about the door, except for the pressure valve malfunction, everything was going smoothly, which made them a little less vigilant. The story from eleven years ago was being reenacted, diving, discovering the door, and approaching the door... The video showed the Trieste heading straight for the torii, in Schneider's eyes, that bizarre building suddenly became a twisted mouth, about to swallow everything.

"Don't get close, don't get close! Return! Return!" He shouted hysterically, the mental imprint from eleven years ago was too deep, at this moment, he couldn't control himself.

No one answered, the communication channel was silent, making one afraid, Gen Chisei didn't speak, the Trieste didn't move, and even the Himegami system of the Japanese branch didn't respond.

"Report to Professor Schneider, five seconds ago, Himegami and I cut off all connections, we have lost all contact with the Japanese branch and the Trieste, I'm trying to repair it, but Himegami is not responding." Norma's voice echoed in the central control room, Schneider was shocked to see the light point representing Japan in the large screen go out.

"It looks like a Japanese ghost painting." Caesar said.

"Incredible," Chu Zihang said, "We've definitely arrived at a dragon-kind city, but these carvings do have a strong Japanese style, and the architectural style also has a Japanese feel."

"Our high school history teacher didn't say that Japan was civilized very late?"

"Why would the Japanese envy our Tang Dynasty civilization so much, sending so many Japanese envoys to eat dry rice balls in the Tang Dynasty?" Lu Mingfei said, "How could the Japanese have such an advanced ancient civilization?"

The Trieste hovered in front of the building, not passing under it, Caesar controlled the air chamber to suck in some seawater, and stabilized the deep-diving vessel. He didn't associate the thing in front of him with a door, it was just that the building with so many details, Chu Zihang needed some time to take pictures of all the details. Caesar also felt that this position was good, so he took out his phone and took a selfie by the observation window, it was a rare opportunity to take a photo with a historical relic.

"Those look like words." Lu Mingfei pointed to the snake-shaped flower pattern in the center of the torii.

The flower pattern was somewhere between a graphic and a text, countless little people seemed to be dancing around a bonfire, the scene was grand and festive. This flower pattern was the first to appear in the ruins of the city, quite different from the text on the tower.

"It's probably text, but it's not dragon text." Chu Zihang said, "We can have Norma identify it."

"Can Norma recognize it?"

"Norma can analyze it and compare it to the library. Norma can access all the libraries in the world, and see which text it is similar to, then we'll know if the ruins of this ancient city have anything to do with Japan."

"We're having some problems with our communications with headquarters, it may be due to the solar flare affecting the communication equipment. The Rock Flow Institute is working on an emergency repair." Gen Chisei's voice came through the headphones, "But this work can also be done by Himegami, her work mode and Norma are very similar, and she can also access libraries around the world."

Caesar hesitated for a few seconds. It was rare for the connection between the commissioner and Norma to be cut off, this time the Dragon Abyss plan was formulated by the Executive Department and directly controlled by Professor Schneider, the Japanese branch was just an assistant, but at this time, they were cut off from headquarters. This meant that until the connection was restored, they would not receive direct orders from headquarters, but could the opinion of the field commander, Gen Chisei, represent Professor Schneider's opinion? Caesar recalled the thick handbook of the Student Council, wondering what to do in this situation. Stay put? Obviously not, there was only 30 minutes of oxygen left.

However, the man in charge of the Pingta Island Elephant seemed to be a serious and responsible man, he should be a trustworthy partner, right? This thought flashed through Caesar's mind, and he passed it. Caesar had once proudly told the student council members

that he would always give trust to a person he met for the first time, because a leader who didn't have the attitude of trusting his partners would never gain more support, but if someone betrayed his trust, then it would be hard for him to gain trust from Caesar again. Caesar Caesar could accept anyone betraying him once, he had the strength to bear it.

"Then let your Himegami talk to me, I hope she's as reliable as Norma." Caesar said.

"Hello, I'm the secretary of the Japanese branch, Himegami, is there anything I can do for you?" A soft female voice came through the channel.

"That doll voice sounds like Lin Zhiling." Lu Mingfei said.

"In Japanese, it's Sakamoto Maaya." Himegami smiled softly.

"I'm going to send you a picture of the text now, please compare it and see if you can find out what it is." Caesar said, "Also, I hope you speak Italian, like Monica Bellucci."

"I'll gather all the resources to do it, but it will take about a minute."

A few milliseconds later, the supercomputer array "Himegami", located at Genji Heavy Industries, was running at full power, grabbing information from computers all over the world. All language research computers were locked at the same moment, as if attacked by a deadly virus, the computers automatically turned on, and the computers were running at full speed, all the text libraries were open to Himegami. Runic, Chinese Xia Dynasty oracle bone script, medieval black magic book secret script, Egyptian, Sumerian, cuneiform... a tide of information poured into Himegami's memory, performing thousands of comparisons per second.

"Regular library comparison completed, no matching object; hieroglyphic library comparison completed, no matching object; spell library comparison completed, no matching object... The true language library has been compared, no matching object found, unable to confirm that these patterns are text."

Caesar hesitated slightly: "What do you mean by a true language library?"

"All libraries can be divided into true language libraries and pseudo-text libraries, true language libraries refer to historically existing and used libraries, pseudo-text libraries refer to texts that linguists believe to be fake."

"How long does it take to compare pseudo-text libraries?"

"Comparing pseudo-text libraries will take seven minutes, because pseudo-text libraries usually lack logic and rules, and it takes more logical operations to identify them. If it was Norma doing it, it would be faster, but it still takes seven minutes for me to gather all the resources."

"Is it necessary to spend seven minutes on this?" Lu Mingfei said, "Our oxygen supply is less than 30 minutes!"

"Start comparing the pseudo-text library." Caesar said, "While Himegami is comparing, we'll search for the embryo, and figure out the identity of this city, maybe we can figure out the identity of the embryo. We're going to kill an ancient dragon, shouldn't we know who it is?"

"Do we need to give it a name when we're done?" Lu Mingfei said, "Anyway, it's dead, we're not going to erect a monument for it."

"But if you don't have a name, how can you brag about it when you're drinking champagne later?" Caesar said, "Otherwise, you'll have nothing to say when you're bragging."

"Boss, we haven't completed the mission yet, now is not the time to be drinking champagne and bragging," Lu Mingfei sighed, "We're in a bind right now, right? This ruin is so magnificent, but we don't have any clues about the embryo!"

"The Lenin." Chu Zihang said.

"What are you talking about?" Caesar asked.

"I'm saying we never found the Lenin, the one we dived from the location where the Lenin sank, it was a 134-meter-long icebreaker, it should be a very conspicuous target, but we haven't found it. According to the information, the Lenin took the embryo away from the northern Siberian port, and the sonar scan showed that the heartbeat was coming from below the ruins. The Lenin sank in this ruin, it sank eight kilometers into the sea, it should have been very fast, the ship's head used to break the ice layer is very hard and heavy, from the balance point of view, it's already facing down. The hard ship's head pierced the seabed, sending the embryo into the underground. But it's impossible for such a huge target to be completely submerged in the seabed, most of it should still be exposed."

"Could it have been flattened by high pressure?" Lu Mingfei thought of the two oxygen steel cans that had been pressed into steel plates.

"No. The oxygen steel cans were flattened because there was gas inside, and the sunken Lenin was filled with seawater inside and out, so the pressure was balanced." Chu Zihang said.

"It's in the ruins! The Lenin is in the ruins! We didn't find it because it was covered by shellfish! It's been sunk for twenty years, it shouldn't look like the photos, it should look like part of the ruins!"

"Yeah! So we just need to find out which part of the ruins can accommodate that chunk of steel, and then we can find the embryo and 'bang' launch the sulfur bomb, and we can go home!" Lu Mingfei was delighted.

"How could a 134-meter-long icebreaker fit into that part of the ruins?" Caesar quickly flipped through the photos.

"Hey, don't look at the photos, just look at it." Lu Mingfei said, "Look up."

Caesar slowly raised his head, following Lu Mingfei's gaze through the observation window above. Behind the torii, that bizarrely shaped ruin rose like a mountain, as if it was about to collapse and cover the Trieste. It was covered with unknown black shellfish like the other buildings in the ruins, thousands upon thousands of tiny things gathered together, the texture was like rust, but when Chu Zihang used the long-distance camera to aim at the building, the screen showed those tiny rust spots wriggling. Lu Mingfei shuddered, this feeling was like seeing countless maggots wriggling on the bones of an elephant.

"The shellfish here are particularly dense, I don't know why." Chu Zihang said softly, "If it really is the Lenin, it's only been sunk for twenty years, why are there so many shellfish?"

"I've never seen shells that move like that, what kind of shells are they, they're so disgusting?" Lu Mingfei said.

"They're mating. These look like lung snails, they're hermaphrodites, but in order to exchange genes, they mate with each other and store the fertilized eggs in their gill chambers for incubation." Caesar said softly, "They're not actually wriggling, they're constantly opening their shells and spraying out the hatched tiny lung snails. This is too incredible, these lung snails are constantly mating and reproducing, producing thousands upon thousands of tiny lung snails every second!"

"Then why aren't the lung snails piling up into mountains?" Lu Mingfei said.

"Those marine organisms." Chu Zihang said, "They're here for the lung snails, there's a nest of lung snails in the deep abyss, it's giving birth to lung snails every moment. The lung snails and the small phosphorescent shrimp are the same, they feed on the phosphorus produced by the volcano, and through an anaerobic chemical reaction to produce protein. And protein is the most important source of nutrition for those marine organisms, the fish feed on the protein to survive, the predators feed on the fish, and the lungworms feed on the predators. Because of this protein factory, a bizarre ecological environment has formed in the deep sea."

"Are those marine organisms also dragon-kind subspecies?" Lu Mingfei said, "Then what about the things inside..."

"The dragon embryo is right in front of us, those marine organisms have been mutated because of it." Chu Zihang took a deep breath, "We've found it."

"Matching target found, in the Japanese 'Kojiki' character library, the flower pattern refers to," Himegami paused, "Takamagahara."

"Repeat, what does that flower pattern mean?" Caesar's voice trembled slightly.

"The interpretation result is that the flower pattern in the Kojiki refers to Takamagahara, the gathering place of the gods." Himegami said.

"What's the Kojiki?" Lu Mingfei looked at Caesar and Chu Zihang, who were both serious, but he couldn't figure out what was going on, so he had to ask.

Caesar licked his lips: "Traditional historians believe that Japan originally had no writing, only language, until the 3rd century AD when Chinese characters were introduced, the Japanese then invented the kana to give their language a phonetic notation. But in the Kamakura period, the Shinto priest Bukeye Sekihoko said that Japan had its own hieroglyphics, which were passed down from the mythical age, so it was called the Kojiki. Later, someone brought out a Kojiki written in the ancient text, such as the Izumo Stone Chamber Text. But its pronunciation system is completely different from ancient Japanese, so even Japanese linguists believe it to be a pseudo-text. In the eyes of most people, the so-called Kojiki is the result of the Japanese people's national self-esteem, they don't want to admit that their culture today is influenced by Chinese civilization, so they made up a story about Japan's prehistoric civilization and advanced writing."

"Maybe the Kojiki isn't Japanese, so its pronunciation rules are different," Chu Zihang said, "It's a pre-historic text, a hieroglyphic text derived from dragon text."

"So who are their gods?" Lu Mingfei actually already guessed the answer.

"The dragon-kind, the gods the Japanese refer to today are the dragon-kind!" Chu Zihang said softly, "The history of the god family in Japanese mythology... is actually the history of a dragon family!"

"Damn, are the Tenno family really dragon-kind?" Lu Mingfei said, "I really believed that the emperors were divine when I took history class!"

"No, the Tenno family is not a hybrid... the real hybrid is... the Snake Branch House!" Caesar said.

"Damn, are we in the Japanese branch of the Snake Branch House?" Lu Mingfei was stunned.

At this moment, the Trieste slowly passed through the huge torii, sliding into the darkness beyond the magma. I don't know if it was an illusion, but as the deep-diving vessel passed through the torii, Lu Mingfei seemed to hear countless people hissing in pain, as if the ghosts of hell were flowing with bloody saliva. The ruins shook, the small stones and the shells of the

dead lung snails rose with the water current, tapping on the outer shell of the Trieste, making a dull sound.

Caesar's face changed: "Is there an undersea earthquake? Call the Sumeru Seat! Call the Sumeru Seat! Did you detect an undersea earthquake?"

"Call the Trieste, call the Trieste, there was no detection of an undersea earthquake, and the Earthquake Bureau didn't issue a news release about an undersea earthquake." Gen Chisei said.

"But the ruins are shaking, how can it not be an undersea earthquake?"

Gen Chisei was silent for a few seconds: "Maybe the embryo is aware of the danger approaching, and is trying to wake up. Are you experiencing any mental interference?"

Caesar gave himself a slap on the mouth: "I think I'm fine, slapping my own face hurts, it doesn't feel like a dream. Our team's kill-embryo is still a kill-embryo, that bastard is still a bastard, he looks pretty normal."

"You still have 15 minutes of oxygen left, this is a rare opportunity. The embryo should be struggling to wake up, we can't let it wake up, seize this opportunity to wipe it out." Gen Chisei said, "I just talked to Professor Schneider over the phone, and he also thinks we should wipe it out. If it wakes up now, it will gain freedom, and we won't be able to hunt it down so easily."

"Does Schneider think so, too? Good! No problem! This is the order I've been waiting for!" Caesar strapped himself tightly to the seat, "Chu Zihang, is the sulfur bomb ready?"

"The bomb is activated, the safety catch is being released, it can be fired in 15 seconds."

"Lu Mingfei, prepare to ascend, the air chamber is ready to drain, the stabilizing wings are ready, the propeller system is ready, the bomb will be fired and we'll ascend immediately after that!"

"Boss, slow down, I'm still flipping through the manual!" Lu Mingfei said nervously, flipping through the operation manual.

The ruins were shaking more and more, the lung snails attached to the surface of the ruins were peeling off, layer after layer, as if they were molting. The city was about to collapse or wake up, its original color and texture were about to be revealed to the world.

"Caesar... look at the sonar screen!" Chu Zihang's voice was strange.

Caesar turned his head sharply, the sonar screen showed a series of red dots, each one beating. Each red dot represented a heartbeat, hundreds or even thousands of things were

waking up, it couldn't be just one embryo! Caesar had initially scanned and thought that there was a huge heartbeat under the ruins, but that was a misreading of the signal, countless things were sleeping under the ruins, and they only had one heartbeat because their heartbeats were completely synchronized!

"Damn! What is this place? A dragon's nest?" Caesar was stunned.

"You look in front, that's... what bloody thing?" Lu Mingfei said with all his might.

Chapter 14: The King's Blood Sacrifice

The progress bar flashed a dazzling red light, rapidly moving from the left side of the screen to the right, and the embryo hatching rate instantly broke through 60%. Norma's preliminary results from the rush repair were that the sonar monitoring the seabed had re-established contact with the headquarters, but as soon as the data came over, the hatching rate began to soar.

"Impossible! Faster than the hatching in Greenland! Ten times faster! The dragon class appeared! Retrieve the safety rope! Retrieve the safety rope!" Schneider still subconsciously shouted to Gen Chisei, who was on the other side of the earth, even though he knew that the communication was interrupted.

The terrifying memory of eleven years ago enveloped him once again. Like a destiny, no matter how well-prepared he was, the shadow of the dragon still haunted him. There was no answer, the hatching rate broke through 90%, the heart rate accelerated to 400 beats per second, and the central control room was filled with frenzied heartbeats. The ancient dragon embryo was about to break free from its restraints, and at this critical moment, they were unable to connect to the 辉月姬 system. Schneider could only watch helplessly as the hatching rate climbed higher and higher, 98%...99%...100%.

"It's too late... It's too late... It's completed hatching! No one can stop it now!" Schneider said softly.

For many years, the Greenland Ice Sea incident had been his nightmare, and now the nightmare had become a reality once more. The door opened, the embryo hatched, and humans confronted unknown creatures in the deep sea, unable to struggle and could only wait to be devoured.

"No, it's still going!" Manstein said.

The big screen showed that the embryo hatching rate was still rising, 120%...150%...190%...240%...

"What's going on? How can the embryo hatching rate exceed 100%?"

Schneider broke into a cold sweat: "If there is more than one living thing there, and the heart rate signals overlap, then the upper limit of the hatching rate will increase. This is a flaw in the calculation method. If 100 dragons wake up at the same time, the upper limit is 10,000%!"

At this time, the reading of the embryo hatching rate had already broken through 8,400%.

