

Paradise 1551

Chapter 1551: Triple Happiness!

For every ordinary fourth-rank Heavenly God that he killed, Lin Huang could obtain twenty thousand to twenty-five thousand types of Rule Bending Powers.

However, he obtained eighty thousand to one hundred thousand types of Rule Bending Powers just from killing one fourth-rank Night Demon Fir. It was almost four times more than what he could get from Heavenly Gods of the same combat strength.

The Night Demon Firs with higher combat strength would have even more Rule Bending Powers within their bodies.

As far as Lin Huang was concerned, killing these monsters was undoubtedly the best way to obtain EXP.

As he led the team forward, apart from letting Tu Tong and Lan Ling practice on the beginner-level monsters, he would kill the rest right away. He did not give Virtuoso and Saber9 any combat opportunities at all.

Virtuoso and Saber9 did not say anything either. They had already begun to realize that Lin Huang seemed to be extra enthusiastic about killing specific monsters.

This was because he clearly did not bother to battle certain monsters, but others he would rush in to kill.

However, the two of them could not figure out what aroused Lin Huang's interest for killing these monsters. To them, the several types of monsters he was enthusiastic about killing did not seem to have anything in common.

The team continued moving ahead in the Demonic Fir Forest.

Very soon, Lin Huang had obtained over a million Rule Bending Powers easily. It was certainly more than several times faster than killing regular monsters.

Suddenly, Lan Ling issued a reminder, "There'll be Dead Spirit Vines ahead."

The Dead Spirit Vine was a parasitic vine monster that lived on the Demonic Firs. While simultaneously obtaining nutrients from the Demonic Firs, they would repay this by using their strength to help the Demonic Firs hunt. Their attacks were not physical like the Demonic Firs but directly targeted the spiritual-layer.

Once the Dead Spirit Vines had extracted more nutrients than the Demonic Firs could give out, the Dead Spirit Vines would usually choose to leave their host Demonic Firs and look for a more powerful Demonic Fir to live on as a parasite. This was to prevent the Demonic Firs from being harmed.

Meanwhile, powerful Dead Spirit Vines that could not be satisfied by the nutrients provided by one Demonic Fir would live on multiple Demonic Firs at the same time to divide up the burden. However, such powerful Dead Spirit Vines usually possessed terrifying ability, which could support the hunting proclivities of multiple Demonic Firs.

The symbiotic relationship between the Dead Spirit Vines and Demonic Firs was a mutually beneficial virtuous cycle.

For the Night Demon Firs, the benefits they received from the Dead Spirit Vines was even greater. This was because the Dead Spirit Vines would take the initiative to hunt and kill any creatures that invaded their territory when the Night Demon Firs were asleep during the day.

Everyone in the team plucked up their courage when they heard Lan Ling's reminder, and were even more on their guard.

The Dead Spirit Vines' combat abilities were more powerful than Night Demon Firs of the same combat strength. Not only that, they had many techniques. Their overall ability would elevate significantly when they combined forces with the Demonic Firs to fight.

However, when Lin Huang heard Lan Ling's reminder, the first thought that flashed through his head was, 'Since they're the Night Demon Firs' parasites, wouldn't they have similar amounts of Rule Bending Powers and sequence powers as the Night Demon Firs?!'

His eyes lit up again when he considered this.

If that were really the case, it would mean that he would gain double EXP—double the happiness!

Naturally, Virtuoso and the rest had no idea about these strange thoughts in his head.

Lin Huang led the team forward, seemingly cautious. Not far into the journey, they encountered a new round of stealth attacks.

This round was different from the previous battle, as this time the Night Demon Firs and Dead Spirit Vines attacked simultaneously.

Vine silhouettes and branches extended, filling the air. The intensity of the attack was more than several times stronger than before; furthermore, this time the attacks targeted all the members of the team.

The members of the team were armed and ready for battle; even Saber9 looked much more serious now.

As for Virtuoso, although their expression was not visible under the mask, the rest could clearly see that they were no longer as relaxed as before.

Due to the intersecting attacks of vine silhouettes and tree branches, it was very hard to differentiate which were spiritual attacks from the Dead Spirit Vines, and which were the Night Demon Firs' physical attacks.

Lin Huang was the only one who felt unusually excited.

Seeing the attacks coming toward them, dense as rain, he stabbed a finger into the air, raising Mirror to shield everyone in the team.

This time, he raised Mirror without any trouble at all, as if he were worried that his comrades could not handle the monsters. However, Lin Huang was the only one who knew that the actual motivation behind this was so he could kill the monsters himself and obtain all the benefits.

Mirror steadily suspended itself in the air, over everyone's heads. Virtuoso and the rest were initially worried that it might not be able to provide any defense against spiritual attacks. However, they soon realized that Lin Huang's Mirror was much more powerful than they had ever imagined. Very quickly, they felt at ease and settled down to watch the scenario play out.

In the void, branches and vines surged toward the group like a furious storm. The moment they touched Mirror, however, they bounced back at an even faster speed.

On the heels of that, blood-curdling screams could be heard in the fog.

A moment later, the attacks that had blotted out the sky were completely gone, and the fog had also become silent.

Lin Huang had dominated the entire place with just one finger.

Tu Tong and Lan Ling were so utterly stunned, they could not snap back to their senses even a moment later.

Virtuoso and Sword9 looked at each other and saw astonishment in each other's eyes that was hard to conceal. This defense technique was practically invincible!

Lin Huang, on the other hand, stood where he was, sensing the massive number of rules that were surging into his body.

Just simply pointing a finger had gained him up to one million EXP's worth of rules.

He sensed that his earlier speculation had been confirmed as well.

Each Dead Spirit Vine had a similar number of rules to the Night Demon Firs that they latched onto as parasites.

The rewards he reaped this round really made him feel twice as happy!

After dispelling Mirror, Lin Huang extended his telekinetic threads one after the other to drag the carcasses back.

He was also finally able to see the Dead Spirit Vines' form.

It was a type of black rattan, the thickness of which varied from that of an adult's thigh to the size of a bucket. They were like massive boa constrictors.

What was more unusual was that all these rattans did not look entirely alike. Apart from a black-colored base, they were all different.

Some had sprouted thorns on their surfaces; some were full of fleshy tumors; some had scales, while some were covered with poisonous secretions...

Although the Dead Spirit Vines would divide into multiple branches when they attacked, one could imagine the consequences if one's soul were struck by those rattans.

Lan Ling and Tu Tong thought it was rather frightening as they watched from the sidelines.

“Store them up. Dead Spirit Vines are great materials for refining spirit weapons even in the universe,” Virtuoso commented with a smile, “You should be able to sell them at a good price when we get out of here.”

Lin Huang’s brows shot up when he heard that. He had not expected to have an extra windfall like this.

Spirit-type god relics were usually expensive as the refinement materials were rare, what more the god sequence relics that Heavenly Gods used.

Naturally, the price for Dead Spirit Vines would be high as they were the main materials for refining god sequence relics. The demand would be high as well.

Lin Huang was even more interested in hunting Dead Spirit Vines now that Virtuoso had provided this information.

This was not merely double happiness—it was triple happiness!

Chapter 1552: Two Young Ones

The first round of battle where the Night Demon Firs and Dead Spirit Vines combined their attacks was intense, but it also ended very rapidly.

As the team moved on ahead, the same thing happened in the second and third rounds.

With Lin Huang’s Mirror, not a single attacking Night Demon Fir and Dead Spirit Vine could survive.

Virtuoso and the rest were feeling more and more stunned by the invincibility of this skill.

“Won’t this skill... drain your Divine Power?” Lan Ling finally could not help asking after she had observed for a while along the way.

“How could that be possible?!” Lin Huang thought her question was rather baffling, but he explained patiently anyway, “Every time Mirror defends against an attack, one-tenth of my Divine Power is drained. If my opponent’s attack contains spiritual power, Rule Bending Power or sequence power, I’ll drain one-tenth of their spiritual power, Rule Bending Power or sequence power.”

After listening to this explanation, Virtuoso and the rest thought this skill called Mirror was even more incredible.

Lin Huang could send his opponents’ attacks back at them just by draining one-tenth of his Divine Power.

This was the equivalent of doing practically nothing except holding up Mirror, and his enemies would have their powers drained.

The reason for this was because no matter what attack his opponent sent at him, the drain on Lin Huang’s side would forever be one-tenth of his opponent’s powers.

Saber9 fell into deep contemplation after hearing Lin Huang's explanation; he was thinking of a way to counter Lin Huang's attack. However, no matter how hard he thought, he could only come up with two ways of doing so.

