

All R. Artist 311

Chapter 311: Detective Novel

If given the choice, Shen Jiarui absolutely would not want to cross paths with Chu Kuang, a formidable opponent who could even match Feng Hua!

Chu Kuang ranked fourteenth?

If it were not for Chu Kuang's lack of experience, he would have been able to break into the top ten!

One look at the leaderboard would make it clear.

Among the short story writers ranked ahead of Chu Kuang, who hasn't been writing for many years?

The only disadvantage for Chu Kuang is his short entry period into the industry, leading to a lesser volume of work.

As one of the authors on the leaderboard, Shen Jiarui understood this very clearly.

That's why he felt frustrated.

Because if it weren't for Chu Kuang, he could have been the first in March.

"Don't panic... there's still hope..."

Taking a deep breath, Shen Jiarui began to comfort himself.

Yes, firstly his work this time is of top quality, and secondly, what if Chu Kuang does not perform well this time?

Thinking about this, Shen Jiarui felt he could do it.

And the more he thought about it, the more it made sense!

Take a leap, turn a bicycle into a motorcycle!

Just like what they discussed in the group.

If he, a writer ranked in his twenties, knocked out Chu Kuang ranked fourteenth, wouldn't his ranking climb?

Ranking equates to worth!

If the ranking goes up, the fee he could negotiate with the platform will also rise!

That's a bigger earning than merely winning the first place of a platform in a month!

"Need to polish it more..."

After having this idea, Shen Jiarui began to work on his new short story, which he had already revised many times, looking for broader room for adjustment.

While Shen Jiarui started working, Lin Yuan was also busy writing his new short story.

The title of the new short story is "A Bowl of Clear Soup and Buckwheat Noodles".

With a quick writing speed, Lin Yuan started articulating: "For a noodle restaurant, the busiest period has to be the New Year's Eve. The same goes for Beihai Noodle Restaurant..."

Unlike the previous novels.

The author of this novel is from Neon.

Neon has numerous classic literary works, which have caused great repercussions worldwide, including this story about a bowl of clear soup and buckwheat noodles—

Follows the same tear-jerker route as “Necklace”.

This is the route many short story writers choose.

However owing to the large number of short stories along these lines, readers have begun to push back.

Just like the trend of chicken soup literature a few years ago, after everyone had had enough of it, the trend of anti-chicken soup literature began.

The current market is heading in this direction.

But this is only because many authors tell heartwarming stories purely for the sake of being heartwarming, leading to reader fatigue.

Real chicken soup, everyone still loves to drink.

Especially this “A Bowl of Clear Soup and Buckwheat Noodles”, which also contains a touch of business wisdom, many companies will promote such short stories.

In terms of its influence on the business world, this bowl of clear soup and buckwheat noodles is formidable.

Lin Yuan wrote leisurely...

Because this novel doesn’t require much background tweak, unlike the western backdrop in “Necklace” where many elements can’t be used directly.

As a work from Neon, which also features oriental culture, Lin Yuan could nearly finish this piece without much adjustment.

Of course, there must be necessary modifications.

After all, this is Blue Star, there's no Neon here.

Even if the culture in Chu Province is similar to Neon on Earth, Lin Yuan knew clearly, it's not Neon.

Only certain things are similar.

...

In no time, Lin Yuan finished "A Bowl of Clear Soup and Buckwheat Noodles" and handed it over to Jin Mu.

Jin Mu is his spokesperson now who will pass his novels to the tribe.

Having dealt with this matter, Lin Yuan started considering the next long novel to write.

Although he is not in a hurry to publish a new novel, he plans to set up the story now.

And before customizing it with the System.

Lin Yuan had a chat with Jin Mu: "Which type of novel makes more money now?"

"Make money?"

Jin Mu took it as casual conversation: "If it's well written, any of them can make money..."

Lin Yuan said, "I'm talking about a novel."

Jin Mu realized something: "Are you deciding on the type for your new novel?"

Lin Yuan said: “More or less.”

This is now work-related communication.

The pen name Chu Kuang is managed by Jin Mu.

He pondered: “The trend has changed quite a lot. The hottest novels from the past were mostly adventurous ones, but now they have become richer. The market category is not as distinct as before due to the merger, it’s basically in a state of blossoming, as long as you don’t choose something extremely niche...”

Speaking of this.

Jin Mu changed his tone: “Niche is also fine, if you want to write it.”

Jin Mu’s shift in tone was for a reason.

Who doesn’t know that Chu Kuang is a lover of niche genres?

He just loves to write rare works in the market, be a pioneer, from sports and competitive novels to cultivation novels and to the tomb raiding genre.

As for genres, they seem to hold no significance for Chu Kuang.

Lin Yuan paused, considering the System’s nature, he felt he should not pay too much attention to the genre.

After all, the works the System provides could become popular, even if they are niche.

“Actually I think...”

Jin Mu suggested: “If it’s something like ‘Ghost Blowing Lamp’ which can be divided into eight parts and each part can be published independently, then there’s no need for us to have a serialized novel every month; we can publish one every few months instead”

“Publish one every few months...”

Lin Yuan thought about this for a while and felt that it was indeed a good idea.

With more and more things on his plate, a serial that could last for a year would indeed be draining. It would be more convenient to publish one novel at a time.

Like the eight stories in “Ghost Blowing Lamp”.

Each story can be regarded as a medium-length novel.

Lin Yuan asked: “If that’s the case, what genre do you think suits best?”

“Definitely mystery!”

Jin Mu answered without a moment’s hesitation: “Sure, the atmosphere for mystery novels in Great Qin is a bit off, but with the consolidation of Qi and Chu, detective novels now account for the biggest trend in the market!”

“Mystery...”

Lin Yuan raised his eyebrows.

Even if he didn’t pay much attention to the novel market, he could still sense the growing popularity of mystery novels, it seemed more and more people were starting to read them.

“I was just talking about the market.”

Jin Mu subconsciously thought that Lin Yuan wouldn’t write detective novels, as all of Chu Kuang’s works hardly contained any detective elements.

Besides, detective novels are renowned for their technical requirements.

If the detective case is not designed cleverly, readers are not likely to buy into it.

You could say this...

Detective fiction readers are the most critical group of readers on Blue Star, they nitpick, and any minor flaws would be magnified by them.

Writing such a novel requires meticulous logic, strong reasoning ability, and perfectly arranged crimes.

This is a theme that can't be handled merely with strange and unpredictable imagination.

However, Jin Mu didn't know that Lin Yuan had quietly thought about writing detective novels—

After writing in the niche genre for so long, shouldn't it be time to try a mainstream genre?

Looking at the popularity of mystery novels on Blue Star, such novels truly fall into the mainstream genre, which is no less popular than adventure novels!

Chapter 312: A Bowl of Spring Noodles

Since he was interested in detective fiction, he naturally began market research.

Lin Yuan spent several days studying the mystery market on Blue Star.

Exactly as he had imagined...

Most of the mysteries on Blue Star were orthodox, the currently most popular genre, and also the original form of detective stories.

Therefore, this was universally acknowledged in the mystery genre as the traditional school.

These types of stories primarily use logic-based reasoning to solve mysteries, featuring thrilling and intriguing plots and clever schemes, often involving murders in locked rooms or on deserted islands...

In other words, Blue Star readers prefer pure detective stories.

If it's pure detective fiction, naturally you would choose the orthodox type of work.

Blue Star also uses the term "orthodox," although most still call these novels "traditional mystery".

After all, this was the most familiar pattern.

On Earth, big names like Agatha Christie and Conan Doyle were representatives of this style.

Orthodox detective stories can satisfy readers who enjoy solving puzzles. They usually put the readers and the detective on the same level, providing the same number of clues. Some orthodox works even issue a "challenge to the reader".

For example, Earth's famous detective novelist Queen liked to do this.

These novels would explicitly tell readers in the work, "You now have enough clues to solve the mystery."

This challenges whether the reader can solve the mystery just like detective.

So, an emphasis on fairness and rational logic characterize this genre of detective fiction.

Readers can enjoy guessing while reading.

This genre is definitely the origin of detective fiction. In comparison to fantasies, it would be called Authentic Xuanmen Sect.

It followed the King's route, a mainstream detective story!

Once he learned about the market and knew the general direction he needed to follow, Lin Yuan could customize his novel.

This time he didn't have to consider saving money.

Because his recent film 'The Tuner' had earned Lin Yuan a fortune!

So much that Lin Yuan had become somewhat inflated.

To be specific, Lin Yuan directly told the system: "I want to customize an Agatha Christie detective novel."

Well, this name should be familiar to everyone.

Agatha Christie, affectionately known as "Aunt Agatha" by detective fiction fans.

She was an English detective novelist, a playwright, and one of the three masters of detective literary works!

On the European and American side of the Earth, alongside Aunt Agatha in the detective genre, was Conan Doyle, the author of the 'Sherlock Holmes' series.

The third was Matsumoto Seicho of Neon, who was not discussed in-depth here.

In short, Lin Yuan aimed at the three masters right from the start and decided to start with Aunt Agatha after some comprehensive deliberation.

The system, however, was open to all: "Do you want to accurately customize a certain work?"

"Conditions?"

"You have to pay extra."

Lin Yuan felt the system's text came with a voice effect:

"I choose random."

Lin Yuan of course wanted to directly customize a mature work in Agatha's style, such as 'No One Survived', which had the most influence.

However, the price for Agatha's representative works must be terrifying.

The more precise the customization, the more expensive.

Random selection was less expensive.