Layer upon layer of waves rolled on the lava river, and these viscous rock solutions flowed extremely slowly. The tens of meters high splashes could hold their shape in the water for more than ten seconds before the shape of the splashes collapsed, and hundreds of tons of magma would beat on the lava river again. The light of the lava was therefore bright, illuminating every corner of the ruins. As the ruins shook, millions of lung snails fell off, accompanied by viscous blood threads. What was exposed was not the giant ship imagined by the Caesar group, but an indescribable alien object, which was nearly a hundred meters long, half inserted into the seabed, and half wrapped in layers of lung snails. The exposed half was the color of luncheon meat, covered with structures similar to tendons and fascia, and it twitched slightly. The lung snails used their mouthparts to bite into the giant's body, constantly feeding, constantly mating and reproducing. Its surface split open with shocking wounds, and the remaining lung snails could be seen sucking tightly onto the depths of the wound.

"Mom, Mom, Mom..." Lu Mingfei said, "Damn!"

"Could it be the embryo?" Caesar was also stunned. If the length of the embryo was already over a hundred meters, how long would this ancient dragon be when it reached adulthood? The lung snails falling like raindrops blocked their vision, so they couldn't see very clearly.

"No," Chu Zihang said softly, "It's the Lenin. Look at the seabed carefully, you can see the traces of it falling from a height."

With that thing as the center, the buildings collapsed in circles, indicating that it did indeed fall onto the seabed at a shocking speed and weight, triggering a shock wave. The exposed part was about 80 meters long and about 25 meters wide, vaguely in the shape of an icebreaker. However, its appearance had completely changed, and anyone who saw this thing for the first time would mistake it for a giant creature rather than a shipwreck.

"This thing is still moving! What's the difference between this and the embryo? Did the icebreaker get pregnant?" Lu Mingfei was stunned by what he saw.

"The shipwreck has been occupied by the embryo, and the embryo has turned the steel into a part of itself!" Chu Zihang said, "Look carefully! In the parts not covered by flesh, you can see traces of blood vessels in the steel!"

"Is this some kind of ability of the ancient dragon? Does it want to eat the icebreaker and evolve into an icebreaker beast?" Lu Mingfei asked.

"No, I think the embryo is actually already dead." Caesar said quietly.

"It's still moving! Its blood vessels are pulsating! There must be a young dragon in the ship's cabin!"

"It still has vitality, but it's impossible for it to hatch now. Someone killed it and used it as a sacrifice." Caesar said, "Look below."

Lu Mingfei and Chu Zihang looked out from the observation port below. At the place where the lung snails were accumulating, the Lenin gave birth to thick blood vessels that penetrated the seabed, and blood flowed from the Lenin towards the entire city, as if it were the nourishing spring of this dead city. As the tremors intensified, the seabed was cracking, and the black gaps were filled with viscous black blood. Although all three of them were only beginners in alchemy, anyone could see that this was a bloody alchemical ritual similar to black magic. The dragon blood flowing out of the Lenin was irrigating the ancient city, and the shaking city seemed to be awakening! Their enemy was not the embryo, but this city of GaotianGen, which had been dead for many years. According to the myth, the gods once lived here, and the gods of the past were about to wake up.

What kind of thing needs to be sacrificed with the blood of an ancient dragon? What kind of devil is nourished by dragon blood?

"It's really sad. The high and mighty king is, after all, just a bloody sacrifice in the face of a more powerful king." Jute麻衣 stood at the top of the Trieste, sighing silently.

She released the shadow and left the Trieste, swimming towards the remains of the Lenin. At this moment, this giant ship wrapped in flesh was withering, and an unknown force was sucking out its blood. The city was awakening, crazily sucking on the exquisite juice. The blood vessels withered, the fleshy surface cracked, and the viscous blood, as thick as syrup, fell into the seawater. The Trieste was less than 200 meters away from the remains of the Lenin, and Jute麻衣 swam as fast as a sailfish. She reached the side of the Lenin and floated up along the side of the ship. All the portholes extended flesh-colored tentacles, ugly like the buds of flesh that grew from a severed arm. Caesar was right, this dragon had its brain removed at the embryonic stage, and now it was just a sacrifice flowing with dragon blood. Because of its lineage, it would never truly die, it would only continue to grow and continue to supply blood to the city. The lung snails also tasted its blood and became a subspecies of the dragon clan, and the marine life evolved by using the lung snails. And the once high and mighty dragon king was now nothing more than a placenta that provided nutrition.

Jute麻衣 reached into one of the portholes and stabbed, like piercing through rotten leather. She cut off a bud of flesh and dove into the Lenin through the porthole.

Gen Chisei boarded the highest point of Mount Sumeru, with searchlights shining on him from all directions. The Wind Group's helicopter fleet, the Fire Group's water police boat fleet, and the Lin Group's fishing boat fleet all surrounded the floating platform where the Mountain Group was located. The helicopters opened their cabin doors, and the bows of the ships were filled with young people in black clothes, all eyes on Gen Chisei. Thousands of raindrops reflected the light, and the black long coat fluttered in the wind. Gen Chisei seemed to be standing in the rain of light.

"Gentlemen!" He looked around. His voice carried far out over the sea, and his words were broadcast on all six floating platforms.

"Please!" He bowed deeply.

He was supposed to give a rousing speech, but suddenly he didn't feel like saying anything. It was all too heavy, almost crushing him. The history of the Snake Qi Eight Families, the underwater city that buried the gods, the ambition to eliminate the Ghost Crowd, the ideal of ending violence... at this moment, everything rested on his shoulders alone. However, he was already very tired, like a burdened Pinzada Island tortoise. It was not ambition, passion, or the pursuit of power that drove him to do this, but simply the fact that he was a burdened tortoise. A tortoise that only knows how to carry its load, unable to turn over and unload the weight on its back.

Tonight was destined to be a night of bloodshed, and no one could stand idly by. Let the bloodbath begin, and the gale of blood and rain would blow towards the Japanese coast.

"Hai!" Thousands of people bowed in unison.

The disguises on the ships were removed, revealing triple-barreled rapid-fire guns, large-caliber anti-ship machine guns, and torpedo launchers. The fishing boats laid down depth charges in a spiral pattern, which would automatically hover at a depth of 1000 meters, forming a complete defensive net. They were originally designed to ambush small submarines, but now they would be used to intercept something even more dangerous. The heavy industries under the Snake Qi Eight Families had always been at the forefront of Japan's Self-Defense Force's advanced weapon design and manufacturing. If they ignored legal sanctions, they could arm an army at any time. These weapons were loaded with special ammunition, and the bullets and shells were filled with liquid mercury, which would release large amounts of mercury vapor upon impact. The torpedo warheads were inscribed with complex patterns, and when these alchemical warheads exploded, they would release fragments capable of cutting through the bodies of dragon-like creatures. Gen Chisei himself picked up a heavy sniper rifle. Although the killing power of this sniper rifle was insignificant compared to the weapons on the helicopters and ships, since this was a war in which no one could remain neutral, he did not want to hide in the depths of Mount Sumeru.

Sakura walked up behind Gen Chisei, "A minor 3.2-magnitude earthquake occurred in the Extreme Abyss, and the God Burial Site is awakening."

"It seems the ancestors never truly died." Gen Chisei said softly, "All these years, they must have wanted to escape the forbidden land and return to the human world, right?"

"That's impossible." Sakura said, "We have made all the necessary preparations, and we also have Miss Eli."

"It will take some time for the God Burial Site to rise to the surface. Why don't you go and rest for a while? I'll continue communicating with the diving team."

"The Norma system keeps calling out to the 辉月姬 system, and 辉月姬 is disguising herself as being under repair in various ways. Schneider won't be able to figure out what's going on for a short time, but he'll eventually realize it."

"It doesn't matter anymore. After tonight, the alliance between the Snake Qi Eight Families and the Secret Party will be over. Just make sure they don't establish contact with the Trieste within an hour."

"Understood."

"Sakura," Gen Chisei turned around, "Do you remember Sakurai Akira?"

Sakura was taken aback, but quickly regained her composure and nodded slightly, "I remember."

"If, I mean, if I didn't kill him with my own hands, but ordered you to do it, could you calmly slit his throat?" Gen Chisei lit a soft Seven Stars cigarette, "Taking advantage of his trust in you to kill him, could you do it?"

"I can do it." Sakura said softly.

"How would you do it?"

"Because I trust you. Whether a samurai or a ninja, if they lose someone and a reason to trust, their path no longer exists." Sakura said, "Trusting you is my principle."

Gen Chisei fell silent for a long time, "Thank you, Sakura. Sometimes you're too smart for your own good." He reached out and patted Sakura's head, then turned and walked along the railing at the top of Mount Sumeru, gazing out at the turbulent sea.

"This situation is too complicated! We can't handle this, let's get someone more experienced from the Execution Department to handle it!" Lu Mingfei shouted, "We don't know what's under

the ruins, or how many there are. All we have is a sulfur bomb, what good is that? I don't even know where to throw it!"

"Damn it! A sulfur bomb won't be able to take out that many targets!" Caesar looked at the sonar screen filled with red dots.

"In this situation, the sulfur bomb is useless. The only solution is to detonate the nuclear power cabin." Gen Chisei said, "The family has been researching solutions to the corpse guard issue with Schneider via overseas calls, and currently, only a nuclear explosion can eliminate all the targets."

"You make it sound so easy! A nuclear explosion? Are you sure this plan was made by the Execution Department and not the Equipment Department? What about us if there's a nuclear explosion?" Caesar was shocked.

"You'll have time to evacuate. Time is limited, listen to me, the nuclear power cabin won't explode under normal circumstances. To detonate it, you must let the neutron density exceed the threshold, in other words, you have to let the nuclear power cabin overheat." Gen Chisei said, "You activate the nuclear power cabin, make it overheat, and then ascend immediately. I'll use the safety rope to pull you out of the water. We can shorten the ascent process to half an hour. When the nuclear power cabin explodes, you'll be four kilometers away from the explosion center, and you'll have a good chance of surviving in that case."

"I thought a nuclear power cabin explosion would cause a tsunami and an undersea earthquake?" Lu Mingfei said, "If there's a tsunami, what chance do we have of surviving? Even oil tankers can be swept into the depths by a tsunami, how can a small submersible like ours escape?"

"It won't be that dramatic, it's just a small nuclear power cabin. The shockwave from its explosion won't even reach the surface!" Gen Chisei said, "Hurry up and do as I say. The nuclear power cabin's control circuit can act as the detonation circuit. All you have to do is activate it and then drop it from above! You have to take this risk, or the corpse guards will break through the surface and it'll be too late. They'll be much faster than our submersible!"

"What are these corpse guards? What are they?" Lu Mingfei asked.

"They're legendary creatures. The bodies of dragon-like creatures don't decay for many years after death. The dragon clan uses alchemy to concoct the corpses of their own kind, using them as guardians of their cities. This is a forbidden technique. Even in ancient Egypt, humans tried to use this technique to mummify the bodies of pharaohs and nobles, attempting to make them immortal. But all they could do was preserve the bodies, they couldn't preserve the activity of the nerves and muscles, so they couldn't create true zombies." Caesar said, "If this is a dragon clan city, there must be a corpse guard buried vertically in the foundation. The embryo's blood

has awakened them. Damn it! Someone must have done this on purpose, the Lenin must have been meant to activate this ancient city!"

"Damn it, damn it, damn it!" Lu Mingfei was stunned, "The plot is developing on its own now! I thought we were just going to be in an adventure drama, then I found out it was a sci-fi drama, and now it's turned into a zombie movie! Don't the main characters get a say? If I'd known it was going to be a zombie movie, I wouldn't have agreed to pilot this submersible! Even if you don't give us EVA, at least give us torpedoes and machine guns!"

"We don't have time for this. If we don't deal with the corpse guards, we don't have any chance of escaping. With so many targets, the sulfur bomb is useless, the only thing powerful enough is the nuclear power cabin."

"If Professor Schneider agrees with this plan, we don't have a choice." Caesar said, "Chu Zihang, you're in charge of activating the nuclear power cabin. I'll pilot the submersible. We'll drop the nuclear power cabin above the Lenin, then ascend immediately!"

"What about me? What should I do?" Lu Mingfei asked.

"There's nothing for you to do. Why don't you record an audio message? If either I or Chu Zihang make a mistake, we can have Gen Jun send the audio as a last will and testament." Caesar's hands moved rapidly across the instrument panel.

According to Gen Chisei's plan, they would use the safety rope to forcibly pull the submersible out of the water. They could ascend eight kilometers in half an hour, but it would normally take them at least an hour and a half. Tripling the ascent speed meant that the pressure change would also triple, which would be a huge test for the submersible's hull and pipe valves. Caesar was fine-tuning the legendary equipment to ensure that all its systems were in the best condition. Chu Zihang had already accessed the nuclear power cabin's electrical control system and ordered the cabin to withdraw all the cadmium rods from the reactor. Without the cadmium rods to absorb neutrons, the neutron density in the reactor began to rise linearly. The circuit system immediately sounded an alarm, as this was not the normal operating mode for the nuclear power cabin, but Chu Zihang wanted it to overheat.

"Caesar, password! Give me the password!" Chu Zihang shouted.

"We don't need a password! The password is for enabling the high-power source, you're trying to forcibly break into the nuclear power cabin's security protection, why would you need a password for that?" Caesar said, "Besides, I've tried entering the password several times and I can't get it right. I don't have any confidence that I'll be able to guess the correct password."

"Didn't you set the password yourself? How could you forget it?"

"I set the password on that night when I was drinking. I remember setting it as Nono's birthday, but no matter how I enter it now, it's wrong. It's wrong whether I enter the year, month, and day or the day, month, and year."

"That password is too easy to guess."

"The high-power source password is just a confirmation step. Who would sneak onto the Trieste to play with the high-power source? There are dozens of people from the Snake Qi Eight Families guarding it day and night."

"Success! I skipped the password step, the nuclear power cabin is overheating, and we can drop it at any time." Chu Zihang locked the state of the cadmium rods.

"Great! Now let's get ready to set sail!" Caesar pushed the output valve of the low-power source to maximum, and the lithium battery group provided energy to the propeller at maximum power. All the air-tight cabins were emptied of seawater. The submersible began to ascend, and the underwater currents were already chaotic. Caesar struggled to stabilize the machine, ejecting air in all directions to steady it. The pipes hissed like a whistle as the gas flowed rapidly through them. Lu Mingfei and Chu Zihang strapped themselves tightly to their seats with safety belts.

"Nono, this is the first version of my will. There's a good chance it will be deleted within half an hour, but if you hear this recording, it means that this will has unfortunately taken effect." Caesar's voice was low and calm.

Lu Mingfei was stunned for a moment, then realized that Caesar was recording his will through the communication channel.

"Although I proposed to you, I never took you home to meet my family. Maybe you feel that I'm not sincere enough. But my family is a bunch of jerks, and if I could, I'd rather you never meet them. I heard that your family is also a bunch of jerks, so I didn't ask to meet them either. But if you're willing, I'd actually be very happy to meet them. I've been thinking about acting like a traditional Chinese son-in-law, discussing Chinese culture with them, and even wearing Tang-style clothing and bringing ham, eggs, and various other ingredients as gifts. Although, to be honest, that would be really stupid."

The Trieste struggled in the underwater currents, its propeller making a clacking sound as it struggled to turn. But Lu Mingfei's attention was focused on Caesar's will.

"To be honest, you always spend all the money in your account, but I've never felt uncomfortable about it. I was hoping that you'd ask me for money or even move into the apartment I rented. But you never asked, you'd rather just eat canned soup until the end of the month when your family sends you money. Everything you do is interesting to me. When I'm with you on the street, I try to guess which restaurant you'll choose, but I never guess right. The more I guess wrong, the more I want to guess. You are the greatest achievement I could ever

hope for in my life, because I've never fully understood you. You're a miko, and you have countless possibilities. To be honest, I'm afraid that after we get married, there will be no more secrets between us, and I'll understand you as well as I understand that girl, and eventually grow tired of you."

"To overcome this fear, I've thought of many ways, even calling my psychologist. But the psychologist said that as a married man for many years, his experience was that no matter what, one day I would grow tired of my wife. Whether or not we divorced would depend on my patience, not my love. But I don't want to grow tired of you. When I met you, you were as beautiful as light, and if you became dull because of me, it would be an insult to light. Although I'm afraid, I'm still preparing for our wedding. I didn't tell you ahead of time because I haven't been able to contact you recently. I hope that after you hear my fears and hesitations, you'll still be willing to say 'I do' with me, and then we can travel the world for our year-long wedding. But if you're in front of me, I won't be able to say these things, and if you hear this recording, I'll already be dead. So it's a paradox."