One was for the power of the attack to exceed Mirror's limit, which meant that it had to exceed ten times that of Lin Huang's most powerful attack. He felt that perhaps even most ninth-rank Heavenly Gods could not achieve this.

The other way was to surround Lin Huang with a multitude.

Although a single person would find it hard to drain Lin Huang's Divine Power, as long as there were enough opponents, they would be able to completely exhaust his Divine Power sooner or later.

Naturally, Saber9 was not wrong in his idea, but what he did not know was that the density of Lin Huang's Divine Power far exceeded that of ordinary people. Draining the Divine Power within Lin Huang's body like that would require many more individuals than Saber9 had anticipated.

As the team moved on in the fog, the number of rules that Lin Huang obtained also increased.

Within less than half an hour even, the number of rules within him had skyrocketed to tens of millions.

However, they seemed to be going deeper into the Demonic Fir Forest. The further they went, the higher the combat strength of the Night Demon Firs and Dead Spirit Vines. The frequency of Lin Huang and the rest encountering other monsters living in groups in the Demonic Forest increased as well.

Although Virtuoso and the rest began participating in combat, Lin Huang's efficiency in obtaining rules only increased.

Over an hour later, the number of rules within Lin Huang's body had broken through to one hundred million.

However, he was still only halfway to breaking through to ninth-rank.

He was extraordinarily excited. If not for Virtuoso and the rest being present, he would have stayed to hunt until his combat strength achieved another breakthrough.

Right in the midst of Lin Huang's enthusiastic killing spree, Lan Ling's voice suddenly came through.

"There might be a powerful Dead Spirit Vine approximately ten kilometers ahead..."

"Can't you confirm the probe results?" Virtuoso asked immediately.

"It isn't that—I didn't detect the Dead Spirit Vine, but I detected trails similar to those left behind by Dead Spirit Vines slithering through," Lan Ling paused, then continued, "Judging by the trails, this Dead Spirit Vine is at least three meters thick..."

Virtuoso fell silent after hearing what she said.

"Three meters thick?! Are you sure about that?" Lin Huang could not help asking. Even he thought that was quite unbelievable.

It must be noted that most of the Dead Spirit Vines Lin Huang's group had encountered were merely as thick as an adult's thigh, while the thickest one was as thick as a bucket. Basically, they did not see many that were half a meter in diameter. Naturally, everyone was doubtful when Lan Ling reported that the Dead Spirit Vine was three meters thick.

"I'm very certain about how thick it is!" Lan Ling added after that, "However, it also might be left behind by monsters such as boa constrictors."

"If it's really a Dead Spirit Vine of that size, its combat strength might be above ninth-rank. There's a high possibility that it might be a half-step Lord as well," Virtuoso said, glancing at Saber9 and Lin Huang.

Saber9 said nothing. Instead, he looked at Lin Huang.

Lin Huang noticed everyone looking at him and knew that they were waiting for him to voice his opinion. "I definitely can't kill a half-step Lord. But... I think we can go check it out first. What if it's not a half-step Lord?"

"What if it is, though?" Virtuoso asked Lin Huang.

"If it is, I have a way of escape." Lin Huang was not particularly worried; at most, he could utilize a substitute for death so he would not die. "However, the chances of the rest of you dying will be very high..."

"That's not acceptable. Why don't I go check it out first?" Lin Huang suggested again.

"Wouldn't it be easier to just detour around it?" Tu Tong could not help commenting.

"Lan Ling merely detected suspicious trails on the ground. Even if it's really a Dead Spirit Vine, we have no guarantee that it will linger in that area. Other areas might not be safe either. After all, such a massive Dead Spirit Vine is sure to have many Night Demon Firs protecting it—we have no way of knowing where the borders of their protected area lie anyway.

"Furthermore, the area under this Dead Spirit Vine's protection ought to be massive. We can't rule out the possibility that the phantom city's entrance is within this area."

The latter part of Lin Huang's comment was also the reason for Virtuoso's hesitation.

If not for this consideration, Virtuoso would definitely have let everyone detour without hesitation. He, too, was unwilling to take on a half-step Lord powerhouse.

Saber9 said nothing; he had realized this as well.

Seeing that Virtuoso was taking a long time to make up his mind, Saber9 finally spoke up.

"How about this—we'll leave the two young ones here, and the three of us will go check it out first."

He obviously meant Lan Ling and Tu Tong when he referred to 'the two young ones.' By now, he was treating Lin Huang entirely as a senior of the same level.

Virtuoso nodded only after Saber9 said this. "Let's do that then."

“Are you sure you won’t die if we encounter a half-step Lord?” Lin Huang looked at Virtuoso and Saber9. “If you’re not confident of that, then it’s better if I go on my own.”

“You’re underestimating us a little too much,” Virtuoso snapped, annoyed.

“My Primordium left me something for my survival.” Surprisingly, Saber9 was much more frank.

Although Virtuoso said nothing, they clearly had a similar method.

“That’s no problem then.” Lin Huang had no more objections.

Virtuoso turned around and looked at Lan Ling and Tu Tong. “Both of you stay here. We’ll contact you after we’ve done some reconnaissance.”

The pair nodded immediately. Although Virtuoso was not their master’s Primordium, Virtuoso was their master’s clone after all. They did not dare disobey an order Virtuoso had given.

Lin Huang led Saber9 and Virtuoso ahead after Virtuoso had given instructions to Tu Tong and Lan Ling.

Lan Ling watched the three of them disappear into the fog. After a long while, she said in a tiny voice, “Master also left us a survival method...”

Beside her, Tu Tong patted her shoulder. “We’ll just mess things up if we go with them. We’d better wait obediently here and see what they find.”

Chapter 1553: We’re Here Anyway

Lin Huang led his team of three forward after leaving Lan Ling and Tu Tong behind.

After two rounds of being attacked by monsters, they finally saw the trail left behind by the Dead Spirit Vine that Lan Ling had mentioned.

It was a shallow gully, but its diameter was approximately three meters wide. It looked very much as if a massive creature approximately three meters wide had pressed down on the road as it went, leaving such a trail behind.

When they saw the gully, Lin Huang and the other two scanned their surroundings with Divine Telekinesis, gathering whatever information they could.

“It ought to have been a few days since this trail was left behind. There are no aura remnants on it at all, and there’s no trace of Divine Power and Rule Bending Power in the surrounding area,” Saber9 was the first to speak up.

“Whether or not the trail was left by a Dead Spirit Vine, it should have been a while since it appeared nearby.” Lin Huang nodded lightly. “It might not be around here anymore.”

“We’re here anyway, so let’s just look around.” Virtuoso did not seem content for them to have wasted their time coming here.

Lin Huang and Saber9 had no objections to this. All of them continued moving forward, following the direction where the gully extended.

After advancing for a short while, they soon noticed something unusual.

“There’s not a single monster around, not even a Night Demon Fir...” Lin Huang frowned slightly and could not help raising his concerns. “Is this normal?”

“It’s very strange,” Saber9 answered before Virtuoso could speak.

“Can we ascertain what exactly the situation is?” Lin Huang fixed his gaze on Virtuoso when he asked that.

“We can’t confirm anything for the time being,” Virtuoso shook their head and replied in the negative.

Lin Huang’s brows lifted when he heard this reply; he said nothing more after that.

Clearly, Virtuoso had some speculations but they could not confirm anything just yet.

Under such circumstances, it was futile to press them further.

If there were things essential for them to know, Virtuoso would definitely tell them.

The three continued moving forward, but the quietness around remained. No living things appeared within the sensing range of their Divine Telekinesis.

Not only were there no monsters, but there were also no Night Demon Firs or even Dead Spirit Vines.

Lin Huang even had faint suspicions about whether or not they had already left the Demon Fir Forest area.

The three flew on in this manner for over ten minutes before their Divine Telekinesis finally sensed a dense Night Demon Fir Forest coming up ahead.

They immediately had their guards up when they saw the Night Demon Fir Forest again.

Any anomalies happening that meant something was definitely wrong!

As expected, before they went too much further, they sensed a colossal monster hiding in the dense forest within the sensing range of their Divine Telekinesis.

It was a monster similar to a giant boa constrictor. The diameter of its torso was at least three meters wide.

Although they had only sensed part of the monster’s body, they immediately speculated that this was the monster that had previously left the trail on the ground.

Judging by its aura, Lin Huang and the others were sure that this monster was a Dead Spirit Vine.

It was an unusually massive Dead Spirit Vine!

Almost as soon as their Divine Telekinesis picked up on the Dead Spirit Vine, the Dead Spirit Vine also became aware of their Divine Telekinesis.

