

## Stranger 411

### Chapter 411: Preliminaries

“An illusion?”

The next second, Han Zhou’s smile stiffened. It was because Ye Qing abruptly popped out of existence like a bubble.

As if on cue, a taunting voice appeared behind him, “‘Midnight Hunt’ Han Zhou, huh? Your fame is well-deserved!”

Shocked, Han Zhou immediately crouched down and dashed away in the opposite direction at top speed. At the same time, he sent a number of Midnight Hunts spiraling toward the voice and yelled, “Erupt!”

The Midnight Hunts exploded, and needles scattered everywhere like a storm. Of course, a small number were flying in Han Zhou’s direction as well. The warrior was ready for this, however. Surrounding himself in a cyclone of force and spinning like a top, he reflected the needles flying his way back to Ye Qing. A fair number of bricks and tiles were caught up in the rush of energy as well. They were all streaking toward Ye Qing at the strength and speed of a hidden weapon.

For a time, a black storm ravaged the rooftop. Over half of the structure collapsed due to how powerful the counterattack was. By the time it finally subsided, the whole place was in tatters, and massive cracks and tiny pinholes littered nearly every brick and tile.

Despite this, Han Zhou looked as white as a sheet. It was because a bluish black hand was gripping his shoulder and freezing him in place.

Behind him, Ye Qing asked with a small smile on his face, “Are we still fighting?”

The warrior let out a bitter laugh and shook his head. “I... surrender!”

Han Zhou was only a middle-stage Spirit Purifier, so he knew from the start that he was probably going to lose this battle. However, he didn’t expect the gap between them to be so huge. He never found the real Ye Qing from the start until the end.

“As expected of the Qing Emperor Junior. You have my deepest respect,” Han Zhou sighed.

“You flatter me, Brother Han. It was a good fight!” Ye Qing relinquished his grip and saluted the warrior just as politely.

After Han Zhou surrendered the fight, a flash of golden light teleported them away from the platform.

Back on the ground, those who hadn’t been called to fight yet were all watching Ye Qing with deep wariness and apprehension.

“He’s plenty strong already, but his movement art is quite outstanding as well.”

Zhang Tiancheng said with a severe expression, “The intel I collected stated that Ye Qing is a cultivator of the Burning Wind and an expert of the fist arts. He also possessed a powerful body and a Spirit Purification stage martial art that had something to do with the hellfire of the Buddhists.

Combined with an outstanding movement art, one might say that he has no weaknesses at all. He's a formidable foe."

"Do you think you can beat him, Brother Yang?"

Yang Zhao was silent for a moment. "I'm not sure. As you say, he is not a foe to be underestimated."

"Big brother, Ye Qing seems ridiculously strong!"

Standing on the opposite side, two disheveled-looking men who were dressed in rags were also staring at Ye Qing with equal wariness and apprehension. They were none other than Zhao Lan and Zhao Lu of the Ragged Villa, and they were both powerful late-stage Spirit Purifiers.

"Yeah. He won't be easy to beat." Zhao Lan nodded in agreement.

"Do you think you can beat him, big brother?" Zhao Lu asked.

Zhao Lan replied, "I won't know until I fight him myself, but we are not weaklings, are we?"

Zhou Lan smiled. "Yeah. Speaking of which, we should watch Jian Wusheng's fight now. He's a formidable foe as well."

Yang Zhao, Zhang Tiancheng, Zhou Lu and Zhao Lan weren't the only ones gossiping about Ye Qing's performance. A lot of people were commenting on the fight as well.

Hao Zhou wasn't actually weak. It was Ye Qing who surpassed everyone's expectations. Han Zhou was fairly famous in Tian Yong, and many formidable foes had perished under his Midnight Hunt. However, Han Zhou wasn't able to harm a hair on his person at all. Of course they couldn't help but be astonished by it.

Ye Qing's fight only took less than a minute, so a lot of people were still fighting when he emerged. He scanned the other platforms and saw a couple of familiar faces—or more accurately, people he decided was worth paying attention to in this Hidden Dragon Meet.

In fact, most of his information came from Gao Ning'an. As a local snake and a member of the Pacification Bureau, Gao Ning'an naturally had his own network. Some of the major gambling dens in Tian Yong also possessed a lot of intel on the contestants, but they were mostly superficial such as their names, backgrounds, origins and more. Gao Ning'an's information was more valuable, however. He knew their martial origins, their habits, their preferred methods and more.

This was why he was able to defeat Han Zhou so quickly. It was a classic case of knowing one's enemy well enough that one didn't fear the outcome of a hundred battles.

Out of all the matches that were happening on the platforms, three were of particular note to Ye Qing. They were Jian Wusheng, Wen Xiaonuan, and Wine's fights.

Jian Wusheng was fighting against a late-stage Spirit Purifier called Xu Songgao. He was a disciple of the Iron Sword Sect and a swordsman as well. But unlike Jian Wusheng, whose fighting style was bloodthirsty and focused on sword qi, Xu Songgao's was basic, old-fashioned, and heavy. His iron sword was nothing special as well.

However, just because his sword style was simple didn't mean that it was weak. After all, all swords began from the basics. Jian Wusheng's sword was vicious and deadly, but Xu Songgao was always able to neutralize them with basic but effective blocks, parries, and counterattacks.

It looked like they were locked in a stalemate, but those with a discerning eye could tell that Xu Songgao was the one at a disadvantage. It was because Jian Wusheng was the one who was doing most of the attacking.

No one could hold a defense forever, and offense was almost always better than defense. As expected, after a brief stalemate, Jian Wusheng abruptly let out a shout and lifted his sword like he would split a river in half. His fearsome sword qi and sword intent didn't just blow through Xu Songgao's defense, but also sent him flying through the air. Even the street they were fighting at was cut in half by the sword qi.

After that, Jian Wusheng rushed forward and thrust his sword at Xu Songgao with unrelenting determination. The buildings to his sides were either corroded by his sword intent or sliced into fine dust by his sword qi, and the ground was cracked like an ongoing earthquake.

No I, no you, no life, and no death. That was the kind of sword intent Jian Wusheng cultivated. Such was his power that the thrust shredded the web of sword qi Xu Songgao had set up before he was sent flying and hit the flat side of his blade.

*DING!*

An invisible storm of sword qi absolutely shredded the street and all of the buildings within the affected area. Inside the eye of the storm, Jian Wusheng withdrew his sword a few breaths later and said, "Well fought."

"Cough! Cough..." Xu Songgao coughed out a mouthful of blood and a gust of sword qi as soon as he opened his mouth. When he finally recovered, he saluted Jian Wusheng and replied, "Thank you for showing me mercy, Brother Jian."

