

## Immortal 141

### Chapter 141: Desperation

Cornered, Zu An had no choice but to raise his sword to deal with the incoming attack. Swords weren't built to collide directly with blunt weapons, and the black lump of a weapon wielded by the attacking zombie seemed to pack quite a punch. So, he chose to use the 'flick' form of the Elementary Swordplay in order to redirect the attack to the side.

Despite so, he still felt a powerful rebound numbing his arm. The zombie's strength was on par with him, and it had the advantage in terms of weapon too. While he had managed to hold on for the time being, things weren't looking good for him.

He rolled on the ground to dodge the next few follow-up attacks from that zombie. When he turned around and saw the holes left on the ground, he belatedly realized just what kind of weapon the zombie was wielding.

It was actually a hoe!

Now that he thought about it, most of the zombies he encountered along the way wielded wooden bats, carrying poles, choppers, axes, and that sort of weapons. Only a small number of them wielded swords, sabers, spears, and the more typical type of weapons.

Why do they look like refugees?

Zu An had noticed earlier that these people wore tattered clothes, and he thought that they had simply decomposed from having stayed underground for too long. But right now, he couldn't help but wonder if their clothes had been so tattered right from the start.

The sight before him really resembled the army of refugees he had seen in historical dramas in his previous life.

Regardless of whether they were refugees or whatever, it was still a fact that they had turned into zombies. Not daring to let his mind wander, he placed his focus back on the battle and used Sunflower Phantasm to dodge the attacks coming from all around.

His initial intention was to run out of the valley. Those Goldenfur Monstrous Rats that had made out with their life proved it to be a viable escape route, and there were grounds to believe that the activity of these zombies was limited to the valley.

Unfortunately for him, the rats had lured far too many zombies to the entrance of the valley while they were escaping earlier, resulting in a huge crowd there. He had attempted to make his way through a couple of times, only to be forced back in the end.

Left with no choice, he could only head deeper into the valley.

He knew that given that he was only placing himself in greater danger by heading deeper into the valley, but he had no other choice. The zombies with hoes were all roughly as powerful as him, and those wielding sabers and swords were even stronger.

In a one-to-one, he could still hold his ground using Sunflower Phantasm, but he was faced with a huge army right now. Just remaining alive on this battlefield was tough enough for him, let alone attempting a counterattack.

In fact, it was thanks to Sunflower Phantasm that he was still managing to hold on thus far. Even if another even more powerful cultivator from the academy had been in his place, it was likely that he would have already been swamped down by the hordes of zombies by now.

“Whatcha staring at? Whatcha staring at? Why aren’t you staring at me?!”

Zu An’s furious curses echoed through the mountain valley. He tried to use his ‘Whatcha Staring At’ skill to distract the zombies, but the latter simply stared at him as if he was a fool, not reacting in the least.

It turned out that ‘Whatcha Staring At’ only worked on intelligent lifeforms capable of speech, so these undead zombies were unfazed by it.

After running for a very long time, Zu An finally found himself cornered. Sunflower Phantasm might be a powerful skill, but there were limits to what he could do with it. Space was limited in this mountain valley, and the terrain was tough to navigate. There was just so much he could do to dodge the zombies.

With his back faced against the cliff, he found himself faced with a crowd of zombies that had gathered in a semicircle before him. He gulped nervously, wondering if he might just meet his end here.

Damnit! I haven’t even released my seal yet. Am I not going to be a real man even before I die?

Zu An found himself empathizing with the eunuchs he had seen in dramas in his previous life. No matter how dangerous it was for them, they still insisted on taking their ‘treasure’ back so that they could be buried with it.

What the hell am I even thinking about?

While Zu An was shuddering in disgust at that thought, the zombies had already darted impatiently at him. He immediately summoned Grandgale, and the bird avatar manifested in front of him. With a step, he leaped onto a tree growing off the cliff face and hugged tightly onto it.

The zombies were confused for a moment due to his sudden disappearance, but one of the zombies swiftly spotted him, pointed in his direction, and released a piercing screech to inform its comrades.

The other zombies raised their heads, and upon spotting him, they immediately began climbing the cliff face. Their movements were astonishingly agile, almost as if monkeys.

Zu An was horrified. Hold on for a moment! Aren’t these zombies supposed to be slow? Why the hell are they so good at climbing? If this was a game, that would definitely be a bloody bug!!

He quickly scanned his surroundings, hoping to find another place to leap toward. With the rise in his cultivation, he was now able to summon Grandgale twice, which meant that he could make another escape attempt. However, the entire area was flooded with zombies, such that even if he leaped elsewhere, it wouldn’t take long before he was cornered once more.

I probably should save it up when I’m in a really desperate situation.

In this short moment, the zombies had already reached the root of the tree and were starting to climb onto the tree trunk to head for him.

With a cold harrumph, Zu An thrust his sword forward and knocked the incoming zombies down to the ground. It was a desperate attempt, but it was unexpectedly successful. It dawned on him that he was actually in an advantageous position here.

The tree trunk hadn't been nibbled through by the Goldenfur Monstrous Rats, so it was still quite resilient. On top of that, this tree was hanging off the cliff face, making it hard for the zombies to approach and knock it down. There were only so few zombies who could approach him at once, and he could easily knock them down.

In other words, he was currently standing on a fortress that he could guard to the end of time!

Knowing that he could finally catch a breather, Zu An heaved a sigh of relief.

However, he knew that he wasn't out of danger yet. His circumstances hadn't really gotten much better. He wasn't in a game, where killing the zombies would give him experience points and equipment for him to gear up and make a comeback. He merely found a foothold for himself for the time being.

The zombies tried a few more charges, but Zu An was able to knock them down by exploiting the advantageous terrain. Eventually, the zombies gave up on climbing the cliff face altogether.

Finally having some time to rest, Zu An exhaled deeply. Are the zombies giving up now? If so, as long as I can last till daybreak, I'd be able to reunite with Ji Xiaoxi. I did sacrifice myself to save her this time around, so even if she doesn't betroth herself to me, at the very least, her affection meter toward me should have hit the max, right?

A commotion suddenly broke out beneath him. The horde of zombies suddenly parted to open up a path, and dozens of new zombies walked over.

"Hm? These zombies look much cleaner." Compared to the other ugly zombies whose flesh was decomposing and had pus flowing out, these newly arriving zombies looked far more pleasant to his eyes.

However, the smile on his face swiftly froze up. These zombies were retrieving a bow from their backs, nocking an arrow and aiming it toward him.

"%^(@#" Zu An.

He felt like cursing right now. How in the world could zombies be able to shoot arrows?

How are these refugees? They're practically an army!

By then, the archers had already released their arrows. Over a hundred arrows swooshed across the air, leaving Zu An so frightened that he quickly hid behind the tree.

Pu!

Zu An's body jolted. He inched forward a little before glancing back to look at the arrow tips that had pierced through the tree. They were stained with bits of crimson blood.

Holy shit!

He realized that he had gotten careless. He was in the world of cultivation right now! Regardless of whether they were zombies or not, how could the arrows they fired possibly be stopped by a mere tree?

It was all those dumb dramas I watched! Somehow people are able to magically survive bullets just by hiding behind a car. They're really imparting the wrong image to the viewers here!

Damn it!

Does this world have the concept of 'tetanus' too? Those zombies have rotting flesh and pus on them. Eek, who knows how much bacteria was on those arrows? Shit!

Goosebumps rose on Zu An's skin, but with another new barrage of arrows coming up, this was no time for his thoughts to be wandering. Not daring to use the trees to hide from the arrows anymore, he raised his sword and prepared himself to deflect the incoming arrows.

Due to him suffering quite some injuries from the arrows that had pierced through the tree earlier, his strength and speed were enhanced by a fair bit. Nevertheless, he still found himself struggling to cope amidst the arrow rain.

He could deflect those arrows that were aimed directly at him, but he couldn't deal with those that were aimed toward the tree. On top of that, the arrows also carried great force behind them, jolting his arm numb. It probably wouldn't take long before the arrows shot the tree down, and by then, he would be a goner.

While his mind was wandering about, he failed to stop one of the arrows, resulting in it piercing right into his shoulder. The sheer force nearly knocked him out of the tree, but fortunately, he managed to grab onto one of the tree branches in the nick of time.

Am I really going to die here today?

An old but majestic horn sounded at this moment. It seemed to carry some sort of mysterious power that left one's blood pumping furiously.

However, Zu An could hardly raise his mood at all. Having watched so many historical drama series, he knew that such horns were used for military signaling in wars.

He was still uncertain at the start, but the horn verified his doubts that these zombies were indeed an army!

It's all over. I can't even deal with these zombies, and they're still bringing reinforcement in! Hm? Wait a moment. Why aren't they firing anymore?

Zu An looked downward, and to his surprise, he saw the zombies staring toward the other end of the valley. These zombies were incapable of speech, but Zu An could still sense the nervousness on their half-decomposed faces.

What's going on?

Zu An was taken aback by the anomalous behavior of these zombies. Nevertheless, he still made use of this opportunity to take out some medicines to rub on his wounds.

He didn't use 'Faith in Brother Spring', which he had drawn from the keyboard. It would be a waste to use that miraculous medicine that could heal even the most severe of injuries here. Now that he thought about it, it was really a huge waste for him to use it on the injuries from the Wailing Whip.

The medicines he was using now were those Ji Xiaoxi had given to him. To be more exact, it was the medicines the male students had given to Ji Xiaoxi, only for her to pass it to him.

"Is it possible for some of them to secretly place poison in these medicine bottles in order to harm me?" murmured Zu An contemplatively. If they had predicted that Ji Xiaoxi would pass their medicines to him, there was a good chance that they would try to tamper with them.

However, he quickly dispelled those thoughts from his mind. He didn't think that those male students were that smart, and he trusted in Ji Xiaoxi's judgment too. She had taken a look at these medicines herself, and given her astute sense for medicine, she would have been able to tell that they had been tampered with or not.

Tok! Tok! Tok!

A series of coordinated footsteps sounded from afar, causing Zu An's face to darken. It made his heart thump nervously as a heavy atmosphere loomed in the air.

#### **Chapter 142: Luck and Risk**

Zu An turned in the direction where the zombies were staring at. The depths of the mountain valley had been cloaked in grayish mist initially, making it impossible to make out anything at all. However, he could now make out some silhouettes.

As the footsteps came closer, the silhouettes became clearer too.

Rows of zombies orderly marched out from the mist, only stopping around tens of meters away. Unlike the other zombies he had been dealing with all this while, these zombies looked far cleaner. Their bodies weren't decomposed, and they were dressed in armor. They had long spears and sharp swords in their hands, and those in the frontlines even had shields on their arms.

"Holy shit, are they elite monsters?" Zu An widened his eyes in horror. While the earlier zombies were refugees, the ones who had just appeared were indubitably soldiers.

Do zombies form armies too?

Zu An felt that things were getting far too ridiculous for his common sense to process.

It was already tough enough for him to deal with those refugees, and he actually had to fight with a bloody army now? That was definitely a one-way ticket to hell!

While Zu An was feeling despaired, he noticed some abnormalities occurring beneath. The zombies camping right beneath him were currently grabbing their weapons tightly as they eyed the army before them warily. They didn't seem to be on the same side as one another despite being zombies.

It was then that the formation of the army suddenly opened up, and a knight squad slowly made its way forward. These knights were riding on zombie horses that were shrouded in black mist, looking quite similar to the dullahans he had seen in animations in terms of character design.

These knights were dressed in armor that was clearly a tier higher than the footsoldiers around them.

The one standing at the forefront of this knight squad wore exquisitely-designed armor that stood out from the rest. It donned a black cloak that made it look as if it was embraced by darkness, and its head was completely covered by the helmet. The only facial feature one could see on it was two bundles of two flames glowing amidst the helmet, presumably its eyes.

Without a doubt, it was the captain of the squad.

As soon as it drew its sword, the other soldiers followed suit that drew their weapons too.

The knight captain pulled on the reins of his steed, and the latter rose up imposingly. That was the signal for the charge. Under his lead, the knights under his command charged toward the enemies. The footsoldiers behind also began charging forth while maintaining their formations.

"What's going on? Is this Zombies VS Zombies?" Zu An was baffled. At this point, he felt like he wouldn't be surprised even if he saw flying pigs in this world of cultivation.

He thought that the refugee zombies would immediately turn tail and run—it was obvious that both sides were on different levels in terms of equipment and strength—but to his surprise, the refugee zombies didn't back down from the battle. Instead, they roared furiously as they charged forward to meet the soldiers with the shabby weapons they had in hand.

Somehow, it looked as if the commoners were rising up in arms to start a revolution against the royal court or something.

It was then that the sky suddenly darkened. Zu An raised his head and saw a massive rain of arrows flying forth from the army's backline. Compared to that, the barrage of arrows Zu An faced earlier couldn't even be considered as a drizzle.

Under the arrows, quite a number of the refugee zombies were immediately pinned down to the ground, unable to rise back up anymore.

Zu An examined the arrows curiously. He had clashed with quite a few zombies now, but despite his attempts, he hadn't been able to cut down a single one of them. Yet, these arrows were actually able to claim their lives?

Are their archers too strong, or is there some sort of special enchantment on these arrows?