At the same time, Lin Huang and the others felt an overwhelming Divine Telekinesis sweeping through, then locking onto each of them.

Their expressions immediately changed, as they could clearly sense that the strength of this creature's Divine Telekinesis had exceeded the standard of a Heavenly God.

As the Divine Telekinesis locked onto them, a terrifying suppression descended.

The three of them felt a sudden weight on their shoulders, as if something heavy was pressing down on them.

The suppression was so powerful that it felt tangible, directly affecting their movements.

In the face of this wave of suppression, a long saber quickly coalesced in Saber9's hand. From head to toe, his Saber Dao heavenly rule activated at its peak, while his saber force soared, forcibly contending against the suppression.

Virtuoso's form, on the other hand, began turning illusory. Their body appeared to be an illusion stacked upon with many layers; it looked extremely creepy.

Instead of contending against the suppression like Saber9, Virtuoso chose to offload the force. They used countless illusory clones to share the suppression load. The final remaining force on their body was almost non-existent.

Meanwhile, Lin Huang consolidated Sword Dao heavenly rule within his body, battle sword in hand. Terrifying sword force emanated from him, consolidating a blood-red sword-wielding shadow above his head.

The shadow wore scarlet battle armor, and the sword in its grasp was 90% similar to Nebula, the battle sword Lin Huang wielded.

However, the shadow was entirely wreathed in red mist so its face could not be seen clearly.

Saber9 and Virtuoso were stunned when they saw the shadow consolidating above Lin Huang's head.

Naturally, they knew what this shadow consolidated from sword force meant.

This was the projection of Great Dao Will. Only powerhouses who had touched Dao could bring about the emergence of Great Dao Will to project such a phenomenon.

The appearance of the shadow proved that Lin Huang's Sword Dao had already touched the threshold of Dao.

Even Lin Huang thought it was strange when he saw the appearance of the shadow. Naturally, he knew what it was. However, he knew that the Great Dao Will's projection had very little to do with his Sword Dao level.

After all, his Sword Dao heavenly rule had only just crossed the threshold of Heavenly Heart—he was still very far from reaching Heavenly Dao.

The emergence of the Great Dao Will might have been caused by the presence of the Sword seal within his body.

However, he did not have the time to dwell on the matter as he had to face a powerful enemy.

After the appearance of the Great Dao Will, the suppression from the Dead Spirit Vine disappeared completely. This also boosted Lin Huang's confidence.

He was not satisfied with merely removing the pressure coming from the suppression. From what he could see, the three of them would be attacked sooner or later since the Dead Spirit Vine's Divine Telekinesis had locked onto them.

He would seize the chance to gain the upper hand now that the pressure had been dispelled before his opponent could make another move.

Lin Huang hesitated no further at this point.

The battle sword in his hand transformed into a long, narrow blade.

Weapon in both hands, his figure turned into a blood-red electric arc as he charged in the direction of the Dead Spirit Vine.

Almost simultaneously, the giant projection above his head moved as well, doing the exact same thing he was doing.

At the same time that Lin Huang moved, the Dead Spirit Vine moved too.

Countless rattans surged forward like a tangle of snakes, sweeping toward the three of them like a tsunami.

At the same time that the Dead Spirit Vine attacked, the Night Demon Firs in the forest ahead also extended their branches to join in the massacre.

In comparison, Lin Huang seemed like a solitary ant charging at an ocean wave. He looked unbelievably tiny.

Behind him, Virtuoso and Saber9 had not expected him to be so extreme.

He had unsheathed his sword for the kill without a single word.

However, after a mere second's delay, they reacted immediately.

The two looked at each other and immediately understood what the other was thinking.

When facing a powerful enemy, there was no fleeing—only battle!

Golden saber gleams filled the sky along with countless white palm prints, attacking the rattan horde, leaving the way free for Lin Huang and clearing the surroundings...

Chapter 1554: A Massive EXP Pack

Countless rattans and branches intersected, practically blotting out the entire sky as they surged forth like a tsunami.

Lin Huang and the other two were like three little boats traveling in the waves, against the wind. They looked as if their boats would capsize anytime.

In the face of an opponent suspected to be half-step lord-level, the three of them showed no fear at all. Countless rattans were crushed into dust as they were swallowed up by Lin Huang's blood-red sword gleam.

Meanwhile, Virtuoso and Saber9, who were behind him on both sides, held nothing back in their attacks. Wave upon wave of palm prints and saber gleams filled the sky with brilliant golden and white luster.

Both of them were fighting as hard as they could so Lin Huang could have an opportunity to attack.

The three of them surrounded the opponent on three fronts and tore a rift in the massive wave by force.

If one were to watch from above, it was as if a strand of golden, red, and white thread was going against the current amid the massive tsunami-like wave without a single pause along the way.

Quite some time later, the thread made it to the top of the wave at last.

Lin Huang and the other two also finally saw the culprit that had attacked earlier—the Dead Spirit Vine.

Within the Night Demon Fir Forest that had now collapsed to the ground, a gigantic Dead Spirit Vine seemed to be staring at the three of them like a snake.

Lin Huang and the other two had yet to catch a glimpse of its entire form, but while the Dead Spirit Vine was slithering, they were also able to see scales on it that looked like those of a dragon.

If not for their Divine Telekinesis having sensed things, they might have thought that it was a Dragon Tribe monster terrorizing the place if they had relied on the evidence of their eyes.

However, Virtuoso and Saber9 knew very well that this Dead Spirit Vine having such scales on its surface was very likely because it had swallowed a member of the Dragon Tribe or a Dragon Tribe member's remains.

When it saw Lin Huang and the others approaching, the strength and frequency of the Dead Spirit Vine's attacks peaked almost immediately.

However, Lin Huang merely made a grand gesture, and Mirror appeared as a shield in front of the three of them, completely blocking all the attacks.

Countless rattans and branches were deflected back when they hit Mirror, landing on the Dead Spirit Vine's massive body.

"This fellow isn't a half-step Lord!" Lin Huang confirmed as soon as he witnessed Mirror taking effect. He shared the news with Virtuoso and Saber9 through voice transmission.

Virtuoso and Saber9 already had their suspicions when the three of them managed to tear a rift through the wave of rattans. However, they also considered that since they were just attacking casually, the Dead Spirit Vine might not be taking them seriously, so its attack strength was rather weak.

However, now the three of them were almost right in front of it.

By all normal logic, it was impossible that this Dead Spirit Vine would hold back on its attacks. At this point, the power of its attacks would definitely be at its usual standard, perhaps even stronger.

However, its attack did not break through Lin Huang's Mirror's defense. It clearly proved that its combat strength was not yet at half-step lord-level.

The three of them heaved a sigh of relief after confirming that the Dead Spirit Vine was not a half-step Lord, but merely a peak ninth-rank powerhouse.

They looked at each other, and it seemed that all of them could read the excitement in each others' eyes.

Now that there was no longer the fear of fighting a half-step Lord, all three's hunting enthusiasm suddenly soared to the highest level.

They had never encountered a peak ninth-rank heavenly god-level powerhouse before. It was the most powerful enemy they had ever fought, which was why their will to fight skyrocketed

The Dead Spirit Vine also appeared to have sensed the three's intentions and became fully enraged.

Countless rattans swarmed from all directions, descending upon them like torrents of rain.

Lin Huang moved his fingers slightly, and Mirror turned into a sphere immediately, enveloping himself, Virtuoso, and Saber9. It countered this round of attack flawlessly.

"Is your Divine Power and Rule Bending Power enough to defend against such an attack?" Virtuoso could not help asking.

Beside them, Saber9 had the same doubts, and he looked at Lin Huang as well.

"I'll give advance notice if I'm running out." Lin Huang's expression was calm with no hint of concern. "I'm not one of those stubborn people who's afraid of admitting defeat."

The duo was relieved as they could tell by Lin Huang's expression that he could handle it.

In reality, Dead Spirit Vine's attack did not last very long either.

It seemed to sense that its attack could not break through Lin Huang's defense, and completely abandoned the attempt after less than five minutes.

After all, an attack of such frequency and intensity was a great drain and burden to it.

Most importantly, Lin Huang's defensive skill was savage. Many attacks were deflected back at it—the gains did not make up for the losses. Although the deflected attacks could not harm the Vine on a physical level, more of its Divine Power and sequence power would be drained to defend itself against them.

Noticing that the Dead Spirit Vine's attacks had weakened, Lin Huang immediately dispelled Mirror that was enveloping them.

He had no idea what Virtuoso and Saber9 had in mind but to him, the Dead Spirit Vine was undoubtedly a massive EXP pack.