Xu Songgao looked dejected as a matter of course. The spectators looked sympathetic as well. Despite his defeat, Xu Songgao was undoubtedly a powerful swordsman. If he hadn't run into Jian Wusheng on his very first battle, he absolutely could've placed better. It was just how life rolled sometimes.

His efforts weren't futile though. His performance had caught the eye of some bigshots.

Although Jian Wusheng and Xu Songgao's fight had ended almost as quickly as Ye Qing's, it was way more interesting and satisfying to watch. Everyone including Ye Qing himself enjoyed the fight a lot.

Next to Jian Wusheng and Xu Songgao's platform, Wen Xiaonuan was fighting against a man named Shi Lei. Their fight was the opposite of interesting with some horror elements mixed in it. Wen Xiaonuan was hanging her head and looking depressed as usual, but the depression didn't affect just her. Before Shi Lei could so much lift a finger, he became depressed as well and lost the will to fight completely. It allowed Wen Xiaonuan to walk up to him and knock him out of the platform with a single palm strike.

The truly entertaining match where both sides were evenly-matched was the one happening on platform number 8, the battle between Wine and Eat.

Wine was Wine of Wine, Sex, Wealth and Popularity, and Eat was Eat of Eat, Drink, Fuck and Gamble.

Their real names were known to no one but themselves. Everyone called them Wine and Eat.

In fact, Wine, Sex, Wealth and Popularity and Eat, Drink, Fuck and Gamble shared a relationship with each other. It was said that Wine, Sex, Wealth and Popularity's master and Eat, Drink, Fuck and Gamble's masters used to be senior brothers until they turned against each other over a woman. As a result, their disciples were hostile toward one another as well, which was why Wine and Eat were going at it with red hot killing intent.

Wine was a sloppy, sleepy-looking, rosacea-faced man in his forties, and his astral qi was created from wine. Constantly surrounded by a pocket of alcoholic vapor, a single inhale was enough to knock someone who was weak to alcohol unconscious.

You would think that Eat was a fatty who was broader than a barn's side, but no, he was thin, tall, and frail-looking. It looked like a gentle breeze could knock him to the ground.

In reality, Eat was carrying a black pan that was bigger than him and swinging it around with such force the spectators could almost feel the gale it produced. Giving off a delicious aroma, roasted chickens, roasted ducks, roasted goose and more food flew out of the pan from time to time.

When the food hit the wine and alcoholic vapor surrounding Wine, they would explode and scatter all over the place. It was so anime that Ye Qing and many others thought it looked more like a culinary exchange than an actual fight. A lot of people felt hungry just watching the fight.

Near the end of the fight, Wine decided to use his signature martial art, the Drunken Fist. His attacks became wholly unpredictable, and his movements were unstable at best. He looked like a drunkard, but one who could beat someone into a pulp with his fists.

Eat also unveiled his trump card, the Gluttonous Palm, and swiped the air in front of him wildly. The way he fought resembled a hungry ghost who was grabbing every food he could lay his hands on.

The fist art was strange, and the palm art was stranger. There was no denying their power, however. The section of the forest they were fighting in were swiftly flattened by the sheer ferocity of their attacks.

It was a difficult fight, and both men suffered serious injuries. In the end, it was Wine who stole the win with a surprise wine arrow from the mouth.

The rest of the matches weren't all that interesting, but thankfully, they all ended relatively quickly. It was time for the second group to start their fights.

As it turned out, the second group's matches were far more entertaining than the first. Xu Rulin, Luo Zhan, Chu Renhe, Tou Jiao, Chen Shaoyu and Yang Zhao were all fighting.

Out of all of the fights, Xu Rulin and Tou Jiao's fight was the most entertaining. They were both polearm wielders, and their techniques were quite the sight to behold. As expected of the Three-Headed Hydra, his Eighteen Forms of Mad Hydra turned his astral qi into countless hydras. They were as deadly as they were fearsome.

Xu Rulin's spear techniques lacked the tyranny or forcefulness of the Eighteen Forms of Mad Hydra, but it did have an unparalleled amount of bloodthirst. It was also simple and deadly effective like what you might expect from a soldier on the battlefield.

Unable to hold, Tou Jiao was pushed back repeatedly until he finally took a spear thrust to the chest. The battle ended with a surrender, though it could've easily been a death if Tou Jiao hadn't surrendered quickly.

Luo Zhan, Chu Renhe, Chen Shaoyu and Yang Zhao won their matches one-sidedly.

#### Chapter 412: Yonghe Lake

The third group included Lin Yuhuai, Chu Nianjiu, and Gao Ning'an. Chu Nianjiu was unfortunate enough to be matched up against Zhao Lu and defeated, but Lin Yuhuai and Gao Ning'an both won their matches by a hair's breadth.

During the fourth group's matches, Qi Xuanyun fought Wealth of Wine, Sex, Wealth and Popularity. Wealth was a stout man who was as wealthy as his name might suggest. Literally every piece of clothing on his body was a Strange Artifact. Even his shoes were Strange Artifacts. In a sense, he was covered from head to toe in money.

Unfortunately, he was only an early-stage Spirit Purifier, and Qi Xuanyun was quite powerful. Even so, he managed to last dozens of exchanges before losing.

Wealth didn't get angry despite losing. Instead, he saluted Qi Xuanyun smilingly before taking his leave.

Fu Chaogang's opponent was a woman in her twenties named Henshui (Hating Water). It sounded like a man's name, but Zhuo Henshui was definitely a woman.

Fu Chaogang practiced a do-or-die fist art where all of his power was invested into his fists. It was why his first strike was usually his strongest, and why the best way to defeat him was to avoid his first punch and stall him out.

However, Zhuo Henshui chose to meet him at his strongest. Not only that, she threw a punch just like he did.

Fu Chaogang lost. Zhuo Henshui's first punch broke his arm, her second punch collapsed half of his chest, and her third punch shattered his head.

As a result, Fu Chaogang became the first casualty of the Hidden Dragon Meet. He wasn't a nobody either.

"Who is this Zhuo Henshui, Jianglong? Why is she so ruthless?"

Inside his kiosk, the Harmony King was watching Zhuo Henshui with a deep frown on his face. Hong Jianglong answered, "According to our intel, Zhuo Henshui hails from the Zhuo Clan from the capital."

"The Zhuo Clan?" The Harmony King furrowed his brows in thought. "Do we have a Zhuo Clan? I'm pretty sure I haven't heard of it before."

Hong Jianglong clarified, "It's a small clan. One of their ancestors was an Attendant Gentleman[1]."

“Oh, they’re just a small clan?” The Harmony King remarked before asking, “So, what’s up with this Zhuo Henshui?”

Hong Jianglong shook his head. “I’m not sure, but it was said that Zhuo Henshui was trained under an unknown master. But whoever they are, they must be quite powerful to have raised such a student.”