Besides, even if it was a random choice, it wasn't aimlessly random. It was a relative random with precise orientation. After all, Lin Yuan had already specifically decided on the author.

It was Agatha!

Most of Agatha's works were of good quality, so Lin Yuan was not worried about getting a bad one.

"Dong ding, congratulations to the host on obtaining the work 'The Murder of Roger Ackroyd,' customization price eight million. Would you like to customize?"

"Customize."

A twinkle appeared in Lin Yuan's eyes and he chuckled a little then shook his head.

He finally decided to write a mainstream genre, intending to follow the traditional detective path, and he didn't expect the system to provide him with a relatively unique work under Aunt Agatha's name.

However, the quality of this work was good.

So, Lin Yuan could totally accept this price.

Yes, among all of Aunt Agatha's works, 'The Murder of Roger Ackroyd' might not be universally acknowledged as the best, but it was definitely a can't-miss work by Aunt Agatha!

The story was a bit unusual.

But this was one of Aunt Agatha's early works which made her famous!

Especially after reading, and acquiring related memories, Lin Yuan felt more and more that this was a good decision.

Though he felt it would have been better if he could have randomly selected 'No One Survived' or 'Murder on the Orient Express'. Yes, 'Death on the Nile' would be nice too.

Nevertheless, he was already highly satisfied!

Even if it wasn't the best choice, it was still a win.

However, this novel also had a characteristic:

Once the reader knows in advance who the murderer is, then reading this novel loses a lot of its appeal.

So...

No spoilers here.

Just a hint:

If you don't want to miss out on the fun of reading because of being spoiled by someone, it is strongly recommended that you read the novel as soon as possible.

Once the novel was customized, the next step was to adjust the background.

In the following days.

Lin Yuan got down to business.

As time went by, it finally became March!

March in the Qin Continent was spring.

Even though the air still carried a chill, everything had started to revive.

And for many short-story lovers, March was the day Chu Kuang released his new short-story on Tribe!

Thus, many people logged onto Tribe to find Chu Kuang's new work—

A short-story called 'A Bowl of Spring Noodles'!

The correct translation of the original title should be 'A Bowl of Clear Soup and Buckwheat Noodles'.

Lin Yuan, wanting to make readers more engaged, didn't use buckwheat noodles, and instead directly chose 'Spring noodles'.

Some of the Chinese translations from Earth handled it the same way.

What kind of noodles didn't matter.

What mattered was what the content was like.

Clearly, Shen Jiarui, currently ranking in the twenties, thought the same way.

At this time, on Tribe, the new works to be released in March had all been published.

Without any hesitation, Shen Jiarui directly clicked on the work titled ‘A Bowl of Spring Noodles’.

The story started in a noodle shop.

Very fitting.

The setting was New Year’s Eve.

The narrative style was rather descriptive: [Just as the final customer stepped out of the door and the shop owner was about to close the shop, the door was slowly pulled open. A woman with two children came in. Two boys, about six and ten years old, dressed in brand new sportswear. The woman was wearing an off-season plaid short coat.]

Shen Jiarui raised an eyebrow.

Chu Kuang’s text style for most of his short stories was quite unique.

For instance, in ‘The Necklace,’ his text was always oddly tonal. Shen Jiarui did not realize that this was the style after translation.

But this time, Chu Kuang’s text style was more similar to his early short story ‘Artificial Beauty’.

It wasn’t difficult to read; the tonality was normal, this was the more common style.

Would there be a shocking twist this time?

What Chu Kuang excelled at most were his groundbreaking plot twists at the end of his short stories. These were twists that, though rational, were unexpected, leaving the reader reeling!

Shen Jiarui had been shocked by Chu Kuang several times.

If it was still that style of a twist ending, Shen Jiarui would be a bit scared.

But as Shen Jiarui read, he gradually realized...

This story...there was no twist.

Chu Kuang this time, unexpectedly changed his writing style and wrote a legitimate short story using descriptive text.

Chapter 313: Warm and Cold

Opportunity!

The word suddenly flashed in Shen Jiarui's mind.

What was Chu Kuang's coup de grace?

That's right, it was his knack for delivering an unexpected, even shattering, ending to a short story!

Faced with such an ending, readers often applaud helplessly!

And such stories were always the most popular among readers.

Because they provide readers with a kind of intense mental stimulation!

So, these types of stories were also the most suitable for vying for the top prize on the platform.

In contrast, narrative stories did not have a similar effect, and the shock factor was much smaller in the face of such a huge reversal from the opponent.

"Could it be that Chu Kuang is intentionally trying out a new writing method?"

Shen Jiarui speculated for a moment, then dismissed it, not dwelling over it, and even feeling a bit excited.

If Chu Kuang didn't write in his best genre, then Shen Jiarui thought, there might really be a chance for him to turn the tables!

That idea flashed through his mind.

The reading continued: ["Ah... Spring Noodles... one bowl... can we have one?" The woman asked shyly. The two little boys were hiding behind their mother, also looking at the lady boss timidly.]

The background was a Beihai Noodle Shop on New Year's Eve.

A woman took her two children to the noodle shop, but only ordered one bowl of spring noodles?

Without any analysis, it was clear that the family was hard-pressed.

However, the next plot was heartwarming:

[On the workbench, there was already a preparation of noodles stacked like small hills, one pile for one person. The owner grabbed a pile and then added half a pile more and put it all in the pot. The lady boss instantly understood that this was extra given by her husband for this family of three.]

The owner was a good man.

He noticed the hardship of the mother and her two children, so he intentionally added more noodles.

As the steaming bowl of scrumptious spring noodles was placed on the table, the family of three immediately gathered around the bowl and started to eat, their heads touching.

The corner of Shen Jiarui's mouth unconsciously curved upward, as if the scene of the mother and children eating noodles played out in his mind.

"It's so delicious!" the elder brother said.

“Mama, you should eat too!” the younger brother picked up a chopstick filled with noodles and fed it to his mother.]

Then, it was the second year.

After the tenth hour of New Year’s Eve, just as the noodle shop was about to close, the door was pulled open again.

The woman, wearing the same clothes as last year, came in with the two boys.

“Can we... have one bowl of spring noodles... please?”

The owner and the lady boss instantly recognized the family of three and, as they did last year, led them to table number two.

The owner, like last year, grabbed one-and-a-half serving of noodles to cook.

The lady boss, though, couldn’t help suggesting; “Hey, hubby, why don’t we give them three bowls instead?”

“No.”

The owner refused his wife: “If we do that, they might feel embarrassed.”

Shen Jiarui was deeply moved.

The owner and the lady boss were as kind as ever.

What’s more, the owner was even considerate enough to preserve the dignity of the family, thus resisting the urge to give them more.

After finishing the meal.

They paid fifteen dollars for a bowl of spring noodles.

The lady boss waved them off, calling out; “Thank you, have a great New Year!”

Shen Jiarui had to admit it.

He was somewhat warmed by the kindness of the noodle shop’s owner and his wife.

What would happen next?

Shen Jiarui was curious to find out.

The business of the increasingly popular Beihai Noodle Shop ushered in its third New Year’s Eve.

The description here was quite interesting:

[Starting at half-past nine, both the owner and his wife seemed preoccupied, though none of them uttered a word. As soon as the shift of the workers ended shortly after ten, they swiftly turned over the tags indicating the prices of various noodles on the wall and hastily wrote “Spring Noodles 15 yuan”.]

Originally, as the prices began to rise that summer, the price of a bowl of Spring Noodles had already become 20 yuan.

Table number two.

About 30 minutes earlier, the wife had already placed a “Reserved” sign on the table.

By half-past ten, there weren’t any customers left in the shop, but the owner and his wife were still waiting for the arrival of that mother and her two sons.

At last, the mother and her sons arrived.

The elder brother was wearing a school uniform, while the younger one was wearing the slightly oversized old clothes that his elder brother wore last year. The brothers had grown up and seemed unfamiliar. However, the mother was still wearing the same off-season, faded short coat.

Shen Jiarui was overcome with emotion, thinking, this is what motherly love looks like.

The story does not delineate it in plain words, but the details speak volumes:

The clothes of her two sons seemed to change every year, but each time this mother appeared, she was “wearing the same off-season, somewhat faded short coat”.

For reasons unknown, Shen Jiarui felt a sour sensation creeping up his heart at this point.

It was here that the story finally introduced the situation of this mother and her two sons.

From the dialogue between the mother and her sons, the owners learned about their situation:

It turned out, their father had died in a traffic accident, but the debt he left behind had to be carried by his wife.

Over the years, the mother had been repaying that debt, thus their rare luxury on New Year’s Eve was to order a bowl of Spring Noodles at a noodle shop.

The two sons were very sensible too.

Her youngest son even wrote an essay at school: [My father died in a traffic accident and left behind a large debt. My mother works tirelessly from dawn till dusk to repay the money. I help her by delivering morning and evening newspapers... on the night of December thirty-first, the three of us shared a bowl of Spring Noodles which tasted amazing... Even though we only ordered one bowl of noodles for the three of us, the uncles and aunties at the noodle shop warmly welcomed us, thanked us, and wished us a good year. When I heard their well-wishes, it was clear to me what they meant: Don’t give up! Keep going! Stay strong! Hence, when I grow up, I would like to run a large noodle shop and say to my customers: ‘Keep going!’ ‘Wish you happiness!’...]

That evening, the mother and her two sons ordered two bowls of Spring Noodles.

The owner immediately prepared three servings of noodles.

Suddenly, Shen Jiarui rubbed his eyes which had started to turn red.