The fourth-rank heavenly god-level Dead Spirit Vine from before had provided him with over one hundred thousand types of Rule Bending Powers. The number of rules within this peak ninth-rank Dead Spirit Vine would definitely be considerable.

However, what he had not expected was that Virtuoso and Saber9 would fight for this monster as well.

As soon as Mirror was dispelled, Virtuoso attacked the Dead Spirit Vine first before Lin Huang could react.

Their jade-like white palms struck out, transforming into tens of thousands of palm prints in the void, all targeting the Dead Spirit Vine.

Almost simultaneously when Virtuoso attacked, countless golden saber gleams consolidated in front of Saber9, surging toward the Dead Spirit Vine like a storm.

Lin Huang was rather confused as to why both of them were even more enthusiastic than he was.

Naturally, he would not back down. If they killed this monster, he might need to spend a few days making up for the EXP that he would lose.

He attacked without hesitation, and it was an extremely powerful attack.

He charged with eleven compounded levels of sequence power and Sword Dao heavenly rule.

A brilliant blood-red glow lit up on the blade at once.

The power of the attack was like a massive blood-red sun descending upon the world. Even the fog around Lin Huang faded a little.

Meanwhile, the sword-wielding Great Dao Will above his head did exactly the same thing.

The gargantuan sword in its hand shone with a red glow that light up the area for miles.

Two red glows, one large and one small, gradually integrated within the void. As Lin Huang swung his sword, the glows turned into an invincible shockwave that shot out...

The Dead Spirit Vine seemed to have sensed this fatal threat, and completely abandoned dealing with Virtuoso and Saber9's attacks. It sent all of its rattans surging forward in an attempt to defend itself against Lin Huang's assault.

However, all of the rattans turned into dust whenever the blood-red shockwave passed by; they did not manage to block the attack at all. The velocity of the attack did not slow down either, not even a little.

Sensing that its defense had failed, the Dead Spirit Vine finally thought of running away. However, it could not escape in time as it was too big.

Almost as soon as the thought of fleeing entered its head, its body was struck by the blood-red shockwave. The shockwave pierced through its body almost effortlessly, leaving a giant hole that was over a meter in diameter on its torso.

The Dead Spirit Vine could sense a terrifying sequence power rushing into its wound, spreading rapidly in all directions.

Meanwhile, its body began to collapse, starting from the wound area...

Lin Huang felt satisfaction like never before as he sensed close to three million Rule Bending Powers surging into his body like a wave. The feeling was over ten thousand times better than soaking in a hot spring during winter.

When the Dead Spirit Vine's carcass collapsed, Lin Huang, who had just devoured all of the Rule Bending Powers, suddenly felt an overwhelming Divine Telekinesis sweeping through.

The suppression coming from the wave of Divine Telekinesis was many times more powerful than this last Dead Spirit Vine.

Saber9 and Virtuoso clearly sensed the same thing. Their newly-relaxed nerves grew tense again. Under the force of this overwhelming suppression, they both even had their knees bowed slightly, and their breathing was visibly more labored now...

Chapter 1555: Phantom City Gatekeeper

Sensing the wave of terrifying suppression, Lin Huang, Saber9, and Virtuoso all had a change of expression.

The Dead Spirit Vine just now was already a peak ninth-rank heavenly god-level powerhouse. The current suppression was so powerful that it was already at the next level. It was obviously a half-step Lord, no doubt about it.

Although Lin Huang was curious about how much of a difference there was between his ability and that of a half-step Lord, he knew very well that this newly-emerged enemy had exceeded the range of what he could handle. He began having thoughts of retreating.

He had dared to attack without hesitation when confronting the Dead Spirit Vine earlier because the suppression from his opponent was not powerful enough to make him want to give up at once. The suppression this time, however, truly gave him the sense that he had met with an invincible foe.

His rational side reasoned that he had no chance of winning at all if the group were to battle their foe head-on. As soon as they fought, there would only be one conclusion, which was that their opponent would kill them.

Just when he was going to tell Virtuoso and Saber9 via voice transmission to retreat, Virtuoso's voice transmission came through first.

"Don't imagine how powerful the enemy might be. The stronger you think it is, the more powerful it will be!"

Lin Huang was stunned when he heard this, but he reacted immediately. "It's an illusion?!"

"You can think of it as that," Virtuoso responded.

At that moment, Lin Huang saw Virtuoso dispelling their defensive technique. Their knees, initially bent, gradually straightened. A moment later, they stood upright within the suppression, as if they were not affected at all.

“We’ve found Phantom City’s entrance.” Virtuoso’s gaze seemed to have pierced through the fog, looking into the distance.

“Can we talk about entrances later—how do we settle the threat in front of us now?” Lin Huang asked through voice transmission immediately.

“That Dead Spirit Vine that we encountered earlier and this monster are Phantom City’s gatekeepers. To put it simply, they’re actually illusions that Phantom City created.”

“So the Dead Spirit Vine that we killed earlier was an illusion as well?” Lin Huang’s brows lifted when he heard that; he had his doubts.

The notifications that came from Xiao Hei were real enough. Meanwhile, the massive amount of Rule Bending Powers that surged into his body was real too.

If it were an illusion, Xiao Hei would certainly not have transmitted fatality notifications.

Virtuoso seemed to notice Lin Huang’s doubts. They then explained further, “It wasn’t a simple illusion, but a real illusion that’s similar to my ability.

“If those who fall under the illusion think it’s real, it will become real and can also interfere with reality. If they insist that it’s fake, then it will merely be a fabricated illusion.”

“Do you mean to say we wasted our efforts killing that Dead Spirit Vine earlier? When in reality, we could have ignored it completely?” Lin Huang was rather speechless.

“That’s right. If we insist on believing that it’s not real, it will just be imaginary.” Virtuoso nodded.

“There’s only one way to pass through Phantom City’s gatekeepers, which is to believe that they’re not real.”

“Can’t we kill all of the gatekeepers by force?” Lin Huang raised his doubts.

“It’s futile. A new gatekeeper will appear every time a gatekeeper is killed. Their abilities will be even more powerful, and their numbers will also increase,” Virtuoso explained somewhat helplessly, “Theoretically, there is no upper limit to the gatekeeper’s abilities.

“Furthermore, no Almighty would be bored enough to come to Phantom City to kill the gatekeepers just for fun.”

While both of them were conversing, Lin Huang noticed that on the other side, Saber9 had stood up as well. He dispelled his defense technique, completely ignoring this wave of powerful, invincible suppression.

At that moment, a gigantic Night Demon Fir extended its branches. Countless leaves blotted out the entire sky in an instant, surrounding the entire space where the three of them were.

The dense branches were like endless tentacles, coming at Lin Huang and the other two from every direction.

“You must steadfastly believe that this attack is just imaginary and that the half-step Lord who launched it isn’t real!” Virtuoso immediately said to Lin Huang through voice transmission as they saw the branches surging toward them like a wave.

Virtuoso already had a rough understanding of Lin Huang’s abilities. Although Lin Huang was powerful, he was far from able to take on a half-step lord-level powerhouse.

If Lin Huang was hit by the attack, he would certainly die!

As his Divine Telekinesis sensed countless branches approaching the group, Lin Huang could not calm himself down. He instinctively wanted to counter and attack with his sword; he was completely unable to ignore this wave of threat.

A moment later, countless branches pierced through the fog. They pierced through Virtuoso and Saber9’s bodies immediately, as if they were passing through two shadows.

The two of them did not defend, nor did they dodge, much less show signs of being struck by the attack.

The next second, over a hundred branches forced their way in front of Lin Huang. Instinctively, he called up Mirror in front of him to shield him.

However, Mirror only lasted for less than a second before it suddenly shattered. The branches directly stabbed through like metal knives piercing through glass.

Lin Huang spat a mouthful of blood. This was the backlash from Mirror’s inability to take the attack and, thus, collapsing.

This was also Lin Huang’s first time encountering a situation where Mirror had been shattered by an assault.

The branches easily pierced through Mirror and continued coming straight at Lin Huang.

Virtuoso and Saber9 were in a panic, but they could not help.

Watching the branches coming at him, Lin Huang suddenly closed his eyes slightly and moved his lips. His emotions soon calmed down.

An instant later, when he opened his eyes, a branch went straight through the middle of his brow. However, there was no trace of blood at all. A moment later, his body was impaled by countless branches, but it was as if they had gone through a shadow.

Only then did Lin Huang lift his hand to wipe at the blood on the corner of his lips. He nodded at Virtuoso and Saber9 lightly. “It’s over!”