“You don’t say?” The Harmony King rolled his eyes. He returned his attention to the platforms since Hong Jianglong wasn’t able to provide a satisfactory answer.

Wei Bulao and Flower Butterfly also successfully advanced into the next match. After all thirty two matches were over, Hong Jianglong gave everyone a four-hour rest. After that, the participants drew lots again to find out who their opponents were.

As there was still an odd number of participants, one person was allowed to advance to the next match without fighting again. This time, it was Lin Yuhuai who got dogshit lucky and qualified for the Top 16 without needing to lift a finger.

Ye Qing had to fight, of course. In fact, his next opponent was much stronger than Han Zhou. It was Zhao Lu of the Ragged Villa.

The Ragged Villa was a strange place where only people wearing rags were allowed to enter. If your clothes were a little too tidy or intact, then you would be barred from entry. As a result, everyone in the Ragged Villa looked like beggars.

It was said that the founder of the Ragged Villa was, in fact, a beggar. He was also extremely hostile toward well-dressed people who looked down on those who were poor or poorly dressed. That was how the strange rule came to be.

The two Zhao brothers were the disciples of the current head of Ragged Villa. As the founder served under the Beggar’s Gang before he left to create his own gang, their martial arts were also rather similar. The Ragged Villa boasted two signature martial arts, and they were the “Eight Directions Art of Begging” and the “Dog Beating Stick Technique”[2].

The “Eight Directions Art of Begging” was a powerful cultivation art that honed all three major components of the body, the qi, essence and spirit. A beggar must survive not just a cruel environment and horrible living conditions, but also the harassment of their own kind. Hence, they must possess a strong body that could withstand both nature and violence.

On top of that, a beggar must endure pain that most could not, and hardships that would break most men. Hence, they must possess an iron will and determination as well.

This was why the “Eight Directions Art of Begging” honed the qi, essence and spirit. Those who grasped it not only possessed a tough body that could withstand most beating, but also gained the Eight Directions Begging Astral Qi, an astral qi that was exceptionally good at recovery. Besides that, they also attained a powerful spirit that could be combined with “Lotus Fall” to hamper an opponent’s mind.

As for the “Dog Beating Stick Technique”, it was an exquisite martial art that didn’t deserve its cheap-sounding name. It thrived on striking, misleading, tripping and binding one’s foe, and every technique targeted a vital spot on the human body. In addition, successful strikes could scatter the vitality in that part of the body, which was why it was such a powerful martial art.

That was why Ye Qing's fight against Zhao Lu was a battle of endurance. No matter how many times Ye Qing crushed the warrior's arms or broke his ribs, he was always able to recover in a very short time. Not only that, Zhao Lu was constantly singing the "Lotus Fall" to hamper his mind while attacking him with the "Dog Beating Stick Technique".

Of course, Ye Qing hadn't gone all out either. For starters, he wasn't using the Boundless Mara Buddha, the "Heavenly Demon Captures The Soul", the "Hellfire Red Lotus Saber Art", or the "Saber of Spring Wind and Fine Rain". He was fighting Zhao Lu purely with his body and his fists. That was what most people thought he was good at.

This wasn't the finals after all, so it was very important to hold his cards close to his chest. Besides, Ye Qing seriously didn't want to stand out anymore than was necessary.

When almost everyone had finished their matches, Ye Qing unleashed his full seven dragon elephant strength and destroyed half of Zhao Lu's body with one punch. The injury was severe enough that there was no way Zhao Lu could repair the wound fast enough to fend off Ye Qing's final attack.

However, Ye Qing misjudged Zhao Lu's desire to win the battle. The warrior actually activated a secret art and detonated his Hatred-class Strange Artifact, the Dog Beating Stick. The explosion of a Hatred-class Strange Artifact was equal to the full-powered attack of a peak Spirit Purifier, so Ye Qing's whole body was covered in blood when he walked out of the explosion.

Furious, Ye Qing punched Zhao Lu again and knocked him out on the platform. If he wanted to, he absolutely could've killed the bastard.

After he left the platform, he saw Zhao Lan holding Zhao Lu close and shooting Ye Qing a cold look. The man then left with his young brother.

Xu Rulin was matched up against Fuck of Eat, Drink, Fuck and Gamble. Obviously, he won.

Luo Zhan's opponent was Chen Shaoyu, and both men suffered serious injuries from their duel. In the end, Luo Zhan proved himself superior and defeated Chen Shaoyu.

Chu Qingge ran into Popularity of Wine, Sex, Wealth and Popularity. She too won her fight dominantly and decisively.

Yang Zhao also trounced Gamble with little effort.

Gao Ningnan was unfortunately matched up against Wen Xiaonuan, and the outcome surprised absolutely no one. He would later tell his friends that it was one of the most confounding losses of his life.

Wine expended too much strength trying to defeat Eat and was unable to recover completely before his next fight. As a result, he was disqualified as well.

Zhang Tiancheng, Chu Renhe and Jian Wusheng all successfully won their fights.

And so the Top 16 were born, and they were Ye Qing, Luo Zhan, Chu Qingge, Yang Zhao, Xu Rulin, Wen Xiaonuan, Jian Wusheng, Chu Renhe, Chen Shaoyu, Zhao Lan, Zhao Bu'er, Zhang Tiancheng, Zhuo Henshui, Wei Bulao, Flower Butterfly, Qi Xuanyun, and Lin Yuhuai, the dogshit lucky bastard this time to qualify without fighting. Only seventeen people were left now[3].

Now that the fight to enter the Top 16 was over, the pace of the Hidden Dragon Meet was finally slowing down. After all, even the strongest warriors needed some time to rest and recuperate. Therefore, the fight to enter the quarter finals would be held the day after tomorrow so that everyone would have a full day to rest.

Since Chu Nianjiu and Gao Ningnan had lost their fights, they felt no qualms cutting themselves loose. The next day, they were gone doing heavens-knows-what at the crack of dawn.

It was evening when someone suddenly messaged Ye Qing claiming that he was a waiter working at the Wine Are Songs Boat. Apparently, Gao Ningnan and Chu Nianjiu had booked a fish head banquet at Yonghe Lake and were inviting Ye Qing to join them.

The fish head banquet was a famous dish in Tian Yong, and the Wine Are Songs Boat was the only establishment who could make them. Everyone wanted to taste it, but the Wine Are Songs Boat only served them once a month. Rarity begets desire, and the fish head banquet became ridiculously famous.

In addition, Wine Are Songs Boat was also a pleasure boat where songs and dances were performed, it was highly recommended by the gentlemen of letters and elegant taste of Tian Yong. Who wouldn't want to eat delicious food, drink fine wine, listen to melodious songs, and enjoy gorgeous dances every once in a while?