"I know that in China, there is a custom of holding a wedding for the dead, but I don't want you to do something so ridiculous. Of course, I know you wouldn't do that anyway, which is why you're the girl I like. But I've already paid to book the wedding service, and I think you might as well not waste it. Please travel the world in my place, and if you're willing, bring a red men's Tang suit. When you're watching the sunset on your small island in Fiji, hang it on the clothesline next to you and watch it flutter in the wind, imagining me there with you. If there really is such a thing as a soul in this world, then at that moment, I will have overcome my fear and be full of joy, because I will have left the best time in your memory, and I will never grow tired of you. Love, Caesar-Gattuso, in the depths of the Japan Trench."

The Trieste finally broke free of the underwater currents and entered an ascending current, soaring upward like a bird that had regained its strength.

"I heard that you secretly wrote a book that made it onto the New York Times bestseller list?" Chu Zihang said calmly.

"Dragon Raja, it's currently ranked third. I plan to release the third book in the series after this mission, that is, if I survive." Caesar said, "You two could be a little more tactful than to eavesdrop on someone else's will."

"I know it's impolite, but your writing is really good. Although your Chinese vocabulary isn't always accurate."

"How can you pursue a Chinese girl without studying Chinese? Chu Zihang, don't you want to record something too? Or do Chinese people think it's bad luck to leave a will?"

"I've already recorded one, just not on the public channel, so you didn't hear it." Chu Zihang said, "It's very short, I can play it back for you."

He pressed the playback button, "Dad, by the time you hear this recording, I'll no longer be in this world. Please don't investigate the cause of my death, because it won't lead to anything and it doesn't matter. This was my own choice, and no one forced me. Please take care of Mom, don't let her be too sad. I know that you and Mom had an agreement not to have children because of me, but at your age, having a child shouldn't be a problem. Thank you for taking care of me all these years, I know you're proud of me."

"Your will is for your stepfather, not your mother?" Caesar asked.

"There's nothing I want to say to Mom. She doesn't have the lineage, she won't understand what we're doing. Saying sentimental things will only make her sad over and over again." Chu Zihang said, "My stepfather is a very rational man, he'll find a way to persuade Mom to have another child. That way, they won't be lonely anymore."

"Wouldn't you be sad if you thought about someone else taking your place, and the three of them being happy together?" Lu Mingfei felt a bit sad.

"No one is irreplaceable, and there's no reason to be sad." Chu Zihang said calmly, "Lu Mingfei, do you want to record something?"

"I've thought about it, but I haven't figured out who to record it for." Lu Mingfei scratched his head.

Gen Chisei leaned against the railing, smoking silently and listening to the conversation from the depths of the sea.

Chapter 15: The Hidden Dragon Rises To The Sea

"We've reached the area above the Lenin wreckage, preparing to drop the nuclear power cabin. Neutron density has exceeded the safe threshold of 120%, and the nuclear power cabin is expected to explode in 20 minutes. The preliminary estimated yield is 1 million tons." Caesar shouted.

"Agreed to drop the nuclear power cabin." Gen Chisei said, "The Sumeru Seat is ready to recover the Trieste."

The crow and the yaksha behind him glanced at each other. They both knew that the chances of survival for the Trieste were slim, not as high as Gen Chisei had said. According to the simulation of the 辉月姬, the chances of survival were less than 1%. Because the nuclear power cabin had been modified, the explosive power was far greater than the million tons claimed by Gen Chisei. Only something with that kind of power could destroy the ruins that buried the gods.

Even if Caesar's team managed to escape the shockwave of the nuclear explosion, they would still have to face the surviving corpse guards. The nuclear explosion might not be enough to take out all of them.

"Release the nuclear power cabin! Return immediately!" Caesar opened the hook holding the nuclear power cabin.

"Wait!" Chu Zihang shouted.

But it was too late. The yellow nuclear power cabin slowly sank. Once the hook was released, it was no longer connected to the Trieste, and with the weight of the nuclear power cabin, the Trieste had no chance of reattaching it.

"What's wrong?" Caesar asked.

"Just before you released the nuclear power cabin, the neutron density suddenly dropped, and the nuclear power cabin re-entered safe mode. The cadmium rods were inserted back into the reactor, so it won't explode at all!"

"You don't say?" Lu Mingfei said, "The Equipment Department's stuff, we couldn't get it to explode when we wanted it to, and now that we've gone to all this trouble to try and detonate it, it won't explode. Are they playing us?"

"Iwafune Research Institute, analyze immediately! What's wrong with the nuclear power cabin?" Gen Chisei was stunned.

The Snake Qi Eight Families' careful planning had reached this critical moment, and everything was perfect. In 20 minutes, the God Burial Site would be destroyed by the high temperature and shockwave of the nuclear explosion. But now, the nuclear power cabin that had been meticulously modified by the Iwafune Research Institute had malfunctioned.

"The analysis results are out, there's a fault in the detonation circuit!" Miyamoto Yoshio shouted in the Snake Qi Eight Families' secret channel, "We originally modified the control circuit designed by the Equipment Department and added a detonation circuit. But we just analyzed the current record of the detonation circuit, and it's damaged. There must have been a short circuit during the descent. After the descent, we had Caesar activate the self-inspection system on the Trieste, but we couldn't tell him about the detonation circuit, so the detonation circuit wasn't inspected."

"So it can't explode? We've awakened the spirits in the God Burial Site, but now the nuclear power cabin can't explode?" Gen Chisei's face turned pale.

He couldn't believe the result. A small oversight, just a small oversight, and a huge disaster had been set in motion, with almost no chance of reversal.

"No, there's still a chance to detonate it. But we must... we must manually enter the password, entering the password will trick the control circuit and force it back into an overheated state."

"How is that possible at a depth of 8,600 meters underwater? Who would be willing to sacrifice themselves to input the password?" Gen Chisei roared.

"There's a chance. The Trieste has underwater walking equipment, although it can't be used for long, but it's enough for them to dive down and input the password. Just open the metal plate at the bottom of the nuclear power cabin, and you'll see the password keyboard, it's waterproof, just hope it doesn't melt in the high temperature." Miyamoto said.

"Who would be willing to sacrifice themselves in this situation? Now that deception is useless, asking them to input the password is as good as sending them to their deaths! Why would they believe me? They should be taking orders directly from headquarters!" Gen Chisei punched the railing in frustration.

"Those who have already written their wills might not mind sacrificing themselves. Why not try to persuade them? At a time like this, we're useless, if it's possible I'd be willing to go deep into the sea to input the password, but I can't do it. If we don't destroy the God Burial Site, it will be a disaster. What we've awakened is a devil, and it's better to leave it sealed than to let it escape." Sakura said quietly.

Gen Chisei took a deep breath. He understood what Sakura meant. At this point, it wasn't a question of whether or not to sacrifice the diving team, if sacrificing everyone here could suppress what was in the God Burial Site, Gen Chisei would do it without hesitation. But if it couldn't be suppressed, the consequences would be unimaginable. However, Gen Chisei wasn't confident that he could persuade the three of them, who were already at their limits, to make more efforts. Caesar's team was already stretched to their limits, and they had been waiting for the moment when they could be pulled out of the water after dropping the nuclear power cabin. At this point, Gen Chisei couldn't think of any reason to tell them that not only couldn't they ascend, but they also had to do a deep-sea walk.

"Gentlemen, bad news. There's a problem with the nuclear power cabin's circuit. You still can't ascend, you must do a deep-sea walk and manually input the password." Gen Chisei connected to the communication channel, "This is our only chance."

He couldn't keep up the pretense any longer. All he could do was tell the truth, and now he needed Caesar's team to do a deep-sea walk, whether or not they were willing to believe him was up to them.

"If we refuse, you won't pull us up, will you?" Caesar said quietly.

"If you refuse, everyone will die. Whether or not I pull you up won't matter." Gen Chisei said.

"Are you asking us to sacrifice ourselves to save more people?"

"If I were in the submersible, I would do the deep-sea walk myself."

"Damn it, you'll never get to sell sunscreen on Pinata Island again! Would you be willing to do it? And what you're asking me to do will prevent me from ever seeing my wedding!" Caesar roared.

"I wouldn't be willing, but I would still do it. Whether or not you're willing is up to you." Gen Chisei said firmly.

"The Japan Branch really is full of lunatics!"

Caesar stood up, took off his headphones and threw them to Chu Zihang, "I don't want to talk to that lunatic anymore, you keep in touch with him. We only have enough oxygen for 8 minutes. I set the password, only I can guess it. If I don't come back in 8 minutes, that means no one can detonate the nuclear power cabin, and you can tell him to recover the safety rope."

"Big bro, you, you, you..." Lu Mingfei said.

"Before we dived, I said that I'm the leader, and the two of you are here to assist me. Don't do anything on your own." Caesar pushed Lu Mingfei away, "Do as I say. If I don't come back, Chu Zihang will take my place. It looks like it was a good idea to write our wills in advance."

"Big bro, I, I, I..." Lu Mingfei said.

Caesar grabbed his neck and pushed him away, "You haven't written your will yet, take these few minutes to think about who to write it for."

"I'll go, you're the leader." Chu Zihang prepared to unbuckle his seatbelt.

Caesar pushed him back into his seat and held him down, expressionless, "Don't think that I'm doing this because I'm willing to sacrifice myself for you two. I'm an engaged man, my life is worth more than yours. I just don't want a situation where one of you two dies here and I survive. That would be too shameful, so shameful that I would rather shoot myself."

"You really are someone who lives only for your pride." Chu Zihang said softly.

Caesar turned his head and looked down at Chu Zihang. In the deep sea, 8,600 meters below, in Caesar's sea-blue eyes, Chu Zihang seemed to see the dazzling sunlight.

"They... they're here!" Lu Mingfei said hoarsely.

Chu Zihang looked out the observation window at the bottom, and reddish mist was rising from the ruins. The dragon blood that flowed through the ruins was spreading, and slender creatures were crawling out of the cracks in the seabed. They tore off the cocoons that covered their bodies, their bodies shining with a metallic luster, and their pupils were a fierce golden color. Because they had been asleep for too long, they couldn't stand up yet, crawling on the seabed and wriggling their long tails. But their bodies, nourished by dragon blood, quickly regained their ancient strength, and as they crawled, they suddenly leaped up and swung their long tails to ascend. They passed by the Trieste, but didn't spare even a glance at the lit metal object. Their eyes were fixed on the endless darkness above, and as the thousands upon thousands of them finally broke free of their seals, they were about to return to the human world.

"Snake-tailed humans." Chu Zihang said softly, "These aren't purebred dragon-like creatures, they were hybrids in their previous lives. This isn't a dragon clan city, it was built by the hybrids."

"Just like the dragon ascending to heaven." Lu Mingfei murmured.

In the view above, countless slender shadows were vigorously swinging their long tails, and the lava illuminated their bodies. They gathered together, like a golden vortex.

"Once they reach the surface, they'll become a real problem. If even one of them is caught by the media, tomorrow's headlines around the world will be about them." Caesar said, "But that's not our problem anymore, let the Japanese deal with it. It's time for their support team to step up. Our mission is just to level this place, whether it's the Lenin, the embryo, or the GaotianGen, the existence of these things is a problem in itself."

"The deep-sea walking equipment can only support five minutes at most." Chu Zihang said, "I'll lower the submersible a bit."

"That's enough time." Caesar climbed into the pressurization cabin next to the pilot's cabin and closed the thick, 10-meter-high door behind him.

Outside was an incredible high-pressure environment, and the deep-sea walking equipment, unlike normal diving suits, was not human-shaped. It was a nearly spherical metal device, and the spherical shape could withstand the most pressure. Although it used aerospace-grade titanium-magnesium alloy and the outer wall was more than 5 cm thick, it still couldn't last long. The spherical cabin was filled with high-pressure saline solution, and only the mask had gas. Deep-sea walkers didn't use their own limbs, but instead manipulated the metal prosthetics on the equipment. Caesar reviewed the operation process in his mind one last time and then dived into the spherical cabin from below. High-pressure saline solution was injected, and the lights in the helmet lit up. Caesar gripped the handles of the metal prosthetics and blew into the microphone in the helmet, "Chu Zihang, test the communication equipment."

"I can hear you clearly, can you hear me?" Chu Zihang tapped the microphone in the pilot's cabin.

"The communication effect is good," Caesar paused, "Aren't you a proud person too?"

Chu Zihang was taken aback.

"It's just that your way of being proud is different from mine. Although it's uncomfortable when you're proud, if you weren't, you wouldn't be worthy of being my opponent. My family's old farts are targeting you, but that has nothing to do with me. Don't think that I would use such lowly means to deal with you. If it's a matter of life and death between us, then keep being proud like this... don't be defeated by a jerk that I look down on."

As the pressurization nozzle ejected the Zeppelin equipment, Chu Zihang saw Caesar raise his thumb at him inside the spherical helmet, perhaps as a sign of "victory."

Caesar slowly descended in the seawater, and from time to time, agile corpse guards brushed past him. This ruin was like a prison for souls in the underworld, and at this moment, the gates of the underworld had opened, and the souls were fleeing for their lives. The corpse guards had no consciousness, but they still retained their animal-like instincts. It seemed that all the corpse guards had a premonition of the impending destruction, and they were fleeing for their lives, ignoring everything in their path. Caesar couldn't figure out how the corpse guards could predict the destruction of GaotianGen, predicting a nuclear explosion seemed beyond their capabilities.

Some of these long-dead hybrids were intact, while others were damaged. They were preserved with a mummification technique that was more powerful than alchemy, their vitality sealed within their immortal bodies. Some had half their heads missing, while others had their abdomens pierced, perhaps the remains of a cruel battlefield. Ancient alchemists had used these remains as raw materials. Caesar thought of the battlefield carvings on the birdhouse, perhaps that battle had really happened in history, and maybe that was what had ultimately destroyed this city.

The Trieste hovered above him, and a rope around his waist connected him to the Trieste, which in turn was connected to the Sumeru Seat via a safety rope. The Sumeru Seat was anchored to the seabed with chains, layer upon layer like a family tree.

In the light of the lava and gas, the nuclear power cabin and the Lenin were clearly visible. The narrow nuclear power cabin had been dropped among the lung snails next to the Lenin, and millions of lung snails were wriggling nearby. Caesar fell into the pile of lung snails, and these tiny creatures were constantly falling off the Lenin, making dull thumping sounds as they hit the Zeppelin equipment. Caesar struggled to manipulate the clumsy prosthetics to stand up, wading through the lung snails towards the nuclear power cabin. The currents were too chaotic, so he didn't dare to float, and instead kept the lead weights on the Zeppelin equipment, crawling along the seabed, somewhere between walking and swimming. Corpse guards passed by overhead, how many of them had regained their vitality? Were there several thousand or several tens of thousands? Caesar couldn't count, and in the ancient days, this GaotianGen had buried

countless corpse guards in its depths. These snake-tailed humans seemed to have directly inherited the civilization of the dragon clan, and were completely unlike humans.

The Zeppelin equipment was already operating beyond its limits, the pressure was off the charts, the output was off the charts, and the lights in the helmet kept flickering. If it weren't for the high-pressure saline solution in the spherical cabin, Caesar would have bled internally, but the high-pressure saline solution also made his eyes bloodshot and his breathing difficult. His eyes were fixed on the nuclear power cabin, less than ten meters away, but he had to wade through waist-deep lung snails to get there, and he was beginning to doubt if he could make it.

His vision was getting blurrier, and the high pressure had the most obvious effect on his vision. The targets in his vision began to have double images, and his head ached violently. The metal prosthetics slipped in the lung snails, and it was like struggling in a mudslide, always on the verge of being swallowed up.

Caesar closed his eyes and released the "Kamaitachi", few people knew that his hearing wasn't just an auxiliary sense, it was even more effective than his vision. The Kamaitachi swirled and danced in the seawater, and Caesar was delighted to find that his domain had expanded to an unprecedented extent. Seawater was an excellent conductor of sound, and the loss of sound propagation in the water was less than in the air. He could hear the sound of the underwater currents, the heartbeat of the corpse guards, the cracking of the ruins, and the ancient, silent bells. Caesar remembered that those collapsed ancient buildings were all hung with thousands upon thousands of black bells. In the days when GaotianGen stood on the earth, the wind must have filled the entire city with the sound of bells.

But in the seawater, the bells emitted a super low frequency sound that was beyond the normal range of human hearing. If he hadn't released the Kamaitachi, Caesar wouldn't have been able to hear this magical music. The heavy, ancient super low frequency sound traveled through the currents in the ruins, and Caesar immersed himself in the ancient music, imagining what GaotianGen must have looked like standing on the earth. When the wind blew, the thousands of bells on the birdhouse would turn one after another, and the waves of sound would rise and fall in the city, like the tides. He had never "heard" such a vast city before.