“How did you do that just now?” Saber9 could not help asking.

He was aware that if he were put in a life-or-death situation after his defenses had been breached, it would be impossible for him to immediately alter his thoughts to ignore the attack.

“It’s just a little trick of a Buddhist cultivator,” Lin Huang explained calmly.

In reality, he knew very well that if he did not have the imperial monster, Demonic Buddhist Holy Son, it would have been hard for him to escape death earlier.

He had borrowed the Demonic Buddhist Holy Son’s meditation secret skill to clear all the thoughts in his mind immediately so he could stay calm. He then imagined that the attack was purely illusory—that the half-step Lord did not really exist.

The whole process had been a close call. If there had been just the slightest flaw, he would have had to use a substitute for death and would need to be revived by now.

Fortunately, he had handled the entire thing without any mistakes in between, which allowed him to barely escape this fatal attack.

“What do we do next?” Lin Huang lifted his head to look at Virtuoso.

“It’s simple. Imagine Phantom City’s entrance.” As soon as Virtuoso was done speaking, they gestured with their hand. A glittering, dazzling golden gate appeared before them. “We just have to open the gates and go in.”

Once they finished speaking, Virtuoso pushed open the gates that had appeared out of thin air. Pulling at Lin Huang and Saber9’s arms, Virtuoso stepped through the door directly...

Chapter 1556: Little Inkblot and Bald Monster

After considering that Tu Tong and Lan Ling might not be able to withstand the test set by Phantom City’s gatekeeper, Virtuoso did not contact them and ask them to catch up to the group. Instead, they led Lin Huang and Saber9 through the gate immediately.

Lin Huang had thought that they would arrive in Phantom City as soon as they stepped through the gate. However, what met their eyes was a completely blank white space.

Amid Lin Huang’s doubts, Virtuoso spoke from beside the pair through voice transmission.

“Everyone must design themselves a character before entering Phantom City. You can imagine yourself to be of any race and appearance. When you get to Phantom City, your form will be whatever you’ve imagined it to be.

“Apart from race and appearance, you also must set your personality, hobbies... also, your skills, divine abilities, rules, sequence powers, and other information.

“Once that’s done and we’re in Phantom City, we have to act in character according to the persona we’ve created. If we’re out of character, we’ll be kicked out of Phantom City immediately.”

‘Like an RPG?’ Lin Huang thought to himself. It sounded similar to the many role-playing games that he had played in the past.

However, in this place, the individual would be the one role-playing, not the game character on computers or mobile phones.

“Can’t I bring all of my skills, divine abilities, and the rest into Phantom City?” Lin Huang raised the issue that mattered to him the most.

“Theoretically, it has to fit your character.” Virtuoso smiled while shaking their head. “After all, if your character is a snake monster, it doesn’t make sense if you set yourself as a sword cultivator or a saber cultivator.

“However, there are loopholes,” Virtuoso continued, “For instance, my character is a masked freak. For the skills and divine abilities on my skill sheet, I possess all sorts of strange and incredible techniques. My character background has a certain mysteriousness included in it, while there are no concrete settings on my skills and divine abilities. However, I included my own abilities. With a character sheet like this, most of my abilities can be used when we get to Phantom City.”

“Or you can do what I did.” Beside them, Saber9 picked up the topic. “I set myself as a weapons master, whereby I can use all weapons. My character sheet basically included all of my skills as a saber cultivator; I can use many non-saber cultivator techniques too.”

What the pair said gave Lin Huang significant inspiration. He soon began working on his character design.

“Character: Mysterious

Race: Suspected to be Protoss, Fallen Protoss, or human

Characteristics: Wears a black robe and a black mask

Combat Strength: Unknown

Cultivation Direction: Unknown

God Territory: Unknown

Skills: Unknown

Divine Abilities: Unknown

Rules: Unknown

Sequences: Unknown”

...

Virtuoso and Saber9 noticed that Lin Huang now had a black robe over him. His physique had become much more majestic, and his aura was now enigmatic and mysterious. Realizing that he had now grasped the essentials of designing his character, they said nothing more and began setting their own character sheets.

A moment later, Saber9 turned into a Buddha with many arms. His long hair, originally tied up in a bun, was no longer there. He had turned completely bald, and his head was full of the ordination scars of a Buddhist monk. (TN: After accepting Buddhist precepts, Buddhist monks use lighted incense sticks to burn parts of their bodies as an offering to Buddha and the bodhisattvas. These are known as ordination scars.) His green robe had transformed into a gray monk’s robe.

His appearance was still around 60 to 70% similar to what he looked like before, but his charisma was nothing as otherworldly and elegant as he had been previously. His face held a touch of faint melancholy as if he had been through all the vicissitudes of life.

Beside them, Virtuoso did not seem to have altered much. They had changed their garb for something more sumptuous, and the mask on their face was now golden. They were also carrying a black walking stick. They still gave off the feeling of a wealthy young master—however, their charisma was no longer as cold and aloof as before. Instead, they were more approachable and warm.

“Aren’t you...worried about being recognized like this?” Lin Huang could not help asking. His voice was much deeper and hoarser now.

The reason he asked because the famous geniuses in the God Territory would basically be on the hunting lists of each tribe. Virtuoso was a powerhouse who ranked among the top True Gods and was a target of many tribes outside the God Territory. Naturally, they were on the Abyss’ hunting list. Trouble would be inevitable if anyone were to recognize them.

“Don’t worry, in Phantom City, there’s all manner of appearances. Not many people will notice us. Moreover, even if anyone did, they wouldn’t connect it with me.” Virtuoso was calm; they did not seem worried at all.

As soon as they were done speaking about themselves, Virtuoso turned their head and looked at Saber9 next to him. “What’s up with you? Do you think you have too much hair or too few arms?”

“I want to see what it feels like to slay someone while wielding sabers in many hands, but I thought that turning into a multiple-armed Abyssal monster would be too ugly...” Saber9 explained in all seriousness, “So I thought of the Thousand Hand Bodhisattva in Buddhism.”

“Isn’t your bald head just as ugly?!” Virtuoso teased, not standing on ceremony.

“Do you believe I’ll try my sabers out on you?” Saber9 lifted his head and stared at Virtuoso.

Noticing that both of them showed signs of wanting to fight due to the disagreement, Lin Huang frowned lightly and stepped forward between them, blocking their way.

“We have urgent business at hand. Let’s finish up our character designs and enter Phantom City!”

Only now did Virtuoso and Saber9 notice that not only was Lin Huang enveloped entirely in a black robe, but even his aura was so mysterious that it was unfathomable.

Virtuoso looked at the darkness under the hood and probed it using their Divine Telekinesis, only to find that it was completely blocked. “You’re wearing a mask too?”

Although they did not see a mask nor sense the presence of one, Virtuoso guessed that it was there anyway.

“I am.” Lin Huang’s reply was simple.

He had actually ingeniously integrated Thousand Face into his character design, enhancing his character’s mysteriousness.

“Have you finished your character design and skills?” Virtuoso did not dwell on Lin Huang’s transformation, asking instead.

Lin Huang nodded, “From now on, my name will be Hermit.”

“I’ll be Thousand Hands then,” Saber9 informed them of his new name.

“Let me think about it...” Virtuoso, on the other hand, did not give out their name immediately. Instead, they thought for a moment, cupping their chin. They spoke again only after a while, “Call me Mask then.

“Or you could call me Xiao Mianmian as well,” Virtuoso said to Lin Huang and Saber9 with a smile, after coming up with their name. (TN: In Chinese, the word for ‘Mask’ is ‘mian ju’; Virtuoso is using a deliberately cute diminutive of their character’s name both here and below.)

Lin Huang and Saber9 turned around and walked away at once, not bothering to pay attention to Virtuoso.

“Don’t you like it? If you don’t, you can call me Xiao Juju instead...”

“Let’s go, Little Inkblot,” Lin Huang ignored the two nauseating endearments they had picked for themselves and gave them a nickname instead.

“I like it.” Saber9 gave Lin Huang a thumbs up.

“I can’t believe you betrayed me, you bald monster. We’ve known each other for so many years and you’re now ganging up with this brat to come up with a nickname for me?!”

“There are three things that I’d like to correct,” Saber9 said solemnly, “First, my head is shaved, not bald. Having one’s head shaved and being bald are two different things. Secondly, my Primordium has certainly known your Primordium for years, but this is only the second time both of us have met. We aren’t very close. Thirdly, it wasn’t me who came up with that nickname. I merely agreed with it...”

Chapter 1557: Phantom City

Lin Huang had imagined many images of how the phantom city might look like inside. However, it looked nothing like his imaginations when they really entered the phantom city.