Ye Qing had heard of the fish head banquet, but he had never tried it before. Naturally, his interest was piqued. Yesterday's matches didn't really tax him anyway, so he didn't hesitate to accept the invitation.

He should be resting right now, but whoever said one couldn't rest in the company of delicious food, beautiful music, and fine women?

As expected of an establishment as famous as the Wine Are Songs Boat, the quality of their service awed even Ye Qing. They had prepared a luxurious carriage with a silk carpet on the floor and a fragrant incense that soothed the nerves to transport him to the venue. On top of that, they had prepared some snacks and hot tea as well. If this didn't count as first class service, he didn't know what was.

"You guys sure know how to pamper your customers!" Ye Qing remarked.

The waiter, Ah Fu, answered smilingly, "As long as you're happy, Lord Ye."

"Oh right, do you know how Gao Ningnan and Chu Nianjiu managed to book a table? It's famously difficult to book a table for the fish head banquet. I know that there are many wealthy and influential people who tried repeatedly to book a table to no avail," Ye Qing asked curiously.

Ah Fu smiled. "It's because Lord Gao and our steward are friends. Half a month ago, he already booked a table saying that he would like to hold a welcoming ceremony for his friend."

"I see! No wonder," Ye Qing exclaimed in realization. No wonder Gao Ningnan told him that he had a pleasant surprise for him before he left this morning, but refused to say what it was when he asked him about it. It was the fish head banquet.

“I heard that you use over a hundred types of fish to create the fish head banquet. Is it true?” Ye Qing asked another question. This was the reason why the Wine Are Songs Boat could only hold the fish head banquet once per month. The amount of time and effort necessary to catch the fishes alone, much less create enough dishes to serve thousands of customers, all of them different, must be mind-boggling.

“You truly are erudite and well-informed, Lord Ye. That is correct.” Ah Fu explained smilingly, “The reason this is possible is because we occupy the Yonghe Lake. The Yonghe Lake is Tian Yong’s biggest lake, and its waters are rich enough to host at least hundreds of kinds of fish, most of them as edible as they are tasty. That is why we are able to come up with the fish head banquet. Otherwise, it would’ve remained an impossible dream.”

It wasn’t long before the duo arrived at Yonghe Lake. At first glance, wisps of white vapor could be seen floating whimsically across the mirror-like waters. This was just the edge, and already they were treated to a great sight. This was why Yonghe Lake was also a famous scenic spot of Tian Yong.

“Where’s your boat? I don’t see it,” Ye Qing voiced his confusion after looking around and finding nothing.

Ah Fu explained, “That’s because it’s parked at the center of the lake. Please, follow me.”

Ah Fu led Ye Qing to a black-topped boat. Then, he pushed off the shore and slowly rowed to the center of the lake.

It bore repeating that the Yonghe Lake was a famous scenic spot in Tian Yong. It was crowded even during the quietest times, much less the middle of the Hidden Dragon Meet. Therefore, countless people could be seen sitting on their own pleasure boats or rowing small boats on the lake, all enjoying the beauty the lake offered them to their heart’s content.

Ye Qing was having a great time as well. He sipped his wine while leisurely taking in the sights around him. Now this, was life.

“Hmm? Why did it get misty all of a sudden?”

Suddenly, Ye Qing noticed that the lake had turned misty before he knew it. At the bow, Ah Fu launched into another explanation, “It’s a normal phenomenon. Yonghe Lake is warm and humid, so it tends to mist up every once in a while. It’s also one of the reasons Yonghe Lake is as famous as it is.”

“The great poet Wang Zengse once made a poem that went something like this: ‘O’ beautiful lake, your mist reminds me of faint sorrow, like a white veil masking an otherworldly beauty’. And is it not true that our lake is beautiful in a different way when peered through a white curtain?”

“You’re right.” Ye Qing nodded smilingly. As Ah Fu said, the people, the boats, and the lake itself looked different in the mist, but not in a bad way.

As the boat sailed deeper and deeper toward the center of the lake, the mist thickened until it became near impossible to peer through. Puzzled, Ye Qing looked at Ah Fu and asked, “Why is the mist getting thicker?”

His heart skipped a beat then. There was no one on the bow. Ah Fu was just chatting with him a moment ago, and suddenly, the man was gone like he was never there. He never felt the man leaving even with his spirit. He didn’t know if he existed in the first place.

Ah Fu wasn’t the only one who had gone missing. The boats around him had vanished without a trace as well.

The entire lake was as silent as death itself.

## Chapter 413: Pipa Player

“What’s going on?”

Ye Qing expanded his demonic thoughts in an attempt to perceive his surroundings, but while his power was working as normal, he couldn’t sense anything living or dead.

It was as if he had suddenly become the only person left in this world.

Ye Qing walked over to the bow and looked around, but of course he couldn’t see anything. The fog was so thick that he could barely see past three to six meters.

He lifted an eyebrow and threw out a punch. The Burning Wind roared and annihilated the fog within sixty meters of him.

“There’s a... no... multiple bodies?!”

The next moment, Ye Qing found an unbelievable number of dead bodies floating at the periphery of his vision. There had to be hundreds of them. What was eerie was the fact that the corpses’ heads were all pointing toward the same direction: him.

The next moment, the fog rolled back in and covered the corpses once more.

“Yeaaaaaaaaaaaaah I don’t think I want to be here. Time to leave.”

Ye Qing had no intentions of braving whatever dangers lurked at this place, but when he got ready to row the boat, he abruptly realized that the oar was nowhere to be seen as well.

“Motherfucker...” Ye Qing cursed under his breath and channeled his internal energies. The next moment, astral qi wrapped around the boat and pushed it back the way he came from.

At least the corpses weren’t blocking his way back to the shore. Otherwise, he would have to row around them or row through the corpses, both of which were inferior options with a considerable amount of risk attached to them.

Ye Qing’s relief didn’t last long, however. The boat shot through the waters at high speed, but he couldn’t see the shore despite traveling for some time. He couldn’t even see the boat or the people he passed by earlier.

Logically speaking, he should've reached the shore at least several minutes ago. In reality, he hadn't. It spelled trouble.

Ye Qing thought for a moment before trying out a couple other directions. Yonghe Lake was a lake, so he should be able to make it to the shore no matter which direction he rowed. But once again, he found himself disappointed.

If he wasn't sure before, he now knew that he was in deep trouble.

"What should I do?" he muttered to himself. Should he try crying for help? But he literally couldn't find the shore, and he hadn't seen a single soul since stumbling onto this situation. Who could possibly come to his aid?

A moment later, Ye Qing threw another punch and blew away the fog once more. As soon as the fog cleared up, he spotted something that should be impossible. He spotted the hundreds of corpses floating in the water earlier.