Soon, the zombies of both sides started clashing with one another. The momentum of the knights' charge was simply too powerful. The refugee zombies, armed with shabby weapons, couldn't possibly hope to stop them. In the blink of an eye, the knights had already sliced a huge opening through their formation.

The footsoldiers marched in right after and sliced down the refugee zombies with ease.

“It’s a one-sided slaughter!” Zu An was appalled. The refugee zombies that had cornered him earlier were actually completely helpless against the army!

The refugee zombies were tenacious in their assaults, attempting to make use of their numerical advantage to swarm down the enemies standing in their path. Even when their bodies were sliced into halves, they continued to bite down on the soldiers, not giving up until their final breath. Unfortunately, their tenacity wasn’t enough to bridge the huge gap in their strength and equipment.

Soon, there was no longer any living soul amidst the refugee army—oh, it should be standing corpses instead. Their bodies had been minced into pieces, scattered all over the battlefield.

The captain of the knight squad scanned the battlefield before finally coming to a halt under the tree Zu An was on.

Zu An slowed his breathing so far that it almost came to a halt. He was afraid to make the slightest noise out of fear that the knight captain would notice him. He had nearly lost his life just dealing with those refugee zombies; against this organized army of zombies, he stood no chance at all.

It was fortunate that the tree was pretty high up, and the knight captain hadn’t raised its head to take a look.

On top of that, the refugee zombies had chomped down on quite a few Goldenfur Monstrous Rats earlier, causing the stench of blood and flesh to overwhelm the area. Otherwise, his scent as a living person would have surely caught the attention of the zombies no matter how he tried to hide.

The knight captain was scanning the battlefield for survivors, whom he stomped down without any mercy. After ensuring that there were no more survivors, the captain waved his hand, and the sharp clanging sound of a gong echoed. The soldiers swiftly got back into formation before marching their way back to the depths of the mountain valley.

“Woah, they even have gongs to signal for retreat!” Zu An’s eyes were nearly bulging out of his eyes. These zombies were far more professional than he had expected.

After the soldiers were finally a far distance away, Zu An finally leaped down from the tree. Looking at the broken limbs filling the area, his cheeks began twitching uncontrollably. If Ji Xiaoxi was here, she would have probably vomited everything out by now.

“It sure was a wasted trip!” Zu An gritted his teeth in frustration.

I nearly lost my life multiple times, but I didn’t gain anything at all. Even in games, trash monsters like zombies would still drop some gold coins and weapons!

Hm? Wait a moment. Even though there aren’t any gold coins here, there are quite a few weapons here though.

Zu An quickly scanned the battlefield. He automatically ignored those hoes, carrying poles, and those sort of unconventional weapons. To him, a weapon’s value lay not in its prowess but its coolness. Only the suavest weapon could match his noble disposition.

He recalled how a few of the zombies were wielding swords and sabers earlier, so he started scouring around. However, his efforts ended up disappointing him. He was actually unable to find a single proper weapon at all. The swords and sabers the refugee weapons had been wielding had broken from clashing against the stronger weapons of the zombie army.

If only I could find some weapons from the zombie army.

Unfortunately, the zombie army had already taken the 'corpses' and weapons of their comrades while they were sweeping the battlefield earlier.

Speaking of which, since those fellows are already dead, what would happen if they 'die' again?

Zu An suddenly tripped over something, causing him to stagger forward. He quickly steadied his balance before turning around to take a look—it was a pitch black arrow. It wasn't the arrows which the refugee zombies had shot at him earlier.

"It's from the zombie army!"

Zu An thought about how the rain of arrows from the zombie army had decimated the refugee zombies, which he hadn't even been able to kill a single one of thus far. Clearly, these arrows weren't ordinary either.

The zombie army had recollected most of their arrows while sweeping the battlefield, but they had simply shot too many of them earlier that it was inevitable that they would miss out some.

Zu An quickly continued scavenging the battlefield, and he eventually found seven of them.

Just by holding these arrows in his hand, he could feel an eerie, chilling sensation gripping his heart. There was definitely something extraordinary about them.

"I wonder how powerful these things are when used against humans." Zu An picked up a quiver and tossed the arrows into it. He was unskilled in archery, but he didn't think that it was a huge problem. With his current strength, he could simply toss them like javelins.

After confirming that there was nothing worthy of note, Zu An quickly headed back to where he had come from. He was worried about how Ji Xiaoxi was faring at the moment.

He rushed back to the tree where the two of them had parted ways, but the latter was nowhere to be seen. Alarmed, he quickly searched the area. To his relief, he couldn't find any of her possessions in the area, which meant that she likely got out of the mountain valley safely.

His first thought was to rush out of the mountain valley to find her, but thinking about how much time had passed since they parted ways, it didn't seem likely for him to be able to catch up with her anymore. Besides, the dungeon was going to be opened only for ten days. He needed to find the Evanescent Lotus, so time was precious to him.

It would be a huge waste of time for him to go about looking for Ji Xiaoxi right now. Most likely, she would return to the mountain valley to look for him.

After a brief moment of hesitation, he decided to venture deeper into the mountain valley.



He knew that there were great dangers lurking there, but based on the knowledge he had acquired from reading plenty of fantasy novels in his previous life, he knew that powerful guardians usually came hand-in-hand with great treasures. Given how powerful the zombie army was, could they be possibly protecting some sort of amazing artifact?

For the sake of 'little Zu An', he was determined to brave through danger this once!

So, he gritted his teeth and began flitting toward the depths of the mountain valley warily. He was prepared to summon Grandgale to flee if any danger came his way.

To his surprise, perhaps it was due to the earlier rampage of the zombie army, the mountain valley was oddly peaceful. There were no ferocious beasts or zombies along the way.

The zombie army was nowhere in sight, but Zu An wasn't worried about losing track of them. He could feel an eerily chilling sensation lingering in the air, the remnant of the zombie army's aura.

As long as he traced this aura, he should be able to find their base without worrying about getting too close to them.

He continued chasing for around an hour's time before suddenly coming to a halt. He could hear heavy footsteps vaguely sounding just ahead of him. So, he slowed his footsteps and carefully proceeded forward. Soon, he caught sight of the zombie army.

However, the current situation was a little baffling. The zombie soldiers were marching forward orderly, disappearing amidst a hill.

### **Chapter 143: Chase**

Zu An rubbed his eyes in confusion, wondering if he was seeing things. However, he soon figured that there was likely to be a cavern there that was just slightly out of his sight, thus creating the earlier illusion that they were disappearing into the hill.

This hill was not too big, spanning just a hundred meters in height and several hundred meters in width. However, there was something unusual about it. Naturally formed hills tended to have ridges, making them look rugged, but this hill actually had a smooth surface. The trees growing on it looked oddly orderly too. It felt more like a carefully managed garden instead.

Once the zombie army was gone, Zu An carefully made his way over to the foot of the hill to take a look, only to realize that he was mistaken. It was actually not a cavern but a pair of majestic stone doors. There were quite a few bizarrely-shaped stone creatures standing by the sides of the stone doors, which he was unable to recognize due to his lacking knowledge about the world.

It looks like I need to find Shang Liuyu to hold some nighttime remedial lessons for me.

He noticed that the stone doors were closed, so he tried to push it open. However, as soon as his palm came into contact with the doors, he immediately felt a chilling vibe racing through his arm, making him shudder.

This place is too sinister!

He took a look around the area, and he soon had a rough understanding just what kind of place he was at. The surroundings looked very reminiscent of a grave, and he was starting to think that the little hill before him wasn't actually a hill but a massive mound.

During the Qin and Han Dynasties, they used to bury members of the royal family in mounds. It was only in the Tang Dynasty that they began building mausoleums. As for the other dynasties, due to their lacking wealth, their graves weren't as impressive.

Zu An examined the area carefully, but he was unable to find a way to open the doors. In the end, he was left with no choice but to give up.

I doubt that a treasure like the Evanescent Lotus would appear in a place as sinister as this, Zu An consoled himself

He realized that the sun had already risen by now, so he felt that he ought to head back now to meet up with Ji Xiaoxi. I should ask her if she knows what kind of environment the Evanescent Lotus tends to thrive in.

On the way back, Zu An couldn't help but wonder how the stone doors were meant to be opened. All of a sudden, he felt goosebumps rising all of his body as warning bells rang in his mind. He immediately executed Sunflower Phantasm to dodge to the side.

A cold gleam of light shot out from behind a boulder right after and struck down on him.

Thanks to his timely execution of Sunflower Phantasm in the nick of time, Zu An barely managed to escape with his life. Nevertheless, there was still a glaring cut on his chest that was bleeding profusely. It was caused by the earlier strike from the enemy. Had it not been for him dodging in time, he would have been split into two.

"Hm?" The enemy was perplexed to see his sure-kill strike falling empty.

On the other hand, Zu An assessed the enemy who nearly took his life just a moment ago. Instead of a zombie or a ferocious beast, he was actually a living human. The clothes he wore and the slightly familiar face he had was telling of his identity. "You're from the academy!"

"Ah, so it's Teacher Zu! My apologies, I realized that there were many zombie carcasses along the way, so I've been on the edge all this while. As soon as I noticed some movements, I thought that it might be a powerful zombie, so I made a move out of panic. I didn't expect that it would be you!" That student's voice was as sincere as it could be.

Zu An sneered coldly in his heart. It was obvious that the earlier attack was planned out, so how could you have possibly not seen me? You must be taking me for a fool!

However, he didn't allow his thoughts to show on his face. Instead, he put on a smile and asked, "What's your name?"

"I'm Shi Shangfei from the Earth class," replied the student.

"Shit Shangfei?" Zu An burst into laughter. He slapped the student's shoulder and laughed, "You have an interesting name there!"

That fellow's cultivation should be around late third rank based on his earlier attack.

"You're too kind." Shi Shangfei's body tensed up as soon as Zu An began slapping his shoulder, afraid that the latter would try to make a move on him. He was so nervous that he didn't even notice that Zu An was making fun of his name.

"Oh right, what are you doing alone here? Shouldn't you be traveling in a teacher's group?" asked Zu An.

Shi Shangfei respectfully answered, "Teacher Zu, my group encountered a pack of wolves along the way. We got separated while running away in a fluster."

"This dungeon seems even more dangerous than I expected," remarked Zu An.

"Indeed." Shi Shangfei nodded in agreement. "Speaking of which, how did these zombies in this mountain valley die?"

Zu An thumped his chest and said, "Needless to say, I valiantly slew them down with my sword!"

"..." Shi Shangfei.

Would it kill you to stop bragging? If you really are that capable, I'll swallow my sword down right here right now! But again, if he wasn't shameless, he should have realized that someone of his caliber isn't worthy of Chu First Miss and backed down by now!

You have successfully trolled Shi Shangfei for +300 Rage!

"Teacher Zu, you came here with Ji Xiaoxi, right? Why don't I see her around?" Shi Shangfei had to tread carefully here. He was confident of dealing with Zu An alone, but he couldn't say the same if Ji Xiaoxi were to get involved too.

"She went off to gather some wild fruits. Ah, there she is!" Zu An gestured to the area behind Shi Shangfei with a slight jerk of his head.

Shi Shangfei subconsciously turned his head around, only to realize that something was amiss right away. He immediately tried to retreat, but it was already too late. A sharp pain on his neck caused him to hurriedly wrap his hands around it, but even so, he was unable to stop his blood from flowing out.

"W-why?!"

He couldn't believe that a teacher would actually kill a student so easily. He was confident in his acting skills earlier, and his explanation made sense too. Even if the other party harbored some doubts, he shouldn't have resorted to a killing move right away!

Zu An sighed deeply. "You must be dreaming if you think that you can play off as a goody two shoes after throwing me a tight slap. You could have still held your own against me if you had chosen to fight me directly, but you simply had to flaunt your acting skills here. Don't you know that people used to call me Sanlitun's Liang Chaowei[1]?"

While Shi Shangfei had no idea who Liang Chaowei, he could tell as much that he had been seen through right from the start. He was trying to make Zu An put his guard down, but in the end, he was the one who put his guard down instead. It made him feel enraged and remorseful.

You have successfully trolled Shi Shangfei for +723 Rage!

"You... Wipe that smug look off your face! I've already told my companions... You will die soon!" Shi Shangfei's face reddened as more blood flowed out of his neck.

"Oh? I should thank you on behalf of your companions then. That's such a relief. I had already put my guard down, and if not for your warning, I might have just fallen for their assassination! But now, they're going to be the ones to die." Zu An chuckled mockingly.

"Y-you..." Shi Shangfei felt that he was going to pass out from anger. Is he not going to at least let me die in peace?!

You have successfully trolled Shi Shangfei for +856 Rage!

"Stop wasting time over there! Why aren't you dead yet? Have some self-awareness here as an insignificant cannon fodder character! People like you should die within a minute of screentime, or else you're going to slow the pace of the film! Besides, isn't it uncomfortable for you to wrap your hands around your neck like this? Come, let me help you."

Zu An stepped forward and pried Shi Shangfei's hands away from his neck, causing blood to spurt out of the deep cut in his neck right away. In just a few moments, Shi Shangfei had breathed his last with his eyes widened in indignance.

Damn it!

You have successfully trolled Shi Shangfei for +1024 Rage!