When he was little, he would go to the Alps with his mother every spring to vacation, and often stand in the grass at the foot of the mountain for hours, gazing up at the sky. The butler and servants would whisper to each other nearby, wondering if the young heir had some kind of mental problem. In their eyes, this mountain was monotonous, but the young Caesar smiled as if he were receiving the adoration of thousands. In Caesar's world, the mountain was filled with music, the wind scattered the dandelions, and the thousands of little umbrellas spun in the wind. The sound of the wind was amplified hundreds of times, like organ music played in a cathedral, and the sound of the dandelion umbrellas sliding through the air was like the choir singing hymns. The whole mountain served as a resonating chamber for the invisible organ, and the whole world played just for him, more wonderful than the adoration of thousands. At this time, only his mother would stand behind him, gently stroking his hair.

As he grew up, Caesar would go to a high place to listen to the music whenever he visited a new city. The sound of the wind, the sound of people, the sound of rain, the sound of dust storms, the sound of machinery, the sound of atmospheric electricity... each city had a different sound, and they came together to form different music. Caesar could hear some cities singing like old men, others crying like young girls, and still others roaring like devils. But so far, no city's music had been like that of GaotianGen, its music was quiet and serene, like a monk standing apart from the mortal world, compassionately watching the changes in the world, reminding him of the moonlight in Nara, and the bell towers casting long shadows on the earth.

The uncomfortable symptoms disappeared, and his body felt soft and comfortable. Caesar swam through the lung snails with his prosthetic limbs, but he felt like he was walking down a long street in the ancient city, and the moonlight above seemed to have been quiet for a thousand years.

He was a young monk in white, scooping up a clear handful of water from the river, and a young girl with a small face walked past, her reflection in the water. Her skirt was dyed with beautiful maple leaves and butterfly flowers, and she wore a fan made of redwood at her waist. The sound of the geta on the girl's feet, patter-patter, and the water in the monk's hand, drip-drop. Far away, the bell of an ancient temple was rung, and the monk and the girl looked up at the same time, their eyes meeting. At that moment, the water in the monk's hand wet his robe, and the girl unconsciously gripped the fan at her waist, it was her token of love, and one day she would give it to her husband.

The girl's long hair flowed with a heart-stirring red in the moonlight.

"Nono..." Caesar said softly.

The girl was Nono, and Caesar suddenly remembered how he had traveled thousands of miles from Da Qin to Japan, and suddenly met the girl who was destined for him. He smiled as he reached out to her across the river, and Nono took his finger and jumped over, their eyes meeting and their faces blushing in the moonlight. In the moonlight, the bell towers of Nara rose, and the ancient demons revealed their giant shadows, their eyes burning with golden flames as they roared silently at the moon, dancing as if to bless the young couple. Caesar embraced Nono, and he could smell the beautiful fragrance of flowers.

"Caesar! Caesar! Answer! Answer!" Chu Zihang shouted.

Three minutes after the ejection of the deep-sea walking equipment, Caesar lay in the pile of lung snails, his last action was to tightly hug a pile of lung snails, and from the camera in the helmet, he seemed to be smiling contentedly.

There was no answer, and although the life-monitoring equipment showed that he still had a heartbeat, he had completely lost consciousness.

Chu Zihang covered the microphone and took off the headphones, handing them to Lu Mingfei, "Remember, from the time the nuclear power cabin was detached, the Sumeru Seat has been unable to monitor the data on the operation of the nuclear power cabin. Communication at this depth must be done via cable."

"What do you mean? I don't understand!" Lu Mingfei shook his head in confusion.

"In other words, if you don't tell Gen Jun, he won't know whether or not the nuclear power cabin has ignited again. If I don't come back, tell him that the ignition was successful, but that he can't recover me and Caesar. He can't verify the results of the ignition, but he'll have to choose to recover you. And if I'm still here, he'll ask us to leave one person in the submersible and the other to go out." Chu Zihang put the headphones on Lu Mingfei's head, "Don't say too much, and don't feel awkward about arguing with me. Just like Caesar didn't sacrifice himself to save you and me, he did it as the leader, his pride wouldn't allow him to kick us out of the cabin."

"My pride wouldn't allow me to let a junior take my place either." Chu Zihang stood up, "If we don't come back, you'll be the leader of the diving team."

Lu Mingfei slumped in his chair, his eyes as innocent as a baby raccoon, but he really hated the look in a baby raccoon's eyes. Damn it, damn it, damn it! Would he feel disgusted if he saw that innocent, helpless look in someone else's eyes in a situation like this?

"Honestly answer me, are you still hung up on Nono?"

Lu Mingfei lowered his head, "Yes, but there's nothing I can do, I'm just trying not to think about her."

"If only the two of us come back, don't feel guilty. It's not your fault that Caesar and I got into trouble, try to win Nono over again, I always feel that she's actually a very fragile girl, and she'll be sad if she loses Caesar, right?" Chu Zihang walked towards the pressurization cabin, "You still have goals to achieve, unlike me, I have no goals left."

"Do you like Xiao Long Nv, senior brother?" Lu Mingfei asked hoarsely.

"Do you call her Xiao Long Nv?" Chu Zihang asked as he closed the door of the pressurization cabin behind him.

"It's been ten minutes, and the Trieste still hasn't ignited the nuclear power cabin." Sakura said, "We'll have to go into battle first. Sonar shows a large group of corpse guards approaching the surface, and their ascent rate is much faster than we imagined. They'll break the surface in two minutes."

"Don't hold back on the ammunition, intercept every single one of them." Gen Chisei said slowly, "Although they are our ancestors, they are now monsters without humanity, only a killing will. Rather than let a single corpse escape, I'd rather dye this sea red with blood!"

"Understood. But if the nuclear power cabin can't be detonated, we won't be able to kill all the corpse guards, and according to Lord Masamune, there may be even more troublesome things in the God Burial Site besides the corpse guards."

"That's how it is on the battlefield. Although we're facing thousands of troops, a samurai with a sword and a place to stand will not retreat. What's more, I believe in those guys." Gen Chisei said.

The warning lights on the floating platform spun, and the searchlights spun as well. The storm raged on the sea, and the lights illuminated the boiling sea. Bullets loaded into the gun chambers, torpedoes preheated, and beehive rockets began to spin. The alarms became more and more dense, and everyone's eyes were fixed on the sea. The black sea churned, and the floating platform shook with it, as if the sea was about to tear itself apart at any moment. The yaksha loaded red shotgun shells into his double-barreled hunting rifle, and the crow taped two long magazines back to back and inserted them into his submachine gun, so that he could just pull out the magazine and turn it over to keep firing, this was the wisdom of gang firefights, because they couldn't customize long magazines like the military, so they used tape to solve the problem. Sakura kept her hands empty, she herself was a weapon.

"The weapons in your hands are no match for the heavy equipment of the Wind, Forest, Fire, and Mountain Groups. What do you plan to do with those hunting rifles?" Gen Chisei asked, looking at the yaksha and the crow.

"I don't know, but we have to have weapons to look like we're here to do a proper job!" The yaksha rubbed his hands, "We're directly under the young master, we can't just sit around."

Gen Chisei laughed, "Heh," at a time like this, it was indeed nice to have a couple of idiots around.

He put on his headphones and listened to Miyamoto's countdown. At this moment, in the central control room of the Sumeru Seat, the large screen showed the results of the sonar scan, and hundreds upon hundreds of lights rose from the seabed at high speed, while the deep-sea bombs formed a barrier at a depth of 100 meters.

"It's begun..." Miyamoto said quietly, the lights on the screen collided with the deep-sea bomb barrier. Miyamoto was the inventor of those deep-sea bombs, and he knew their effects. He could imagine that at a depth of 100 meters below their feet, the deep-sea bombs were detonating in chains, each one releasing a dazzling flash of light and tens of thousands of hard steel beads. These beads were constrained to a flat plane, and their trajectory and light formed perfect circles. Any creature that passed through these large circles would be cut to pieces.

The people on the surface saw the light of the explosion shining up from the depths of the sea, as if fire was burning up from below. Half a second later, the shockwave from the deep-sea bombs reached the surface, and white waves rose into the sky.

"46% survival rate!" Miyamoto shouted, "46% of the corpse guards survived!"

The steel-blue bodies leaped out of the white waves, and with their snake-like tails, the sturdy corpse guards were over five meters long. They swung their tails like dragons, leaping to a height of three or even five meters before falling back into the sea. But in the moment they were airborne, the Wind Group's "Hornet Tail" machine guns opened fire, and the rain of bullets fell from the sky, striking the hard bodies of the corpse guards and splashing sparks. Many of the corpse guards were pushed back into the sea by the force of the bullets. The torpedoes fired by the water police boats had already been launched, and these small but powerful torpedoes were agile and deadly. They left white trails on the surface as they raced towards their targets, and the triple-barreled ship guns were the main attack weapons, their fire and explosions deafening.

Gen Chisei fired at the corpse guards that broke the surface, his heavy sniper rifle might not have as large a caliber as the ship guns, but a direct hit was always fatal.

"The second wave is here!" Miyamoto shouted.

There was no time to set up another deep-sea bomb barrier, so the second wave of corpse guards was completely unimpeded. Again, hundreds of steel-blue bodies leaped out of the water, some twisting their bodies to land on the water police boats, wrapping their powerful tails around the ship guns that were spitting fire, twisting the gun barrels. The gun turrets exploded, the gunners turned to ash, and the corpse guards, thrown back into the sea by the flames, immediately dove deep. Below the surface, there were countless snake-tailed hunters, and they seemed to sense the slaughter, the killing intent inherited from the dragon clan immediately roused, and they turned to attack the most vulnerable water police boats.

Gen Chisei kept firing, for now, the corpse guards couldn't threaten the Sumeru Seat, but if wave after wave of them broke the surface... no one would survive.

Lu Mingfei watched as the lung snails seemed to bury Caesar and Chu Zihang, and he sat alone in the pilot's cabin, his hands and feet cold. He wanted to do something, but he was powerless, he hadn't even learned how to use the Zeppelin equipment.

The lung snails attached to the outside of the Lenin must have weighed hundreds of tons, and they would crush a person to death if they fell on them. Chu Zihang was trying to crawl towards Caesar, but he was further from the nuclear power cabin than Caesar. He had been blown off course by the currents when he fell into the lung snails, and his landing spot wasn't as good as Caesar's. According to the instructions, the Zeppelin equipment could only support five minutes, and it was used for emergency repairs to the exterior of the submersible, but now Caesar's

Zeppelin equipment had been down for seven minutes, and Chu Zihang's for two. Caesar was completely unconscious, and Chu Zihang's vital signs were getting worse, he was relying on bloodlust to keep going, but in this extreme environment, bloodlust didn't have much effect.

The chances were getting smaller and smaller, and the spherical Chu Zihang was still flailing his arms in the lung snails, although he knew that Chu Zihang was doing his best, Lu Mingfei still couldn't help but find it funny. He often felt that he couldn't understand his senior brother, he was the kind of person who didn't really care about anything, but as long as he had a shred of strength left, he would go all out, never giving up as long as there was a glimmer of hope. Chu Zihang finally broke through the lung snails in front of him and grabbed the handle on the back of Caesar's equipment, trying to tie Caesar's spherical equipment to his own with a strap, but it was difficult for the two spheres to walk side by side.

Lu Mingfei watched them through the observation window, he had never felt as sincerely moved as he did at that moment, he really was a waste of space.

Objects. What exactly qualifies him as an S-rank? Is it solely based on his self-destruct magic of trading lives? In reality, he is a level one player who hasn't leveled up since leaving the beginner's village, and his only skill is self-destruction. Aside from that, other minor monsters are taken care of by senior brothers like Caesar and Chu Zihang.

More and more corpse guards crawled out of the ground and slithered, reminiscent of countless earthworms emerging from the soil in spring. A massive fissure appeared, cutting vertically into the river of lava, with hundreds of thousands of tons of lava pouring into it. Something enormous was struggling in the molten rock, its scales black, and its back ridge adorned with bone spurs tipped with hooks. Black metal hooks pierced its flesh, pinning it firmly beneath the ruins. However, the metal hooks were about to lose their hold, and it frantically lashed out with its thick tail, causing the remaining standing structures to collapse in chunks, with metal fragments and gravel floating up and forming large patches of mist in the seawater.

But that wasn't the worst of it. Lu Mingfei stood up in terror because he saw swarms of fireflies flying out of the fissure!

They were the Ghost-tooth Hornworms! Their first appearance was when they surfaced from the trench, but who would have thought that the ruins were their lair. The hornworms created silver streaks in the seawater, uninterested in small creatures like the Lung Snails or the corpse guards. Instead, they gradually approached the struggling Caesar and Chu Zihang. Lu Mingfei's head felt like it was about to explode as he recalled Chu Zihang or Caesar mentioning that the Ghost-tooth Hornworms could bite through bronze pillars and devour them, secreting a strong acidic mucus to aid their terrifying teeth in chewing metal. He wondered if the titanium-magnesium alloy used to make the Zeppelin gear could withstand the hornworms' bites.

"Run! Run! Run!" Lu Mingfei shouted into the microphone.

However, Caesar and Chu Zihang couldn't run; they were completely trapped in the pile of lung snails. Chu Zihang didn't respond; he let go of Caesar and pushed aside the lung snails in front of him, heading towards the nuclear power cabin. Apparently, he had already heard Lu Mingfei's shout and understood the situation. He was trying to see if he could ignite the nuclear power cabin before the hornworms pounced and tore them apart, but he only knew that the password was related to Nono's birthday. Lu Mingfei pounded the dashboard in frustration, feeling helpless.

Suddenly, a pair of skillful hands rested on his shoulders, vigorously massaging his shoulder wells.

"Oh dear, your shoulders are so tight. You must be spending a lot of time working at your desk, or rather, gaming, right? That's really bad for your cervical spine, you know. You should come for regular physiotherapy treatments; patronize my business and I guarantee your health; let's strive for progress together!"

"What the hell?" Lu Mingfei screamed, jumping up and banging his head on the monitor above.

"Where would there be ghosts at 8,000 meters deep in the sea? Unless it's a pirate with a stone tied to his leg and thrown into the sea. It's me, your little brother, the integrity-first salesman, your trustworthy life partner, and the warm little cotton jacket in your life." The masseur said solemnly.

Lu Mingfei turned his head, and there was the little devil, dressed in indigo kimono and geta socks, sitting on the console with his hands under his chin, his cheeks flushed and adorable as if they were fresh red apples, just like the textbooks said.

"Weren't you on vacation?" Lu Mingfei stammered.

"Ah, who says I'm not? I had just finished packing my luggage and was about to board the train. I was flirting with a girl in a miniskirt in the VIP lounge when I suddenly felt that you were in danger, so I rushed here without stopping." Lu Wenze sighed, "I spent so much time chatting her up for nothing, leaving her alone in the VIP lounge. She's definitely not going to pay any attention to me now."

"Didn't you say that Japan is not under your jurisdiction?"

"Japan is not under my jurisdiction, but you are currently outside of Japan's maritime boundaries." Lu Mingze glanced out the window, "This time, you guys have really set a record. There are at least a thousand corpse guards, and underground, there's a pure-blood dragon that has been enhanced with alchemy, an ancient species.

"The corpse guards are manageable, but what about those Ghost-tooth Hornworms? Do you have a way to deal with them?"

Lu Mingze smiled, "The corpse guards are not that easy to handle. You don't understand those things. Their brains are dead, but their nervous system, heart, and muscles are still intact, wrapped in the amniotic fluid they secrete themselves. Their bloodthirsty nature and aggressiveness are even stronger than when they were alive. Their bodies and bones, enhanced by alchemy, are more resilient than before, making them perfect killing machines aside from being a bit slow. When they truly launch an offensive, they are more terrifying than the hornworms. The hornworms only prey, but the corpse guards are bloodthirsty. They kill because their mental imprint was left through alchemy when they were being crafted. But now, they sense that this ancient city is about to be destroyed, and they are trying to escape. However, if they catch a whiff of your blood and flesh, they will still be drawn by their bloodlust."

"Then what about Caesar? Why did he suddenly faint like that?"

"It's an illusion. When this city stood on the ground, the alchemical domain constructed by the bells covered it. Those who are unfamiliar with the rhythm would be guided by illusions. However, now that it's sunk deep in the sea, you can't hear the bells, but Caesar's spirit tongue is the 鎌鼬. He just used the wrong spirit tongue. But it's not too bad, look how happy he is, he might be hallucinating about marrying Nono in a wedding dress and consummating the marriage, that must feel so good."

Lu Mingfei's eyes twitched involuntarily. He turned away, avoiding Lu Wenze's gaze.

The corpse guards crashed into the 'Driest' with force, and Lu Mingfei saw a twisted, hideous face peering through the observation window. The corpse guard seemed to have realized that there were living creatures inside this metal shell.

"What a nuisance! I'm talking to a client, and these despicable things come to interrupt?" Lu Mingze frowned, "Scare them a little, teach them some manners."