"How could this be? Have I been running in circles this whole time? But that's impossible!" Ye Qing frowned when a possibility occurred to him. "Or maybe... they're following me!"

Chilled at the thought, Ye Qing stared closely at the corpses to see if his assumption was true. However, he was disappointed to find that the corpses hadn't moved at all. Even the surface of the lake was perfectly still.

A dozen breaths later, the fog rolled back in and blocked his sight once more. Just in case, Ye Qing threw another punch and blew it away again.

This time, every hair on Ye Qing's body stood on end. It was because the corpses had gotten much, much closer during the instant the lake was covered, even though his eyes still told him that the corpses hadn't so much as twitched in the wrong direction.

This time, Ye Qing purposely allowed the fog to cover up the corpses before he dispelled it with a third punch. As expected, the corpses had gotten closer yet again.

Despite the eerie situation, Ye Qing actually felt better now that he had figured out the corpses' pattern. Now, he had to make another choice.

He was unable to find the shore no matter which direction he traveled. There was one direction he hadn't checked, however: the direction where the corpses laid.

Obviously, he was afraid that the corpses were dangerous. However, it would seem that he had no other options.

The thought had just passed through his mind when a corpse floated past his boat. Despite this, its movement didn't elicit any ripple at all.

The next moment, more and more corpses entered Ye Qing's view. They were so numerous it looked like they were queuing up to float past his boat.

Ye Qing channeled his energies and got ready for anything. Thankfully, nothing happened yet even though the number of corpses in the lake kept increasing.

Suddenly, a massive object appeared in the distance. It was a large ship. There were lights shining out of its windows and entrances, and overall it looked like an ordinary ship. The throng of corpses surrounding it made it clear that wasn't the case, however. It almost looked like the corpses were protecting this ship.

As the ship came closer, the fog grew thicker as well. It was also mixed with a strange scent.

The ship came to a stop when it was around sixteen meters away from Ye Qing. Then, the corpses surrounding his boat came together to form a path that led straight to the ship.

Ye Qing looked at the thick fog around him and hesitated for a moment. Then, he jumped off the boat and soared toward the ship like a swift.

Sixteen meters was nothing to him. It certainly wasn't a distance worth stepping on the eerie path of corpses.

After he landed on the deck, Ye Qing spread out his demonic thought like a spider web and scanned his surroundings. However, he still couldn't perceive any anomalous energy.

He subconsciously looked behind him and felt his heart skipping a beat. It was because the bodies that were facing down had faced up before he knew it, and they were all wearing a strange, eerie smile on their face.

As for his boat, it was nowhere to be seen.

There was no going back now.

After taking a moment to steady himself, Ye Qing stepped inside the ship. It was incredibly big and extravagantly furnished. However, it was also completely devoid of life.

Every once in a while, Ye Qing would comb through his surroundings with his demonic thought. However, there was nothing and no one. While studying the ship's layout, he discovered that there was a platform surrounded by tables and chairs at the center of the ship. There were also boxes and theaters on the higher floors, which meant that this ship was probably a pleasure boat.

Something felt off with the furniture's placement, however. He just couldn't tell what.

*Twang! Twang!*

Suddenly, a short twang of pipa came from the stage. It sounded like the warm-up session before a performer launched into their performance.

But how could there be a pipa twang when there was no one here?

Ye Qing looked and felt his heart skipping another beat. A woman had appeared on the stage before he knew it. Her face was veiled, and she was carrying a pipa and stroking its strings gently.

"I am Hua Mei. I am very happy that you've all come to listen to my performance today."

This time, Ye Qing broke out in cold sweat and goosebumps. As soon as the woman finished, people appeared on the empty tables in the blink of an eye as if magic. That wasn't the strangest or

most frightening thing, however. It was the fact that he recognized most of these people. They were none other than the corpses he saw on the lake surface earlier.

He knew this for certain because he had memorized some of their faces when they faced up earlier.

Something was different though. The people sitting at the tables seemed to be alive. "Seemed", because they felt alive to his demonic thought even though it was the opposite when he was outside the ship.

Suddenly, the woman on the stage looked at Ye Qing and greeted him, "Please take a seat, dear customer!"

Her warm, soothing voice sounded like the March wind of spring, but Ye Qing felt chilled to the core. It was because his instincts screamed that something very, very bad would happen if he refused her. So, he obediently walked over to an empty chair and took his seat.

After Ye Qing took his seat, the pipa player withdrew her gaze and began playing her pipa. A beautiful, melodious cadence began resonating inside the ship.

The music sounded as soft, warm, and soothing as the spring wind. One could practically hear the beauty and hope contained within the notes. Even a musically illiterate person like Ye Qing found himself awed by the wonderful music.

But of course, he hadn't forgotten his situation. He was keeping an eye on his surroundings at all times. Just a short while later, Ye Qing suddenly noticed that everyone was bleeding through their eyes, ears, nose and mouth. Everyone was so enraptured by the performance that they didn't seem to notice their unusual condition, however.

It was at this moment he felt something warm and sticky flowing out of his own eyes, nose and ears. When he wiped the liquid away and took a look, he confirmed that it was blood.

"What the hell?" Ye Qing was stunned. He couldn't speak for the others, but how the hell was he bleeding? And when was he hit by this spell?

He tried to get on his feet and get the hell out of here, but the pipa player abruptly stared at him with her round, charming eyes. Large beads of cold sweat began rolling off Ye Qing's forehead. A few seconds later, he slowly sat back down on the chair.

It was only then the pipa player looked away, and Ye Qing let out a huge sigh of relief. His entire body was covered in cold sweat. During that few seconds the pipa player was staring at him, he felt like a million knives were pressed up against his body. If he dared to leave his seat, he had no doubt that he would die a horrible death. The feeling was so strong that it almost felt like he had already died once.

Left with no choice, Ye Qing could only remain at his seat and listen to the murderous performance. At least it was just bleeding. Blood was the one thing he wasn't afraid to lose.

Ye Qing soon cursed his naivete, however. At a certain point, the music took a turn and became sorrowful. Gut wrenchingly so. Ye Qing began feeling his intestines twisting and stretching until they literally snapped into pieces.

He wasn't the only one. He could clearly hear countless people's intestines snapping inside their bodies as well. It sounded so crisp it was almost as if they had cucumbers in their stomach, not intestines.

This was the first time Ye Qing heard and felt his intestines snapping in his stomach, ever. To say that the pain and horror were indescribable would be an understatement. The only silver lining to this situation was that he was resilient and full of vitality, so the wound healed almost immediately after intestines snapped in half.

The bad news was that the music was still ongoing, so his intestines broke down again, and again, and again.