Thirty yuan was the price for those two bowls of Spring Noodles.

The story continues in this seemingly mundane narrative, progressing slowly.

In the subsequent years, the couple who ran Beihai Noodle Shop would always reserve table number two on New Year's Eve, but the mother and her two sons never showed up again.

A bit later on.

Thanks to a thriving business, the Beihai Noodle Shop underwent a renovation.

Tables and chairs were updated with new styles, but table number two remained the same.

The owners didn't find it out of place, instead, they placed table number two in the middle of their shop.

When customers inquired about the reason behind it, the owners did not hide anything.

And thus, the story about table number two turned it into "the table of happiness".

The customers repeatedly shared this story.

Some even traveled long distances just to get here.

Some were female students, and there were young couples as well, all wanting to have a bowl of Spring Noodles at table number two.

The reputation of table number two grew tremendously because of this.

Finally, after ten years, the mother and her two sons reappeared.

By this time, both brothers had made a good living and the mother had finally put on a new down coat.

The mother and her two sons specifically thanked the owners:

“We were the customers who had shared a bowl of Spring Noodles on New Year’s Eve, fourteen years ago. It was this bowl of Spring Noodles and the encouragement that got us through the tough times.”

Shen Jiarui bit his lip, as if holding back some kind of emotion.

However, all his emotions fell apart with just one sentence.

Just because of a single, simple phrase spoken by the mother:

“Manager, three Spring Noodles.”

As if it was a ten-year appointment they were expected to show up for.

The story also mentioned: [“Okay.” He wanted to reply as such, but the husband couldn’t answer, tears running down his face.]

Outside the story.

Shen Jiarui wiped his tears and suddenly felt that the last hint of cold in the air had been dispelled by the breath of spring.

Chapter 314: Reflecting Reality

Shen Jiarui has read many stories and written many stories. If you talk about clever designs, literary metaphors, and satires of reality, Shen Jiarui thinks that this “A Bowl of Spring Noodles” is overly simple, it’s unworthy of Chu Kuang’s esteemed reputation!

But strangely also here...

This clearly simplistic story, full of ‘chicken soup for the soul’ vibes, has made Shen Jiarui cry unexpectedly. He hadn’t anticipated this, even forgetting during the reading process that this was part of a competition.

Why did this happen?

Shen Jiarui doesn’t think that it’s the simple warmth that moved him, as he has read thousands of similar stories, even to the point that he is reluctant to write such stories. This novel must have something unique.

Shen Jiarui scrolled through the comments.

Shen Jiarui won’t be the first reader of “A Bowl of Spring Noodles”, nor will he be the last. At this point, many people have finished reading this story, so the comments section is quite lively.

“Feels pretty average.”

“Chu Kuang is below standard.”

“‘Chicken soup for the soul’ style melodrama.”

These were some of the negative comments Shen Jiarui saw, which should have made him ecstatic, but instead, he didn’t feel the joy he had expected. He felt a kind of indescribable heaviness. Shortly after, Shen Jiarui saw a trending comment: “As a business, a few bowls of noodles are nothing. But the human care, trust, and support moved people. Economically, it doesn’t make sense for the mother and her two children to show up, but comforting the desperate and warming those in need are valuable aspects of a society.”

Shen Jiarui suddenly felt a little enlightened.

Indeed, people aren’t just living to eat, but there is something very powerful in this world that seems useless but can create greater value in the future. This is the meaning of this story.

This trending comment got many likes.

It's imaginable that for Chu Kuang, the reviews for this short story must be polarized. Some people will find the story melodramatic and feel that Chu Kuang's latest writing doesn't meet the standard, lacking the amazing plot twist that used to be in his works.

But many others will agree with it.

The latter group is likely those who have experienced kindness from strangers, in gestures or even just a glance. But their power is no less than the simple phrase "A Bowl of Spring Noodles" in the story.

Let's look at the ranking again.

My short story is called "The Killer", a detective thriller type story with an ending readers could never have imagined: the final killer is a brown horse. It's currently ranked first in the March short stories, receiving very good reviews, while Chu Kuang, who was highly rated by many people, is in second place. It seems not everyone bought into his latest work.

"My rank is pretty good..."

It would be hypocritical to say Shen Jiarui is not at all pleased. After all, securing first place would earn him quite a sum. However, inside, he felt that Chu Kuang's latest short story was quite powerful but not suitable for ranking-oriented competitions like this.

If described with music:

It's like I used rock.

But he sang a sentimental ballad.

The former can ignite the atmosphere on stage while the latter is heartfelt. Being heartfelt is not suitable for competition. So, assuming there aren't any surprises, it looks like I might keep this first-place rank until the end?

...

Chu Kuang hasn't written a short story in quite a long time. Naturally, his latest release published in Tribe Literature in March has attracted attention from the industry. But when they saw the novel was ranked second, many were taken aback:

"It's only second?"

"Is this an upset?"

"Shen Jiarui is something."

"Chu Kuang's last story was even able to compete with one of the Big Three in Qin Province. I didn't expect this new one would only rank second, especially without any strong competitors this time. Shen Jiarui couldn't pose much of a threat to Chu Kuang."

"This indeed is an upset."

"I've read both stories. Shen Jiarui's story is superb while Chu Kuang seems to have made some adjustments to his personal style. Those changes seemed not very successful. One progressed, and one regressed, hence the result."

...

Since his debut, Chu Kuang has been invincible!

Even when people were doubting him, Chu Kuang was capable of creating miracles, turning the tide!

But unexpectedly, when people had high hopes for him this time, Chu Kuang messed up!

This created a lot of controversy in the industry.

And because of Chu Kuang's defeat...

The controversy has started to escalate, even leading to some comments claiming a decline in Chu Kuang's writing level. Some people spoke as if they had insider knowledge:

"If Chu Kuang is not running out of new stories, why hasn't he published a new short story for such a long time?"

Some people thought about it, and it made sense.

Chu Kuang used to publish short stories frequently before. With just four of his works, he secured his position in the short story arena.

However, after those four works, it took him so long to publish his fifth one...

Why?

People didn't think too much about it before, but now they feel that it's very likely because Chu Kuang can't come up with new good stories, that's why he hasn't published any new short story.

Even if his ranking decreased, he didn't take any measures in time.

If that were not the case, why did his new short story "A Bowl of Spring Noodles" that was published after such a long time failed to take off, and didn't even manage to beat Shen Jiarui, a short story writer much lower in the ranks?

Logically, after not having published any new short story for such a long time, shouldn't he have been brewing a staggering masterpiece that would blow everyone's mind?

The new short story he took so long to produce... Is this it?

"Has he run out of creativity?"

Some voices speculated.

Indeed, some extraordinarily brilliant writers during their peak period gradually became ordinary after publishing several astonishing works. But nobody thought that this would happen to Chu Kuang, especially after he had just completed a highly popular long novel.

Nevertheless, there were also many voices refuting this claim.

“There are always some people with ulterior motives, who scrutinize every move of writers like Chu Kuang with a magnifying glass, and seize on any minor mistake. Just because Chu Kuang came in second, they couldn’t wait to jump out...”

Turns out this was the mainstream voice.

The public was mostly willing to give people like “Chu Kuang” some space.

The use of “them” here is due to the similar rhythms seen online over and over.

Rival peers have never been too amicable in the literary circle and the traditions of this circle are filled with arrogance and disdain among writers. It is a particularly high-pressure zone, full of infighting.

So over the years, whenever a writer’s performance failed to meet a perfect standard, they received similar treatment.

Such a phenomenon, in the eyes of some literati, had become a cancer.

They aimed not just at Chu Kuang, but at everyone who achieved success, but couldn’t maintain a perfect performance afterward.

What nobody expected, though, was...

While the outside world was debating whether the quality of Chu Kuang’s latest short story had declined, the ranking of “A Bowl of Spring Noodles” unexpectedly, and unexplainably surged to the top at 9 a.m. the next day!

Everyone watched in real-time as the votes for “A Bowl of Spring Noodles” continuously soared!

And by two o’clock in the afternoon, “A Bowl of Spring Noodles” had already claimed the champion’s throne!

“What the hell is going on?”

Vote manipulation is strictly forbidden on Blue Star; the platform has zero tolerance for such actions!

Whoever dares to manipulate votes will instantly earn a horrible reputation!

Besides, isn’t the technical department of the Tribe too capable to allow such blatant manipulation?

Everyone was flabbergasted.

If it wasn’t vote manipulation, why did “A Bowl of Spring Noodles” surge ahead so dramatically, completely overtaking Shen Jiarui?

“Take a look!”

Amid the confusion and bewilderment, someone prompted, “Turn on this morning’s news from Zhongzhou Station, Chu Kuang’s new short story got reported by official media!”

Swoosh!

Everyone instantly searched for the news from Zhongzhou Station, only to find this headline: [A One-Man Train Station!]

The subheading read:

The real-life version of the story “A Bowl of Spring Noodles”!

Zhongzhou Station holds a comparable status to that of CCTV in Blue Star. It's a television station that can't be isolated by the cultural wall. However, no one in the industry could have imagined that Chu Kuang's new short story would be endorsed by Blue Star's biggest official media!

Everyone clicked on the news...

Chapter 315: A One-Person Train Station

Those just tuning into the news from the industry are at a loss.

Everyone cannot imagine what a train station has to do with spring noodles until they see the specific content of this news...

In the news, a female presenter narrates emotionally.

"A few months ago, a train was about to be suspended in Ye City, Chu Province—every once in a while, there would be service cancellations in Blue Star, which is a common affair, but why did it grab widespread attention from the public?"