"Who are you talking to? Me?" Lu Mingfei pointed at his nose, "In their eyes, I'm probably no different from a smoked bacon strip. Smoked bacon can't scare away hungry diners no matter how hard it tries."

"How could I talk to you like that? I was instructing the bodyguard girl who came with me." Lu Mingze smiled.

Outside the deep-sea vessel, Jue De 麻衣 slowly stood up. The bluish-gray scales on her body opened and closed, making a metallic clashing sound.

She drew the blade that was tied to her thigh, stretching her arms wide. The surrounding corpse guards were intimidated by her bone-chilling killing intent and dared not approach. However,

they continued to circle the 'Driest' at high speed. Lu Mingze was right; these creatures were manipulated by their killing intent and bloodlust. When they smelled the scent of life, even in the midst of their escape, they would stop to hunt.

Several corpse guards charged at Sha De麻衣 from different directions. Their immortal bodies were over five meters long, and their massive size and incredible strength made their impact comparable to that of a charging rhinoceros. Even without their sharp claws and teeth, they could shatter an enemy's entire skeleton. The seawater was churned by their long tails, and in the midst of the turbulent currents, Sha De麻衣's slender body stood like a slender bamboo in a raging storm. She drew her arms through the air, and golden flames ignited on the blades, transforming into a pair of long swords over ten feet long. In her left hand was the Ame-no-Habakiri, and in her right, the Futsu-no-Mitama. She spun, and the two divine-level weapons stirred up transparent vortices in the seawater.

Lu Mingfei felt the deep-sea vessel vibrating as if tons of ink were being poured onto its exterior, spreading like a black cloud that enveloped the 'Driest'.

The corpse guards, sliced in half by the lazy waist, emitted inaudible howls as they swirled frantically around the 'Driest', seeking new opportunities to attack. Sha De麻衣 did not pursue them; she stood on her tiptoes on top of the deep-sea vessel, gently shaking off the black blood from her double blades, her long hair dancing like flowing clouds.

"The corpse guards are fine, but if that huge creature wakes up, it'll be a big problem." Lu Mingze said, "It's a pure-blood dragon with a title, an extremely superior bloodline. Its bones were used in an alchemical process to create the corpse guards, and its skeleton was used to lay the foundation for this city. You guys have really stirred up big trouble this time. You shouldn't have come here. Although countless people throughout history have wanted to come here to seize something, no one has dared to because this is a forbidden land, not meant for the living to enter. So, in the end, they set a huge trap, threw you guys in, and opened the forbidden door, which always requires a blood sacrifice."

"Who's behind all this, trying to harm us?" Lu Mingfei widened his eyes. Although the mission was arranged by Angres, Lu Mingfei didn't believe that Angres had sent them here to die, even though he was an old eccentric, he still had principles.

"This piece of intelligence will cost you a quarter of your life." Lu Mingze smiled.

"Get lost!"

"Now, let's talk seriously. Do you want to make a deal or not? You're at the end of your rope here. Relying on Chu Zihang, you won't be able to get close to the nuclear power cabin. But if you say the word, I'll immediately kill all these corpse guards! I'll beat that titled creature so badly it won't be able to find its own teeth! Two hours later, you'll be dining on Michelin three-star

Japanese cuisine and drinking top-shelf sake at the Peninsula Hotel in Tokyo, with a gorgeous geisha's thighs to rest your head on!" Lu Mingze patted his chest.

Lu Mingfei stared into Lu Mingze's eyes, unconsciously backing away until he bumped into the dashboard.

He was unwilling. There was always a shadow in his heart, and every time he made a deal with Lu Mingze, that shadow grew larger, as if it wanted to devour him. Deep down, someone seemed to be constantly shouting at him, telling him to stop, that he couldn't make any more deals, that if he kept going, he would lose something even more important than his life! But it was truly laughable to think about it; he was so poor that he only had credit card debt left, and yet he still felt there was something more important than his life. He just didn't want to; he was afraid, even more so than he was of the corpse guards and hornworms.

The two brothers locked eyes, and the air seemed to freeze, an uncomfortable silence filling the space between them.

"Don't look at me like that, it makes me feel quite embarrassed, as if I'm the bad guy here." In the end, Lu Mingze relented, trying to appease Lu Mingfei, "I'm really not a bad person, I'm a devil, and devils are supposed to tempt customers to sell their souls. If I spent my days fundraising for Hope Project or helping out in disaster relief in Africa, would I still be a devil? The other devils would laugh at me and call me a spineless wonder. You know me, I offer fair prices and get the job done. Just give the word, big brother, and I'll immediately wipe out all these corpse guards! I'll beat that titled creature so badly it won't be able to find its own teeth! Two hours later, you'll be dining on Michelin three-star Japanese cuisine and drinking top-shelf sake at the Peninsula Hotel in Tokyo, with a gorgeous geisha's thighs to rest your head on!"

"I don't want to sink Japan," Lu Mingfei said wearily, sitting down in the chair, "I just want..."

He was at a loss for words. Since he was young, he had never really known what he wanted. He had already sold half of his life to Lu Mingze, and with that, he could have bought enough money to purchase a country or at least clear his credit card debt, yet here he was, still penniless... He had used his life to save the world, but the problem was that he didn't really want to save the world. Saving the world had nothing to do with him; he only had small, selfish desires, like wanting to visit the legendary Akihabara, see pretty girls in miniskirts and black silk stockings, and secretly browse AV stores to experience the feeling of being surrounded by chests and thighs... Most of all, he wanted Nono to like him.

"I was just joking. Big brother, you're a good person, you wouldn't want to sink Japan. A sunken Japan would just be an underwater ruin, not fun at all. A floating Japan is much more interesting; the night sky in Shinjuku will always be illuminated by neon lights, monkeys will bathe in the hot springs of Hokkaido, there will be girls in maid outfits and black silk stockings in Akihabara, and when the cherry blossoms fall, if you ride the Shinkansen, the petals will scatter along the long mountain paths, and the train will rush through the blossoms..." Lu Mingze's eyes

sparkled, as if he too was filled with anticipation for those beautiful things, "That's the real Japan, big brother, you like things that are alive, you wouldn't let me sink it."

"Of course, what's the point of dead things?" Lu Mingfei said.

"But people don't truly die when they stop breathing. There's a saying that people die three times: the first is when they stop breathing, biologically they are dead; the second is when they are buried, when people come to their funeral and reminisce about their life, and in society, they are dead, no longer occupying a place; the third is when the last person who remembers them forgets, and that's when they truly die." Lu Mingze said softly.

"What are you trying to say?" Lu Mingfei's heart trembled.

"Big brother, have you ever thought about it? If you die here, who will remember you? At your funeral, Chu Zihang's mother will cry herself unconscious, the Gatuso family will come out in full force to fight Angres, but what about you? Are you expecting your uncle and aunt to mourn for you? Or that chubby little cousin of yours? Damn him!" Lu Mingze coldly laughed, "Every time I think about him sharing my name, I want to erase him from this world."

Lu Mingfei believed he was capable of doing it. When the little devil was unhappy, his smile was adorable yet sinister, his teeth grinding slowly, and at times like these, he was capable of anything.

"Oh, and Nono, will she cry for you? No, she'll be shedding her tears at Caesar's gravestone. Remember the saying from our middle school textbook, 'There are those who are alive, yet dead; and those who are dead, yet alive.' That saying is true. Caesar will live on in Nono's heart, but what about you? You'll be forgotten soon enough, and eventually, all that will remain is your name on the Martyr's List of the Secret Party. On your memorial day, those hot-bodied babes will still throw drunken parties, kissing and flirting with handsome guys, not thinking of it as a special day that requires mourning."

Lu Mingfei's heart ached quietly.

"So, a person like you has to keep living. Because only by living can you take revenge on this world that ignores you." Lu Mingze leaned close to Lu Mingfei's ear, "One day, you'll make this world remember you. It's better to be hated and remembered than to be forgotten without a trace, isn't that a famous quote?"

"I don't want to take revenge on anyone! Go to hell!" Lu Mingfei shouted.

"Ah! My Shakespearean acting skills, if I had used them to preach to a monk, he would have disrobed and returned to the secular world by now. But with you, big brother, I used all that sincere emotion, and all you can say is 'Go to hell, devil'?" Lu Mingze sighed, "It's really frustrating, let's go out and get some fresh air."

He pushed open the cabin door, which was over 10 centimeters thick! Lu Mingfei rubbed his eyes, and to his surprise, it was a clear and sunny day outside, with no corpse guards, no seawater, and not even a hint of the ever-present salty taste since they had set out to sea. The 'Driest' stood steadily in a stone dock, but the ancient city was still there, as were the towering spires. He followed Lu Mingze out of the cockpit, walking on the wide stone-paved avenue, with canals on both sides and those temple-like massive buildings, their roofs bristling with iron thorns, and hundreds of meters of iron chains hanging from them, from which hung millions of bells.

A cool breeze blew through the silent ancient city, and the millions of bells sang a profound, grand song in the wind. Lu Mingze, with his hands behind his head, walked in front, breathing in the fresh air, and Lu Mingfei felt like they were traveling in a castle of sleeping beauties.

But this was Takamagahara, wasn't it? When this ancient city stood on the ground, was it always this peaceful and serene?

"Hey! The nuclear power cabin!" Lu Mingze pointed ahead.

"That's way too abrupt, friend! Even in fantasy and time-travel stories, there should be some limits!" Lu Mingfei exclaimed.

But indeed, in the center of the road ahead, there was the nuclear power cabin, half-buried in the ground and half-exposed, just like when Sun Wukong dived into the East China Sea Dragon Palace and saw the needle at the bottom of the sea. And by the roadside, there sat two expressionless men—Chu Zihang and Caesar... holding hands.

"What's with the hand-holding?" Lu Mingfei couldn't help but quip, even though the scene and atmosphere were not suitable for jokes.

"Can't help it if they're close," Lu Mingze shrugged.

Caesar and Chu Zihang seemed completely oblivious to their presence. They weren't stiff like puppets; on the contrary, they exuded intimacy and affection, something that wouldn't have happened in the real world even if they had been handcuffed together.

"Big brother, you really don't want to make a deal? Think about it, if these two die, you'll instantly become the number one in Cassel College. The wedding will obviously be called off, and while Nono is heartbroken, you can step in and comfort her, showing her that she's not alone without Caesar. When the time is right, I'll get you some colorless and tasteless aphrodisiacs, and you can put them in her drink! Have you looked at the photo album I gave you? After that, you won't need to look at photos anymore; you can see the real thing! Countless ancient playboys have proven that a couple that sleeps together forms a bond that's not easily broken!"

"Bullshit! What playboys? They're just horny devils!"

"Horny devils are still people!" Lu Mingze clapped, "I think this plan is solid. Let's just do it!"

He actually drew Caesar's Desert Eagle from his waist and aimed it at Caesar's forehead. "Big brother, just say the word, and I'll pull the trigger. Your annoying wedding will be canceled instantly!"

"Put the gun down!" Lu Mingfei shouted in alarm, "Put it down!"

"How about this, big brother? Your goal is to win Nono's heart, and I can help you with that by getting rid of Caesar. As for seducing her, I can't guarantee success... I won't even charge you for this. This shot is on the house!" Lu Mingze pulled the trigger.

Lu Mingfei covered his ears and screamed. Caesar's face was drenched in a thick, sticky red liquid. Lu Mingze smiled and brought the gun to his mouth, licking it, "Delicious tomato sauce, big brother, do you have any fries?"

Only then did Lu Mingfei realize that there was no bullet hole in Caesar's forehead. The Desert Eagle in Lu Mingze's hand was just a toy. If it had been the real Desert Eagle, at such close range, Caesar's head would have been blown off.

Lu Mingze actually took out a bag of fries. He fired two shots into the paper bag, squeezing out two dollops of tomato sauce, and handed the bag to Lu Mingfei, "Just joking, don't take it seriously. Spray some of this on his face to give big brother some satisfaction."

Lu Mingfei, still shaken, took a fry and bit into it. The fry tasted freshly cooked, sweet, and crispy.

He sighed, "You really know how to have fun, bro..."

"Hey, hey, hey, hey, hey, hey!" He didn't even finish this sentence when the hairs on his sweat stood up again.

Lu Mingze was wrapping a wire around Caesar's neck, stepping on the back of his neck, and pulling hard, "I can't do something as violent as shooting, so strangling is a more elegant way."

Lu Mingfei flew and tried to knock Lu Mingze down, but he fell to the ground. As soon as he flew, the wire in Lu Mingze's hand broke. Lu Mingze sighed regretfully, threw away the wire, and paced back and forth, pretending to be deep in thought, "The tool is not handy. Is today not a good day to kill?"

"Can you stop playing around? I'm not that close to Caesar. What does his wedding have to do with me? I'm just a little upset and sad. I'm actually a good person. Maybe I'll have a foreign romance in Japan this time." Lu Mingfei said, "Can you leave me alone, friend?"

"One day, you'll want to kill him." Lu Mingze tilted his head and looked at Lu Mingfei, "When you truly understand what you want, when you realize that you have nothing in this world... or when you truly understand the beauty of power."

He squatted down and examined Caesar's eyes, "Think about what this guy is dreaming about in reality. What kind of dream? Using this hand to slowly unzip Nono's wedding dress? Looking at her smooth back and exposed skin, the color of her underwear..."

He closed his eyes as if in meditation, "Black, yes, this guy would imagine black underwear... As the zipper goes down, it would reveal her beautiful waistline. His bride lies on the moonlit bed, and the shadows of the trees fall on her beautiful back, like vine tattoos. His hand keeps going down..."

"Enough! Enough!" Lu Mingfei's face was difficult to look at, and he covered his ears, trying not to listen, but Lu Mingze's voice penetrated everything and echoed in his mind.

"Don't you want to cut off this hand and replace it with your own? Don't you want to hold the girl you love with your own hands? Possession means holding something tightly in your hands, something that others can't take away, right?" Lu Mingze's small face was slightly distorted, with a faint, sinister smile. His speech was rapid like a storm, not giving Lu Mingfei a moment to breathe... This was his true face. He was a devil, with flames of violence and desire burning in his heart. He never spoke in the name of love and loyalty. He only believed in fire and the sword.

"Shut up, you bastard!" Lu Mingfei suddenly roared.

Lu Mingze was stunned. He even seemed a little scared, blinking and backing away. Lu Mingfei sat on the ground for a few seconds, then tiredly got up and retreated, "Can you stop being so explicit? You're disgusting."

"Where in this world is there a clean devil?" Lu Mingze said softly.

"I don't want to make a deal with you. I don't have the courage. I'm scared." Lu Mingfei said.

"I know." Lu Mingze nodded.

"Sometimes I feel that compared to your deals, death is not so scary. I don't know why I feel this way, but I'm really scared of making deals with you. I just want to stay away from you." Lu Mingfei said, "Sometimes I think you're pretty good, with your free services and all, but I'm really scared... Not of you, but of your deals."

"So, you're going to refuse this time?"

"Just leave. Gen Zhisheng is still trying to save us. Maybe by the time I get back to reality, I'll hear the safety rope ringing, and we'll be pulled back to the surface." Lu Mingfei said, "You don't really understand me... I want Nono to be happy, I like her, and I'm indeed afraid to think about her marrying Caesar. But I don't feel that Caesar took something away from me. Nono was never mine to begin with. I'm just afraid to think about how lonely I'll be when they're so happy. She can't become a prisoner. If she's willing to be a prisoner and live in my cage, then she's not the Nono I like anymore."

Lu Mingze was silent for a long time, then sighed softly, "So, this deal is really going to fall through?"

"Just leave. Don't pretend to be sentimental. You're a devil, and you don't understand these things." Lu Mingfei waved his hand, "Next time you come to find me, don't give me a speech. Let's save time and only meet when there's business."

A piece of paper was handed to Lu Mingfei.

"I'm not crying. Why are you giving me a tissue?" Lu Mingfei grumbled.

"The password to start the nuclear reactor." Lu Mingze said indifferently, "Nono doesn't like to celebrate her birthday because she feels that every time she does, she gets a year older. So, she always avoids that day and throws a party with her friends the day before her birthday. Caesar set the password not on Nono's real birthday, but on the day they throw the party every year. British style, with the day first, followed by the month and year."

The paper handed to Lu Mingfei was a greeting card. Lu Mingfei was surprised to open it and saw a handwritten password inside, along with beautiful small print, "An early birthday gift, to my dear brother, Lu Mingfei." Looking at the cover of the greeting card, there were two boys running in the rain with lotus leaves as umbrellas. Lu Mingfei sat dumbfounded, looking at Lu Mingze. This greeting card seemed to have been prepared in advance, so Lu Mingze never intended to make a deal with him.

"It's still a few months until my birthday..."