And so began one of the worst tortures Ye Qing had ever experienced in his life. The worst part was that he couldn't leave because it would result in certain death. Not even blocking his hearing helped because the music was no mere music. It seemed to ignore the boundaries of the physical and seep into his very soul.

There was nothing he could do besides gritting his teeth and enduring it. The performance had to end eventually. He just needed to hold on until then.

An unknown amount of time later, the sorrowful song finally came to an end, and so did the unnatural power twisting and snapping his intestines like twigs. But before he could let out a sigh of relief, the tune grew passionate and rapid. He felt like he was on a battlefield ready to fight the biggest war of his life.

His heart began beating much, much faster. In fact, it was beating at the same tempo as the pipa, which was to say, very fast.

#### Chapter 414: Fog

Ye Qing could feel his heart straining to maintain the breakneck pace. It was bearable at the beginning, but it eventually grew to the point where his heart was starting to hurt a little.

Luckily for Ye Qing, his body was powerful, and he had long since reached the point where he could control his body down to the finest detail. For now, he could still endure the pressure.

The same couldn't be said for the rest of the crowd, however. Ye Qing saw with his own eyes some people's chest heaving up and down like there was something trying to push its way out before their heart literally burst out of their chest. Even more people's hearts exploded inside their chest and caused blood to shoot out of their orifices like a fountain.

Despite the horrifying phenomenon, no one moved a muscle. They were still wearing enraptured smiles on their faces.

An indefinite amount of time later, when Ye Qing was starting to lose control, the music finally hit a diminuendo and slowed down.

By now, Ye Qing's heart was covered in cracks. Had the tune continued for another minute or so, it would've exploded just like the others.

The heart wasn't the intestines. He could heal his intestines as many times as was necessary, but he would be lucky to survive an exploding heart.

Knowing that he had no time to waste, Ye Qing sucked in a deep breath and hurriedly channeled his enormous vitality to heal his damaged heart. At the same time, he paid close attention to the pipa player with his demonic thought.

*What the fuck is she going to play next?*

On the stage, the pipa tune abruptly took a nosedive toward absolute silence. It was like falling from the sky all the way to the ground. It was such a dive that everyone felt weak and sleepy all of a sudden.

Then, the pipa player stretched the strings to the absolute limits before letting go.

*Twang!*

A loud, shrill, high-pitched noise stunned the world. It was like a thunderclap that jolted the dreamers back to reality.

Blood jetted out of Ye Qings orifices instantly, and his head hurt like it would split apart at any second.

In fact, some peoples heads did explode into a shower of red and white like overripe melons.

It took Ye Qing a good while to recover his wits, and when he did, he was terrified by what couldve been. If he hadnt been on his guard this whole time, it couldve been him who lost his head and mind.

The pipa player wasnt done, however. Oh no, she wasnt even halfway through her performance. She would continue to play through multiple tunes of different styles and subject her audience to many, many different kinds of torture.

Sometimes, her tune was as fiery as fire.

Sometimes, it was as cold as ice.

Sometimes, it was as intense as a war.

Sometimes, it was as forlorn as the rain.

Sometimes, it was as hushed as a whisper.

Sometimes, it was as noisy as a downpour

Each tune came with its own unique effects. Some people suddenly combusted into flames even though there was no fire around, and some people became encased in ice even though there was no ice. Some people exploded into a million pieces, some people were sliced and diced into a million cubes, and some people took thousands and thousands of arrows in the heart.

It was like a showcase of the one million ways to die. Some time later, the only one who was still sitting on his chair and still looked like a human was Ye Qing.

More time passedwas it an instant, or was it an eternity?and the pipa sound suddenly vanished. Ye Qing didnt notice it at first because he was in a daze. There was a quiet sigh, and he heard someone whispering beside his ear almost like they were standing right next to him,

Watch out for the fog. Go the second floor and hide

Ye Qing jolted awake and looked left and right. He couldn't find the speaker, however. Not only that, the pipa player was gone, and the seats were completely empty. The ship had also returned to silence. It was like everything that just happened was a dream.

*Was it a dream?*

Ye Qing didn't know. The pain and injuries he suffered were very real, however. Had he failed to endure until the end, Ye Qing was certain that he would've died.

Sucking in a deep breath, Ye Qing cycled his astral qi and executed the Paranirmitavaavartin Heavenly Demon Sutra to repair his tattered body and spirit. Everything was fine for a dozen or so breaths when suddenly, he felt a bone-chilling iciness pressing him from all sides. When he opened his eyes, he saw that a thick fog had spilled into the interior of the ship from all sides. He could also see indistinct shadow pacing here and there in the fog.

His senses told him that the fog was extremely dangerous. It was at least as dangerous as the pipa player that put him through hell earlier. He was certain that his fate would be a grim one if it caught up to him.

It was then Ye Qing recalled the whisper he heard earlier. Watch out for the fog. Go to the second floor and hide

*But what if it was a ploy? What if the fog is actually where the exit is? What if*

Lets hope I didn't make the wrong choice.

In the end, Ye Qing chose to trust the pipa player. If he entered the fog, there was a huge chance he might die. If he listened to the pipa player's advice, he might yet survive this.

His mind made up, Ye Qing blurred and reappeared on the stage. He was about to leap to the second floor when suddenly, he discovered a pipa set on a table on the stage. It was none other than the pipa the pipa player was using earlier.

There was no time to think. He grabbed the pipa and leaped up the second floor.

As soon as he landed on the second floor, the fog engulfed the central hall completely. Not only that, it was rapidly surging up the second floor as well.

Not about to wait for the fog to catch up to him, Ye Qing immediately ran up to the nearest room. On the way, he noticed that the door was locked by a rusted bronze lock. It looked so frail that even an ordinary person could probably rip it apart without too much trouble.

Ye Qing didn't hesitate to grab the bronze lock and rip it apart.

The next moment, every hair on Ye Qing's body stood on end. It was because a pair of arms had reached out from the gap and grabbed his wrist in the blink of an eye.

The hands were thin and slender. There was no doubt they belonged to a woman. However, the hands were also ghastly white and as cold as ice.

The next moment, the hands pulled Ye Qing toward the entrance with unbelievable strength. Even with his body, he staggered and accidentally placed half a foot into the room.

As soon as his foot passed the threshold, something black rose from the floor and wrapped around his ankle. Then, it pulled him toward the room as well.

*Boom!*

Ye Qings muscles bulged as he pulled back with titanic strength. Caught off guard, the thing grabbing his wrist and his ankle were dragged out partially.

As expected, the person was a woman. She had a gorgeous face with a shapely nose, slender eyebrows, round eyes, perky lips, and smooth white skin.

She only had a face. Everything below her chin was a black mass of hair. In fact, it looked like the entire room was filled with hair. It was what was clinging to his ankle right now.