Yeah, why?

How did it get connected to Chu Kuang's new short story?

Many people were wide-eyed.

"Turns out, from what reporters learned, this train was, in fact, decided by the Mountain Stone Company who operates it to be discontinued three years ago because this route had been losing money long term. But then, a special discovery made the Mountain Stone Company change its mind."

The narration paused for a moment.

In the snowy scenes, a simple-looking girl wrapped in a thick cotton-padded coat and a red scarf appeared.

Someone accepted the interview:

“At the time, the railway bureau had already decided to shut down the station, but we discovered that there was a high school girl who would take this train to school every day.”

The camera cuts.

The girl also accepted the interview: “I am the only passenger at this train station...”

Some people seemed to have made a connection.

The female host continued to introduce: “This is the route from Bai Tong to Yuanqing operated by the Mountain Sea Company, the largest railway company in Chu Province, with a network covering the entire province. However, before the suspension, the Mountain Sea Company noticed a 17-year-old high schooler that depends on this train to commute between school and her home daily. At 7:04 in the morning, she goes to school; at 17:08 every evening, she returns home, punctual and regular over three years.”

By this time, those who had read “A Bowl of Clear Soup Noodles” had vaguely guessed the cause.

The female host’s voice continued to narrate: “Mountain Sea Company decided, alright, in order not to affect her schooling, we will keep this railway for her. If it’s just her that’s riding, okay then. The train service won’t stop until she completes her high school. So this situation carried on, spanning three years until a few months ago when the girl no longer needed to take that train to school.”

The camera focused on two different train timetables.

The first timetable had many stations marked.

The second timetable only showed two time points.

“Since there were no other passengers, the train timetable was also changed.”

“It used to depart on a set schedule, passing through several stations, with specified departure and arrival times, and the fare for each segment.”

“Then we thought, why should it be so complicated, the phrase ‘Only For You’ suffices.”

“Pick you up heading to school every day, pick you up leaving school every day.”

“What’s more, according to the habits of the people of Chu Province, if it’s done, it is done accurately to the second. Even with only one passenger, if it’s said that it arrives at 7:04, it won’t be a minute off. If it’s said that it departs at 17:08, it will leave without fail.”

“Remember, a train is not a taxi. How many people are needed to run a train? Train drivers, conductors, ticket inspectors, security personnel, electrical maintenance staff... Not to mention the wear and tear on the train and the rail track, just the fuel consumption of these two carriages running for an hour would not be insignificant. Thus, it’s not free of charge. The Mountain Sea Company isn’t a social charity organization; the student has to purchase a ticket to enter.”

“So, how much is the fare?”

“Our reporters learned that the round trip fare totalled thirty-six yuan, which is a usual fare for cab rides in Chu Province. Therefore, thirty-six yuan for a train ticket is indeed a fair price. Moreover, because tickets are being sold, there are personnel to inspect and collect them, requiring more human and material inputs.”

Seeing this, many people even doubted if this girl had some connections?

But...

The female host stated,

“According to our understanding, such treatment, if not backed by a powerful background, might be something one could hardly enjoy, especially if it perseveres for three years. Yet, our reporters discovered after some investigation that this is by no means a case of a powerful family. In Blue Star, it probably falls within the range of impoverished households eligible for minimum living subsidies, otherwise, they wouldn’t be living so far from the school.”

“The world is full of true affection.”

“Coincidentally, in early March, a renowned author Chu Kuang published on ‘Tribe’ a novel entitled ‘A Bowl of Spring Noodles,’ which also tells a deeply touching story. The story is simple. A woman’s husband gets in a car accident and owes a large sum of money. The woman raises two children. Every New Year’s eve, they go to a noodle restaurant where the three of them share a bowl of noodles. Receiving the owner’s good wish of ‘May you have a good year,’ the woman eventually repaid the debt, and the two children also succeeded. Throughout it all, for the mother and her two children, the price of spring noodles remained the same.”

“The society or the public, if they want to treat someone kindly, need not do it in an exceptionally grand manner by showering them with love. A single word could be enough.”

“This phrase can be ‘Here’s a bowl of spring noodles.’”

“It can also be ‘For 1095 days, even if you are the only one, this train runs for you.’”

“I believe that all the good in the world relies on that moment of kindness that you and I possess.”

The girl has no connections, she was just lucky to receive a kind act from a humanistic company.

It’s just like the mother and her two children in ‘A Bowl of Spring Noodles.’ They aren’t impressive and are somewhat destitute, but the owner and his wife of the noodle restaurant are willing to offer their kindness.

That’s all.

This real-life news story seems to echo ‘A Bowl of Spring Noodles’, a title in this very moment.

At this moment.

Many who have read this novel fell into silence.

Even the industry insiders who once doubted the quality of this novel, who can deny the stirring within them upon witnessing this real-life story?

Is it mawkishness?

Is it a comforting pep-talk?

If kindness is mawkish, please do not skimp on your sentimentality. If the pep-talk warms the heart, do serve me a bowl.

So, this is the reason for ‘A Bowl of Spring Noodles’ comeback today!

The news didn’t mention the achievements of Chu Kuang nor excessively praised how excellent this novel is. However, the simple quotation at the end says it all.

One is a story from the novel, and the other is a story from reality.

The fact that the reality is more dramatic than the novel, yet so similar is quite remarkable.

So alike.

Many people unconsciously reopened ‘A Bowl of Spring Noodles’, and yet, this time, the feelings gathered from the news were entirely different.

“This could probably be the simplest story ever written by Chu Kuang, with no surprising twists and turns, no earth-shattering reversals, but it has a healing power for the soul. I think Chu Kuang’s talent has already been condensed into a bowl of spring noodles, quietly warming many people’s hearts.”

Chapter 316: The Number One Chu Fanboy Goes Online

The previous skepticism about whether Chu Kuang had “lost his talent” seemed to disappear abruptly.

In fact, there are such people on the internet.

They usually hide in the dark, afraid to show themselves, but they always stir up trouble when people least expect it. Yet when the person they’ve targeted regains their strength, these people scatter like birds and beasts, acting as if they’d never existed.

These people might be labeled as “trolls” or “internet knights”.

Anyway, with the reports from Zhongzhou Station, the topping of “A Bowl of Spring Noodles”, and these people’s return to hiding, Chu Kuang had returned to being the Chu Kuang people knew –

The one whose works were few since debut, yet always lined with awe-inspiring magnificence!

Not only that.

In the following days, the influence of “A Bowl of Spring Noodles” seemed to be expanding as many enterprises actually esteemed the work as a business classic and required their employees to read it!

Many entrepreneurs affirmed the hidden business strategies in the novel!

This also had something to do with the background of the Qin and Chu merger.

Indeed, many companies had a chance to soar after the Qin and Chu merger, but some industries faced disaster.

They were struggling to survive, but they never gave up.

Like the mother and her two sons in “A Bowl of Spring Noodles”, no matter how difficult or desperate, they were still persevering and seeking new hope!

This was another unexpected surprise for the industry insiders!

It was not until many entrepreneurs publicly talked about their view on “A Bowl of Spring Noodles”, and praised the caring actions of the owners from the Beihai Noodle Shop to their customers, that everyone realized this work even has the potential to be a commercial Bible!

In fact.

The appearance of this novel has a special backdrop, which was the great economic collapse in Neon on Earth.

At that time, “A Bowl of Spring Noodles” emerged, encouraging many businesses that were struggling to survive.

When it comes to Blue Star.

Although there was no economic collapse, the effects of the merger trend for some enterprises were similar. Therefore, the appearance of this novel can be said to be timely, and it instantly became a favorite among many businessmen.

Of course, the story of “A Man’s Station” from Chu Province, as a real-life version of this novel, also encouraged many people.

“Hey, Chu Kuang’s luck is too good this time!”

In a small group chat, someone mentioned Shen Jiarui and seemed to be somewhat displeased.

No sooner had this person finished speaking than a wave of retorts rose:

“You call this luck?”

“Even if you want to flatter Mr. Shen, you don’t need to spout such nonsense, right?”

“This novel is clearly underestimated by many people. Isn’t it just a counterintuitive way of thinking? I believe that anything overdone is not good, using it for the sake of using it is certainly undesirable, but if this cup of chicken soup really warms your stomach, why should you forcefully dislike it?”

“Teacher Chu Kuang is not incapable of using tricky techniques. I feel like he just didn’t bother to go for the fancy stuff this time. Don’t his previous works already prove his skill?”

“...”

This person did not expect that his casual pro-Shen Jiarui comment in the group chat would incite general outrage.

What was even more unexpected was that Shen Jiarui responded, and his tone wasn't too good, firing off several messages:

“The four words I hate the most are, ‘Writers belittling each other’.”

“There's plenty of such phenomenon in this industry because some people are insincere. If it's good, say it's good. If it's bad, say it's bad. Of course, I want to win too, but I wouldn't make excuses when I lose, and I certainly wouldn't say it's just luck. You don't need to try and make me look good.”

System prompt:[Baby has left the group chat]

...

When Shen Jiarui realized he had been bumped to second place, he wasn't overly disappointed, as he had liked Chu Kuang's simple story from the beginning.

This sense of recognition made him ungrudging when he lost.

After all, he had always been ranked lower than others.

Actually, Shen Jiarui even admired Chu Kuang to some extent. He didn't believe that Chu Kuang wasn't aware of the disadvantages of “A Bowl of Spring Noodles”, but he still published it.

“I graciously admit defeat!”