Zu An proceeded to search his body, but he was only able to find some dry rations, silver pieces[2], and ki stones. The saber which Shi Shangfei wielded was only so-so in terms of quality, severely lacking in comparison to the weapon the Chu clan had prepared for him.

Eek, he's poorer than I thought.

There was no way a millionaire like Zu An would be interested in such low-level loot.

While feeling disappointed by the lacklustre gains, he began reflecting on the earlier situation. This was not the first encounter he had with danger; his battles with Pei Mianman and Snow had nearly taken his life too. However, those two were fifth rank cultivators, so it was only normal for him to be threatened by their prowess.

Shi Shangfei, on the other hand, was only a third rank cultivator, but he, too, nearly took his life away with that very first strike.

This made Zu An realize that he was still being too careless at the moment. He would have to be far more attentive to his surroundings, or else he would make an easy target for others.

Ah, Shi Shangfei mentioned earlier that he had already called his companions over...

A sharp piercing sound suddenly echoed above as a black shadow swiftly whizzed toward Zu An.

This time, Zu An was prepared. He took a step sideward, but he didn't just stop there. He quickly followed up with a roll to escape even further away.

Right after he completed that set of movements, the ground where he was standing, along with the places where he could have evaded to, were pierced with three arrows each.

Judging from the speed and strength of the arrows, the enemy was likely to be stronger than the zombies he had faced earlier, but that didn't mean that he would be harder to deal with. After all, he was facing a whole army of zombies earlier whereas there was only one archer right now!

As common sense dictated, in order to defeat a long-range enemy, the first thing one had to do was to arrow the distance first.

So, as soon as Zu An dodged those arrows, he immediately rushed in the direction where the enemy had come from. As long as he could close the distance, he was confident that he would be able to overpower his enemy with his 'Bixie Swordplay'.

However, just as he was about to reach the archer, another three more people suddenly appeared by his side. One wielded a sword, one wielded a saber, and the last one wielded a spear. Their weapons were different from one another, but their attacks were incredibly coordinated. Each of them was able to accurately aim at his vitals from different directions.

So, Zu An did the wisest decision anyone could do in that situation—run.

Based on the aura emanated by these people earlier, the weakest of them were at early fourth rank, and the spear user had already reached late fourth rank. As powerful as his 'Bixie Swordplay' was, his cultivation was simply too low at the moment. If it was one-to-one, he might still stand a decent chance, but that wasn't the case right now.

If he pushed himself, he probably could kill one or two of them, but he would also end up sustaining grievous injuries, possibly getting killed even.

Please, my life is worth much more than yours! How much of a waste would it be if I traded my life for mere small fry?

The enemies also didn't expect Zu An to suddenly turn tail and flee either. There was a moment of awkward silence amongst them before they hurriedly chased him. The archer had also managed to recover by this point, and he swiftly nocked an arrow and aimed it at the fleeing Zu An.

He released the arrow with utmost confidence that it would strike its target. Yet, it was as if Zu An had eyes behind his back. At the very last moment, he twisted his body sideways and dodged it impeccably.

"???" Archer.

Zu An patted his thumping heart in relief. He had been guarded against this archer from the very start, so as soon as he heard the arrow, he immediately began taking evasive measures. Of course, part of the credit went to the Sunflower Phantasm's elusive footwork, or else it would have surely taken far more effort.

As for the other few fourth rank cultivators chasing him, they were alarmed to find that Zu An was much faster than they had expected.

At fourth rank, a cultivator's agility would be significantly boosted, allowing him to cover great distances with a single leap. Theoretically speaking, they should have been able to catch up with a mere third rank within moments. Yet, while they hadn't shaken off yet, they were unable to close the distance at all!

Zu An was also feeling incredibly pressured too. He finally understood why martial artists could easily leap ahead of their opponents and intercept them in the movies. He was getting a firsthand experience of it at the very moment.

Every single time the fourth rank cultivators behind him leaped, they would be able to close the distance significantly. If not for the fact that they needed to land on the ground and build up momentum for the next leap, they would have already caught up with him by now.

Even though Sunflower Phantasm did increase his speed significantly, this movement skill was focused more on the element of 'phantasm' instead of 'fleeing'. Due to that, he was unable to shake them off despite having run quite a while now.

#### **Chapter 144: Is He Going to End Me In a Single Strike?**

Tens of li away, a teacher and a group of students were gathered around a petite woman. Upon seeing her eyelids fluttering open, they began cheering in delight.

"Xiaoxi, you're finally awake!" Bai Susu patted his chest in relief, calming down his shocked heart.

Ji Xiaoxi groggily opened her eyes as her memory slowly drifted back to her.

She remembered how Zu An had helped her lure away the zombies. She had wanted to help him, but there was nothing she had learned that was useful against those zombies. So, she could only try her best to hold back her tears while watching Zu An left with the huge group of zombies before hurriedly rushing out of the mountain valley in seek of help.

Unfortunately for her, it was already night time then, and there were many dangers lurking on the plain. For some reason, the dragon feces she carried with her seemed to be not as effective as before. While most ferocious beasts still dared not approach her, they continued prowling in the vicinity. Upon realizing that she was only a young woman, they began trying to probe her, wanting to see how powerful she was.

Later on, she even encountered a pack of wolves, who chased her all around the place. Left in a desperate position, she hurriedly lit up the signaling stick Bai Susu had given to her previously.

It was fortunate that Bai Susu and his group happened to be in the area, so they rushed over to save her. However, her accumulated exhaustion from having run around the place finally took its toll on her, causing her to pass out. It was only now that she finally regained consciousness.

"Xiaoxi, how are you feeling?" Bai Susu heaved a sigh of relief inwardly. If anything were to happen to her, Principal Jiang would really go on a rampage.

"I... I'm fine. Quick, you need to save big brother Ah Zu!" exclaimed Ji Xiaoxi.

At this moment, she really hated herself for her weakness. How could she have fainted at this crucial moment?

“Zu An?” The crowd only remembered right now that she was supposed to be with Zu An. They were too focused on her earlier that they automatically neglected that pesky man.

“What happened to the two of you?” asked Bai Susu.

“We encountered a group of Goldenfur Monstrous Rats earlier in the day. In order to hide from them, we stumbled onto a mysterious mountain valley...” Ji Xiaoxi quickly recounted everything that had happened.

“What? The entire place is filled with zombies?!” Bai Susu was alarmed.

Such a situation had never happened before. While the academy had warned the students gravely earlier, it was mainly to keep the students on their guard, an additional safety precaution. On the whole, the Ursae Dungeon is still relatively safe, and there were centuries of records to testify to it.

There had never been a sighting of zombies in here before.

However, Bai Susu didn’t doubt Ji Xiaoxi’s words. Putting aside the fact that she was known for her honest-to-fault nature, he had also started to realize that something was amiss in here while exploring the area. The number of ferocious beasts and the extent of their aggression were far greater than before.

“Hurry up and save him!” Ji Xiaoxi tugged Bai Susu’s sleeves as she pleaded with the surrounding students.

The students glanced at one another hesitantly, and eventually, one of them stood forward and said, “If there are really as many zombies as you mentioned, we’d just be running to our deaths too.”

“Indeed. Besides, given how much time has passed, it’s likely that he has already...”

...

“That’s nonsense! Big brother Ah Zu is definitely fine!” Ji Xiaoxi had always been a kind-hearted but shy individual, so she had never gotten angry at anyone over the years. Yet, she actually lashed out at someone here for Zu An.

Bai Susu fell deep in thought. There was some sense in what the other students were saying too. It was not that they were afraid of death, but the chances were indeed likely that Zu An was already...

On top of that, if they were to encounter the zombie swarm while trying to save Zu An, there was a high chance that they would meet with casualties. As the teacher-in-charge of this group, he had to prioritize the safety of his students.

“If you aren’t going, I’ll go by myself!” Ji Xiaoxi rose to her feet and tried to walk away, but she had sprained her leg while running away from the wolves earlier. The stabbing pain in his leg caused her to lose balance and fall back down onto the ground.

“How are you going to save him in your current state!” exclaimed Bai Susu in frustration. “Let’s do this instead. The rest of you stay here; I’ll go take a look by myself.”

There was some risk leaving these students alone here since they consisted of the weaker students, but considering that they were in the outer perimeter and that there were quite a few people in his group, they should be able to fare fine even if ferocious beasts approached them.

It was then that a lofty voice sounded.

“I’ll go.”

The crowd turned around, only to see a graceful woman dressed in a white robe standing by the side. Who else could it be other than Chu Chuyan?

“Young miss Chu, what are you doing here?”

“Young miss Chu, did you meet with some trouble?”

...

The crowd was surprised by her presence. Quite a few men immediately stepped forward to talk to her.

A pity for them, Chu Chuyan didn’t even bother to shoot them a glance. She walked straight toward Ji Xiaoxi and said, “Where’s the mountain valley you split up with him at?”

In truth, she had been feeling quite uneasy ever since entering the dungeon. Zu An’s sudden appearance in the Clans Tournament had foiled the plans of many powers, so it was very likely that someone would try to exact vengeance on him here.

With worry plaguing her mind, she eventually decided to turn around to take a look. It happened so that she caught sight of Ji Xiaoxi’s signaling stick, so she rushed over to take a look. She also happened to overhear her words too.

Ji Xiaoxi was stunned by the beautiful woman before her for a moment, but she quickly snapped out of it. She swiftly drew out the rough location of the mountain valley on the ground for reference.

Chu Chuyan turned to Bai Susu and said, ‘Teacher Bai, you should take care of them. I should be fine alone.’

Leaving those words behind, she swiftly flitted into the distance.

Gazing upon her gradually vanishing silhouette, Ji Xiaoxi couldn’t help but mumble under her breath, “She’s truly ravishing close-up...”

Bai Susu heaved a sigh of relief too. It was good that Chu Chuyan arrived in time. She could already compete with the teachers of the academy in terms of cultivation, so there was no need to worry about her safety.

...

Meanwhile, Zu An was still desperately trying to get away. Having watched plenty of military-related movies in his previous life, he decisively chose to hide in one of the forests he passed by. Of course, it



was not as if he really had real experience in jungle warfare at all, but the situation was desperate enough to warrant a try.

The four cultivators chasing him were all at the fourth rank, so he didn't stand a chance at all in a direct encounter. He had to find an opportunity to split them up and strike them down one by one. There were plenty of covers and obstacles in the forest, making it harder for them to come to each other's aid.

On the other hand, the four cultivators frowned upon seeing that Zu An had fled into the forest. That being said, there was no way they would give up just because of that, especially since they had the advantage in terms of absolute power. Thus, they charged into the forest without much hesitation too.

Zu An leaped around the forest nimbly, making full use of his movement skill and the trees in the area. It was much harder for the four cultivators to follow him now, and for once, he was starting to widen the distance between him and his pursuers. If he continued running on, there was a good chance that he could shake them off.

However, he knew that even if he managed to flee from them once, he might not necessarily be able to flee from them every single time.

There seemed to be plenty of people after his life in this dungeon. If he wanted to survive to the end, he would have to start getting rid of some enemies.

So, he searched for a tree with a lush crown and leaped into it, making use of the leaves to conceal his presence.

A short moment later, the four cultivators arrived in the vicinity.

"What happened? Did we lose him?"

"Don't panic! He should be hiding in the vicinity!"

"Everyone, be careful. Make sure to check the branches above too. He could be hiding amidst the trees!"

...

Zu An's heart immediately sank. These people were supposed to be students of the academy, but their actions spoke nothing of amateurs at all.

Honestly, Jiang Luofu needs to pull up her stockings. How could she not know when there are so many spies in the academy! I really need to give her an earful when I return!

The four of them searched the area for a while, but it was no easy feat to find an individual when there were so many plausible hiding spots in the forest.

"This won't do. It's no different from searching for a needle in a haystack."

"Let's split up. It'll be much more efficient."

"Won't it be dangerous if we split up though? The young master said that his fighting prowess is greater than what it seems on the surface."

“Tsk! No matter how strong he is, he’s just a mere third rank cultivator. He can’t possibly slay us with a single slash of his sword, right?”

“Yes, that’s right! We’re not like that useless Yuan Wendong anyway. Why would that fool even bother talking to him at that crucial moment? He was asking to be crippled!”

“Alright then, let’s split up and search the area. If you encounter him, there’s no need to go all out. Just try to slow him as much as you can and wait for us to support you.”

...

The four of them took a direction each, and they slowly scanned outward with wary looks on their faces. The one who was heading in Zu An’s direction was the archer.

This was good news, for he felt that the archer posed the greatest threat to him. Having to deal with the other three melee fighters was already tough enough, but having to keep a lookout for the ranged archer too was really pushing the limits of his focus.

On top of that, the hardest part about running away earlier was that he had to dodge the arrows coming from the archer too, which significantly affected his speed. As a result, the four cultivators were able to slowly gain on him, leaving him with no choice but to head into this forest.

If he could get rid of this archer, he would have more room to maneuver around, be it whether to engage the other three in a fight or flee.

And this fellow was the one who said that I can’t OHKO him earlier. Hah! Since he already raised the flag, I’m obliged to fulfill his prophecy!

However, looking at the silhouettes of the other three in the distance, Zu An decided to give up on this tempting idea. Fourth rank cultivators were able to cover long distances pretty quickly, and there was no guarantee that he would be able to get the archer in a single shot. The archer was, after all, a fourth rank cultivator as well.