After Ye Qing dragged the woman out of the room, a vicious snarl overcame her beautiful features. More hair crawled out of the room and wrapped around his arms, legs and torso, pulling him toward the room with all their might.

This time, Ye Qing pulled with all his might and unleashed his Burning Wind to destroy the hair, but to his shock, it failed. Not only that, his seven dragon elephant strength was more or less equal to the womans. As a result, they became locked in a temporary stalemate.

How troublesome! Ye Qing spat. He could see out of the corner of his eyes that the fog had already surged up the second floor.

Some quick thinking later, Ye Qing condensed his demonic thought into a saber and slashed out using the Hellfire Red Lotus Saber Art. As soon as the hair that resisted even the Burning Wind made contact with the red lotuses created from the saber art, they immediately burst into flames and spread out at an incredible rate.

As the hair disintegrated, the womans face became contorted in pain. It would appear that the hellfire had successfully dealt some damage. She instinctively let go and withdrew back into the room.

The Red Lotus Hellfire extinguished bit by bit after the woman returned to the room. She glared at Ye Qing with hatred and fury amidst a sea of hair.

The next moment, countless hair burst out of the entrance and surged toward Ye Qing.

Ye Qing wasnt going to wait, of course. He didnt have the time to fight against the woman. As soon as he severed the hair binding him, he immediately dashed down the corridor at top speed.

Ye Qing looked left and right for a room he could enter and hide, but so far every room he saw was locked. He didnt dare to force his way through just in case they were hiding a terrifying Stranger like the one encountered earlier. He couldnt afford to get entangled with another Stranger at this juncture.

But if I cant enter these rooms, then how the fuck am I going to avoid the fog? Ye Qing frowned deeply. Its not a trick, is it? Is she trying to trick me into opening these rooms and releasing the Strangers for whatever reason? Cant say thats not a possibility

ARGH!

It was at this moment a bloodcurdling scream interrupted his train of thought. When he looked behind his back, he saw that the screamer was none other than the female Stranger he fought earlier.

The female Stranger had been chasing him. Maybe it was her size, but the fog caught up to her before she could enact her revenge. Her black hair flailed all over the place as she struggled to escape with all her might, but the silhouettes in the fog were keeping her pinned.

The silhouettes were just pacing back and forth around the woman. They weren't doing anything at all. Despite this, the woman was screaming in pain and horror as if she was subjected to some sort of unimaginable horror. Eventually, her voice grew weaker, and her silhouette grew blurrier. Then, she abruptly vanished into the fog as if something had dragged her away.

I need to find a room now!

Ye Qing made up his mind after witnessing the female Stranger's downfall. Whatever the pipa player was planning, it was better than being caught by this strange fog. Worst case scenario, he would just drag one of the Strangers out into the open, kill them, and take their room via brute force.

There was still time though. Ye Qing kept running forward in hopes of finding something that might help with his predicament.

There's exactly one room that isn't locked!

After circling around the second floor once, Ye Qing found exactly one unlocked room. Every other room was locked tight.

Is this the room she wanted me to hide inside?

Ye Qing hesitated for a moment before giving the door a push. He tensed up as the door swung open, but to his surprise, nothing attacked him. His demonic thought told him that everything inside the room looked normal as well. This is it! He exclaimed with relief before stepping inside.

He didn't have a choice anyway. The fog was less than a meter away from him now. At this range, he could even feel its coldness and anomalous energy. He would die if he didn't enter the room.

*Creak*

As soon as he stepped inside, the door behind him closed shut of its own accord.

Chapter 415: The Woman Inside The Mirror

After the door closed, the anomalous energy and iciness clinging to his skin vanished into nothing. An invisible weight that Ye Qing hadn't sensed before also lifted from his shoulders.

He didn't relax though. While paying close attention to the strange fog that was only kept away by a thin piece of wood, he carefully scanned the room he was in.

The room's decor was simple but elegant. There was also a faint, sweet scent in the air. At first glance, it looked like a woman's boudoir.

There was another room partially located deeper inside the room. The entrance was partially covered by a curtain of beads, but he could vaguely tell that there was a bed and a dressing table.

When his eyes swept across the dressing table, a gasp nearly escaped his throat. There was a person. A woman. It looked like she was combing her hair. She wasn't sitting in front of the dressing table, however. No, she was inside the bronze mirror. A reflection of someone who didn't exist in reality.

Cold sweat broke out of Ye Qing's back. He was immediately struck by the impulse to turn around and get out.

Of course, he didn't do that. If he opened the door, then he would die for sure. If he stayed inside, he might yet live to see another day.

Ye Qing hid his aura as best he could while watching the woman inside the mirror warily. He didn't want to draw her attention one bit. It was at this moment he saw the woman slowly raising her arm and reaching forward. To Ye Qing's shock, the arm actually poked out of the bronze mirror and into the real world before waving in his direction. She seemed to be beckoning him to come closer?

The woman waved again, but Ye Qing didn't move as a matter of course. His refusal must have angered her, because bright red blood abruptly seeped out of the bronze mirror, and the temperature inside the room dropped ten degrees in an instant.

The blood on the mirror slowly came together to form five words:

*Do you want to die?*

Of course Ye Qing didn't want to die, so he obediently walked over to the dressing table. After he arrived, the words turned into a single word:

*Sit.*

Ye Qing did as she ordered.

*Comb my hair!*

Before Ye Qing could think of anything else, the woman pulled her head off her neck and thrust it into the real world.

Ye Qing: ...

*Oh. So this is how it is.*

Ye Qing had a choice then. Should he accept the head and do as the woman asked, or should he sent it flying like a soccer ball?

Unfortunately, this room was the woman's turf. He was almost certain that his head would fly off his neck the second after he kicked her head.

The woman in the mirror felt as strong as the pipa player he encountered earlier. This meant that it was impossible for him to settle this via brute force. Left with no choice, he caved to her demand and accepted the human head, placing it on the dressing table and allowing her hair to hang loosely at the sides.

After the headless body on the other side of the mirror handed him a wooden comb, Ye Qing began combing the woman's hair.

Ye Qing shuddered as soon as the comb made contact with the woman's hair. It was because an evil, indescribable energy had invaded his body. As the comb slowly slid down her soft hair, Ye Qing's eyes lost all focus, and his mind plunged into a dark nightmare.

Despite having lost his consciousness, Ye Qing's movements didn't stop. As if his body had a mind of its own, he continued to comb the woman's hair stiffly and mechanically like a puppet.

Slowly, hair began growing out of the arm he used to comb the woman's hair. His skin was also growing pale and stiff like its vitality was drained away by something.