He posted this sentiment on Tribe.

Comments sections instantly filled up with comforting responses, mostly from Shen Jiarui's fans.

A comment said: “Chu Kuang is really amazing.”

Shen Jiarui surprisingly responded: “You should say he is incredibly amazing, especially after seeing many companies esteeming this work as a commercial Bible recently. Although I feel there might be excessive interpretation involved, if such interpretations can help some people overcome difficulties, then whether the interpretation is wrong or not isn’t as important.”

In addition, Shen Jiarui also responded to many other comments with unabashed praise, leaving his fans perplexed, yet amused.

“What the...”

“We are trying to comfort you.”

“End up you are a[Chu fan]?”

“I declare the birth of the number one Chu fan.”

“Chu Kuang: You’re praising me so much, I kind of want to give you the first place.”

“Wow, Shen Jiarui certainly knows how to flatter!”

“Chu Kuang is indeed amazing, but Shen Jiarui’s work this time is also not bad, the twist in the end was excellent.”

“...”

Shen Jiarui coughed, replying to the last person: “The twist technique was learned from Chu Kuang. I feel this technique is indeed very powerful, highlighting the unexpected but reasonable.”

The fans were completely speechless.

This person has completely become a Chu fan!

What's more, someone actually took the screenshots of Shen Jiarui showering Chu Kuang with praise and posted them. That completely exposed the "Chu fan's" true nature.

Shen Jiarui: "..."

How did I become a Chu fan?

Well, what the hell, there's nothing wrong with it.

Shen Jiarui thought he had a dog-like composure.

Among those with very high rankings and who were very close to Shen Jiarui, a certain writer secretly chatted with Shen Jiarui a few sentences:

"If I see Chu Kuang in the future, I'll help you take revenge!"

Shen Jiarui replied his friend without mercy: "You don't know how scary Chu Kuang really is."

The friend was furious: "I'm ranked eleventh!"

Shen Jiarui: "How many years have you been writing, and how long has Chu Kuang been writing?"

The friend was silent for a long time before replying: "Hello Chu fan, goodbye Chu fan."

Shen Jiarui rolled his eyes.

A fact almost nobody knew was that...

Blog, on their side, had also been closely following the performance of Chu Kuang's new work because they had already reached a preliminary agreement with Chu Kuang. Chu Kuang's next short work would most likely be published on Blog!

As a result, Blog witnessed Chu Kuang's strong overtaking and his usual dominance in the short works section!

"Impressive!"

"Even without the boost from the news, it's inevitable given the widespread circulation of this work in various enterprises, that it would overtake and reclaim first place!"

"Why not strive for someone like this!"

"Exactly, always letting the people from Tribe taste all the sweetness."

"The most crucial thing is, Chu Kuang has great cost efficiency. Do you remember how much money we spent on inviting Mr. Feng last time? We barely managed to match Chu Kuang."

"If you can't beat them, join them!"

"..."

Chapter 317: Great Detective Poirot

Although the road to the top of "A Bowl of Spring Noodles" was somewhat tortuous, Lin Yuan didn't feel wronged.

Compared to novels like "The Necklace" with its dramatic twist ending, this kind of sentimental short story indeed couldn't make an immediate sensation.

If there was anything that surprised Lin Yuan, it was the unexpected discovery of his haters...

There used to be very few online voices discrediting Chu Kuang, but this time, just because the new short story didn't rank first right away, quite a few people jumped out to set the tone.

Had he done something wrong recently?

When Lin Yuan spoke about this to Jin Mu, Jin Mu laughed and said,

“Even the most perfect person will be ridiculed by haters. There are always some people who inexplicably show hostility towards unrelated people. As a writer, the situation is relatively better. If you were an artist, that would be truly cruel. You haven’t done anything wrong.”

Alright then.

Lin Yuan didn’t dwell heavily on the issue either.

Jin Mu brought up another topic: “Do you have any plans for the next film?”

The film “The Tuner” was off circulation by then.

The box office for this movie ultimately exceeded one billion.

However, after various parties took their shares, Lin Yuan ended up only pocketing around two hundred million.

“Let’s talk about it later.”

Ol’ Zhou had asked about this as well, but Lin Yuan didn’t give a clear answer either. His plan was to first complete Chu Kuang’s new book, “The Murder of Roger Ackroyd.”

The case took place in a village.

There were two prominent households in the village.

The master of one of the households was named Roger, a widowed man.

The master of the other household was Ferrars, and Lin Yuan used the name Flora.

This was a wealthy widow.

Flora became a widow because she poisoned her husband.

Maybe because they had similar experiences, Roger and Flora fell in love.

At the beginning of the story, Flora committed suicide.

Roger knew that someone had discovered she had poisoned her husband, and Flora was being blackmailed by this person during her life, which might have been the direct reason for her suicide.

Roger wanted to know who the blackmailer was.

Before committing suicide, Flora left Roger a letter.

But Roger died without finishing the letter, he was seated in the study when his neck got sliced by a knife...

The story unfolded from there.

Changing the background was not a big deal.

As for the names of the characters, Lin Yuan didn't need to change much either.

Since Blue Star is big, all kinds of surnames existed here, regardless if it's Mike, David, or Alice, they were all names from Blue Star.

Especially in Yan Continent, such westernized names were quite common.

Therefore, Lin Yuan did not worry about the discomfort that such names might bring.

The story is centered around the doctor named Xie Shepherd.

Just as in many cases in "Sherlock Holmes," they are unfolded from the perspective of Watson.

Because Xie Shepherd was a local doctor who knew Roger quite well, and with his alibi, he became Poirot's assistant, helped Poirot investigate Roger's case, and finally witnessed the truth revealed by Poirot through his perspective...

It's worth mentioning that Poirot is the protagonist of "The Murder of Roger Ackroyd"!

Poirot!

Full name: Hercule Poirot.

In Chu Kuang's writings, he naturally could only be called Poirot to fit the characteristics of Blue Star.

The lovers of detective stories on Earth would definitely be familiar with this name, just as everyone knows Sherlock Holmes.

Because in many of Queen's detective novels, the male protagonist is Poirot.

When Poirot dies in the book, he even made it to The New York Times, reflecting the horrifying influence of his character!

This is a great detective who can be on par with Sherlock Holmes (both are detectives created by mystery writers, and their creators are equally famous)!

And "The Murder of Roger Ackroyd" was exactly a work that familiarized readers with Poirot.

Poirot was once a policeman. Later, he quit his job as a policeman and became a private detective.

As a result, after solving a series of major cases, Poirot became world-famous!

He became a regular in the newspapers and a superstar detective in the eyes of high society!

Poirot then retired. He moved to the village where "The Murder of Roger Ackroyd" took place, with leisure time spent growing pumpkins, and was invited to successfully solve Roger's case.

This case made Poirot realize that he still loved solving mysteries, so he came out of retirement.

Like “Murder on the Orient Express,” it was solved by Poirot after he came out of retirement.

Also, “Death on the Nile,” was resolved by Poirot.

Therefore...

Many fans of detective stories on Earth enjoy comparing Poirot with Sherlock Holmes, and supporters of both sides continue to debate who’s stronger.

Of course, such comparisons are meaningless.

Because it’s like comparing the creators of these two characters, Queen and Conan Doyle, who are both among the top three detective masters in the world and unsurpassable industry figures.

...

Of course, Lin Yuan was fond of Sherlock Holmes, although he couldn’t remember the details of the Sherlock Holmes series, he had to recall them through the system.

Upon receiving a custom work, the system could always bestow Lin Yuan with plenty of memory about the work, including its achievements, and so forth.

At the same time,

Lin Yuan also adored Poirot.

He did not think of himself as a scum.

As a matter of fact, many lovers of reasoning are like this, being particularly fond of both Sherlock Holmes and Poirot, as well as Marple and Queen, etc.

Sherlock Holmes was a man who particularly values evidence, enjoying analyzing a case through the discovered evidence.

Also, Sherlock Holmes was more emotional and not good at socializing.

In contrast to the dashing Sherlock Holmes,

Poirot was an adorable elderly gentleman, who was somewhat behind the times and had a poor adaptability to new things. He had the utmost faith in the “little grey cells” of his own brain.

Besides, he placed more emphasis on the analysis of the cases and his comprehension of human nature.

Although he was arrogant, he was also kind and particularly good at social interactions, being comfortable around women.

Therefore, the main difference between Sherlock Holmes and Poirot lies in their individual characteristics.

Poirot was of average appearance, standing a little over 1.6 meters tall, sporting meticulously groomed mustache on his upper lip.

He was extremely fastidious about cleanliness (OCD), a thing that Poirot could never tolerate about Holmes’ always messy room.

Poirot always kept himself spotless. He’d rather take a bullet than let his clothes be tarnished.

He also had an obsession with symmetry. He chose to live in his apartment solely because of its symmetry to the buildings on both sides.

Clearly a terminal patient of obsessive-compulsive disorder.

Poirot was also very vain. He insisted on wearing brand-name leather shoes, even in rural areas where he should be wearing other types of shoes.

He always wore an excellently tailored striped suit and waistcoat, along with an inherited pocket watch.

Additionally, his physical fitness was very poor.

Many people have ridiculed Poirot's appearance, but Poirot didn't mind. He secretly laughed off all the sarcasm and ridicule and confrontations—

He was Poirot, the world-class detective!

The world had to accept him as he was, including all his appearances and personality traits!

In the detective novels.