If he screwed up here, he could very well get encircled and land himself deeper in danger.

The silhouettes of the four cultivators gradually disappeared amidst the forest, but Zu An still chose to hold his position. His decision proved to be right, for a few moments later, all four of them suddenly ran back in unison and scanned the surroundings, only to sigh in disappointment.

“Hmph, looks like that fellow really isn’t here.”

Zu An sneered coldly in his mind. I’ve seen plenty of such trivial tricks on TV. If you think that you can fool me with that, you really ought to get your brain checked out.

The spear user, seemingly the leader of the group, turned to the archer and instructed, “Po Zhongyou, you’ll camp here in case Zu An escaped our notice and returns back here.”

Zu An was delighted to hear that. He was still feeling dismayed at having missed an opportunity to make a move, but who could have thought that they would deliver their comrade right into his hands.

Though, I must really say that their group sure has queer names. There was that Shit Shangfei earlier, and now there's this Poo Zhongyou. What's with their obsession with scat?

Po Zhongyou laughed heartily in response. He raised his bow up high and declared, "Very well! If he dares come back here, I'll end his life with a single arrow!"

The others nodded in response before swiftly into three directions to resume their search. Clearly, they were afraid that Zu An would get away.

Po Zhongyou took a while to assess the area as he murmured to himself, "I should find a vantage point to get a clearer view of the surroundings. Hmm, that tree looks not bad."

With a satisfied nod, he nimbly leaped onto one of the lower-lying branches of the tree and swiftly made his way up to the top. However, there was a surprise waiting for him there. He found himself welcomed with the sharp, cold glint of a sword.

It was a fast, sharp, and accurate slash. To make things worse, he was still in midair when the attack occurred, making it impossible for him to maneuver around. He couldn't dodge even if he wanted to.

This lightning-fast sword slit his throat, turned his shocked exclamation into guttural groans.

"How about that? You said that I couldn't get you in a single slash, right? Looks like it's time for you to review your review."

The leaves parted, and Zu An's gleeful face emerged from within.

#### **Chapter 145: A Family Should Remain Together**

Po Zhongyou grabbed the sword on his neck, hoping to push it away. However, it was futile. The damage was already done, and it had sapped him of whatever strength he had. His hands simply slumped feebly on the sword as he struggled to take in his final breath.

His mind had devolved into chaos. Why is this fellow here? Has he been waiting here all this while to ambush me?

He finally understood why the young master instructed them to show utmost caution lest they were done in by this fellow's slyness.

But the young master didn't tell me that this fellow would be so despicable! Even when having successfully landed a fatal blow, he still doesn't want to let me rest in peace!

Looking at the look of ridicule on Zu An's face, Po Zhongyou felt heat rushing into his head. Blood also gushed up his throat and splattered everywhere.

You have successfully trolled Po Zhongyou for +1024 Rage!

Po Zhongyou continued to glare at Zu An with widened eyes, but his body had begun slumping forward. He was already dead.

"It's over already?"

Zu An was disappointed. He was still hoping to obtain a bit more Rage points from the other party.

He retracted his sword before laying Po Zhongyou's corpse down on the branch. He started off by searching the latter's body, but there were only some dry rations and recovery medicine. The bow he wielded seemed to be quite decent, but it was a pity that Zu An didn't know archery.

He took a look at the arrows Po Zhongyou had in his quiver, but they snapped fairly easily once he exerted some force on them. It was clear that the quality of those arrows was far beneath those he had obtained from the zombie army. He couldn't bother to keep inferior products with him, so he tossed it aside too.

"Damn it, it's yet another poor bloke!" Zu An cursed.

Why are these cultivators so poor? At least Shi Shangfei had some silver pieces on him, but this Po Zhongyou has nothing of value at all!

He was just about to toss Po Zhongyou's body down when he suddenly changed his mind. Trash can have value as well if put to good use.

So, he lifted Po Zhongyou's body and began flitting in the direction of where the saber user had headed off to earlier. The saber user was the weakest one of the other three, so he should be fairly easy to deal with.

...

Meanwhile, at the northern area of the forest, Shi Zhenxiang was marching forward warily with a saber in hand, scanning the area thoroughly. However, he couldn't find any traces of Zu An at all.

"Lil' bro, I'll definitely exact vengeance for you!" he murmured through gritted teeth.

He was none other than the elder brother of Shi Shangfei.

The two of them were orphans, and they were each other's pillar of support. They went through all sorts of grueling training in their earlier years, and they had accomplished numerous difficult missions too. They were promised that if they could accomplish this mission from young master Shi, they would be granted the freedom to go wherever they wanted to.

Who could have thought that things would turn out like this?

It was just yesterday that they were reminiscing on their childhood while sitting before the setting sun, dreaming about the fruitful life they would have ahead of them. His younger brother even said that it would best if the two of them could marry two sisters, so they would be able to remain close with one another.

But all of it had come to naught!

"That bastard Zu An! I'll slice you into pieces!" Shi Zhenxiang swore.

You have successfully trolled Shi Zhenxiang for +876 Rage!

All of a sudden, he heard footsteps sounding behind him. He immediately turned around to take a look, only to see Po Zhongyou waving to him. He heaved a sigh of relief and said, "Didn't our leader ask you to camp there? Why did you suddenly come here?"

Shi Zhenxiang couldn't help but notice that Po Zhongyou's eyes were glaringly wide, and he wondered if the latter's eyes had gone bad from practicing his archery too much.

"I saw a silhouette running in this direction, so I came over to take a look." Zu An stood behind Po Zhongyou, holding up the latter's body while speaking in a deeper, muffled voice. It wasn't exactly identical to Po Zhongyou's voice, but it was sufficient to dupe someone who wasn't paying close attention.

"What? Zu An is here?" Shi Zhenxiang gripped his saber tightly as he hurriedly scanned his surroundings. "Great! I'll be able to exact vengeance for my little brother then!"

Zu An had already known this saber user's name from the earlier influx of Rage point, so he was able to deduce right away that he was Shi Shangfei's older brother. I must say, what's wrong with their parent's heads? Why the hell did they give them such names? One is called Shi Shangfei (Flying Shi) and the other one is called Shi Zhenxiang (Shit Smells Nice)?

"Why are you heading toward my side? We should split up so as to widen our search radius!" Shi Zhenxiang noticed that Po Zhongyou was walking in his direction, so he immediately harrumphed in displeasure.

Hm? Wait a moment, why is his walking posture so weird? Also, that voice earlier on...

While Shi Zhenxiang was in the midst of making sense of those incongruencies, a black silhouette suddenly charged in his direction. He instinctively pulled his saber upward and sliced the black silhouette into two. It was only after the black silhouette fell to the ground did he belatedly realize that it was Po Zhongyou. His eyes immediately widened in disbelief, "A-ah? Why would it be you..."

What left him even more confused was that even though Po Zhongyou was slightly weaker in close-quarter combat as an archer, the latter wasn't so weak as to be killed by him in a single strike.

It was at this moment of confusion that a cold glint shot straight for his neck.

This time around, the one who was confused was Zu An instead. He was confident that his sword would be able to plunge into Shi Zhenxiang's neck, but to his astonishment, he found himself unable to push his sword in, as if there was invisible armor around the latter's neck.

He suddenly remembered that third rank cultivators were capable of ki emanation. They could manifest their ki around their body to form an armor so as to guard against attacks. The higher one's cultivation rank was, the greater the defensive prowess and area of the ki armor.

This was also one of the decisive advantages that higher-ranked cultivators had over lower-ranked cultivators. Sometimes, a lower-ranked cultivator might not even be able to pierce through the ki armor of a higher-rank cultivator in battle, making it hardly a fight at all.

But of course, the manifestation of ki armor was extremely consuming on one's ki, so no one would keep it on at all times. This gave lower-ranked cultivators a chance to defeat higher-ranked cultivators.

It was for the same reason that Zu An was able to defeat the fifth rank Yuan Wendong and kill the fourth rank Po Zhongyou. He had caught them off guard, such that they couldn't even activate their ki armor in time.

After Shi Zhenxiang blocked off Zu An's assassination attempt, he immediately launched a counterattack by bringing his upraised saber downward.

In face of the attack, Zu An quickly back his sword to fend against the saber, but the terrifying might coming from the saber knocked the sword out of his hands. He was forced to hurriedly retreat a few steps to recover his momentum.

However, Shi Zhenxiang had no intention of letting Zu An catch a breather. He continued charging forward to pressure him. "You son of a bitch, I nearly fell for your trap! Hah, you're a goner now!"

They were around ten meters away, but Zu An felt as if the saber was right in front of him. He quickly rolled sideward to dodge the attack, making him look rather unkempt.

It was the correct decision, for the tree that was just behind him earlier was split into two by Shi Zhenxiang's invisible saber ki.

Zu An's heart jolted in fright. Third rank cultivators could only manifest ki around themselves for protection whereas fourth rank cultivators could exert their ki further outward to launch an attack. This meant that his enemy was, to some extent, capable of long-ranged attacks too, making him a far greater threat than he had initially expected.

Shi Zhenxiang quickly followed up with a series of attacks, chasing Zu An around the place as he laughed heartily, "You don't even have your weapon on your hand now; how do you expect to compete with me? I'll tear your flesh out and exact vengeance for my little brother!"

"What are you talking so much nonsense for?" sneered Zu An.

With a furious outburst of speed, he suddenly charged forward with astonishing speed, arriving right before Shi Zhenxiang in the blink of an eye.

Zu An's sudden approach scared Shi Zhenxiang out of his wits. While he was slightly distracted earlier with his words, he had been continuously swinging his saber to pressure Zu An, and his eyes had never looked away from Zu An at any point. Yet, the latter actually managed to bypass his saber and arrive right in front of him without him knowing how!

Just like that, the tables were turned. The two of them were so close that Shi Zhenxiang's saber was behind Zu An. At least for this very instant, his saber was rendered completely useless.

On the other hand, Zu An was holding onto a black arrow, and he was in the midst of thrusting it toward Shi Zhenxiang's wrist.

When Shi Zhenxiang finally caught a good glimpse at the weapon Zu An was holding, disdain surfaced in his eyes. Arrows had to be shot from a distance in order to gain momentum for a powerful strike. Using it as a dagger at close-range would only greatly discount its prowess.

Not to mention, he also had his ki armor to protect him too. While he was caught off guard by Zu An's mysterious approach, the difference in their cultivation rank meant that there was no way Zu An could breach his defense.

However, barely a moment after those thoughts surfaced in his mind, he felt an excruciating pain stabbing into his wrist. A wintry chill flowed in through his wrist and diffused throughout his entire body, making him shudder uncontrollably. He felt like his entire body had been encased in ice.

Following that, he felt stabbing pain coming from his hands and legs, and before he knew it, he had already crashed down onto the ground, unable to get up anymore.

"You severed my tendons!" Shi Zhenxiang immediately realized what was going on, and he exclaimed in horror.

You have successfully trolled Shi Zhenxiang for +999 Rage!

Zu An looked at him apologetically. "I'm sorry, but you were simply too strong. For my own safety, I have to be more thorough."

"..." Shi Zhenxiang.

The hell! So the reason why you're callously crippling me is because I'm too powerful?

You have successfully trolled Shi Zhenxiang for +666 Rage!

However, Shi Zhenxiang soon came to terms with it. He had been raised as a death soldier whose only worth lay in his ability to accomplish dangerous missions, even at the expense of his life. He knew that he was already a goner at this point, but there was just one last question that continued to linger in his head.

"Where did that arrow in your hand come from? Why is it able to breach my ki armor?"

"I picked it up on the floor," replied Zu An with a smile.

He had thought that these arrows harnessed extraordinary power from the very start. After all, these were the arrows that had killed the monstrously resilient zombies with ease. It was for that reason that he thought of using it to breach Shi Zhenxiang's ki armor, and to his relief, it worked out well.

However, he noticed that the arrow in his hand had lost some of its magnificent lustre after being used. It looked like there was a usage limit to it.

"..." Shi Zhenxiang.

Do you take me for a three-year-old child? A weapon that you picked up off the street was able to breach my ki armor?

You have successfully trolled Shi Zhenxiang for +250 Rage!

"Now, how should I deal with you?" Zu An squatted down and asked.

"Kill me if you want, but don't even dream about getting anything out of me!" Shi Zhenxiang harrumphed coldly. His only regret here was his failure to exact vengeance for his younger brother.

"I'll be merciful and give you a chance here. You can do whatever you want, but as long as you can survive a strike from my dagger, I'll let you off. How does that sound?" Zu An began whipping out Poisonous Prick as he spoke.

"Are you serious?" Shi Zhenxiang knew that there was definitely a loophole here, but his innate desire to live still compelled him to take on Zu An's offer.

"Of course! I've crippled your limbs earlier, but I didn't cripple your cultivation. You should still be able to use your ki armor, right?" said Zu An with a benevolent smile.

He had intentionally spared Shi Zhenxiang earlier because he wanted to use the latter to try out the prowess of his tools.

Shi Zhenxiang glanced at the quiver Zu An was carrying as his face darkened. "You're just toying with me here. That arrow you used earlier was able to penetrate through my ki armor easily. I don't stand a chance at all."