It was completely different from other places in the abyss. It was an extremely bustling, massive city. There were even skyscrapers that were very similar to the human world.

If not for the various creatures of all shapes and forms on the streets, he would think that he had returned to a grade-A foothold in the gravel world.

“There are so many people?” That was what confused Lin Huang the most.

The reason being the gatekeeper obstacle alone was enough to block most people for getting in.

“In reality, there are little outsiders in the phantom city. Most of them are local residents,” Virtuoso explained, “A portion of the residents and the buildings here are made by the possessor of the castellan’s seal, while a portion of them were created by the phantom city automatically.

Hearing that explanation, a term popped into Lin Huang's head instantly – NPC.

If he looked at the phantom city as a RPG, then these local residents were undoubtedly the world's NPCs. To Lin Huang, the outsider, he was the player.

“So how do they differentiate the player, I mean the outsiders and local residents?” Lin Huang almost asked the difference between players and NPCs.

“There's no proper way to do that,” Virtuoso shook their head and smiled, “However, under usual circumstances, those with exaggerated form and style have a high possibility of being an outsider. However, such a determination method isn't 100% effective.”

“I supposed the castellan's seal you're after is in an outsider's hand?” Lin Huang asked again.

“It's not as simple as you think...” Virtuoso shook their head, “Indeed, there's a real living thing required to activate the castellan's seal to build the phantom city.

However, the castellan's seal might not be a complete piece, but a couple of fragments. As long as we're able to gather them into one, we can activate it as well. If that's the case, the fragments might be in the hands of a few different people.

Also, the castellan's seal must stay inside the phantom city, but the seal's possessor might not. There might be a possibility that the person might get a local resident to take care of the castellan's seal. After all, many of the local residents are characters the person created, whereby he knows who is the one that he can trust the most. Therefore, the castellan's seal wouldn't be 100% with an outsider.”

“So what's your plan?” Hearing Virtuoso's explanation, Lin Huang figured the mission might be much more difficult than he imagined.

“If there's a castellan in this city, there's a certain chance that the castellan's seal is with the castellan. Even if it isn't, he definitely knows something about the castellan's seal.

If there's no single castellan, but a group of people managing, we look for the few who have the highest position among them. Even if we can't find the castellan's seal directly, we should be able to find some intel that's useful.

The thing I'm most worried about is that there's nobody managing the city, or the manager is just a puppet, whereby nobody knows who this phantom city's creator is...”

Virtuoso raised a few possibilities, “No matter what, the first thing we need to do now is to gather information. Gather as much as we can, gather information about this phantom city.”

“Do we split up?” Lin Huang asked.

He asked that as the efficiency of gathering information would be higher if they split up than three of them staying together.

“I agreed with splitting up,” Saber9 nodded.

They were no longer in the foggy swamp. They did not have to worry if they were lost.

The three of them had different styles of conduct. Naturally, they would use different ways to gather information in order to obtain more sources. Theoretically, although they would gather many repeating information at the same time, the amount of information would be greater.

“We’ll split up for two days. During the two days, gather as much information as we can. Hold back even if we find out something important. Do not be rash to move on to the next step.

We’ll meet under the highest building two days later. We’ll discuss our strategy after organizing the information each of us obtained,” Virtuoso soon came up with a plan.

Lin Huang and Saber9 agreed.

Subsequently, the three of them split up and went toward the direction they chose.

Lin Huang chose to move cautiously after breaking away from the team and being alone.

After all, nobody knew if there were any Lords in this phantom city.

According to Virtuoso’s description, if the possessor of the castellan’s seal was a lord-level powerhouse, he could create lord-level local residents, as well as setting the city’s entrance authorization to lord-level.

If there were really Lords in this phantom city, not only that would mean the chances of the three of them obtaining the castellan’s seal was pretty slim, it would also mean that they were in an extremely dangerous city.

One must know that the outsiders in the phantom city were the equivalence to players, they did not have a second life. Players could be revived after death. However, outsiders would really die if they died in the city.

Even though Lin Huang could substitute death with his imperial monster, facing a Lord’s Odylic attack, he would not be able to be revived.

Meanwhile for Virtuoso and Saber9, although they had the technique of saving their lives their Primordium left behind that could defend lord-level attacks, there was a limitation to that.

Lin Huang was cautious as he had his guards up on the possible Lords in this city.

He did not sense any Divine Telekinesis’ detection, so he was being extra careful not to spread his Divine Telekinesis.

He looked around, there were creatures of all forms and appearances around him.

There were abyssal creatures, Bug Tribe monsters, Immortal Tribe and Protoss...

His odd getup in black robe looked the most ordinary among the crowd, so he did not attract any attention.

He was relieved sensing there were no eyes staring at him.

He soon had his eyes on a cafe nearby. He frowned slightly.

‘There’s even a cafe here?!’

This phantom city was highly similar to a human city. That made him have a faint suspicion that the possessor of the castellan's seal was a human. Or maybe that person stayed in the human world for a little while.

He walked to the cafe and sat under the umbrella in the al fresco area. He ordered a cup of coffee.

Very soon, a lady attendant with rabbit ears brought his coffee.

If he was somewhere else, Lin Huang might not be able to hold back and to look at a rabbit-eared lady attendant. However, he had seen many creatures of various forms, so the rabbit-eared lady in front of him looked ordinary now.

He did not forget what he was here for when the rabbit-eared lady served the coffee to his table. A gush of red glow flashed through his eyes when he locked eyes with the lady attendant.

He managed to read the lady's memory during that mere moment.

He did that by borrowing Grimace's Ocular Skill Rule.

However, the rabbit-eared lady did not notice that. She merely put down the coffee with a light smile on her face and left.

Meanwhile, Lin Huang picked up the coffee and began to retrieve the information that was useful to him from the memory he read...

Chapter 1558: Holder With A Split Personality?

It only took a moment for Lin Huang to finish reading the information he had retrieved from the memory of the rabbit-eared female attendant. However, he was not able to glean very much useful information.

The rabbit-eared lady attendant was an ordinary person with no cultivation base at all, so her memory contained no information about cultivators.

"Do ordinary people in this city have no idea at all that cultivators exist?" Lin Huang frowned slightly.

This was something he had previously not anticipated. Based on his earlier assumptions, there ought to be many cultivators among the local residents. Besides, a small-scale battle caused by even the slightest of conflicts would cause anomalies people could see.

However, in the rabbit-eared lady's memory, to the authorities, most of these anomalies were accounted for as weather phenomena. A small number of these strange happenings were regarded as man-made flying machines.

There was almost nothing useful to Lin Huang in the rabbit-eared lady's memory, apart from a simple map, some common sense, and knowledge of this current world.

"It looks like I'll still need to find a cultivator first..." Lin Huang drummed lightly on the table with the fingers of his left hand, raising the coffee cup to his mouth with his right hand and taking a sip.

After a moment of thought, he released colorless and formless Leech Pods from his body that dispersed in all directions.

He did not dare to use Divine Telekinesis rashly just yet, but he could use Leech Pods. This was because it was hard for Leech Pods to be discovered without the use of Divine Telekinesis.

Of course, he did not disperse them in a wide range. Instead, he manipulated the Leech Pods to within a five-kilometer radius around him.

After all, the wider the area that the Leech Pods spread to, the higher the possibility of encountering a powerhouse. Furthermore, his current objective was to gather information. He did not want to attract unwanted trouble before officially taking action.

Lin Huang drank his coffee casually, silently monitoring the real-time images that the hundreds of Leech Pods sent back.

Within five minutes, he noticed a few individuals he suspected might be cultivators.

Since he did not use Divine Telekinesis for detection, and these individuals had no energy fluctuations emanating from them at all, Lin Huang could only make basic speculations based on the images the Leech Pods sent.

To use Lin Huang's own words, to observe someone's essence, qi, spirit, and so on was actually a purely subjective matter.

After locking onto these several potential individuals, Lin Huang thought to himself for a moment and abandoned the idea of appearing in front of them directly. Instead, he controlled a few of the Leech Pods to infiltrate the suspected candidates' bodies.

There were a total of four individuals who were infiltrated by Leech Pods. However, only one of them was a real cultivator, while the remaining three were merely ordinary people.

Lin Huang felt slightly embarrassed to have discovered this from the Leech Pods.

However, he was thick-skinned enough and soon recovered from his embarrassment. He began extracting the information that the Leech Pod had retrieved from the cultivator's mind.

This particular cultivator was a Silt Monster.