"There's no way, and it's not a festival or holiday, so I can't say we're having a customer appreciation event. Just take it as a birthday present." Lu Mingze sighed, "Brother, I know you won't make a deal with me. This is not your style. You never make deals with me to save yourself. The first time was for Nono, the second time for Chu Zihang... You wouldn't make a deal with me to save your life, I knew that a long time ago. So, forcing you is useless. If there comes a day when you're willing to make a deal with me for yourself,

our contract will take effect immediately, and everything you have will belong to me."

"Am I that self-sacrificing?" Lu Mingfei grumbled, "Then don't call me brother anymore. Just call me Lei Feng."

"How can Lei Feng compare to you? You're Prometheus, the fire-stealer." Lu Mingze said, "I have to go catch my train. Text me if you need anything."

"Hey, hey... Will inputting the password in my illusion work?" Lu Mingfei asked embarrassedly. After receiving such a big gift from the little devil, he felt a little guilty. If he had known, he wouldn't have called him a bastard.

"You can input it anywhere, even on your phone's keyboard." Lu Mingze shrugged, "You can think of this password as a spirit tongue. If you want to use it, it will take effect. So, I'll be going."

"Okay, goodbye." Lu Mingfei said.

"Goodbye." After saying this, Lu Mingze suddenly took out the Desert Eagle and fired seven or eight shots of tomato sauce at Caesar and Chu Zihang's faces, then ran off laughing.

Lu Mingfei sat up straight. He was still in the cockpit, with the corpse guards swirling around the 'Driest', splattering black blood in the seawater. Lu Mingfei held a small birthday card in his hand.

The Ghost-tooth Hornworms had already surrounded Caesar and Chu Zihang's Zeppelin gear, biting furiously. Fortunately, the toughness of the titanium-magnesium alloy far exceeded that of bronze and other materials, so it was quite challenging for these little creatures to bite through. Lu Mingfei rushed to his discarded combat suit and took out his phone to input the password, directly entering it as a phone number. Chu Zihang was exhausted, and he was less than 5 meters away from the nuclear power cabin, but his metal prosthesis had broken, and he couldn't push away the heavy pile of lung snails.

After entering the password, Lu Mingfei resolutely pressed the dial button.

A spherical figure suddenly stood up. It was Caesar, who had been unconscious all this time! His pupils burned with a bright light, and he used his metal prosthesis to crush the hornworms attached to his body, clearing a path through the lung snails with the force of a jackhammer. Caesar stepped over Chu Zihang and approached the nuclear power cabin. Lu Mingfei was stunned. Only then did he understand Lu Mingze's intention. The password Lu Mingze gave him was not for the nuclear power cabin but a password that could make his wishes come true. In the moment he entered the password, destiny, transcending all rules, began to move according to Lu Mingfei's wishes. In the face of this password, all laws were overturned, and everyone and everything revolved around Lu Mingfei's desire. Caesar, who stood up again, did not do so out of his own will but to fulfill Lu Mingfei's wish!

Caesar used his pincer-like prosthesis to tear off the armor covering the circuit board, revealing the LCD screen underneath, which glowed faintly. This equipment had withstood the test of the extreme high temperature of over 200 degrees in the trench, proving that the Equipment Department could make good stuff when they put their minds to it.

Caesar was a bit dazed and slowly entered the password, confirming it once successfully. The nuclear power cabin reignited, the cadmium rods recovered neutrons, and this time, it would not enter safe mode. It had truly become a nuclear bomb. Caesar turned and grabbed Chu Zihang, who was struggling in the pile of lung snails, and removed the lead weights from the Zeppelin gear. With reduced weight, they immediately rose, along with the hornworms biting onto the gear. Half a minute later, Lu Mingfei heard the sound of water being pumped into and drained from the neighboring pressurized cabin. Then, when the pressure in the pressurized cabin returned to the same level as the cockpit, Lu Mingfei eagerly opened the pressure door.

Chu Zihang was pulling the unconscious Caesar out of the Zeppelin gear. The hornworms, smelling the organic matter, pounced and bit onto Caesar, wriggling their tails as they tried to drill into Caesar's chest cavity.

"What the hell are these fish!" Lu Mingfei's scalp tingled.

Chu Zihang drew his long sword and used the tip to pick off the hornworms' teeth, throwing them aside. He then stomped on one, killing it. These creatures were not to be feared when there were only a few of them, but killing them would still require some effort. After a few seconds of biting, Caesar's back had a dent, and a piece of flesh had been torn off. Lu Mingfei took a fire extinguisher from the cockpit and sprayed it at the two sets of Zeppelin gear, causing the hornworms to fall off. These things could remain active out of the water, but they still needed oxygen. The carbon dioxide foam from the fire extinguisher was deadly to them.

"He still has a pulse, so he should be fine." Chu Zihang pounded Caesar's chest and listened, "He just exerted too much strength and passed out from exhaustion."

"Quickly notify Xumizuo to start the recovery! Immediately! Tell them the nuclear power cabin ignition was successful." After saying this, Chu Zihang also collapsed on the ground, "I'll take a few breaths and then go find you."

Sha De麻衣 knelt on top of the deep-sea vessel, with traces of blood seeping from her scales. The Ame-no-Habakiri and Futsu-no-Mitama hovered like wings, guarding the 'Driest'.

A single corpse guard couldn't challenge her, but a group of them could swarm and overwhelm even an aircraft carrier task force. They surrounded Sha De麻衣 like a pack of wolves, constantly wearing down her stamina, waiting for her to truly tire out. At the moment, she had not yet reached the point of true exhaustion, and her movements still carried a chilling killing intent. The corpse guards continued to hover, but Sha De麻衣 could feel that her situation was

not due to physical exhaustion but the activation of her bloodline, which was being eroded by the drug.

Normally, this drug could sustain her for four hours, and within those four hours, her bloodline would not go out of control. But here, 8600 meters deep in the sea, as she continuously exerted her strength to fight the corpse guards, she had exceeded her limits, and the bloodthirsty gene in her bloodline was stirring.

At this moment, the corpse guards suddenly began to retreat, and Sha De麻衣 felt the rise of high-temperature water currents beneath her. The base of Takamagahara ruins groaned as if in its death throes.

A wall of fire rose slowly from the side of the 'Driest', and thunder roared in the depths of the trench. The river of lava erupted! Hundreds of millions of tons of lava poured out from the fissure! The lava was golden-red when it first emerged, gradually solidifying and turning black. It took about half a kilometer to fully solidify, forming a black wall. The seawater nearby instantly vaporized, as if a hundred thousand thunderbolts were exploding continuously on the seabed. The 'Driest' and the corpse guards were only a few hundred meters away from the wall of lava, and below them, molten lava was gushing out. Above, newly solidified volcanic rocks were already falling. So, the corpse guards abandoned their attack and resumed their escape, fearing the impending collapse of the lava wall. In the face of such a massive disaster, even these creatures were awed, and it was clear that when the lava wall collapsed, there would be no survivors.

From the beginning, they were not fleeing out of fear of the nuclear power cabin but because they sensed the impending eruption of the undersea volcano.

Sha De麻衣 tied herself to the surface of the deep-sea vessel with straps, patting it, "Sister can only help you to this point... The rest depends on your luck." She said with lip language.

"It's too late to call for Xumizuo now. We have to accelerate and leave. You control the rudder and stabilizers." Chu Zihang stumbled into the cockpit, "The nuclear power cabin is about to explode. We must get beyond the safe distance!"

"But we don't have any power! We've already discarded the nuclear power cabin! The lithium batteries alone won't be enough!" Lu Mingfei exclaimed.

"I'm also an engine." Chu Zihang tied himself securely to the seat.

His golden eyes burned, and the cockpit walls glowed golden. Waves of heat rippled through the air.

The Lord's Flame erupted! A black flame vortex appeared in the seawater below the deep-sea vessel, the most condensed form of the Lord's Flame, with internal temperatures reaching

thousands of degrees but without any heat leaking out. The black vortex rotated slowly in the seawater for a second before collapsing, releasing the heat, and instantly vaporizing a massive volume of seawater. The steam flow and flames intertwined and spiraled in the deep sea, roaring. Lu Mingfei had seen Chu Zihang release the Lord's Flame before, and when combined with the Wind King's Eye, it created a fire tornado. Now, Chu Zihang could create a fire tornado on his own, and Lu Mingfei wondered if he had been practicing.

The Lord's Flame generated a massive amount of steam, and under the high pressure of the steam explosion, the 'Driest' shot upward. Lu Mingfei felt like his neck would be twisted off by the acceleration, but he still managed to turn his head and look at Chu Zihang, who sat calmly with his face seemingly covered by a golden mask.

In the Kill-embryo Senior Brother's heart, was Xiaomi still alive? She always stood behind him, silent, and whenever he released the Lord's Flame, she would release the Wind King's Eye to assist him. When he flipped through magazines in a cafe, Xiaomi sat across from him. When he visited the aquarium to see the white whale, Xiaomi lay on top of the tank, making faces at the whale. Chu Zihang had been visiting the aquarium more and more often, spending hours alone, slowly eating a hamburger while watching the white whale. Lu Mingfei once thought that Chu Zihang's mental state was concerning, becoming more and more like a monk. At this rate, Cassel College would soon open a separate Buddhist department for him.

But now, Lu Mingfei felt a bit jealous of this dead monk. He felt that Chu Zihang was actually quite happy. Although Xiaomi was just a virtual character, she belonged entirely to Chu Zihang, to the point where Ye Mengjad had mockingly told him, "She's your girl." Chu Zihang would never be able to be with her, but he would also never lose her. As for Nono, she was alive and kicking, but Lu Mingfei couldn't have her. He was Nono's friend, sharing her friendship with many others. But some things couldn't be shared. One could share breakfast bread, afternoon tea, the evening sky and the sound of cicadas, the world and the sunshine, and even a good brother's underwear, but some things were not meant to be shared.

At this moment, the heavy and scorching rock wall began to collapse, and giant volcanic rocks fell from half a kilometer above, crashing onto the 'Driest'. Normally, volcanic rocks contained a lot of air bubbles, making them the only rocks lighter than water. But the volcanic rocks here were different, as the extreme high pressure prevented the formation of air bubbles. Lu Mingfei looked up through the observation port and saw a Tiananmen-sized black boulder approaching, blocking his entire field of view.

The 'Driest' and the boulder brushed past each other and continued to ascend.

Lu Mingfei stared at the screen, which showed the external camera's view of Takamagahara. This scene was solemn and majestic. Takamagahara slid along the sloping seabed towards the river of lava. The final buildings gradually tilted and collapsed, and the giant bells rolled in the streets and alleys of the city, as if, at this moment, they were playing a sad song, like a desperate bird's cry. Mountain-like volcanic rocks fell from the sky, and the lava pouring from the

fissures washed over the ruins, flowing through the streets and converging into small rivers. It was as if the city was being cleansed by the flames. As the fissures widened, more and more of the ground was swallowed by the lava river, and some broken land masses disappeared forever into the lava river. Soon, with the explosion of the nuclear power cabin, Takamagahara would be forever erased from the world.

Lenin, along with the giant embryo, slid along the sloping seabed, crashing into countless buildings and rolling into the lava. The embryo didn't struggle, and the Lenin floated in the lava for a moment before slowly sinking. A broken metal tower fell on it, crushing its bridge. The high temperature burned away the fleshy layer covering the Lenin, exposing the hard alloy red star at its bow, which was the last to sink. At this moment, the 'Driest' had already moved away from the trench, and the bright lava river in their field of vision gradually dimmed.

"Is it dead?" Lu Mingfei asked.

"It's a pity we couldn't find its bones, and we don't know which first-generation species it was." Chu Zihang said softly, "Quick! Call Xumizuo, the Lord's Flame can only be used to temporarily accelerate. Tell them to activate the safety rope!"

The sea was ablaze, and the Snake Branch family had set fire to a 10,000-ton cruise ship, creating a thick layer of oil on the sea surface before igniting it. The corpse guards jumped in the burning sea, their bodies illuminated by the flames. Although the fire was not instantly lethal to them, it still affected them. The Fire Group had been completely wiped out, and the corpse guards' primary target was now the Fire Group's patrol boats. Without effective escape measures, the sailors would be doomed if they didn't grab the life ropes thrown down by the Wind Group. Several lifeboats had already been shredded by the corpse guards, which devoured the flesh and blood voraciously, despite their inability to digest it. However, the Wind Group's life ropes gave the corpse guards an opportunity to attack, and four helicopters had already crashed due to the corpse guards climbing the ropes.

The remaining helicopters were also useless, as they could only carry a limited amount of ammunition. The Wind Group began to retreat from the battlefield.

The Lin Group was still holding their ground, as the corpse guards were eager to breach the defense line of the Xumi Seat held by the Mountain Group. Three of the six floating platforms had already sunk, and the other two were occupied by the corpse guards, leaving only the one where Gen Zhisheng and the Yanliu Research Institute were located. The corpse guards had invaded the Xumi Seat through the docks, and Gen Zhisheng personally commanded the defense. Surprisingly, the seemingly useless hunting rifles and submachine guns were quite effective in this situation, and Crow and Yaksha guarded Gen Zhisheng's back. Yaksha continuously fired the hunting rifle, blasting the brains out of approaching corpse guards, while Crow fired his submachine gun and Sakura slashed with her sword. Gen Zhisheng had discarded his sniper rifle and now wielded the Spider Cutter, which was more useful in close-quarters combat within the corridors. The corpse guards' strength and speed even

surpassed the evolved Sakura, but fortunately, they lacked the ability to adapt. They often charged at Gen Zhisheng with incredible speed, only to be slashed by his blade.

"The seventh wave is coming!" Miyamoto Shigeo shouted in the communication channel.

How many more waves were there? Gen Zhisheng didn't know, but he had to hold his ground and defend the entrance to the Yanliu Research Institute. If the battlefield command center was destroyed, their mission would fail.

A corpse guard suddenly fell from the top of the corridor, and in an instant, it used its sharp claws to tear off a person's skull. Yaksha pounced and fired the hunting rifle into the corpse guard's eye socket, blowing its brains out.

"Come on, baby! Come on, baby! You are beautiful, you are lovely!" Yaksha continued to fire at the corpse guard's skull while singing strange English songs.

Gen Zhisheng had long known that this guy was a pervert, but at this moment, only a pervert like him could stand firm on this bloody battlefield.

"If I die here, at least I would have fulfilled my responsibility to the family. I hope Noda and that guy really have some true feelings." Gen Zhisheng thought to himself.

"Call Xumizuo! Call Xumizuo! The nuclear power cabin has ignited! Pull us out! Pull us out!" Lu Mingfei's voice suddenly sounded in their headphones.

"What did you say? Say that again?" Gen Zhisheng hadn't received any communication from the deep sea for a long time, and he thought the 'Driest' was already lost.

"I'm saying we did it! Also... save us! Ah!" Lu Mingfei shouted.

"Those bastards actually did it!" Gen Zhisheng exclaimed.

Sakura looked at him in surprise, as she had never seen Gen Zhisheng lose his composure like this.

"Tell me what to do, I'll go!" Gen Zhisheng jumped towards the top engineering elevator.

"Young Master, the motor of the capstan has been damaged by the corpse guards, and we can't pull them out of the sea." Miyamoto Shigeo said.

"Damaged? How bad is the damage? Can it be fixed?" Gen Zhisheng paused.

"The starting wheel of the motor is broken, and it can't be started. We've tried sending people to fix the starting wheel, but the top of the Xumi Seat is full of corpse guards, and the teams we've sent have all been killed."

"Tell me what to do, I'll go!" Gen Zhisheng said.

"Young Master, you can't go there! It's full of corpse guards." Miyamoto Shigeo exclaimed.

"That's exactly why I have to go." Gen Zhisheng didn't finish his sentence when Crow and Yaksha jumped in as well, "What are you two doing here?"

"A subordinate is one with the Young Master, and where the Young Master goes, we must follow." Crow wiped the sweat from his head, "But I'm not sure I can handle it myself if there are too many corpse guards."

"I am coming, oh I am coming, baby, baby, go." Yaksha was still humming his strange English song, with his Japanese-accented English.

"If we make it out alive, I'll sign you up for an English class so that I don't have to suffer through your terrible English singing." Gen Zhisheng sighed.

"First, we need to manually rotate the capstan to reach a certain initial speed. The motor itself is not broken, just the starting wheel. Once we reach a certain initial speed, the motor can output normal torque to pull up the 'Driest'." Miyamoto Shigeo explained, "But to reach that initial speed, we need to manually turn the capstan, which will require about six people. I'll send another six-person team up from here."