"Don't worry, I won't be using those arrows," said Zu An. "You should have noticed how my arrow lost its lustre after being used. Each of them can only be used once before being rendered ineffective, and I only have that few of them left. Why would I waste them on you?"

Shi Zhenxiang was stunned. Those words sounded credible to him. It was indeed not worthwhile to waste something as valuable as those arrows on a cripple like him. "Very well, I'll agree to your challenge. I hope that you can hold the end of your promise."

He channeled his ki and formed a translucent armor around his body. Hmph, you were only to get the better of me because your arrow has the ability to pierce through my ki armor. Don't even think that you can do the same with that lousy dagger of yours!

On the other hand, Zu An was in no rush to make his move. He began asking leisurely, "Are you on good terms with your younger brother?"

"Of course!" replied Shi Zhenxiang.

It looks like this fellow had useless compassion in him. As long as I survive this ordeal, even if I can't recover from my injuries and exact vengeance personally, I'll use all of the wealth I've amassed to hire an assassin to kill him!

Zu An nodded in realization. He raised Poisonous Prick up high and plunged it downward. Before Shi Zhenxiang's incredulous gaze, the dagger pierced through his ki armor as if it was no more than a slab of tofu before slightly piercing into his skin.

Zu An was intending to see how effective Poisonous Prick was on a cultivator's ki armor, as well as the effectiveness of its sure-death effect on high-rank cultivators. It might have worked on his previous opponents, but there was no guarantee that it would continue working on stronger enemies too.

Shi Zhenxiang was shocked when his ki armor was breached, but he saw that the dagger had barely scraped his skin, he heaved a sigh of relief. He was just about to say something when his body suddenly shuddered. Before he knew it, he was already plunged into endless darkness.



Right before his death, the last words he heard were, "Since the two of you are so close to one another, why don't you join him in hell then? A family should stay together through tough times, no?"

You have successfully trolled Shi Zhenxiang for +1024 Rage!

## **Chapter 146: Unexpected Situation**

While Zu An had managed to deal with two enemies thus far, he dared not let his guard down at all.

While he was clashing blows with Shi Zhenxiang earlier, he realized that even though he had defeated a fifth rank cultivator and killed a fourth rank cultivator before, there was a lot of luck at play there. In a real fight, defeating a fourth rank cultivator was definitely no easy feat.

It was fortunate that he had Poisonous Prick and the armor-piercing arrow he had picked up earlier, or else he couldn't even breach their ki armor. The remaining duo was of even higher cultivation rank, so defeating them would pose much more of an issue.

It looks like I can't brute force my way through. I need to think up a strategy and make it work.

Looking at Shi Zhenxiang's corpse, an idea floated into Zu An's mind.

...

Meanwhile, after searching the forest in vain for quite some time, the remaining two killers realized that they might have run in the wrong direction. So, in accordance with their previous agreement, they headed back to where the bow user was supposed to be camping to meet up, only to bump into one another.

The sword user asked, "Brother Jia, did you find anything on your end?"

"I couldn't find anything. What about you, Brother Zhen?" asked the spear user.

The sword user's name was Zhen Liumang whereas the spear user's name was Jia Zhengjing. They were both death soldiers groomed by the Shi clan. It was in the recent two years that they were dispatched to the Brightmoon Academy, and they soon got on fairly good terms with one another.

"I couldn't find any trails on my side. Could he have headed northward, to where Shi Zhenxiang is?" asked Zhen Liumang. "Should we head to the north area to take a look?"

Jia Zhengjing shook his head. "Let's meet up with Brother Po first. If Brother Shi hasn't returned yet, we'll head northward to take a look."

"Alright then!"

With someone to cover them, their movements were less careful this time around. They swiftly raced back to the area where they left Po Zhongyou.

"Say, if neither of us found any traces of Zu An at all, is it possible that he has turned around and headed back to where Brother Po is?" asked Jia Zhengjing.

Zhen Liumang replied with a laugh, "Brother Po would have long shot Zu An to death if he spotted him. Even we would have trouble dealing with his arrows if we can't get close to him."

"That's true." Jia Zhengjing nodded. He suddenly noticed a silhouette in front and remarked, "Ah, Brother Shi is... back..."

His words carried a hint of doubt as he realized that Shi Zhenxiang was standing a little too high above ground. They quickly rushed over, only for their faces to pale in shock. They realized that Shi Zhenxiang was hanging off a tree with a noose around his neck.

"Brother Shi!" exclaimed Zhen Liumang in horror.

They had been together with one another in Brightmoon Academy some several years now, resulting in them forging a bond of camaraderie. He was horrified to see the other party hanging off the tree. Without any hesitation, he rushed forward to sever the rope so as to put Shi Zhenxiang's body down.

"Be careful!" warned Jia Zhengjing.

However, it was already too late. The moment the rope was severed, a black shadow suddenly darted across the air.

Stuck in midair, Zhen Liumang was unable to dodge the arrow at all. Fortunately, he wasn't completely unguarded. He swiftly swung his sword to deflect the arrow, but before he could even heave a sigh of relief, something on Shi Zhenxiang's body suddenly exploded.

With a scream of horror, he quickly tossed the body away. It was fortunate that he had activated his ki armor to protect himself earlier, so even though the explosion had dealt significant injuries to him, it wasn't fatal.

The shockwave of the explosion pushed him toward the ground. He was just about to curse at the evil bastard who lay out this series of despicable traps when the ground beneath him suddenly caved in, and he fell into a pit.

Ahhhh!

A scream of horror sounded. There appeared to be some kind of mechanism inside the pit to deal with its unsuspecting victim.

Everything happened in the blink of an eye, catching everyone off guard. Jia Zhengjing was horrified too, but he held back his urge to check on his comrade. Instead, he scanned his surroundings carefully.

All of a sudden, a silhouette darted toward him from the side with a black dagger in hand.

"Over there, huh!" Jia Zhengjing's spear rushed forth like a silver dragon rising from the sea. In terms of force and speed, his spear thrust was indubitably far stronger than the dagger brandished by the silhouette.

However, he soon sensed that something was amiss and leaped backward. When he finally glanced downward to take a look, he realized that his armor had been slit open, revealing his inner shirt.

Had the enemy moved even a single inch closer, the dagger would have pierced through his skin and skewered his abdomen.

“Where did the dagger in his hand come from?” Jia Zhengjing was shocked. He had been maintaining his ki armor all this while, so ordinary attacks shouldn’t have possibly hurt him at all. Yet, that earlier strike actually managed to penetrate both his ki armor and the soft armor he had bought at a high price. This was inconceivable to him!

On the other hand, Zu An lamented over his failure. The earlier strike was a good one, but the short strike range of Poisonous Prick and the sharp reflexes of his enemy worked against him. Otherwise, he could have bragged about having killed a pinnacle fourth rank cultivator in a single strike.

Thinking about this, he suddenly found himself filled with awe for Dongfang Bubai. While he was lamenting about the shortness of his dagger, the latter was already dominating the world with just a couple of needles in hand.

The battle didn’t stop right after this clash. Jia Zhengjing was, after all, no ordinary student. He had been groomed as a death soldier from a young age, and he had learned many new things in Brightmoon Academy too. He swiftly recovered from his astonishment and charged forth with a furious roar, thrusting the spear in his hand toward Zu An.

With the earlier precedence, his movement was more controlled and careful this time around, but its force was still not to be underestimated. The spear seemed almost to be ripping vacuums in the path of its movement.

Zu An dodged sideward before attempting to make another frontal charge, but he suddenly felt a strong gale coming from his side. He quickly retracted his dagger and pulled it to his side, blocking off the sudden spear sweep.

Despite having successfully blocked the attack, the sheer force from the spear sweep forced Zu An to use Sunflower Phantasm to retreat a few steps before he was able to neutralize the impact.

On the other hand, a cold sneer formed on Jia Zhengjing’s face. He had been learning spearmanship from a very young age, so how could he possibly allow anyone to get close to him so easily? In fact, the attack he had made earlier harnessed the full force he had as a pinnacle fourth rank cultivator, and it should have been more than enough to crush the enemy.

However, the smile on his face soon froze. There wasn’t as much feedback from the blow as he had expected, as if he had struck a bed of cotton.

“Your movement skill...” mumbled Jia Zhengjing. He could tell that the other party had used his bizarre movement skill to neutralize the force of his attack.

He had also heard about how Zu An’s bizarre movement skill had won the limelight at the Clans Tournament, but the intelligence team had also figured out that while the movement skill looked impressive at first sight, it was riddled with openings.

But that was clearly not the case, be it when the other party attacked him or evaded his attack.

On the other hand, after neutralizing the sweep with some difficulty, Zu An charged toward the spear user once more. He heard a groan coming from the trap, which meant that the sword user wasn't dead yet. He had to quickly eliminate the spear user so as to avoid it turning into a two-on-one situation.

However, all of his offensive attempts were parried by the spear with loud clangs. This was the difference arising from their cultivation rank and combat experience. It wouldn't be easy for Zu An to catch the spear user off guard.

Zu An's face turned grim. He dished out blows at an increasingly faster speed, and paired with Sunflower Phantasm, he really looked like a specter haunting the battlefield.

Sweat began trickling down Jia Zhengjing's face. He finally understood how a fifth rank cultivator like Yuan Wendong ended up getting crippled by Zu An. The world mocked Yuan Wendong for foolishly underestimating his opponent, but that was only because they had yet to have a taste of his swordsmanship themselves.

It was indeed the Thirteen Forms of Elementary Swordplay from Brightmoon Academy, but it was somehow elevated to another level in Zu An's hands. His attacks looked straightforward, but when paired with the movement skill, they became nearly impossible to predict.

Jia Zhengjing had managed to hold on thus far, but he definitely wasn't as relaxed as he appeared to be. The cold sweat drenching his body was the best evidence of it.

He was still attempting to launch attacks initially, but after trading several blows, he was forced to take on a defensive position. It was only at times after Zu An failed an assault that he was able to sneak in an attack, but then Zu An would swiftly retaliate with a counterattack, nearly doing him on several occasions. In the end, he was forced to go into full defensive.

He desperately swung his spear to form an impregnable defensive shell around him, reminiscent of a barrier.

It was incredibly frustrating for him. He should have been at an advantageous position here, but he could only resort to holing himself up like a tortoise here.

On the other hand, Zu An's hands were starting to feel numb from having clashed with the spear user too many times. There were several occasions where his dagger was nearly jolted flying when they crossed blows, but having learned a lesson from his previous encounter with Shi Zhenxiang, he made sure to hold it tighter than ever.

After several blows, Zu An didn't dare to go too aggressive anymore. He chose to skirt around the spear user instead to wait for an opportunity to strike.

He knew that the initiative was in his hand right now. The spear user was swinging his spear to create a defense shell around his body at the moment, but it was obvious that he couldn't keep this up for too long. He was depleting his ki at a terrifying rate, and it was only a matter of time before his reserve emptied out.

The spear user would eventually have to thrust his spear outward to launch an attack, and that would create space for Zu An to enter and end the fight.

A short moment passed, and Zu An noticed that the defense shell had gotten smaller from before. It would appear that the spear user had noticed this problem too and was attempting to conserve his energy. A smile crept on Zu An's lips. There was no way he would allow the spear user to catch a breather, so he headed inward once more to pressurize the other party.

At this very moment, Jia Zhengjing was feeling so stifled that his lungs were going to blow up. He had never felt so aggrieved in a fight before. He obviously had the advantage in terms of speed and strength, but the sheer elusiveness of the other party's movement skill was more than enough to undo whatever advantage he had.

He was still infuriated at the start, but soon, his heart turned cold upon realizing the terrible situation he was in. He would indubitably succumb to the other party at this rate and lose his life. He had to make a counterattack.

But the problem was that launching a counterattack would force him to expose his openings, and he might die even faster as a result of that. That pitch-black dagger Zu An was holding in his hands gave him dangerous vibes. Every time it came close to him, goosebumps would rise on his body.

However, a twist in the situation suddenly occurred then.

A silhouette leaped out from the pit and grabbed onto Zu An before shouting, "Brother Jia, kill him!"

It was Zhen Liumang! There was still an arrowhead stuck in his leg, and his body was filled with terrible wounds, but he was still alive!

Zu An realized that he had gotten careless. He could still hear groans from the pit at the start, but as the voice grew deeper and quieter, he thought that the other party had succumbed to his injuries and died. Yet, who could have thought that he was simply biding his time for an opportunity to strike?

This wily fox!

Zu An tried to break free of Zhen Liumang's grip, but the latter was at mid fourth rank, an entire rank stronger than him. The sheer difference in their strength made it impossible for Zu An to break free.

"Die!" sneered Zhen Liumang.

In his view, the greatest threat Zu An posed was just his movement skill. So, he began channeling his ki to enhance his strength, intending to crush Zu An's bones.

He might have sustained great injuries here, but it would be all worth it if he could kill this fellow. The young master had declared that he would handsomely reward the person who managed to kill Zu An.

However, Zhen Liumang's body suddenly froze up at this critical moment as he found his own strength seeping out of his body. The last sight he saw before everything went dark was Zu An nicking his arm with his dagger, then a bunch of profound, black runes began seeping in through his wounds.

"What dagger is that... How could it be this formidable..."