This type of monster was a creature that took the form of a lump of dark-brown mud—it had no distinguishable essence, qi, or spirit on it at all. Essence, qi, and spirit aside, even if Lin Huang were to stand right in front of it, he would not be able to locate its face.

The reason he locked onto this monster was purely that it was the only Silt Monster within range of his hundreds of Leech Pods.

This Silt Monster was a Virtual God rank-7; Lin Huang finally managed to extract some comparatively useful information from its memory.

In this phantom city, the ratio of ordinary people to cultivators was 9:1. The cultivators mingled with these ordinary individuals, living in the normal world.

What made Lin Huang more curious was that in this Silt Monster's memory, the lowest combat strength among the cultivators in this world was that of Virtual God. There were no cultivators below god-level. Individuals below Virtual Gods were ordinary people; there was a huge gap where mid-level cultivators would be.

Moreover, since the beginning of time, ordinary people were completely cut off from any information about cultivators in this world.

Ordinary people did not admire cultivators, nor did they idolize them. They had no idea that cultivators even existed.

Even if these ordinary people witnessed something about cultivators occasionally, they would forget about it automatically.

Meanwhile, for cultivators, it was an unspoken rule that their skills and divine abilities should not be displayed in front of ordinary people, much less attack them.

The Silt Monster had no idea why exactly they could not attack ordinary people. However, from the information in its memory, it was clear that something bad might happen if they killed normal individuals.

Therefore, ordinary people and cultivators had lived peacefully thus far in this odd state of co-existence.

Lin Huang thought such a social structure was rather interesting, although it was clearly an artificial construct.

What piqued his interest even more as he read the information was that he realized this city was different from any other cities that he had seen.

"There's an inner world that's like an inverted image..." As Lin Huang mumbled softly, the curiosity gleaming in his eyes grew even more.

He had retrieved a rather special bit of information from the Silt Monster's memory.

At the moment, he was only looking at the surface of the city. Meanwhile, hidden underneath the surface, the city possessed another side.

As soon as one passed through a certain door, cultivators could enter this inner world within the city.

That city was exactly the same as this one. However, there were no ordinary people, only cultivators.

There were markets for trading for all sorts of items and channels to obtain various kinds of information. Not only that, killings and battles could happen at any time...

Compared to the peace and quiet of the surface world, although there was a certain order in this inner world as well, what emerged more frequently was the unbridled growth of madness and desire.

The cultivators fought bitterly in the inner world, but as soon as they returned to the surface world, they blended into the circles of ordinary folk.

Life was at peace in the mortal world.

Lin Huang even quietly speculated that the holder of the castellan's seal of Phantom City might be a person with a split personality.

After reading the Silt Monster's memory, what disappointed Lin Huang more was that he did not find out anything about the castellan's seal, or the holder of the castellan's seal.

The Silt Monster's memory was completely blank as far as this information was concerned.

Although there was no direct clue to the castellan's seal, Lin Huang did not feel defeated. At the very least, he had now discovered the existence of the inner world, as well as how to enter it. Finding more clues was only a matter of time.

After all, the Silt Monster was merely a Virtual God. It was considered the lowest form of existence in this phantom city. If Lin Huang were to view Phantom City as a game, the Silt Monster would be just a minor creature in it.

Going by a game designer's way of thinking, they would not store very much important information within a minor creature by the roadside.

Following common game design practices, the more powerful the monster, the more information it would contain.

Furthermore, this game even had a new, hidden map now, which would undoubtedly allow the players to gain more rewards.

Lin Huang was not at all worried about obtaining more information later.

From the Silt Monster's mind, he retrieved the closest coordinates to the inner world's entrance. With no hesitation, he disappeared in a flash...

Chapter 1559: I'm Lost

There were many entrances and exits to Phantom City's inner world. Lin Huang soon found the closest one by following the coordinates in the Silt Monster's memory.

This set of coordinates was located in an alley surrounded by low, old buildings.

When Lin Huang arrived close to the coordinates, he did not go into the alley immediately. Instead, he observed the environment of the surrounding areas.

These old buildings seemed to have existed for at least thirty to forty years. Compared with the skyscrapers he had seen earlier, they seemed to be of considerable age.

Some were already dilapidated and had been gazetted as dangerous buildings. No one lived in them any longer.

However, there were still some old buildings with residents of various races.

When Lin Huang appeared, clad in his black robe, he did not attract the residents' attention.

Only a few of them glanced at him, then went about their own business.

After scanning his surroundings and realizing that nobody was watching him, in a flash, Lin Huang entered the alley he had seen from the Silt Monster's memory.

The alley was less than a meter wide and was very narrow. If he had not seen the image in the Silt Monster's memory, it would have been hard for him to imagine that the inner world's entrance and exit could be located in such a cramped place.

Lin Huang halted after he had walked some twenty meters into the alley. He spread his Divine Telekinesis slightly, and his gaze fell on an inconspicuous black dot on the wall on the right.

The dot looked like it had been lightly dotted onto the wall with a ballpoint pen. It was even smaller than a sesame seed.

However, Lin Huang knew it was not the ink left by some ballpoint pen, but the inner world's entrance and exit in its miniature form. People without Divine Telekinesis would not be able to see it at all.

Lin Huang extended a finger, pressed on the black dot, then channeled Divine Power into it.

As the Divine Power channeled through, the insignificant, almost imperceptible black dot began to grow quickly at a speed visible to the naked eye. Within just the time it took for a breath, the dot's diameter had surpassed two meters, transforming into a round black whirlpool.

Once he saw that the whirlpool had formed completely, Lin Huang drew back his hand and stepped into the whirlpool.

As soon as his body submerged into the swirling mass, the black whirlpool shrank immediately. Within less than the time it took for a breath, it reverted to its original size of a black dot.

A moment later, its color faded slowly, and it gradually vanished, as if it had never existed.

Lin Huang raised his head for a look after he had teleported through the entrance, and his brows quirked involuntarily.

He was still in the narrow alleyway and its surroundings. He was even standing in exactly the same spot he had been before he stepped through.

However, he soon noticed something different. Even without using his Divine Telekinesis, he could clearly sense the auras of extremely mighty powerhouses nearby. Not only that, there were many of them.

There were even a few auras within a very close distance, gathered at the end of the alley.

Lin Huang raised his eyes and looked up as a giant eyeball with three pupils hovered in the air, leaning forward. It was looking down condescendingly from high above the alley.

He only noticed this one eyeball, not the monster's full appearance. However, he could see the disdain in its eyes.

The next instant, Lin Huang appeared in a flash right at the entrance to the alley.

Almost at the same time, a red beam shot out from his sleeve, piercing through the eyeball immediately.

A miserable shriek rang through the air at once.

Only then did Lin Huang notice that there were four monsters blocking the alleyway.

The fellow who had spied on him by releasing the eyeball was a humanoid monster.

The biggest difference between itself and humans was that it had no head. There were only tentacles extending from its neck up, and each tentacle had a massive eyeball connected to its tip. A total of seven eyeballs hovered in midair; they looked extremely strange.

Lin Huang had no idea what species this monster belonged to at all. He had never seen anything remotely similar even in the monster guide.

As for the other three monsters, one of them looked a little like an oversized monitor lizard. The scales all over its body were black and shiny; only the six eyes on its forehead were dark green.

Another monster was an ice-blue ancient humanoid corpse, standing close to three meters tall. It was clear that it had not been human when it was still alive. It stood on the rooftop of a building opposite, its gaze ice-cold.

The remaining monster was a bird beast reduced to skeleton form. Lin Huang could not even guess what kind of species it had been when it was alive. It flew in circles above their heads, while from its crimson eyes, two streams of fire trailed through the air.

In the face of these four who were blocking the road, Lin Huang did not panic at all.

He had already learned from the Silt Monster's memory earlier that there was a high chance of newbies being attacked when they entered the inner world.

There would be a group of fellows hiding near each inner world's entrance and exit, waiting to kill the new faces.

There were also some others who would lurk around to watch. After all, there was limited entertainment in this city.

According to the Silt Monster's memory, the only safe place was the alley where the entrance and exit were located. As soon as one walked out of the alley, someone might intercept them.

Therefore, Lin Huang chose to attack first.

If someone was intercepting a target for the kill, it was only natural that there would be retaliation.

This was permissible by the rules of the inner world.

As long as they did not attack in the crowded regions of the city under the city guards' surveillance, basically, nobody would bother.

Watching the eyeball monster being impaled, screaming continuously as its body began to disintegrate, the other three interceptors' expressions revealed shock.

Many onlookers began whispering to each other.

"Dumb Bird and the rest have met their match this time..."