Only second to Sherlock Holmes in fame, Poirot's popularity gradually gained momentum over the years. Earth came to an end. As the works of Agatha Christie continued to be adapted for the silver screen, especially those classics of hers that featured Poirot in every place,

That's another reason why Lin Yuan was thrilled when he received "The Murder of Roger Ackroyd"

The novel is presided by Poirot!

Lin Yuan was certain that in the future he would publish more of Agatha Christie's works, and one day, Poirot would become a renowned detective in Blue Star!

Therefore, "The Murder of Roger Ackroyd", being Poirot's first appearance in Blue Star, was of particular importance.

This was significant for Lin Yuan.

He would eventually release the Sherlock Holmes series. However, Poirot's brilliance should not be obscured!

After all, they were world-class private detective figures alongside Sherlock Holmes, appearing in more than thirty novels of Agatha Christie.

Lin Yuan was contemplating...

If Poirot were not an eccentric old man, but was as versatile as Sherlock Holmes, would he be even more famous?

Yet on second thought, Lin Yuan felt that it was precisely because Poirot was completely different from Sherlock Holmes, which made him popular.

Poirot was Poirot. Sherlock Holmes was Sherlock Holmes. Both were well-known and unique personalities.

When Lin Yuan was working on “The Murder of Roger Ackroyd”, he always felt delighted while describing Poirot.

In the book, Shepherd said, “If only these walls could speak.”

Poirot’s response was simply iconic.

He looked at the wall and touched various pieces of furniture, “To me, sometimes they do speak — whether it’s a chair — or a table, always providing me with some clues.”

Poirot liked to say such cool lines.

What appear to be complex clues in others’ eyes, would always be systematically sorted, formed a clear structure and orderly arrangement, just like his personality, pursuing order to such an extreme!

Of course,

Poirot’s most impressive scene should be the ending of “Murder on the Orient Express,” which won’t be revealed here.

Lin Yuan was writing the new piece happily.

When it came to the last few chapters of the novel, Lin Yuan felt more joyful.

This novel didn't follow the traditional logistic reasoning pattern of Agatha Christie's works, but pioneered a unique detective writing style—

Agatha Christie was recognized as the strongest Pioneer in the field of detective novels!

So, it was full of innovation and uniqueness, just like the games the system often enjoyed playing.

Lin Yuan believed that when the readers reached the conclusion, they would surely be caught off guard.

After all, Poirot had gained his fame from “The Murder of Roger Ackroyd,” and Agatha Christie's reasoning was also held in high regard by outsiders since this novel.

“Oh...”

Having completed the amount of work he assigned to himself for the day, Lin Yuan remembered that he still had the task of helping Sun Yaohuo and Jiang Kui gain popularity.

After all, there was only that much time throughout the year.

And it was already March.

Perhaps after he wrapped up “The Murder of Roger Ackroyd”, he would need to ramp up the publicity for both of them so that the development of the three pseudonyms could go hand in hand.

Chapter 318: The 3rd Disciple

Of course, there was a sequence to be followed, the priority was certainly to finish “The Murder of Roger Ackroyd”.

Fortunately, this novel was only a little over a hundred thousand words. Even after Lin Yuan made adjustments to the background, the overall word count didn't exceed one hundred and fifty thousand. It could be read in half a day at a normal reading speed——

Even if the deduction part required slower reading.

Lin Yuan's typing speed was fast, he was quick at writing, it was only adjusting the background at the beginning that took a bit of effort.

March 5th.

Lin Yuan finally completed this novel.

After taking a breath, he went through the whole text again. After confirming that there had been no issues, Lin Yuan didn't rush to contact the publishing house. Instead, he took some time off to visit the company.

Inside the company.

The departments were buzzing with gossip, as if discussing some big scoop.

“What happened?”

Lin Yuan asked his assistant Gu Dong.

Gu Dong made Lin Yuan a cup of tea and chuckled:

“You don't know! For the March music chart, our Starlight won first place again. This time, Teacher Yang Zhongming made his move, releasing a song he has been grinding for two years. As expected, he crushed the competition, just like you did last month!”

Lin Yuan then realized.

There was nothing surprising about Yang Zhongming's victory.

Gu Dong chuckled:

“But you might not guess that just like you, Teacher Yang Zhongming also released a piano piece this time. Some people say that the quality of this piece is not inferior to ‘Mariage d’Amour’.”

“Is that so?”

Lin Yuan became more interested immediately.

He put on his headphones, opened his computer, searched for Yang Zhongming’s piece, and began to listen.

It was a pop piano piece just the same...

That was hardly surprising; for classical piano to be enjoyed by both refined and vulgar, the difficulty level is too high.

Modern piano music that’s appreciated by everyone without a threshold is more common.

After listening, Lin Yuan nodded.

Maestro’s previous pieces lacked a kind of dominating presence that belonged to Maestro. However, Yang Zhongming’s piece this time had genuinely proved why Maestro was Maestro!

Strong!

This piece, called “Lucent”, would have been a hit even on Earth. It was an excellent piano piece.

However...

Considering it took Yang Zhongming, a Maestro, two years to create this piece, Lin Yuan did not find it surprising.

Without the aid of the System, how many two-year periods could even a Maestro afford to spend?

When he thought about it.

His victory against the Maestros before was because they didn't bring out their best works.

If the Maestros had all brought out pieces they had been carefully polishing over two years, perhaps he wouldn't have won so easily as he did.

"System, a question."

"Go ahead."

"What level does Yang Zhongming rank at on Blue Star?"

"Top three in comprehensive composition ability."

The System answered without hesitation.

Lin Yuan was shocked. He only knew that Yang Zhongming was a Maestro but he didn't know that Yang Zhongming was in the top three Maestros on Blue Star!

If you consider the entire Blue Star, the total number of Maestros isn't small. From a global perspective, the base number is necessarily larger.

"It seems Yang Zhongming's character card is more valuable than I thought."

Lin Yuan raised an eyebrow and asked his assistant Gu Dong to call Feng Shuo and Xue Liang.

...

Feng Shuo and Xue Liang were both Lin Yuan's disciples.

The two received the message and quickly arrived at Lin Yuan's office.

"Master!"

After the two entered, they looked at Lin Yuan with eager eyes.

"Hmm."

Lin Yuan looked at Feng Shuo's composition ability, which had impressively reached the level of 642.

In other words:

Feng Shuo had already graduated!

Seeing the System's prompt that Feng Shuo had reached the graduation standard, Lin Yuan smiled and proceeded to check Xue Liang's composition ability.

He remembered that the last time he checked, Xue Liang's composition ability was over six hundred.

However, he was surprised to find that Xue Liang's composition ability had reached 777!

Both his disciples had made him proud!

Leaving aside how quickly Feng Shuo achieved masterhood.

The potential Xue Liang has shown is beyond Lin Yuan's expectations.

Lin Yuan had initially thought that after Xue Liang surpassed the 600 point barrier to reach the gold standard, he might stop progressing.

But now he's passed 700!

What exactly does 700 signify?

If we were to categorize the gold standard, in Lin Yuan's mind, it is divided into three tiers.

Benchmarks between 700 to 800 belong to the middle tier.

Those between 800 to 900 are among the strongest gold holders!

A case of hidden power suddenly unleashed?

In terms of innate abilities, Xue Liang definitely falls short compared to Feng Shuo.

But, after granting Xue Liang more autonomy, the fact that he could still progress is really a feat itself.

Perhaps Lin Yuan should pay more attention towards his apprentices.

After a thoughtful pause, Lin Yuan began, "Feng Shuo, you won't need to continue learning with me for a while."

"Why..."

Feng Shuo instantly turned pale, thinking that he might have made a mistake, he trembled as he spoke, "If there's something you're not satisfied with, just speak up, I'll definitely correct it..."

"That's not it."

Lin Yuan said reassuringly, "You've done very well, precisely because of that, you've met my conditions to graduate, and like Xue Liang, you can stand on your own now."

"Graduate?"

Feng Shuo was startled, his expression slightly loosened, but there was still a hint of loss in his eyes. He wished he could continue learning under his master's guidance.

“As for Xue Liang...”

Lin Yuan hesitated and said, “Once I train another apprentice, I’ll resume classes with you, you’ve made great progress lately.”

“Master...”

After hearing these words, Xue Liang was moved to the brink of tears.

All of the effort he’d put in for so long suddenly felt so worth it!

He always knew that as long as he worked hard, his master would recognize his efforts!

What Xue Liang didn’t know was that Lin Yuan had no idea of the efforts he’d been making behind the scenes.

Lin Yuan had simply been making judgements based on the System’s numerical evaluations...

However, this assessment was the most straightforward.

“So, I called you here today to ask you who you think should be my third apprentice, after the third apprentice, I’m probably not going to take any new ones easily.”

This was Lin Yuan’s objective.

He thought this task of selecting the third apprentice should be discussed with the opinions of his two current apprentices, as in his mind, he had decided to further strengthen his bond with his apprentices.

“A third apprentice?”

Feng Shuo and Xue Liang exchanged looks and were overtaken by emotion to think that their master would seek their opinions on such a matter.

“No rush, take some time to think it over and help me identify potential candidates. After all, this will be your future junior brother or sister.”

“Okay”

“Since the two of you have graduated, I should assign you some tasks. For the next few months, Xue Liang, you will write a song every month for Sun Yaohuo, and Feng Shuo, you will be in charge of Jiang Kui. You should know that these are our department’s tasks.”

Lin Yuan was considering conducting a proper assessment of his two apprentices’ abilities.

“I accept!”

Feng Shuo loudly responded, feeling somewhat excited, as long as he completes his tasks successfully, he should be able to continue studying under his master, right?