With those parting words, Zhen Liumang's breathed his last.

Meanwhile, Zu An was feeling incredibly stressed out even though he had managed to kill one of his enemies. The problem right now was that the sword user's hands were still fixed to his body. He would need a moment's time to fully shake off the burden hanging on him, but it was clear that the spear user wouldn't give him the chance to do so.

No matter how powerful Zu An's movement skill might be, its prowess was bound to be discounted with a burden hanging off him.

Jia Zhengjing's spear shot toward him with the grim reaper's scythe. Now that Zu An had lost the advantage of his movement skill, he was no more than a moving target now.

#### **Chapter 147: Magical Flashlight**

Faced with this undodgeable spear thrust, Zu An suddenly shouted out, "Whatcha looking at!"

At the same time, he tossed his dagger straight toward Jia Zhengjing.

"I'm looking at you, shithead!"

Jia Zhengjing was stunned. He finally understood why Yuan Wendong would actually respond to Zu An's remark at that critical moment during the Clans Tournament. It turned out that Zu An's taunting ability had already risen to the level where it could be considered as a true weapon!

But it was all too late. Watching as the dagger sink into his chest, Jia Zhengjing closed his eyes indignantly.

Goddamnit, how did things turn out like this!

You have successfully trolled Jia Zhengjing for +1024 Rage!

Meanwhile, Zu An wasn't faring much better himself either. While Jia Zhengjing's momentary lapse in attention allowed Zu An to adjust himself to dodge the fatal blow, he was still left with a deep puncture in his chest.

With laborious movements, he pried open Zhen Liumang's hands and shook off his body before staggering over to Jia Zhengjing's fallen corpse to retrieve Poisonous Prick. He made sure to confirm that the two of them were indeed dead before heaving a sigh of relief.

It was not his first life-and-death battle, but this was the first time it had been so gruesome.

Ah, just what sins have I committed to suffer such a fate? How great it would have been if I was still in my air-conditioned room, enjoying a cool cup of cola while playing my games? Why the hell did I have to transmigrate into this horrible world and fight desperately for my life?

Zu An lay on the ground, panting heavily. It took him a while before strength finally returned to his body. With a deep sigh, he began applying some recovery medicine on his wounds to stop the bleeding.

It was fortunate that cultivators in this world had incredibly resilient bodies. Had it been in his previous life, that deep puncture in his chest would have probably taken his life even before he could be transported to the hospital.

Zu An bandaged his wounds messily before beginning to sweep the battlefield. Just as he had expected, there weren't much money or any ki stones on the remaining two assassins too.

It was also then it dawned on him that it was meaningless to death soldiers like them to build up wealth. They were forced to take on dangerous missions where they could very well lose their lives, so it was meaningless for them to accumulate material possessions. So, they opted to trade whatever they had to raise their fighting prowess instead. At the very least, that would increase their chances of survival.

In the end, to Zu An's dismay, he only found some dry rations and recovery medicine. He had spent so much effort and resources on the traps he had constructed—he wasted his precious armor-piercing arrows and hidden weapons Ji Xiaoxi had given him—but he got hardly anything in return. Heck, he didn't even earn much Rage points either!

Just thinking about it made Zu An greatly aggrieved. He ran over to Jia Zhengjing's side to strip off his soft armor. There were a cut and a hole in it, both caused by Zu An in the earlier battle, but the other parts were still working fine. It was still barely usable.

Considering how a pinnacle fourth rank cultivator was using it as a defensive tool, it should be of fairly decent quality. Just to be safe, Zu An grabbed another sword and tried hacking at the soft armor, and to his relief, it couldn't pierce through it at all.

His first thought was to wear the armor backward since the cut and puncture was only at the front of the armor. This way, he would get full protection for the front of his body.

However, on second thought, he felt that if it ever came to a point where he would need this soft armor, it was highly likely that he would already be running away. In such a case, it would be more important for him to protect his back instead. So, he flipped the armor around and wore it the proper way.

Following that, he leaped into the pit and recollected the armor-piercing arrows that hadn't lost their lustre yet. All in all, there were four of them which were still usable.

Other than that, he also noticed a miniature hand crossbow in the pit which appeared to belong to Zhen Liumang. It probably dropped from his arm while he was falling into the pit.

Zu An attached the hand crossbow onto his wrist as his feelings of aggravation finally soothed a little. At least he managed to loot two usable pieces of equipment after that difficult fight, so it was not all that bad.

After taking whatever he could, Zu An headed over to a quiet location to take a look at the Rage points he had amassed thus far. He was initially planning to save up his Rage points so that he could use them up all at once. Perhaps, he might just get something good that way. However, after the near-death experience he just had, he finally came to understand the danger he was in, and he dared not to remain complacent anymore.

Just like the death soldiers, he ought to convert all available resources he had into tangible strength so as to increase his chances of walking out of this dungeon alive.

To his astonishment, he actually managed to amass a hulking 75,873 Rage points!

There was no place to wash his hands and face right now, so he chose to rub on the bloodstains on his body instead, consoling himself that red is the color of auspiciousness.

He began drawing the lottery. The light marker quickly shot across the keyboard before eventually stopping at the letter 'D'.

Ding!

Congratulations, you have won a 'Magical Flashlight'!

Zu An's eyes slowly widened in disbelief. He never thought that he would actually manage to draw an artifact right away. Is Lady Luck finally shining on me now?

He quickly took a look at the description of the item.

Magical Flashlight: The greatest work of a bald scientist in another world.

Artifact Effect: It's able to light up in the presence of light without requiring any energy sources at all. Of course, this also meant that this flashlight would never light up in the absence of light. It's rumored that this flashlight harnesses an incredible effect, but no one has been able to figure out its use for the past thousand years. Could you possibly be the exception? Uses: 3

"..." Zu An.

His mind was completely blown after reading the description. For a flashlight to light up in the presence of light instead of the absence of it... What is bloody wrong with that scientist's mind?

He was really wondering if that bald scientist was named Haw Kar-ying![1]

And what shocked him more was that there was actually a use limit on this lousy piece of shit! Even if there was unlimited use for this, he wouldn't be able to find a place to put it to use at all!

What was even worse was that the description hinted at an incredible effect, but it refused to elaborate on what it was. What the hell? You might as well not say anything at all!

Zu An tried thinking deeper into it, but he couldn't figure a use for this flashlight at all. So, he decided to just continue on with the lottery.

Perhaps it was because he used too much of his luck on drawing the first artifact, but the next 18 draws gave him a 'Thanks for playing'!

Zu An's eyelids twitched, wondering if he had used up his luck. When he finally pulled a ki Fruit on his nineteenth pull, he heaved a sigh of relief.

All he got were 'Thanks for playing' and Ki Fruits afterward, to the point that he was getting numb. It was like an endless repetitive cycle.

But all of a sudden, the light marker stopped on the letter 'Y'. Zu An froze for a moment, wondering if he was seeing things. When was the last time I managed to draw two items simultaneously?

He was too used to having horrible luck that this sudden outburst of fortune caught him off guard. He hurriedly checked on the details.



Congratulations on drawing 'Befriend a Rich Man'!

Befriend a Rich Man: When you reach a certain level of wealth, appearance, age, personality, and all of those superficial traits will be rendered meaningless. Everyone will think of you as an amicable man overflowing with charisma.

Artifact Effect: Every time you spend 100,000,000 coins, you'll be able to make a target view you as a friend. The effect lasts for an hour.

## **Chapter 148: Moon's Reflection**

Zu An suddenly thought of his previous life's Jack Ma, the creator of Alibaba, as well as Uncle Wang, who charismatically lectured the crowd that they ought to start with a small financial target, for say, a hundred million RMB.[1]

Hmmm, I could do that too, right? If I go in public and start talking about how easy it is to get a pretty wife or something, I should be able to collect a massive outburst of Rage points.

Yeap, this idea is not bad. I ought to give it a try too.

He examined the 'Befriend a Rich Man' skill and found that even though it had no usage limit, there was actually a huge restriction to it—money.

However, he noticed that the artifact effect was described rather ambiguously. The 100,000,000 coins seemed to be referring to copper coins, which meant that it was 100,000 silver taels each use. Hmm, that doesn't sound too much.

Currently, he had 650,000 silver taels on him at the moment, and the Four Seas Casino still owed him another 500,000 silver taels. In total, he would be able to use the ability six times.

Had anyone else known what he was thinking, they would have surely burst out cursing. 100,000 silver taels was definitely a huge sum. One must know that even wealthy merchant clans in this world would have difficulty forking out 100,000 silver taels at one go.

Right now, Zu An was considering another problem, and that was the effect of the skill after spending the money. The details in the artifact effect were lacking, only mentioning that he could turn a target into his friend for an hour. However, there were many different kinds of friends too, such as friends who had been through hardship and friends who scurried off in the face of trouble. He wasn't certain how effective the skill would be.

For example, if I try this skill on Jiang Luofu, could the two of us become friends with a lot of benefits?

Zu An was a little tempted, but he suddenly recalled the sealed state he was in and fell gloomy.

My priority right now should be to find the Evanescent Lotus. Let me put all miscellaneous thoughts away for now.

He continued to draw the lottery, but he didn't get anything else that was worthy of note. His final loot was 70 Ki Fruits. With that, he had used a total of 156 Ki Fruits on his fourth formation, which meant that he just needed 77 more to fill it up entirely.

While it looked like the speed of his cultivation was incredibly slow at the moment, it was already much faster than the other cultivators in this world. Others had to spend at least decades of hard work in order to reach his current cultivation rank whereas it only took him a month or so.

Besides, his cultivation would rise significantly every time he suffered a beating due to the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra, which meant that it was only a matter of time before he caught up with the others.

If others were to learn of his secret, they would surely go green with envy and chase him down for his cultivation secret.

Zu An had noticed this too, but he viewed it as a path he had to tread down. After all, he was aiming to become the strongest man in the world!

He had read far too many webnovels in his previous life, and his head had been poisoned by all sorts of overpowered protagonists. He compared himself with those protagonists—as if he was on the same level as them—and he felt that his current accomplishments were still lacking in comparison.

Well, a top-notch prodigy like me should aim for the stars, right?

After some rest, Zu An felt that he was faring much better now, so he headed out of the forest to resume looking for Ji Xiaoxi. His mood was pretty good from having obtained two artifacts from the lottery.

However, the moment he walked out of the forest, the smile on his face froze up. Goosebumps rose all over his body, and his heart began thumping out of nervousness.

There was a woman dressed in a green dress before him. She had a graceful slender figure and an alluringly willowy waist. A slight breeze swept across the land, fluttering her skirt. Her face was hidden behind a veil, shrouding her in an air of mystery.

Any other men would be delighted to stumble upon such a beautiful woman in the wilderness, but Zu An was in no mood to appreciate her beauty. He had a firsthand experience of the terrifying power harnessed within her slender profile.

This woman was no other than Snow!

The latter had already noticed him too, and her lips curled up in glee. Found him!

Zu An's eyes flickered around nervously for a moment before he finally managed to calm his nerves. Instead of turning tail and fleeing, he walked over with a smile and said, "Oh? Miss Qiao, I never expected to meet you here."

Snow was surprised. Given the grudge between them, she thought that the two of them would break out into a fight right away upon meeting one another, but the other party was approaching her amicably instead.

It took a moment before she realized that she was currently Qiao Xueying of Brightmoon Academy, not Snow. It was only natural that he didn't recognize her.

Hmph! It must be because I'm in the tenth place in the Sweetheart Ranking that he's trying to chat me up! This fellow sure is... Despite being impotent, he's still so lecherous!

You have successfully trolled Qiao Xueying for +233 Rage!

Zu An's heart skipped a beat. Woah, she must really hate me a lot. She's raging at me when all I've done here is to greet her?

Watching as Zu An approached her like an ignorant fool, Qiao Xueying's lips curled up in ridicule. All of a sudden, she didn't want to kill him that quickly anymore. That fellow made me suffer so much the last time, making me... me... that! How can I vent my anger if I don't toy with him a bit?

"Miss Qiao, you seem to be in a really good mood. Is it because of me?" Zu An sighed deeply. "I guess it can't be helped. With my dashing appearance, it's hard for any woman not to be in a good mood upon meeting me."

"..." Qiao Xueying.

Still as thick-skinned as ever, I see.

You have successfully trolled Qiao Xueying for +131 Rage!

However, she maintained the smile on her lips and said, "Young master Zu, aren't you afraid that your wife will be displeased?"

Hmph, I shall twirl you around my fingers like an utter fool. I'll first make you fall for me before exposing my true identity to you. Heh, let's see how you'll react to that!

Zu An waved his hands and said, "Miss Qiao, please do not worry. My wife has said that she doesn't mind me looking for another woman. If you don't believe me, you can feel free to ask her."

Qiao Xueying clicked her tongue in annoyance. How dare this fellow mess around with other women behind the young miss' back?

However, barely as this thought surfaced in her mind, she realized that she was still addressing Chu Chuyan as young miss and feeling indignant on her behalf. It looked like the years she spent by Chu Chuyan's side had really left a deep impression on her.

"Miss Qiao, what are you doing alone? It's not safe for you to walk around alone. This dungeon seems to be far more dangerous than stated in the records," said Zu An. "However, now that you've met me, there's no need to worry anymore. I'll protect you from now onward."