The Japanese archipelago was trembling, and the seismic waves from the undersea earthquake had reached the land. Giant waves crashed on the sea, and the Xumi Seat swayed like a small boat in the storm. The howling wind and pouring rain battered the top platform of the Xumi Seat. As soon as Crow and Yaksha stepped out of the elevator, they started firing wildly, and everywhere they looked, there were corpse guards. The steel-blue bodies of the corpse guards appeared sinister in the firelight, some biting and devouring corpses, others coiling like snakes high above. Every step Gen Zhisheng took, he stepped on blood.

"The earthquake bureau has just issued an earthquake and tsunami warning. The tsunami will arrive in seven minutes." Miyamoto Shigeo said in the headset, "The Xumi Seat can hold out for no more than 15 minutes. The Yanliu Research Institute is preparing to evacuate, so please hurry, Young Master."

"Where's your six-person team? I can't find them!"

"Over there, they look quite tasty." Yaksha pointed to six white-clad corpses near the capstan, with the steel-blue corpse guards coiled around them.

"Damn! How can we turn this thing with so few people?" Crow looked up at the huge capstan, which had a diameter of more than two meters and was wrapped with thumb-thick metal cables.

"I have the strength of two people, and so does Crow. Can you handle the weight of two people, Crow?" Gen Zhisheng gripped the manual wheel.

The manual wheel was made of iron, with a diameter of about one meter, cold and damp, and the surface was wrapped with thumb-thick ropes.

"We can try, but if the three of us turn the wheel, who will guard our backs?" Crow asked.

"I have the strength of two people in one hand, and I'll shoot with the other." Yaksha tore off his shirt.

Gen Zhisheng untied his necktie and wrapped it around his hand, gripping the turning wheel, "I'll say one, two, three, and we'll push together."

The turning wheel locked, and the safety hook on the top of the 'Driest' automatically released. Gen Zhisheng exerted force on the manual wheel, and the huge capstan slowly began to turn. Bright sparks flew out to several meters away, and the metal cables made a teeth-grinding sound as they tightened, no less taut than a guitar string. The Xumi Seat and the 'Driest' were like a mother and a fetus, and the metal cable was the umbilical cord connecting them. If the umbilical cord broke, the fetus would die. Gen Zhisheng's arms strained, and his muscles contracted as if they were being twisted like a rope. He braked with a clench and release motion, and even through the silk necktie, he could feel the heat from the turning wheel, as if it were a red-hot branding iron. The howling wind and pouring rain battered his body, and the high temperature of his body evaporated the rainwater. Crow and Yaksha fired their guns to repel the approaching corpse guards.

"Young Master." Sakura said softly behind Gen Zhisheng.

"Great! Sakura, you guard our backs!" Gen Zhisheng exclaimed in surprise.

"Young Master, give up. We're out of time."

"What do you mean? The tsunami is still seven minutes away." Gen Zhisheng was taken aback.

"We just received news that after the Fire Group was annihilated, the corpse guards are trying to breach the defense line of the Lin Group. And according to the sonar scan, there's an eighth wave of corpse guards following the 'Driest', and the total number of this eighth wave is the same as the previous seven waves combined." Sakura said softly, "This is no longer a situation that can be resolved by conventional means. If the eighth wave of corpse guards surfaces, we

won't be able to control the battlefield. The only option is to use Miss Erii's power to destroy them before they reach the surface. But that would inevitably destroy the 'Driest' as well."

Gen Zhisheng froze.

"Mr. Masamune is on the phone." Sakura handed Gen Zhisheng her phone.

"Chishi, I know this is a difficult decision." Tachibana Masamune's voice was low and deep, "But a man's path is always difficult. Sacrificing those three would be unfortunate, as they barely escaped from a desperate situation. But if we don't make a decision now, everyone will die, and the corpse guards will invade Japan, killing people in the streets of Tokyo. We are close to success, and now we just need to be ruthless. You are the leader, and you should understand. Erii is almost here, and I've sent a helicopter to pick you up."

Gen Zhisheng turned to look at the sea, where a small boat was approaching through the spotlight, with Erii standing at the bow. Her long, crimson hair was tousled by the sea breeze. The waves were towering, but her small boat sailed calmly. Nearby corpse guards pounced on the small boat, but Erii casually swung her cherry-red long sword, effortlessly slicing through them. This moment, she resembled an ancient sword saint, but her sword technique was very immature, no better than a little girl waving a pencil knife. However, her casual slashes contained an absolute will to cut, and she was not so much cutting the corpse guards with her sword as issuing commands to slice them apart.

The spirit tongue, Judgment, was a legendary power that no one had ever seen before. The corpse guards gathered around the small boat, and Erii's slashes became faster and faster, her sword seemingly weightless and without any technique. She was simply issuing death commands, and the corpse guards sensed the aura of death, gradually backing away. Erii didn't pursue them, and her actions were as casual as if she were playing a fighting game, although the game was extremely bloody. She wiped the blood from her sword on the sea, rolled up her sleeves, and exposed her delicate wrists, extending her hand to touch the sea. In an instant, the sea calmed, and everything fell silent. A domain emerged from Erii, suppressing everything within it.

Erii clapped her hands in a rhythmic manner, and a corner of the dark clouds above collapsed, revealing the serene moonlight. The moonlight reflected on the sea, creating a silvery sheen, and the temperature of the sea began to drop. A few minutes later, centered on the small boat, the sea froze, forming a giant ice sheet that spread in all directions. As the tsunami arrived, the towering waves crumbled at the edge of the ice field. Everywhere was pitch-black, except for a patch of moonlight on the silvery sea.

The helicopter hovered above, its spotlight illuminating the small boat and Erii. The massive rotor blades stirred up a storm, but the sea beneath remained absolutely calm. The tsunami couldn't breach the field, and the helicopter would have its rotor blades snapped if it dared to leave Erii's domain.

Gen Zhisheng looked down at Erii, at this battlefield where countless lives had been lost, and silently smoked the cigar that Caesar had given him on their first meeting. He suddenly felt a sense of nostalgia... for those crazy days with the three lunatics.

Erii stood up, and the sea rose with her. It was an ice mountain, narrower at the top and smooth as a mirror.

A faint blue light flowed on the surface of the ice mountain, within which countless corpse guards were frozen. Below, sharp ice ridges grew rapidly. Erii stood in the air, surrounded by towering ice cliffs, and she silently mouthed something, issuing commands that no one could understand.

"Amazing!" Crow and Yaksha exclaimed.

"That's the Tsukuyomi power." Sakura said softly.

Suddenly, the ice mountain, with Erii on it, sank, causing towering waves to crash into the sky. The ice mountain was like a giant ice spear, piercing the sea and plunging into the abyss, carrying an absolute will to cut and sever.

The 'Driest' stopped ascending and was surrounded by corpse guards.

A colossal creature appeared in the observation window, its black body swaying in the water. It was the creature that had struggled in the fissure, the pure-blood dragon crafted into a corpse guard, which had finally escaped from the seabed. Its golden pupils were like giant candles, and its rotting body was adorned with ancient armor, layer upon layer connected by bronze chains. Its ribcage was empty, and within swam a swarm of Ghost-tooth Hornworms! This creature's body served as a nest for the hornworms. As if a thousand lamps had been lit at once, the hornworms' eyes shone with a crystalline glow.

"Now, do you still want to recite poetry?" Chu Zihang asked.

"Spare my life, hero!" Lu Mingfei cried.

At a depth of about 300 meters, when the momentum from the nuclear blast's shockwave dissipated, they could no longer accelerate.

Chu Zihang might be able to release the Lord's Flame again, but the deep-sea vessel couldn't withstand the impact. The outer shell was making terrifying cracking sounds, and the resin windows were deforming at a visible rate. The Lord's Flame and the nuclear blast shockwave had dealt irreparable damage to the vessel's outer shell, and they would be lucky to make it to the surface. Their last hope was the safety rope, waiting for Gen Zhisheng's signal.

"I think I hear the sound of cracking eggs." Lu Mingfei said softly.

"That's our outer shell cracking." Chu Zihang said.

Indeed, it sounded like eggshells cracking, and the cracks slowly spread across the surface... but they were inside this giant egg. The metal cracking and curling sounds were teeth-grinding, followed by a "boom" and the sound of rushing fluids.

"We're leaking!" Lu Mingfei's face paled.

"We're leaking, but the water hasn't entered the cockpit yet." Chu Zihang said, "The 'Driest' has a double metal outer shell, with light oil between the layers. Now, the outer shell is punctured, and the oil is leaking."

"Call Xumizuo! Call Xumizuo! We need their support!" Chu Zihang shouted into the microphone.

Chu Zihang and Lu Mingfei didn't know that their calls were echoing in the empty Xumi Seat, which was slowly sinking into the sea. The corpse guards that had occupied the Xumi Seat had no escape, and as the platform sank, they would be frozen.

A helicopter hovered above the sea, its spotlight illuminating the small boat and Erii. The massive rotor blades stirred up a storm, but the sea beneath remained absolutely calm. The towering waves couldn't breach Erii's domain, and if the helicopter dared to leave, its rotor blades would be snapped.

Gen Zhisheng looked down at Erii, at this battlefield where so many had perished, and silently smoked the cigar that Caesar had given him on their first meeting. He suddenly felt a sense of nostalgia... for those crazy days with the three lunatics.

Erii stood up, and the sea rose with her. It was an ice mountain, narrower at the top and smooth as a mirror.

A faint blue light flowed on the surface of the ice mountain, within which countless corpse guards were frozen. Below, sharp ice ridges grew rapidly. Erii stood in the air, surrounded by towering ice cliffs, and she silently mouthed something, issuing commands that no one could understand.

"Amazing!" Crow and Yaksha exclaimed.

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Suddenly, the ice mountain, with Erii on it, sank, causing towering waves to crash into the sky. The ice mountain was like a giant ice spear, piercing the sea and plunging into the abyss, carrying an absolute will to cut and sever.

The Lenin slid along the sloping foundation, its massive hull crashing into countless buildings along the way and eventually plunging into the lava. The embryo didn't struggle, and the Lenin floated in the lava for a moment before slowly sinking. A broken metal tower toppled over and crushed its middle, destroying its bridge. The high temperatures burned away the fleshy layer covering the Lenin, exposing a hard alloy red five-pointed star at its bow, which was the last to sink. By this time, the Diriyah Strait had already moved away from the deep trench, and the bright lava river in their sights gradually faded from view.

"Is it dead?" Lu Mingfei asked.

"It's a shame we couldn't find its bones, and we don't know which original species it belonged to," Chu Zihang said quietly. "Hurry! Call the Sumer, Junyan can only be used to temporarily accelerate. I can't hold on for much longer. Tell them to activate the safety rope!"

The sea was ablaze, and the Snake Qi Bajia had set fire to a 10,000-ton cruise ship, creating a thick layer of oil on the sea's surface before igniting it. The corpse guards jumped in the burning sea, their bodies illuminated by the flames. Although the fire was not instantly lethal to them, it still affected them. The Fire Group had been completely wiped out, and the first target of the corpse guards was the Fire Group's water patrol boat. Without an effective escape plan, the sailors would be finished if they didn't grab the life-saving ropes thrown down by the Wind Group. The corpse guards had shredded several life rafts, and these bloodthirsty creatures were frenziedly devouring the flesh and blood, regardless of their lack of digestive abilities. However, the Wind Group's life-saving ropes gave the corpse guards an opportunity to attack, and four helicopters had already crashed due to the corpse guards climbing up the ropes.

The remaining helicopters were also of little use, as the ammunition that helicopters could carry was limited, and the Wind Group began to retreat from the battlefield.

The Lin Group was still holding their ground, as the corpse guards were eager to attack the Sumer defended by the Shan Group. Three of the six floating platforms had already sunk, with the corpse guards occupying two more, leaving only one platform, where Gen Chisei and the Rock Flow Research Institute were located, still holding strong. The corpse guards had invaded the Sumer through the shipyards, and Gen Chisei personally commanded the defense. Surprisingly, the shotguns and submachine guns, which they had thought to be useless, turned out to be very handy in this situation. Crow and Yaksha guarded Gen Chisei's back, and Yaksha repeatedly used the shotgun to blast away the approaching corpse guards. Crow's submachine gun and Sakura's blade followed up to slaughter them. Gen Chisei had thrown away his sniper rifle, and the weapon in his hand was now the Spider Cutter, which was much more useful in the narrow corridors than a long-range weapon. The corpse guards' strength and speed even

surpassed the evolved Sakura Aki, but fortunately, they lacked the ability to adapt their strategies. They often charged at high speeds only to crash into Gen Chisei's blade.

"The seventh wave is coming!" Miyamoto Shigeru shouted in the communication channel.

Gen Chisei didn't know how many more waves there would be, but he could only hold his ground and defend the entrance to the Rock Flow Research Institute. If the battlefield command center was destroyed, they would lose the war.

A corpse guard suddenly dropped from the top of the corridor, and in an instant, its sharp claws sliced off a person's skull. Yaksha pounced, jamming the shotgun into the eye socket of the corpse guard and firing, causing its brain to splatter.

"Come on, baby! Come on, baby! You are beautiful, you are lovely!" Yaksha continued to fire at the brain of the corpse guard while singing loudly.

Gen Chisei had known that this guy was a pervert, but at this moment, only a pervert like him could stand firm on this bloody battlefield.

Even if he died in battle, at least he had fulfilled his responsibility to the family. He hadn't let down those small-time gangsters and their families, and he hoped that Noda 寿 and that girl would develop genuine feelings for each other.

"Call the Sumer! Call the Sumer! The nuclear reactor has been ignited! Pull us out! Pull us out!" Lu Mingfei's voice suddenly rang out in their earphones.

"What did you say? Say that again?" Gen Chisei hadn't received any communication from the seabed in a long time, and he thought that the Diriyah Strait was already lost.

"I'm saying we did it! And also... save us! Ah!" Lu Mingfei shouted.

"Damn it! Those lunatics did it!" Gen Chisei exclaimed.

Sakura looked at him in surprise, as she had never seen Gen Chisei lose his composure like this.

"Engage the winch! Miyamoto Shigeru! Pull up the Diriyah Strait!" Gen Chisei shouted as he brandished his knife and rushed forward.

"Young Master, the motor of the winch has been damaged by the corpse guards. We can't pull them up anymore," Miyamoto Shigeru said.

"What's the extent of the damage? Can it be fixed? Hurry up and fix it!" Gen Chisei was stunned.

"The starting wheel of the motor is broken, and it can't be started. We've tried to send people to fix the starting wheel, but the top of the Sumer is full of corpse guards, and the teams we sent have all been killed," Miyamoto Shigeru explained.

"Tell me what to do. I'll go!" Gen Chisei jumped into the engineering elevator that led to the top of the Sumer.

"Young Master, you can't go there! It's full of corpse guards," Miyamoto Shigeru exclaimed in shock.

"That's precisely why I have to go," Gen Chisei interrupted, only to see Yaksha and Crow following him into the elevator. "You two, get back here! What are you doing, following me?"

"As subordinates, we are one with the Young Master. Where the Young Master goes, we must also go," Crow said as he wiped the sweat from his head. "Although I'm not sure I can handle it if there are corpse guards everywhere."

"I am coming, oh I am coming, baby, baby, go," Yaksha continued to hum his strange English song, with his Japanese-accented English.

"If we make it out of this alive, I'll sign you up for an English class so that I don't have to cringe every time I hear you sing in English," Gen Chisei sighed.

"We first need to get the winch rotating to reach a certain initial speed. The motor itself is not damaged, only the starting wheel is broken. Once we reach the initial speed, the motor will be able to output normal torque and pull up the Diriyah Strait," Miyamoto Shigeru explained.

"However, in order to reach that initial speed, we need to manually rotate the winch, which will require about six people. I will send up another six-person team from here."

The Japanese archipelago was trembling, and the seismic waves from the undersea earthquake had already reached the mainland. Giant waves as high as walls battered the Sumer, causing it to sway like a small boat in the storm. The howling wind and pouring rain lashed at the top platform of the Sumer. From the moment they stepped out of the elevator, Yaksha and Crow opened fire, shooting down the countless corpse guards that surrounded them. The steel-blue bodies of the corpse guards looked sinister in the firelight, some biting and tearing at corpses, while others coiled around the high places like snakes. Every step Gen Chisei took was on blood-soaked ground.

"The Earthquake Bureau has just issued an earthquake and tsunami warning. The tsunami will arrive in seven minutes," Miyamoto Shigeru said in their earphones. "The Sumer can hold out for no more than 15 minutes. The Rock Flow Research Institute is preparing to evacuate, so please hurry, Young Master."

"Where is your six-person team? I can't find them!"

"Over there, they look quite delicious," Yaksha said, pointing to the six white protective suits on the edge of the winch, now entangled by the steel-blue bodies of the corpse guards.