“Me too!”

Xue Liang said excitedly, his thoughts similar to Feng Shuo’s.

Lin Yuan nodded, “The works you prepare for these two will be subject to my revisions. Now if you do well...”

What rewards would there be for doing well?

Lin Yuan didn’t say.

But if they did well, he would continue to tutor them.

Lin Yuan had a sense that with Yang Zhongming's character card, plus the effect of the Teacher's Halo, perhaps he could train a new Maestro junior.

Feng Shuo...

Xue Liang...

Both have potential...

Lin Yuan noticed that with Feng Shuo's graduation, the system indicated that the effect of Teacher's Halo had been enhanced...

As for why Lin Yuan did not plan to take any more apprentices after his third one, it's because his mission is to train three apprentices.

For now, it is crucial to focus on the mission.

While testing the abilities of his two apprentices, Lin Yuan figured he could sneakily take it easy. If his apprentices absolutely need help, he could always step in. In fact, Lin Yuan was prepared for a big outlay, he would just exchange a few classics with the system to give to Sun Yaohuo and Jiang Kui later. He was committed to completing the department's tasks after all.

Chapter 319: The Murder of Roger Ackroyd

With the company affairs taken care of by her two apprentices, Lin Yuan found herself with quite a bit of free time on her hands.

After some thought, she finalized "The Murder of Roger Ackroyd" and handed it to Jin Mu, instructing him to contact Silver Blue Books.

"You really wrote a mystery novel?"

Jin Mu was somewhat taken aback as he looked at the document for "The Murder of Roger Ackroyd" that Lin Yuan had sent him.

He remembered that Lin Yuan had casually mentioned that mystery novels were popular during their discussion on what genres were leading the book market.

To his surprise, his boss had indeed produced a mystery novel.

Just because this genre was popular?

Although it seemed like a strong enough reason at first, Jin Mu couldn't shake the feeling that something was off.

Yet, considering Lin Yuan's track record of going under three different pseudonyms, each excelling in a different field, he couldn't find a reason to doubt her.

"Can I take a look at it later?"

As a fan of mystery, Jin Mu believed he had a say in this.

"You can."

Lin Yuan responded.

Smiling, Jin Mu didn't rush to read. Instead, he called "YangFeng".

"Chu Kuang has a new book?!"

"YangFeng" received Jin Mu's call during his office hours.

His enthusiasm surged at the news, culminating in an excited shout within the office.

"A new book by Chu Kuang?"

The announcement was like magic, silencing the entire Fantasy Department at Silver Blue Books.

Everyone quietly paused their work to look at “YangFeng”.

Ever since the closure of “Ghost Blowing the Lantern”, the Fantasy Department at Silver Blue Books had been looking forward to Chu Kuang’s new book.

Everyone excitedly speculated about the genre Chu Kuang would tackle next.

There were all sorts of guesses.

It was known that Chu Kuang never wrote two novels of the same genre. He was a consummate pioneer!

“What genre is it this time?”

“YangFeng” swallowed, attempting to ask the question nonchalantly. It was the one thing everyone had their minds on.

Having been Chu Kuang’s editor for so long, “YangFeng” felt prepared for any genre that Chu Kuang might have chosen.

No matter what, he wouldn’t be surprised by the genre of the new book this time.

“After all, I’ve been trained for so long.”

“YangFeng” thought proudly to himself.

Jin Mu’s voice was oddly hesitant, “A mystery novel.”

“...”

“YangFeng” turned from confident to stunned. He asked for confirmation, ”

“It’s really a mystery novel?”

Jin Mu firmly answered, “Yes.”

“YangFeng” felt dizzy, his demeanor crumbling, a hint of disappointment on his face, “A mystery novel...”

He had mentally prepared himself for any genre Chu Kuang might choose. It would’ve still been normal.

But when he found out the genre of Chu Kuang’s new book, “YangFeng” couldn’t help but lose composure.

Not only was “YangFeng” thrown off guard, the entire Fantasy Department was left dumbfounded.

Don’t get us wrong.

We’re not doubting.

The pure issue is, the Mystery Department handles mystery novels.

Indeed, if “Ghost Blowing the Lantern” could barely be categorized under fantasy literature, then a mystery novel was undoubtedly out of its league.

This was a distinct category.

The company has a dedicated mystery novel department.

The genre of Chu Kuang’s new book was not related to the Fantasy Department.

“Alright, I will have someone from the Mystery Department get in touch with you.” “YangFeng”’s voice carried a heavy sense of loss.

“Alright, the novel has been sent. Please check.”

“Understood.”

After he hung up, the department fell into silence.

After a while, someone asked, “He really wants to write a mystery?”

“YangFeng” nodded reluctantly.

Everyone’s mood had become somewhat melancholic.

Then Ol’ Xiong came out, his face wearing an excited smile, “I think I heard you all discussing Chu Kuang’s new book. Is it ready?”

“Yes.”

“YangFeng replied, “It’s a mystery.”

The smile on Ol’ Xiong’s face disappeared instantly: “Mystery?”

YangFeng shrugged his shoulders.

Ol’ Xiong stood there dumbstruck for a few seconds, then waved his hand saying,

“What type of book Chu Kuang wants to write is his freedom, send me the manuscript, I will visit the mystery department.”

“Alright.”

Five minutes later, Ol’ Xiong arrived at the mystery department.

Mystery, being as popular a genre as fantasy, having its own department was no surprise.

But the Mystery Department at Silver Blue Books has always been lukewarm.

In terms of performance, it couldn't come close to the Fantasy Department. The Fantasy Department was Silver Blue's biggest money maker!

So, Ol' Xiong held the mystery department in contempt. It was a small department after all.

But today, this small department had snatched away Chu Kuang.

Alright, then.

Perhaps 'snatched away' was not the right term, after all, it was Chu Kuang's personal choice, and everyone belonged to the same company. Regardless with whom Chu Kuang shared his profits with, it all belonged to Silver Blue Books...

"Brother Xiong."

The editor-in-chief of the Mystery Department, Cao Dezhi, seemed surprised to see Ol' Xiong in the department, "What brings you here?" he asked.

"Chu Kuang's new book is a mystery." Ol' Xiong grumbled: "According to the company rules, your department is responsible for connecting with him."

"Chu Kuang?"

Cao Dezhi was stunned for a moment, then overjoyed!

Chu Kuang was very well known at Silver Blue Books, he was their money tree!

He couldn't believe that this money tree wanted to write a mystery novel. Naturally, Cao Dezhi was over the moon about this!

While he was not sure how good Chu Kuang's mystery novel would turn out to be, nor had he heard before that Chu Kuang would write such a genre, but as long as Chu Kuang was willing to write-

Regardless of the genre, there would be readers who would buy it!

This is the influence of a GOAT-level author!

At Chu Kuang's current level of fame, whatever genre he chose to write, the sales wouldn't be too bad because his reputation had already been established!

Right now, what the Mystery Department needed most was sales!

Thinking of this, Cao Dezhi totally understood why Ol' Xiong looked so unpleasant, he chuckled lightly and said,

"Brother Xiong, my condolences."

One of the top authors from the Fantasy Department has come to write mystery, probably causing the editors in the Fantasy Department to collectively go into shutdown mode, while he had unexpectedly hit the jackpot!

"Go to hell."

Ol' Xiong retorted, not in a good mood: "Once Chu Kuang is done playing around with mystery, he'll come back. By leaving him in your mystery department, you're wasting talent."

"Brother Xiong..."

Cao Dezhi said, feeling glum: "There's no need to belittle our Mystery Department like that."

Ol' Xiong scoffed: "Belittling, huh? Among the top five companies in the publishing industry, our Mystery Department at Silver Blue Books is the worst. I guess Dezhi is more aware of this than I am."

Cao Dezhi suddenly forced out a bitter smile.

What Ol' Xiong said was a fact.

The author's strength in the Mystery Department of Silver Blue Books, was grossly mismatched with Silver Blue's overall standing. It was barely at the same level as the mystery departments of some second-rate publishing houses...

"Alright."

Ol' Xiong waved his hand: "I have sent the book to your email. Remember to check it. I have relayed the message. Get in touch with Chu Kuang's agent later."

"Alright."

Cao Dezhi nodded.

After Ol' Xiong's departure, Cao Dezhi thought to himself: "I hope Mr. Chu Kuang can give me a pleasant surprise..."

The Mystery Department was in some serious trouble.

If department performance didn't improve, he guessed that the Editor-in-Chief would probably replace him. Therefore, Dezhi had been quite worried about it.

However, Chu Kuang writing a mystery novel brought a ray of hope to Dezhi!

At least...

The sales performance of the Mystery Department was guaranteed to some extent!

Chu Kuang was really a good man who brought aid in times of trouble!

With this hope in mind, Cao Dezhi returned to his office, opened his email, and started reading the novel titled “The Murder of Roger Ackroyd”.

Chapter 320: Fooling Around

The story began with an introduction of the case:

Flora poisoned her alcoholic husband, inheriting his wealth and becoming the wealthiest woman in the village.

There was also the wealthiest man in this village, named Roger.

Roger’s wife had died many years ago.

Perhaps both of them had lost their spouses and empathized with each other, so they fell in love.

Roger planned to marry Flora.

Before marriage, Flora told Roger: “I killed my alcoholic husband. This secret is known by someone in the village who has been continually threatening me with it recently and has extorted a lot of money from me.”

Roger was shocked.

He was a just person, unable to accept that the woman he loved had murdered her husband.