"You?" Qiao Xueying couldn't help but sneer mockingly. However, she quickly changed her tone and replied, "You have my deepest gratitude, young master Zu."

"Wait a moment, what's with that 'you'? Do you not believe me?" Zu An immediately got agitated.

"Have you heard of Yuan Wendong? He's a fifth rank cultivator—a fifth rank cultivator, I joke you not—and I defeated him! There's also..."

Qiao Xueying couldn't be bothered to listen to his nonsense. She interrupted him and asked, "Did you meet any other students along the way?"

"Students? I don't think so. You're the first one I encountered. Ah, it must be fate bringing us together!" Zu An chuckled.

"You didn't meet anyone?" Qiao Xueying eyed the wound on Zu An's chest. "What's with that injury then?"

"Ah, I stumbled into a few zombie soldiers and fought against them. Ahhh, it was really a tough fight. There's really something weird about this dungeon! I didn't think that there would actually be zombies here... The academy should have told us something in advance!" Zu An spoke with a hint of fright in his voice. His acting was as genuine as one could imagine.

Qiao Xueying pondered over Zu An's words. She recalled what she had seen in the mountain valley she passed by earlier, and a furrow formed on her forehead. Did Jia Zhengjing and the others encounter the zombies and get killed off by them?

"Hm? Honey, what are you doing here?" Zu An suddenly glanced behind Qiao Xueying and exclaimed in delight.

"Young miss!" Qiao Xueying's body shuddered as she subconsciously turned around to take a look, only to see no one behind her.

Zu An was waiting for this opportunity all this while. He intentionally dragged the conversation around the place in order to make Qiao Xueying lower her guard so as to create this opportunity.

Without any hesitation, he drove his dagger straight toward Qiao Xueying's heart. He didn't show any mercy this time around, resorting to Poisonous Prick for this attack. While it was a pity to let a beauty die just like this, he was well aware that she had entered the dungeon to take his life. With her fifth rank cultivation, any compassion he showed would likely spell in his death.

'Bixie Swordplay' was fast enough as it was, and Zu An had taken her by surprise this time around. Even a cultivator of Qiao Xueying's level couldn't hope to dodge it.

Psh!

Blood splattered all over the place.

Zu An had managed to pierce his dagger into Qiao Xueying's body! However, he didn't look relieved at all. There was something weird about the feedback coming from the dagger.

As he had expected, ripples suddenly appeared on the 'Qiao Xueying' which he had pierced, and she eventually morphed into a flower that dissipated into thin air. Meanwhile, the real Qiao Xueying was standing several meters away, glaring at him chillingly.

From the moment she turned around and saw no one at all, she knew that she had made a fatal mistake. Her initial thought was to use her ki armor to guard against his incoming attack, but every cell in her body was tingling, warning her of a terrifying danger that was encroaching on her.

She couldn't understand why Zu An could make her feel such a great threat, but she instinctively resorted to a talent that she could only use three times in her life, Moon's Reflection, and transferred the damage she suffered onto a flower.

"You actually made me waste a use of my Moon's Reflection!" bellowed Qiao Xueying.

You have successfully trolled Qiao Xueying for +1024 Rage!

One must know that every use of Moon's Reflection was equivalent to an additional life! She had been in danger many times since a young age, but she could never bring herself to use Moon's Reflection. She knew that this technique could save her three times from a powerful opponent whom she stood no chance before, which was why she treasured it greatly.

Yet, she actually wasted it on a man whom she thought of nothing more than a mere ant!

Despite her furious bellow, there was no one to answer her. Zu An had already turned around to flee back into the forest, and he was just a moment away from vanishing from Qiao Xueying's side.

### **Chapter 149: Addicted to Labor**

Qiao Xueying finally understood that Zu An had recognized her right from the start, and he was just putting on an act to make her lower her guard so as to kill her.

She planned to make a fool out of Zu An, only to realize in the end that she was the fool all along. The explosion of embarrassment and fury in her head nearly drove her insane that very instant.

You have successfully trolled Qiao Xueying for +1024 Rage!

She immediately gave chase right away, determined to mince that darned bastard into pieces so as to vent her anger.

Zu An ran off as fast as he could, but he realized that even while using Sunflower Phantasm, he was still unable to outrun Qiao Xueying. If not for the complicated terrain in the forest, he would have been caught by now.

After running a while, Zu An made use of an opportunity where he was in her blind spot to climb up a tree and conceal his aura, hoping that she wouldn't find him.

Qiao Xueying chased over, only to realize that Zu An's figure had vanished. Her footsteps gradually slowed to a leisurely stroll, and she remarked calmly, "Zu An, I'll admit that your strength has caught me off guard. But if there's one thing you should have never done, it's to run into this forest."

Zu An was stunned. It was through exploiting the terrain of the forest that he managed to get rid of Jia Zhengjing and the others, which was why he instinctively tried to emulate his previous success.

"Have you forgotten my awakened element?"

Qiao Xueying casually raised her hand, and the leaves on the ground suddenly began moving on their own accord. Their soft surface hardened into sharp knives, and they shot straight toward where Zu An was hiding.

Zu An leaped down from the tree, knowing that the other party had already found him. He stared at her in astonishment as he asked, "You're able to sense me?"

Qiao Xueying was in no rush to make her move. "Every tree and every grass in this forest are my eyes and ears. Where could you possibly hide?"

Zu An's face turned grim. If what she said was true, he had really cornered himself by choosing to escape into the forest. However, he still found it hard to believe that those who had awakened the wood element would actually be powerful to this extent. At the very least, he hadn't seen any fire element cultivators summoning magma from underground yet.

"What's with that slash earlier on? Why did it leave me with an overwhelming sense of dread, as if I was facing death itself?" asked Qiao Xueying.

This was the question that had been plaguing her mind all this while. Given the disparity in their strength, there was no way Zu An's attack could have breached her defense.

"You want to know? Call me big brother Zu, and I'll tell you," replied Zu An casually.

In his head, however, his mind was whirring quickly to figure a way to escape from this situation.

Qiao Xueying's face turned cold. "It has been a while since we last met, but you're still as hateful as ever."

You have successfully trolled Qiao Xueying for +400 Rage!

Zu An sighed deeply. "It has been a while since we last met, but your mouth is still as foul as ever."

Qiao Xueying harrumphed coldly. She slowly flicked her finger upward, and the leaves in the area began dancing around her body. "I'll break your arms and legs. Let's see if you can still talk tough afterward."

With a wave of her wrist, the leaves immediately whizzed toward Zu An's limbs, moving at a speed so fast that it seemed to reach him in the blink of an eye.

Zu An's silhouette blurred as he dodged those leaves by a hair's breadth. Cold sweat began trickling down his back. If not for his Sunflower Phantasm, that earlier attack would have punctured him full of holes.

Knowing that he would be a goner if he remained in a defensive position, he began charging toward Qiao Xueying to launch a new wave of offense, hoping to curb her attacks even by a little. At this point, he had already switched out to a regular sword. He was reserving Poisonous Prick for critical moments so as to avoid revealing its true nature. Otherwise, it would be much harder for him to defeat his opponents if others were guarded against it.

"Hm?"

Zu An's movement skill was so bizarre that Qiao Xueying was unable to make sense of it. She chose to back away for the time being, but Zu An's sword continued to pursue her tightly, not letting her escape at all.

With a cold harrumph, she waved her hand. The leaves in the area began fluttering around her like dancing butterflies, blocking off Zu An's attacks.

Zu An tried to approach her from different angles, but he was unable to pierce through the barrier of green leaves.

"It's just the most ordinary Elementary Swordplay from the academy, but you were able to bring out such prowess from it. I guess it was not entirely bad luck that Yuan Wendong lost to you," said Qiao Xueying.

If not for the huge gap in their cultivation ranks, she might not have been able to cope with him and his swordplay in a direct encounter. But of course, there was no way she would say those words aloud lest this hateful man got too gleeful.

"However, it's all over now!"

Zu An immediately realized that things were getting bad for him. He hurriedly backed away, but countless vines were slithering across the ground like an army of snakes, rushing in his direction.

Zu An tried his best to dodge the vines with his movement skill.

Is this the true prowess of a fifth rank cultivator? The power of elements is truly difficult for lower-ranked cultivators to cope with. Thinking back, it's truly a relief that I prepared an electromagnet to deal with Yuan Wendong's army of swords. Otherwise, no matter how formidable 'Bixie Swordplay' is, I probably won't be able to defeat him.

Zu An's movements grew faster and faster, but the vines in the area began weaving together to form a huge net, slowly stifling his escape routes. Slowly but surely, he was getting cornered.

Once, when he was landing on the ground, a tree branch lying on the ground suddenly morphed into a rope, catching him off guard. He lost balance for a moment before crashing into a tree. Countless vines immediately darted forth to bind him in place.

Zu An tried his best to struggle out of the vines, but he wasn't able to break free.

Qiao Xueying slowly walked up to him with a triumphant smile hanging on her lips. "Oh? Why aren't you running anymore?"

"You were desperately trying to get me to stay. How could I let you down?" replied Zu An.

Qiao Xueying's face turned cold. She picked the sword he had dropped on the ground and said, "Hmph, your tongue still remains sharp even when you're already at death's door. Let's see if you'll still continue running your mouth after I sever your tongue!"

"Sever whatever you want, but at least make sure it's a clean cut so that I can attach it back." Zu An gulped.

Qiao Xueying burst into laughter. Perhaps it was because victory was already in her grasp, she was actually humored by Zu An's words. "You want me to cut your tongue cleanly? That isn't a problem at all. If you trust me, I can dice your body up clean enough so that you can reattach your body piece by piece afterward."

"I trust you. There's no need for you to demonstrate it," replied Zu An hurriedly.

Qiao Xueying harrumphed. "That won't do. You don't have a choice here."

Zu An sighed deeply before putting on a more severe tone, saying, "Snow, have you forgotten how it felt to give birth the last time?"

Just hearing the words 'give birth' was more than enough to make Snow stagger backward in horror. That excruciating pain that seemed to seep right into her bones had dealt to her a lasting trauma, such that she had many nightmares about it over the last few nights. "W-what do you mean? Were you... Were you the one who did it to me back then?!"

This was a question she had been wondering for quite some time now. She had visited many physicians to check on her condition back then, but all of them said that there was nothing wrong with her body at all. No one was able to figure out the cause of those abrupt spasms she suffered.

Most of them told her that her symptoms were identical to the labor pain suffered during childbirth. As a maiden, she felt deeply offended and angered to hear those words.

"I told you that I would give you a taste of what pregnancy feels like, but you still continue to pursue me relentlessly. Are you getting addicted to childbirth now?"

Zu An had already decided to use his 'Knock-You-Up Eyes'. There were only two uses remaining, but considering the current circumstances, it didn't seem like he had any other choice now.

I was too kind the last time around, and it cost me another use of this skill. I mustn't make the same mistake anymore.

It was at this moment that Zu An suddenly widened his eyes. He stared at something right behind Qiao Xueying in disbelief for a moment before exclaiming in surprise, "Honey, you're here?"

This time around, Qiao Xueying didn't even bother to turn around. She sneered coldly, "Did you think that I would fall for the same trick twice?"

But the next moment, she suddenly found her body trembling uncontrollably. A thin layer of ice had formed on her body, freezing her in place.

Chu Chuyan slowly walked over as she said, "So you were Snow. I should have guessed."

"Y-young miss..." Qiao Xueying's heart shuddered.

It really is her! Damn it, it's all Zu An's fault! If not for him distracting me, I wouldn't have been done in so easily!

So, she shot Zu An a glare.

You have successfully trolled Qiao Xueying for +530 Rage!

Zu An was rendered speechless. What is wrong with this woman? The one curbing you here is Chu Chuyan! What does this have to do with me?

"Young miss? I don't think I'm worthy of being addressed that way by you," said Chu Chuyan.



As she spoke, she walked over to Zu An's side. With a swipe of her hand, frost immediately cloaked the vines and weakened their structure, allowing her to break them with just a tap of her finger.

Excited, Zu An rushed forward to give her a big hug. "How wonderful, honey! I never thought that I would meet you here. Come, give me a hug of love!"

Chu Chuyan dodged his hug with a sidestep, ignoring him altogether. She turned her eyes back onto Qiao Xueying.

Many emotions flickered across Qiao Xueying's face, and in the end, she sighed deeply and said, "I'm deeply grateful for young miss' care and concern over the years. It's just that I already have a master, so I ask for your forgiveness."

"Who's the master you speak of? Shi Kun?" asked Chu Chuyan.

Qiao Xueying shook her head and said, "I apologize, but I cannot reveal that to you."

Chu Chuyan frowned. She wasn't sure about how she should deal with the current situation either. In the midst of this silence, Zu An stepped forward and offered a solution, "Isn't this easy to deal with? Ask her any question you want to, and if she refuses to answer or lies, I'll strip off a piece of her clothing. If she refuses to speak till the end, I'll take off all of her clothes and tie her to a tree at the entrance of the forest so that everyone can admire her body."

"..." Chu Chuyan.

Qiao Xueying's body trembled in fury. "You bastard!"

You have successfully trolled Qiao Xueying for +1024 Rage!