“That newbie is a tough one!”

Lin Huang did not even look at the eyeball monster. He glanced over the remaining three monsters. “Are you... sure you want to fight me?”

As soon as he said that, the eyeball monster’s miserable howls stopped, and its body disintegrated completely.

To Lin Huang, the eyeball monster was merely a seventh-rank True God. It could not even be considered an opponent. He had not even used sequence power in the attack earlier, merely true god-level Rule Bending Power.

The remaining three were not much more powerful than the eyeball monster. There was very little in the way of benefits if he killed them, so he really could not be bothered to attack.

The three remaining monsters were also not fools. They had been wandering the inner world for years and had seen many powerhouses. Although Lin Huang’s demonstrated ability was merely the tip of the iceberg, they knew they could not afford to offend the person in front of them.

“I’ve no intention of fighting. I merely sensed that your aura is rather unfamiliar, so I thought I would observe,” the iced-blue corpse spoke up first. Since he stood the farthest from the three, it made sense for him to say that he was just watching the battle.

“Me too. I was just curious and thought I’d watch,” the completely black ‘monitor lizard’ chimed in hastily.

Lin Huang said nothing. He lifted his head to look at the skeleton bird beast that was still circling in the sky.

The skeleton bird beast noticed Lin Huang looking at it and was so scared it slowed down a beat in its flapping, almost falling out of the sky. In a panic, it stuttered, “I-I’m lost. I-I accidentally f-flew over here...”

The onlookers were rendered speechless.

However, Lin Huang’s reaction surprised all of them. He merely nodded lightly and responded, “Oh, I see.”

Almost everyone had the same thought pop into their heads, ‘You actually believe such nonsense?!’

The next instant, however, Lin Huang took a step forward and directly appeared on the back of the skeleton bird beast.

The skeleton bird beast was stunned for a moment, thinking it was going to die, but it heard Lin Huang’s voice transmission in its ears a second later.

“Take me to where you live.”

Chapter 1560: The Tallest Building

Lin Huang took a step forward and appeared right away on the skeleton bird beast's back.

Upon seeing that, everyone thought it was the end for the skeleton bird beast, not just the skeleton bird beast itself.

Many of the onlookers even secretly lamented that this Dumb Bird had brought it upon itself by not being able to use its brains, even when trying to lie.

The next instant, however, everyone present saw the skeleton bird beast flapping its wings, bringing with it the mysterious black-robed man...

All that remained were a group of onlookers staring at each other.

"What happened? That black-robed man really bought into Dumb Bird's nonsense?"

...

The place where the skeleton bird beast lived was not at all far from the inner world's entrance and exit—less than five minutes away, in fact. It landed on top of a building, bearing Lin Huang with it.

Lin Huang looked at the sunken rooftop of the two or three-story building and realized that it was probably the skeleton bird beast's nest where it normally lived. It had forced a perfectly good roof into the shape of a nest by sleeping on it.

"S-Senior, what do you need me to do?" Although it was over ten times bigger than Lin Huang, the skeleton bird beast was as obedient as a student before him.

After all, he had killed the eyeball monster with merely one blow, and its ability was not much more powerful than that particular eyeball monster.

"Eighth-rank true god-level..." From up close, Lin Huang sized up the skeleton bird beast, causing it to panic. "I supposed you've been staying in the inner world for many years now?"

"I-It's...it's been a few years." The skeleton bird beast hesitated a little but nodded anyway.

"Excellent." As soon as Lin Huang finished speaking, the pupils of his eyes turned pitch-black, and the skeleton bird beast's body froze suddenly as well. Its crimson eyes also became pitch-black at a speed visible to the naked eye.

The way Lin Huang saw it, although the skeleton bird beast's ability was average, it still had eighth-rank true god-level combat strength after all. Moreover, it had stayed in the inner world for quite a few years. Its knowledge of this world would certainly be much greater than that of the Silt Monster.

Therefore, he read the bird's memory directly with barely any hesitation.

It had to be said that although this skeleton bird beast was not very intelligent, Lin Huang retrieved a great deal of useful information from its memory. A lot of it was on matters that the Silt Monster was unclear about, and there were even some things that the Silt Monster knew nothing about at all.

One particular piece of information was the one Lin Huang had wanted to discover the most.

It was information suspected to be about the founder of Phantom City!

In the skeleton bird beast's memory, Lin Huang found a tale that appeared to be a legend.

In ancient times, there were three Almighties who spread cultivation methods and founded this inner world.

The three Almighties were, respectively, a fabulously wealthy massive golden dragon, a nine-tailed demon fox of unparalleled beauty, and a compassionate, enlightened eminent Tantric Buddhist monk.

However, apart from several stories within the legend itself, there was no further information about the three.

According to the skeleton bird beast's memory, the current inner world did not have any specific masters. Instead, six ninth-rank true god-level powerhouses shared the work of keeping it under control.

'Legend says that the three Almighties created the inner world, so there's a chance the castellan's seal is divided into only three fragments. Now that there are six individuals who share the duties of keeping the world under control at the moment, it's highly possible that the castellan's seal is with three of the six.' Lin Huang quietly analyzed the possession of the castellan's seal. 'However, it can't be completely ruled out that the legend was purposely created to conceal the truth—in reality, all six of them might possess a fragment of the castellan's seal...

'There's also the possibility that none of these prominent six have any of the fragments. The six of them could just be decoys set up by the actual holder of the castellan's seal...'

Even after some analysis, Lin Huang still could not come to a clear conclusion.

'Although I can't be sure who has the castellan's seal, at least there's a new clue...'

Lin Huang set his sights on the six inner world overlords. Even if they did not have the castellan's seal fragments with them, he was sure that they definitely knew a great deal more information about the castellan's seal.

However, Lin Huang did not intend to rashly contact these six individuals. He had other plans.

As the pitch-black color in his eyes faded, the skeleton bird beast gradually recovered its consciousness.

By the time it was completely clear-headed, Lin Huang was long gone from the top of the building.

"Where did he go?" The skeleton bird beast looked around but did not see Lin Huang anywhere. "What happened?"

It thought back carefully, but could not recall exactly what happened earlier. It faintly remembered a whirlpool similar to a black hole that seemed to have appeared beneath the black hood...

Since the skeleton bird beast really could not recall what happened, it did not bother with wasting its already limited brain cells. It shook its head, pushing the rather uneasy memory from before to the back of its mind.

In the inner world, two days went by in a flash.

Lin Huang arrived at the tallest building in the city's central district at the agreed-upon time.

He took a seat at an open-air restaurant, ordered a drink, and patiently waited for Virtuoso and Saber9.

Two days ago, the three of them had agreed to meet under the tallest building here.

Although they had no idea back then that the phantom city had a surface world and an inner world, Lin Huang knew that Virtuoso and Saber9 would definitely come to this building in the inner world instead of the one in the surface world.

As expected, Saber9 appeared under the building not long later.

Lin Huang looked over at him. As if sensing his gaze, Saber9 turned to look in Lin Huang's direction as well.

Noticing Lin Huang, Saber9 walked directly to the table he was sitting at without any hesitation. He then took a seat across from Lin Huang.

"What will you drink?" Lin Huang asked with a smile.

Saber9 peered at the coffee mug in front of Lin Huang. "The same thing you're having will be fine."

The waiter very soon served Saber9's coffee, and the pair chatted as they drank. They did not mention the castellan's seal at all.

Virtuoso had yet to arrive, so it did not make sense for them to talk about that now.

After they had chatted for a while, Lin Huang realized that he was finishing his coffee and could not help glancing at the time. "It's almost the time we agreed upon. Will that fellow be late again, I wonder?"

Saber9 said in some irritation, "Instead of picking up their Primordium's good habits, that fellow picked up all the bad ones!"

Fortunately, Virtuoso was punctual this time.

They arrived at 9 a.m. sharp.

They caught sight of Lin Huang and Saber9 immediately. Walking toward the both of them directly, they took a seat without ceremony.

"You're punctual today," Lin Huang commented with a quirk of his lips.

"Of course. I said I would get here at 9, so I got here at 9. I'm not late by even a minute!" Virtuoso replied, sounding very pleased with themselves.

"I wonder who it is who's never been punctual even after agreeing on a set time," Saber9 unceremoniously pulled the rug out from under Virtuoso's feet.

Virtuoso directly ignored Saber9's snub, directing his words to the two of them, "We'll end the small talk here. Let's get down to business."

Seeing that Virtuoso had used serious matters to change the subject, Saber9 had to let things be.

"How did your investigations go these last two days? Tell me one at a time." Virtuoso went straight to the point.