Although he did not plan to report Flora, their engagement ended without a hitch.

However, Flora was still the woman Roger loved deeply, so he asked Flora: who was the one secretly extorting her behind her back?

He wanted to help Flora get out of this trouble.

Flora didn’t answer immediately, but told Roger to wait for two days.

As a result, Roger received news of Flora's suicide.

Before he could grieve, Roger soon received a suicide note from Flora...

No one knew if Roger had read that letter.

Because that letter was missing, and Roger was found dead in his study, his neck slashed with a knife.

The novel was written in the first-person perspective, that is, from the perspective of the village doctor, Xie Shepherd.

Writing fantasy novels in the first person is often a taboo, but it's fine for mystery, thriller or detective types of novels.

The first-person perspective could enhance the reader's sense of immersion.

"A quite conventional opening."

Cao Dezhi commented softly:

"In all likelihood, the murderer is the one who blackmailed Flora. He likely killed Roger and took Flora's suicide note for fear that his blackmail would be exposed."

It wasn't hard to guess.

From the current content, the story is moderately compelling.

Cao Dezhi couldn't help but feel a bit let down.

If only pursuing decent sales, Chu Kuang's pen name is the best guarantee.

But if he wants a huge success in sales, then it would depend on the quality of the detective novel—

Compared to steady success, Cao Dezhi naturally hopes for this work to be a huge hit!

“Perhaps it’s a bit rusty because it’s the first time writing a mystery?”

Cao Dezhi evaluated inwardly: “For an author who is writing a mystery for the first time, this is really not bad. From this perspective, Chu Kuang is deserving of the title ‘GOAT author’.”

Actually, it’s not that Chu Kuang didn’t write it well...

There’s nothing wrong with Chu Kuang’s writing style in this detective novel.

The problem is that Chu Kuang wrote too conventionally.

Out of ten detective novel writers, five could write like this.

So, it isn’t unique!

However, Cao Dezhi still read on. A moderate hit was also good, as their mystery department was so desperate that they didn’t even have moderately successful works.

Moreover...

As a mystery enthusiast, he enjoyed the process of solving the puzzles.

And the ultimate pleasure for a mystery enthusiast is undoubtedly discovering who the murderer is before the detective does in the book!

Soon, the story moved on to Chapter Three.

A new character appeared at this point, a detective named Poirot!

According to the novel, Poirot was a renowned private detective who had cracked many major cases, recently moving to the village and spending his days growing pumpkins in his yard.

“A detective that suddenly appears?”

Cao Dezhi raised an eyebrow.

Detective Poirot was an outsider to the village. An outsider suddenly moves in, and two people in the town die in succession?

Is it a coincidence?

Cao Dezhi was a bit suspicious that the detective was the murderer.

If this was the set up, this novel might be a bit unconventional and offbeat.

However, after reading a dozen or so more pages, Cao Dezhi dismissed this suspicion.

Poirot was indeed a detective, and the first-person narrator, Xie Shepherd, became Poirot’s assistant once the latter started investigating the case.

Then who was the murderer?

The police suspects Roger’s adopted son Ralph Paton.

Yet, Cao Dezhi decisively ruled out him as a suspect. The one who most looks like the murderer in a murder case is often the least likely to be the murderer; they are just red herrings set up by the author.

As a matter of fact, Poirot didn’t suspect Paton either.

This detective seemed to be quite competent.

And as the story kept developing, with more and more characters involved, Cao Dezhi's reading experience gradually began to change.

"This is getting interesting..."

The difficulty of the case was steadily increasing, the number of suspects was increasingly growing, and the readability of the story seemed to be rising gradually.

First was Roger's friend, Blunt.

This was a strong man. At the time of Roger's death, he happened to be visiting Roger's house.

Furthermore, Blunt had no money, but liked Roger's niece, who happened to have a special relationship with Roger's adopted son, Ralph Paton!

So this guy could very well have killed Roger, then framed Paton, so he could get the girl...

"Could it be him?"

Cao Dezhi began his brainstorming, shifting his gaze to another character in the book.

The skinny, meticulous, lively and cheerful manservant Raymond.

This person didn't seem to have any major issues, but in detective novels, the ones who seem least likely to be the killer often turn out to be the killer!

Soon after, Cao Dezhi's attention was drawn to other characters...

There were many characters related to the case.

And with every individual implicated in this case, it seemed everyone had their own secrets!

Poirot even purposefully gathered everyone together and pointed it out:

“All of you have concealed some facts from me. Maybe you thought those facts were irrelevant to the case and chose to protect yourselves, but the key to solving the case might be within the facts you’ve concealed.”

Cao Dezhi thought Poirot was frustrated.

What surprised him was that Poirot was not troubled at all, but rather showing off, “But it’s okay, I will figure out everything.”

How should I put it?

It was more like a challenge to the murderer.

“Very soon, I will find you.”

Statements like this one made Dezhi suddenly realize that he was starting to like this detective.

But who could the murderer be?

Dezhi was getting anxious.

As the chief editor of the mystery department with a long history, he had been able to identify the murderer in 80% of the detective novels he had read before the detective in the story had solved the case!

But this time, he was unable to make a definitive conclusion.

That was because each character had an alibi, and each character was also hiding part of the truth, making the case even more complex.

The case was like a line in the grass.

There must be foreshadowing hidden in the story, indirect evidence of who the murderer is, but after reading two-thirds of the content, Dezhi still couldn't accurately guess the murderer!

Chu Kuang was really doing a good job.

This case, if not prepared and planned with enough patience, it would be hard to write so complexly, yet within the complexity, Chu Kuang continued to clear up the fog through the detective's hand.

"Now that I have suspected everybody who can be suspected, who then, is the murderer?"

This had become the thing Dezhi cared most about, he would rather skip to the end right now and see the truth!

But he held back.

The enjoyment in reading a detective novel lies in the reasoning during the reading process, once the murderer is known, it's hard to feel the thrill anymore.

At this point, Cao Dezhi suddenly realized that he had been completely absorbed by "The Murder of Roger Ackroyd"!

This is a really good case!

The planning and arrangement of the entire case were very beautiful!

This made Dezhi, on one hand, anxiously want to find out who the murderer is, and on the other hand, finding it more and more interesting!

It turns out that fantasy writers can also write such beautiful detective novels!

The initial feeling was average, but perhaps that was because this novel takes a while to get heated.

Well...

Drawing conclusions now seems to be a bit early too.

If Chu Kuang is just bluffing and the final murderer can't make the reader have a sudden realization, then this book can't be considered ingenious.

Thinking of this.

Dezhi anxiously continues to read the book.

The last few chapters, he read word by word, sentence by sentence.

But the further he read, the more uneasy he became because the murderer was still hidden in the mist. Even as the story progressed to the latter part, Dezhi himself couldn't find the answer!

"Could it be that the murderer is not on the list of suspects?"

If that's the case, Dezhi would definitely curse loudly!

Because this behavior is just like a horror movie, scaring the audience into jumping from time to time, but when it comes to the end, the director tells you that all of this is because the protagonist has a mental illness, so he is imagining it...

Go to Hell.

Chu Kuang wouldn't play this kind of trick, would he?

With the frustration of not being able to guess the murderer and the worry about whether the ending can explain everything, Dezhi finally reached the third-last chapter.

The chapter was titled "The truth is revealed".

This is the third-last chapter of the novel. Chu Kuang didn't choose to reveal the solution in the last part; it seems like there's still a summary of the whole case...

“I admit, I can’t guess who the killer is.”

Dezhi felt a bit heavy, he began to worry that the ending of this novel couldn’t satisfy him completely.

At the end of the chapter.

Poirot revealed the truth: “Who is familiar with Ackroyd and knows that he bought a dictation machine; who knows certain mechanical principles; who had the chance to take the dagger from the silver cupboard before Flora arrived; who had a container that could hold the dictation machine; who had a few minutes alone in the study while Parker was making a call to the police...”

Reading up to this point, Dezhi suddenly stood up from the computer!

His eyes, wide open like copper bells!

His breath, at this moment, became extremely coarse!

Shock!

Tremor!

Never expected!

The whole book’s killer he guessed turned out to be...

Xie! Shepherd!

Yes, it’s “me,” Xie Shepherd, the first-person narrator!

The whole story was shown from Shepherd’s perspective. From Poirot’s appearance to Shepherd becoming Poirot’s assistant, Dezhi never suspected Shepherd during this process!

It's not that he's not smart enough!

It's because he, had been fooled by Chu Kuang!

The fooling was so thorough!

Who could guess that "I" was the murderer?

When the reader opens "The Murder of Roger Ackroyd", they would probably rule out Shepherd in an instant!

This person has witnessed the development of the entire case as a participant, and at the beginning listed an alibi...

But it was all fake!

The characters' alibis started being overturned in the middle of the story, but by that time, Dezhi's attention was already completely attracted by several major suspects!

"Damn it!"

Dezhi felt like he had been thoroughly fooled. Which detective novel would mislead readers like this, with the murderer being "me"?

It was simply cheating the reader's feelings—

Dezhi felt like he should be raging mad.

But for some reason, after he blurted out a curse, his face suddenly turned red, and his eyes filled with embarrassment.

He really didn't want to admit it, but a very subversive fact at this moment was:

He actually felt...

ecstatic?

That was a kind of pleasure that filled his heart after being gorgeously humiliated by the author!

And when he finished reading the following two chapters of explanation, understanding that the entire story of “The Murder of Roger Ackroyd” was actually Shepherd’s confession...

Dezhi had a thrill.