Zu An sighed softly and said, "You also know that you serve a different master, so you should have known what your plight would be if you got caught. If you're going to continue insisting on your silence, I'm going to start."

He picked his sword back up and pointed it toward her robe.

Chu Chuyan stepped forward and stopped him. "Enough. It won't do to humiliate a woman like this."

Zu An shrugged. "We're the only ones here. You're a woman, and I've already seen everything her body has to offer. How can this be considered a humiliation?"

Chu Chuyan found herself at a loss for words. For some reason, Zu An's words always had their own twisted logic that made it hard to argue against him.

Qiao Xueying glared at Zu An so sharply that it felt like daggers were going to fly right out of her eyes. That matter was her greatest shame, but this man actually spoke of it as if it was nothing at all.

You have trolled Qiao Xueying for +512 Rage!

Chu Chuyan waved her hand and dispelled the frost shrouding Qiao Xueying's body. "Leave."

Qiao Xueying was stunned. "You're letting me off?"

"Your motives for approaching me were impure, but it doesn't change the fact that we had been sisters for many years. I can't bring myself to take your life. I wish you all the best from now onward," said Chu Chuyan.

### **Chapter 150: It's Precisely Because of You that I'm No Match for Them**

Zu An felt that his wife was being needlessly kind to her enemies, and he had a strong feeling that it would backfire on her in the future. Nevertheless, the words that poured out of his mouth ended up being compliments, "Honey, your heart is truly made out of gold. It's no wonder why others call you a fairy!"

Qiao Xueying shot a glare at Zu An hatefully, "Our young miss is a fairy, but it's a pity that she married a fellow like you. It's almost like a flower had been stuck on top of cow dung!"

Zu An shrugged off those remarks and said, "It's no wonder why people say that you're a long-haired, willow-waisted boor. Don't you know that cow dung can provide a flower with a lot of nutrients, allowing it to blossom more ravishingly than the others? In my view, it's a flower's greatest blessing to be stuck on top of cow dung."

"..." Qiao Xueying.

"..." Chu Chuyan.

"What fate it is to actually bump into young miss Chu here!"

Refreshing laughter suddenly sounded in the distance. The three of them quickly turned their heads over, only to see Shi Kun walking over with his entourage.

Admittedly, Shi Kun did look dashing amidst the bunch of crooked faces around him, but the more good-looking he appeared, the more Zu An wanted to sink a punch into his face. It was enough for this world to have a hottie like him; there was no need for another inferior replacement!

Qiao Xueying's eyes widened in astonishment upon seeing Shi Kun. She knew that her failure must have disappointed the young master, but what she was more worried about right now was a conflict breaking out between the young master and the young miss. What was she to do if that were to happen?

Chu Chuyan shot a glance at Shi Kun and said, "Young master Shi, what brings you here?"

"I was just taking a look around the dungeon and happened to pass by here. It sure was a stroke of luck for me to stumble upon young miss Chu here," replied Shi Kun with a smile.

His eyes had been intently fixed on Chu Chuyan all this while, treating Zu An as nothing more than thin air.

"A stroke of luck? That's hard to say."

Chu Chuyan glanced at Shi Kun and the lackeys around him. There were two fourth rank and five third rank cultivators, but it was worth noticing that she had never seen them in the academy before. It was a wonder how the Shi clan managed to slip them into the dungeon.

“Young miss Chu, you’re making fun of me.” Shi Kun was still maintaining a smile on his lips, but his heart had already turned cold. Snow is indeed useless. Again and again, she keeps failing me. Now that Zu An has met up with Chu Chuyan, it won’t be easy to take his life anymore.

“I’ll have a chat with you when we’re out of the dungeon. For now, we need to continue exploring the area.” Chu Chuyan turned around and left the area.

Under normal circumstances, she wouldn’t fear Shi Kun and his lackeys, but for some reason, the injuries she sustained from fighting the sixth rank Wu Di on the dueling ring the other day wasn’t healing well.

Shi Kun’s cultivation was unlikely to be beneath hers, and he had Snow on his side too. Considering all of their lackeys as well, she was definitely at a disadvantage here.

“Young miss Chu, please wait for a moment,” Shi Kun called out. “There are all sorts of bizarre phenomena occurring in the dungeon, making it more dangerous than before. Why don’t we group up so that we can look after one another?”

“There’s no need for that,” replied Chu Chuyan. She didn’t even bother to turn around to answer.

“You still don’t get it? She’s telling you not to be a lamppost! Get lost, don’t interrupt our lovey-dovey time.” Zu An waved Shi Kun away in disdain before hurriedly chasing after Chu Chuyan.

Watching their departing silhouettes, Shi Kun clenched his fists furiously, cracking his joints.

Damn you, Zu An! You won’t remain smug for long!

You have successfully trolled Shi Kun for +512 Rage!

Meanwhile, after chasing up to Chu Chuyan, Zu An asked curiously, “Honey, it was queer how you coincidentally appeared when I was in a critical situation. Have you been secretly following me out of worry?”

“I’m not that free,” replied Chu Chuyan. “I met Ji Xiaoxi earlier, and she informed me that you were in danger. So, I came over to take a look.”

“Is Xiaoxi fine?” asked Zu An anxiously. He had been worrying about Ji Xiaoxi’s plight all this while. He had indeed lured the zombies away, but there were all sorts of other dangers lurking in the dungeon too. It didn’t seem safe for her to be traveling all alone.

“Other than the sprain on her leg, she’s fine,” replied Chu Chuyan. She paused for a brief moment before asking once more, “She seems to be very anxious about you. The two of you don’t seem to be normal friends.”

“Ah, I didn’t think that you would figure it out so quickly.” Zu An laughed heartily. “It’s not that I want to brag about my charisma, but people used to call me ‘Kidnapper of Ladies’ Hearts’, ‘Widow’s Bane’, ‘Auntie Bewitcher’... Any women who have gotten to know me will find themselves falling deeply in love with me... Ahhhh, don’t go!”

Chu Chuyan harrumphed coldly. “Why didn’t Snow fall for you then?”

"She might look desperate to kill me on the surface, but this is what you call 'a loving, quarreling couple'[1]. Love and hate are two sides of a coin. Who knows? Her feelings for me might just flip over in the next moment!"

"..." Chu Chuyan.

"But honey, you don't need to get jealous! No matter how many women come to love me in the future, none of them can possibly shake the position you have in my heart!" Zu An patted his chest confidently.

"You sure are confident in yourself," remarked Chu Chuyan.

"Of course! The key to a man's charm is his confidence!" answered Zu An.

Chu Chuyan couldn't be bothered to argue with him on this. Her eyes fell upon his chest, and she exclaimed in astonishment, "What's with this wound? Did Snow cause it?"

"How could she have the ability to do so? It's caused by Shi Kun's other lackeys."

Zu An quickly filled her in on the fight he had previously in the forest.

Even someone as calm as Chu Chuyan was shocked by the news. "A late fourth rank, two mid fourth rank, and an early fourth rank cultivator were chasing you, but you still managed to turn the tables on them?"

"I'm incredible, aren't I?" replied Zu An gleefully.

"But how could that be possible?" Chu Chuyan couldn't come to terms with it.

Zu An was only a third rank cultivator at the moment. While he did manage to defeat Yuan Wendong on the dueling ring back then, everyone could tell that his victory was, to a huge degree, luck. There was no doubt that he was indeed stronger than most third rank cultivators, but his strength wasn't so great as to be able to defeat four fourth rank assassins!

"There's still a lot to me which you don't know of, but it's fine. Time will eventually show you," said Zu An with a mysterious smile.

"Then how did you get caught by Snow earlier?" asked Chu Chuyan.

Zu An scratched his head sheepishly as he replied, "Well, we just happened to be in the forest. Her elemental ability is wood, and I happened to get careless."

Chu Chuyan nodded in realization before falling silent.

"Ah right, why did you leave earlier? Those are the assassins that Shi Kun has brought into the dungeon to come after my life. As my wife, shouldn't you stand up for me?" asked Zu An. There was a hint of dissatisfaction in his tone.

Chu Chuyan's face reddened. It took her a long while before she finally answered, "I can't defeat them."

"You can't defeat them?" Zu An was taken aback by the unexpected answer. "But you're the number one prodigy of Brightmoon City! Your words just shattered the majestic impression I have of you in my heart."

“Shut up!” snapped Chu Chuyan. Then, she exhaled deeply and explained, “Shi Kun’s cultivation is not beneath mine, and he has Snow and a huge group of assistants by his side. How are we supposed to stand up to them in the earlier situation?”

“But you have me on your side too!” grumbled Zu An in discontentment.

Honestly, he would love more than anything to get rid of Shi Kun. The latter had made many attempts to take his life in the past, and there was little doubt that he would continue to do so in the future too.

To snip off the root of the problem, Zu An would have to eventually deal with Shi Kun, and this dungeon was the greatest opportunity he had. Otherwise, once they were out of here, it would be hard to touch Shi Kun, especially since he had powerful experts constantly guarding him.

“It’s precisely because of you that I’m unable to defeat them!” Chu Chuyan rebutted coldly.

Zu An was rendered speechless for a long while. He had never known this cold wife he had was actually so good at arguing.

“Hahaha, I heard from Elder Shi that young miss Chu has suffered significant injuries on the dueling ring, but it looks like your injuries are more severe than I thought.”

A peal of laughter sounded from the distance as Shi Kun walked out with a paper fan in his hand. He was accompanied with his group of lackeys, and Qiao Xueying was standing amidst them with a complicated look on her face.

Chu Chuyan immediately turned around with a deep frown. “You were eavesdropping on us?”

Shi Kun snapped his paper fan shut before continuing on with a smile, “Young miss Chu, are you unaware that I practice a wind element cultivation technique? There’s a skill amongst wind cultivators known as ‘Whisking Wind’ that allows one to amplify any sounds in the area, and we just happen to be standing in the direction of the windflow.”

Chu Chuyan glanced at the lackeys, who had dispersed around the area, and asked, “What do you intend to do? Are you trying to pick a fight with me?”

Shi Kun shook his head. “Young miss Chu, you’re misunderstanding. I’ve admired you for a very long time, so you need not fear that I’ll make things hard for you. The only one I wish to deal with here is Zu An.”

Zu An’s heart sank. So Chu Chuyan is still injured. It’s no wonder why her face continued to remain pale over the last few days.

“Zu An is my husband. Your action is no different from provoking me,” replied Chu Chuyan.

Zu An was stunned. He hadn’t expected Chu Chuyan to say such words. Her usual cold attitude made him doubt if they were really a family, but during such a critical moment, she actually openly acknowledged him to be her husband.

What’s going on? Why do I feel so touched?

Shi Kun's suave face distorted upon hearing those words. He began pacing around in irritation before snapping furiously, "Just how in the world is this scoundrel qualified to be your husband? Young miss Chu, you're a woman bestowed with utmost beauty and top-notch cultivation talent by heaven. Only the most outstanding man in the world is qualified to stand by your side! That man over there is nothing but trash..."

You have successfully trolled Shi Kun for +256 +256 +256...

Zu An interjected in before Shi Kun could even finish his words, "Hold it there for a moment, Brother Shit Kun, could the 'most outstanding man in the world' you speak of be referring to you?"

"So what if it is?" replied Shi Kun arrogantly.

"Oh? If I'm not mistaken, the most outstanding man in the world should be His Majesty. If you really mean what you say, could that mean that you think that even His Majesty isn't as powerful and outstanding as you are?" Zu An chuckled softly.

"I..." Shi Kun nearly choked right there. He never thought that Zu An would pick such a fault from his words. "That's naturally not what I mean. You should stop trying to twist my words to slander me!"

No matter how arrogant Shi Kun was, there was no way he would dare to disrespect the emperor. If the emperor were to hear of this matter, it would bring down not just him but his entire clan too. As a prominent clan in the capital, he grew up listening to stories about the emperor, so he naturally knew how terrifying the emperor was.

You have successfully trolled Shi Kun for +444 Rage!

"Since that's the case, wouldn't it mean that you were just boasting about your own capabilities?" scoffed Zu An. He looked at Shi Kun with eyes dripping with disdain.

"..." Shi Kun.

He felt that the refined and gentlemanly image he had painstakingly built up over the years was going to be ruined in the hands of this scoundrel! Why is this bloody rascal so hateful?!

You have successfully trolled Shi Kun for +512 Rage!

Chu Chuyan also added in at this moment, "I'm choosing a husband here, not a scholar or a general. It just happens that Zu An fits my criteria, so I'm afraid that I'll have to turn down your feelings for me."

Zu An's eyes lit up. He reached out to grab Chu Chuyan's cool yet tender hands and said, "Honey, I knew that you are fond of me!"

"..." Chu Chuyan.

Her instinctive reaction was to shake off his hand, but considering the context, it didn't seem right for her to do so.

This fellow sure knows how to take advantage of me!

Looking at the tightly linked hands between the two of them, Shi Kun's face turned completely livid.  
"Chu Chuyan, I've always thought of you as a pure maiden, but how dare you hold the hand of another man? Are you such a loose woman?!"

You have successfully trolled Shi Kun for +999 Rage!

1. It's used to describe a couple, often married, who keeps arguing with one another, but despite the apparent disharmony, they are actually in love with one another and cares for each other, just that they express their feelings in a different way.