"Damn it! How can we get the winch turning without enough manpower?" Crow looked up at the huge winch, which had a diameter of more than two meters and was wrapped with wrist-thick metal cables. When stationary, this metal safety rope could lift five Diriyah Straits.

"Since Yaksha said he has the strength of two people, and I also have the strength of two people, can you manage the strength of two people, Crow?" Gen Chisei asked as he gripped the hand wheel.

The hand wheel was made of iron and had a diameter of about one meter. It was cold and damp to the touch, with thumb-thick jute ropes wrapped around its surface.

"We can try, but if the three of us are turning the wheel, who will watch our backs?" Crow asked.

"I have the strength of one person in one hand, and I can shoot with the other," Yaksha said as he tore open his shirt.

Gen Chisei took off his tie and wrapped it around his hand before gripping the hand wheel. "I'll count to three, and we'll push together."

The hand wheel locked into place, and the safety hook at the top of the Diriyah Strait popped up electrically. Gen Chisei exerted force on the hand wheel, and the huge winch slowly began to turn. Bright sparks flew out to several meters away, and the metal cable made a teeth-grating sound as it tightened, no less taut than a guitar string. The Sumer and the Diriyah Strait were like a mother and fetus connected by an umbilical cord. If the cord broke, the fetus would die. Gen Chisei's arms strained with effort, his muscles contracting like tightened ropes. He braked by loosening and tightening his grip, and even through the silk tie, he could feel the hand wheel heating up from the friction, hot enough to burn like a red-hot branding iron. The howling wind and pouring rain lashed at his body, but his high body temperature evaporated the rainwater. Yaksha and Crow fired their guns to the left and right, repelling the approaching corpse guards.

"Young Master," Sakura said softly from behind Gen Chisei.

"That's great! Sakura, you help us guard the back!" Gen Chisei exclaimed in delight.

"Young Master, give up. We're out of time," Sakura said.

"What do you mean? The tsunami is still seven minutes away," Gen Chisei said in surprise.

"We just received news that after the Fire Group was annihilated, the corpse guards are trying to break through the Lin Group's defense line. And according to the sonar scan, there is an eighth wave of corpse guards following the Diriyah Strait, and the total number of this wave is the same as the combined number of the previous seven waves," Sakura said quietly. "This is no longer a situation that can be resolved by ordinary force. If we let the eighth wave of corpse guards break through to the surface, we will not be able to control the battlefield. The only way is to use Miss Erii's power to destroy them before they reach the surface, but that will also destroy the Diriyah Strait."

Gen Chisei froze.

"Here's Mr. Masayuki's phone," Sakura said as she handed Gen Chisei a phone.

"Chisei, I know this is a difficult decision," Masayuki Tachibana's deep voice said. "But a man's path is never easy. Sacrificing those three is something we are unwilling to do, as they have just escaped from a desperate situation. However, if we don't make a decision now, everyone will die, and the corpse guards will invade Japan and kill people on the streets of Tokyo. We are close to success, and now we just need to be a little ruthless. You are the leader, and you should understand. Erii is on her way, and I have already sent a helicopter to pick you up."

Gen Chisei turned to look at the sea, where the searchlights illuminated the waves and Erii stood at the bow of a small boat, her dark red hair tousled by the sea breeze. The sea was turbulent, but her small boat moved calmly through the waves. Nearby corpse guards pounced towards the small boat, but Erii drew the sakura-colored long sword at her waist and casually waved it, effortlessly splitting the corpse guards in two. In this moment, she exuded the aura of a sword saint from ancient times, but the way she wielded the long sword was very immature, like a little girl playing with a pencil sharpener. However, her casual slashes contained an absolute will to cut, and she was not so much cutting the corpse guards with her sword as she was giving them a command to be cut.

Kotodama·Judgment, this was a Kotodama that no one in history had ever seen, and there were only legends about it. The corpse guards surrounding the small boat became denser, and Erii's slashes became faster and faster. The sword in her hand seemed weightless and without technique, but she was constantly giving commands of death, death, and more death. The corpse guards sensed the aura of a grim reaper, and gradually dared not approach. Erii did not pursue them, and she went about her task as casually as if she were playing a fighting game, although this game was extremely bloody. She wiped the blood off her sword in the seawater, rolled up her sleeves, and exposed her slender wrists. She extended her hand and placed it on the sea's surface, as if stroking a restless cat. In an instant, the sea calmed, and everything became still. A powerful domain was generated around Erii, suppressing everything within it.

Erii clapped her hands in a rhythmic manner, and a corner of the clouds in the sky actually collapsed, revealing a clear moonlight that fell on the sea's surface. The moonlight reflected off the rippling waves, making the sea look like a silver ingot with fine lines on its surface. The

temperature of the sea's surface gradually dropped, and the dancing silver light gradually froze. A few minutes later, starting from the small boat, the sea began to freeze in all directions. In Gen Chisei's eyes, the corpse guards were frozen in the seawater, unable to struggle even with their incredible strength. In front of Erii, they were like toys.

Even Anghe would be shocked by this display. The Secret Party understood the mysterious world, but what Erii was doing seemed to have transcended alchemy or Kotodama and entered an entirely new realm... the realm of the gods.

She lowered her head and hummed a song, her gaze seeming to penetrate the dark sea. Her gaze was like that of a god looking down on humans from the heavens.

Gen Chisei leaned weakly against the winch, knowing that he could not change anything. Once Erii entered this state, she would not listen to anyone, and anything that approached her would be killed. In this moment, she was no longer the obedient little girl, but a grim reaper. Sakura looked at him and thought of his determination just a minute ago, and she suddenly understood... in Gen Chisei's heart... he really wanted to save those three lunatics.

In the midst of the world-destroying roar, the shockwave arrived as expected. This was the shockwave from the nuclear reactor explosion. Lu Mingfei had never experienced such a violent acceleration, and compared to this, Anghe's modified Maserati was weak. His vision went black, and he felt like his eardrums had ruptured. However, this also meant that they had succeeded. Once the nuclear reactor exploded, the city would be swallowed by the lava river, and that hellish ruin would be no more. The corpse guards, those grim reapers, would also be buried.

"We actually survived," Lu Mingfei panted. "I thought I should start reciting poetry several times. I read in books that Japanese warlords would always recite a poem before their death, like 'At the end of the extreme joy and sorrow, there must be light in the cloud and mist. All the glory and wealth in the world is just a dream, and when you wake up, it's time to sleep.' And also, 'There is no difference between good and evil. The great way penetrates the source of the heart. Fifty-five years of glory is just a dream, and when you wake up, it's time to sleep.' It's so cool."

"That's not something they started reciting when they were about to die," Chu Zihang said. "In fact, the cultural level of most Japanese warlords was not high, and they would have someone else write the poem beforehand, and they would just recite it when the time came."

"I thought so. If I could only say 'Spare me, hero,' where's the poetry in that?"

"There's something else that survived." Chu Zihang suddenly said.

Lu Mingfei looked at the screen and saw thousands upon thousands of black shadows rising from the seabed at high speed. They gathered together like a black vortex. It was the last batch of corpse guards escaping from the High Plane, and there were more of them than expected.

They had not been affected by the nuclear blast. In the black vortex formed by the corpse guards, a huge figure appeared, and every time it flicked its long tail, it created countless eddies and whirlpools. The corpse guards surrounded it as they rose, because the creature generated upward-flowing water currents as it moved, which the corpse guards could use to migrate more efficiently. The fastest of the corpse guards had already approached the Diriyah Strait, and in the light of the Vasray, their ice-crystal fangs reflected a piercing light.

"Do you still want to recite poetry now?" Chu Zihang asked.

"Spare me, hero!" Lu Mingfei cried.

At a depth of about 3,000 meters, when the inertia from the nuclear blast shockwave was spent, they could no longer accelerate.

Chu Zihang might have been able to release Junyan again, but the deep-sea probe could not withstand the shock. The hull was making a terrifying cracking sound, and the resin porthole was deforming at a visible rate. Junyan and the nuclear blast shockwave had dealt irreparable damage to the probe's hull, and at this rate, they would be lucky to make it to the surface. Their last hope was the safety rope, and they just needed to wait for Gen Chisei's safety rope to take effect.

"I think I hear the sound of cracking eggs," Lu Mingfei said quietly.

"That's our hull cracking," Chu Zihang said.

It did sound like the sound of an egg cracking, and the cracks slowly spread across the surface of the "egg"... except they were inside this giant egg. The sound of metal tearing and curling was teeth-grating, and then there was a "boom" followed by the sound of fluids gushing.

"We're leaking!" Lu Mingfei's face turned pale.

"Yes, we're leaking, but the water hasn't entered the cockpit yet," Chu Zihang said. "The Diriyah Strait has a double metal hull, and the layer between them is filled with light crude oil. Now that the outer hull has been breached, the oil is leaking out."

"Call the Sumer! Call the Sumer! Quick! We need support from the safety rope!" Chu Zihang shouted.

Chu Zihang and Lu Mingfei did not know that their shouts were echoing through the empty Sumer, which was slowly sinking into the sea. The corpse guards that had occupied this giant floating platform had nowhere to escape and would be frozen once the Sumer sank into the sea.

The helicopter hovered above the sea, its searchlights illuminating the small boat and Erii within. The massive rotor blades stirred up a fierce wind, but the sea below remained absolutely calm.

The towering waves could not invade this area. Erii hummed softly to herself, and within a one-kilometer radius of her and the small boat, the sea's surface was completely frozen. The tsunami had arrived, with layer upon layer of waves reaching dozens of meters high, but they all crumbled at the edge of Erii's domain. All around was darkness, with only a sliver of moonlight illuminating this crystalline sea's surface.

It was not so much that the helicopter was waiting for Erii, but that Erii was protecting the helicopter. If the helicopter dared to leave her domain, the fierce wind would snap its rotor blades.

Gen Chisei looked down at Erii and at this battlefield where too many people had died. He silently smoked the cigar that Caesar had given him on the first day they met. He felt a bit of nostalgia... for those few days when he was surrounded by those lunatics, dancing and singing.

Erii stood up, and the sea's surface rose with her. It was a massive iceberg, narrower at the bottom and smooth as a mirror at the top.

A pale blue light flowed across the surface of the iceberg, within which countless corpse guards were frozen. Below, sharp ice ridges rapidly grew, forming a cage of ice blades. Erii stood high in the air, surrounded by ice cliffs and ice blades. She silently mouthed something, and the words that came out were incomprehensible.

"Amazing!" Crow and Yaksha exclaimed.

"That's Tsukuyomi," Sakura said quietly.

Suddenly, the iceberg carrying Erii sank, causing a towering wave to surge into the air. This iceberg was like a giant ice spear, piercing straight down into the sea. It carried an absolutely ruthless "cutting" will.

The Diriyah Strait stopped rising and was surrounded by corpse guards.

A massive creature appeared in the observation window, its black dragon body coiling in the seawater. This was the pure-blooded dragon that had struggled in the crack, the one that Lu Mingze had mentioned. Its golden pupils were like giant candles, and its rotting body was covered in ancient armor, layer upon layer connected by bronze chains. Its ribcage-like belly cavity was teeming with a swarm of Ghosttooth Dragon Vipers! This creature's body was a nest for the vipers. As if a thousand lamps had been lit at once, the eyes of the Ghosttooth Dragon Vipers glowed, and the sleeping fish all woke up. An overwhelming dragon aura filled the cockpit, enough to crush the spirits of normal humans. The king of the corpse guards let out a silent roar, its crystalline fangs transparent.

They had no escape route, and the Sumer no longer responded to their calls.

The dragon slowly opened its ribcage, and the Ghosttooth Dragon Vipers poured out, covering the Diriyah Strait. They sounded like a thousand silk threads being cut at once as they bit and chewed. Their golden eyes filled the porthole, and their teeth left crisscrossing marks on the resin glass. Terrifying sounds came from all directions as the vipers not only bit the glass but also drilled holes in the metal hull. Now, the vipers filled the space between the outer and inner hulls, eating everything in their path, including optical fibers and buffer materials. Although the outer hull was damaged, most of the circuits were still working, but now, one by one, the lights on the control panel went out, and the pressure, water pressure, and ammeter gauges all returned to zero as the vipers devoured everything.

The Diriyah Strait was being eaten, and the only thing protecting them now was the metal inner hull.

"It's been nice knowing you," Chu Zihang said.

"Same here," Lu Mingfei said quietly. "Boss, it's been nice knowing you, too."

Chisei was still unconscious.

The porthole shattered, and seawater rushed into the cockpit with tremendous pressure. Lu Mingfei felt like his ribs had all broken, and the air in his lungs was trying to escape... Thousands of Ghosttooth Dragon Vipers pounced on him, and the seawater became scorching hot. Chu Zihang released Junyan, but not to save himself. He burned the Ghosttooth Dragon Vipers, and they would turn to ash along with him. However, Chu Zihang's specialty was dying with his enemies.

At that moment, a bone-chilling cold descended, instantly compressing the domain of Junyan. The release of Junyan was interrupted, and it was as if a bomb that had already started to explode was forcibly restrained! Lu Mingfei looked up and saw the pale blue ice spear falling with the current!

The spear's aura was bone-chillingly cold, and within that cold was an absolutely domineering will to cut through everything! The dragon raised its head and let out a silent roar, its giant golden pupils reflecting the image of the ice spear. This half-dead creature sensed the coming of its doom but was unable to escape. It curled up and trembled slightly. The Ghosttooth Dragon Vipers also stopped their attack and tried to retreat back into the dragon's body to hide.

Hypoxia and high pressure could kill them at any moment, but Lu Mingfei still had a faint consciousness. He felt a familiar aura descending from above... like an old friend.

The ice spear pierced the dragon's back ridge. The king of the corpse guards was unable to resist, and the ice spear dragged it down into the abyss, its powerless tail flailing in the water. The other corpse guards were also instantly killed, their bodies splitting in two. This was the second time Lu Mingfei had witnessed such an absolute killing will, second only to the "Shiva's

Dance" of the dragon king Fenrir. It was a judgment from the gods, nailing sinners to the pillar of shame, allowing no resistance or appeal. A light figure leaped from the tail of the ice spear, a girl in a red and white miko outfit. Her wide sleeves billowed in the water, and the ribbon that had been tying her hair broke, letting her long, dark red hair flow free.

Lu Mingfei subconsciously wanted to call out a name... Nono!

He would never forget this moment, even as his eyes clouded over and his vision blurred. He remembered the deep red hair flowing like seaweed in the Three Gorges Reservoir. Nono had taken off her diving suit and put it on him, her body in a bikini, so alluring and beautiful. Nono had always been bossy towards him, but at that moment, she had been gentle and encouraging, encouraging him to live.

"Nono! Nono!" Lu Mingfei twisted his body, trying to swim towards the figure, his consciousness fading. He wanted to embrace that shadow, not noticing the cruel, grim reaper-like look in her eyes.

"Nono! Nono!" He shouted, not caring as seawater entered his lungs.

The girl drew the sakura-colored long sword at her waist and pointed it at Lu Mingfei's brow, ready to strike. This sword, capable of easily slicing through corpse guards, was aimed at Lu Mingfei's brow.

"Nono! Nono!" Lu Mingfei did not see the sword, he just wanted to reach the shadow before him.

The grim reaper-like coldness in Erii's eyes suddenly collapsed, and the innocence of a little girl returned. She curiously looked at Lu Mingfei, not with the delight of meeting a familiar person but with the curiosity of a street lunatic running towards you. Lu Mingfei thought he was trying to swim, but his movements were clumsy, like a duckling paddling its feet. Erii swam around Lu Mingfei, unsure why the boy in front of her was crying.

Lu Mingfei did not reach the blurry shadow, and his vision went completely dark. He thought he was dead. As the last breath left his lungs, he felt himself being gently embraced.

A diving helmet was placed over his head, and oxygen entered his lungs. Lu Mingfei's consciousness slightly recovered, and the lamp inside the helmet illuminated his eyes. He tried to see the person holding him but could only make out a blurry figure. He didn't know if this girl was Nono, as Nono didn't have Kotodama, but the power of this girl surpassed that of any mixed-blood he had ever seen. Nono was like a proud rose, but the girl in his arms was as soft as a sakura blossom. The girl pointed upwards, and Lu Mingfei weakly shook his head, indicating that he couldn't swim up. There were still hundreds of meters of seawater above them, and with his remaining strength, it would be too difficult.

"Don't die," he heard the girl's voice in his mind.

"Nono, Nono," Lu Mingfei whispered, only remembering this name.

"Don't die," the girl's voice said again.

The girl let go of Lu Mingfei and swam upwards. Lu Mingfei looked up, and the red and white miko outfit disappeared from view.

He weakly moved his hand and felt a yellow rubber duck.

"I won't die," he said quietly to himself. "Because you haven't... given up on me yet."

[TO BE CONTINUED]