Even worse, the paleness and the unnatural hair was growing rapidly and spreading to the other parts of his body. More specifically, they spread every time he combed the woman's hair once.

At this rate, the unusual phenomenon would overtake his body completely. The moment he lost all of his vitality was the moment he transformed into a puppet.

An unknown amount of time later, a light suddenly shone out of Ye Qing's unfocused eyes like a star. He then began coughing violently.

Every time he coughed, a thick ball of hair would fly out of his mouth. It was endless, however. No matter how many times he coughed, he could never empty his stomach completely.

The woman was cackling evilly on the dressing table, and the bronze mirror was leaking blood non-stop. He was starting to see all sorts of terrible and inexplicable illusions.

Worse still, the paleness and the hair were still spreading even though he had stopped combing the woman's hair. Knowing that he couldn't wait any longer, Ye Qing spat out another ball of hair before growling out, Break!

*"Heavenly Demon Captures The Soul"*

As he tapped the space in front of him, demonic thoughts rippled out like waves. The hair, the paleness, the cackling head, the bleeding mirror, and the rest of the illusions immediately disappeared like a bubble.

The next moment, Ye Qing found himself sitting in front of the dressing table and combing the woman's hair. In fact, he had just completed exactly one stroke.

Ye Qing broke out in cold sweat. If the Paranirmitavaavartin Heavenly Demon Sutra wasn't such a godly cultivation art, if his demonic thoughts and the demonic lotus in his head weren't naturally resistant to illusions, he would've perished inside his nightmare already. The death of one's spirit was no different from true death.

*Continue.*

A bloody word appeared on the mirror.

*First it was death by music, now it was death by combing? Why the hell am I so unlucky today?*

The bloody word on the mirror felt just as threatening as the pipa player's gaze when he tried to leave earlier. He had no doubt that something terrible would happen if he refused the order.

So, Ye Qing gritted his teeth, shielded his mind with his demonic thought, and picked up the wooden comb once more. Then, he began his grim task anew.

As the comb slid down the woman's head, a familiar, terrible sensation assaulted him once more.

Hah hah

In front of the dressing table, Ye Qing was breathing heavily and sweating like crazy. His face was also as pale as a sheet. This was the fifth time he combed the woman's hair, and each time he would experience a nightmare that was filled with endless horror and despair, pain and hopelessness.

The illusions felt so real that even with his foreknowledge and power, he was just barely able to snap out of it. If he wasn't practicing the Paranirmitavaavartin Heavenly Demon Sutra, and if his willpower hadn't been tempered by Nanke, he would've succumbed to the nightmares already.

He was mentally exhausted, however. He could only do this a couple more times before he was finally spent.

*Continue.*

The bronze mirror was as relentless as ever, but this time, Ye Qing didn't obey the command. Instead, he lowered his head thoughtfully.

*Continue.*

A few seconds later, when the woman saw that Ye Qing wasn't moving, her headless body slowly raised its hands and reached out of the bronze mirror. The bloody word started bleeding profusely, and a cold, strange, terrifying aura gushed out of the bronze mirror and caused the room temperature to nose-dive.

It was so cold that a layer of ice appeared on Ye Qing's body. Even his blood seemed to be frozen in his veins. The woman's arms reached for his neck as if she would strangle him to death.

Despite the crisis, Ye Qing still refused to move a muscle. When the woman's hands were an inch away from his neck, he suddenly broke into a grin and declared, "This too is an illusion."

Begone!

His demonic thought-infused command broke out like a thunderclap in spring. As if on cue, the pair of arms slowly faded away like sand, and his very surroundings flickered like the disturbed surface of a previously calm lake. Then, the bleeding mirror, the headless body inside the mirror, the head on the dressing table and even Ye Qing himself scattered into nothing like a bubble. The real Ye Qing was still standing at the entrance, and there was no one inside the bedroom. The dressing table was empty, and there was no woman combing her hair inside the mirror.

It was almost as if everything he experienced before was just a dream.

A nightmare was terrible, but what could it do when the dreamer had awakened back to reality?

Phew that was way too close, Ye Qing muttered under his breath.

He had figured out everything. From the moment he set foot inside the room, he was struck by some sort of anomalous power and pulled into an illusion. Everything he experienced afterward was just that, an illusion. In reality, he had never even taken a single step away from the door.

Had he failed to recognize that the reality where he was forced to comb the woman's hair again and again was also an illusion, he would never have snapped out of it. He would have been forced to repeat the illusion until he went crazy, or he angered the woman and was strangled to death. It was death either way.

The only reason Ye Qing managed to figure out his situation was all thanks to the Annon Sutra. The illusion itself was quite impressive, and it managed to replicate practically everything on his person except one: the Annon Sutra.

At first, he didn't notice that he was still trapped in an illusion. But when he realized that the bronze mirror would never stop asking him to comb the woman's hair, he realized he needed to do something.

His first thought was to seek help from the Annon Sutra, but when he looked inward, he realized in shock that he couldn't find it anywhere. The Annon Sutra was Ye Qing's most treasured item, which was why he kept it close to his chest instead of storing it inside the Nine Heavens.

At first, he thought he somehow lost the Annon Sutra and panicked a little. But after he calmed down, he realized that that was impossible. He realized that he was still trapped inside an illusion. The anomalous power that dragged him into the illusion probably failed to replicate it because it was too special.

In the end, he was able to return to reality, but Ye Qing couldn't feel happy at all. After all, he still had no idea when or how he got dragged into the illusion in the first place. The killer fog was still outside the room, and now he knew that an unknown horror lurked inside the room. How could he possibly relax under these circumstances?

Now that he thought about it, he had probably succumbed to the illusion when he looked at the dressing table or more accurately, the bronze mirror set on top of the dressing table.

Ye Qing split his attention between the dressing table and the fog outside the room, ready for anything. It was deathly silent both inside and outside the room.

Once, Ye Qing tried to poke his demonic thought outside the room, but he immediately and involuntarily tensed up like he had caught the attention of something monstrous. He didn't hesitate to dispel his demonic thought and gave up trying to find out what was happening outside.

A long contemplation later, Ye Qing ultimately chose to remain inside the room, terrified as he was. Each minute felt as long as a year.

Thankfully, nothing else happened after he broke out of the illusion. When he was certain that he was safe for the moment, he finally allowed himself a small sigh of relief.

#### Chapter 416: Corpse Ship

*RrrRrrRrrRrr...*

Over two hours later, a strange noise suddenly broke the silence of the room. Ye Qing hadn't relaxed for a moment since he snapped out of the illusion, and the occurrence was so sudden that he nearly jumped on his feet. He immediately clenched his fists and channeled his energies, ready to react at first notice.

When he looked at the source of the noise, he realized that the bronze mirror had rolled off the dressing table. It was headed straight toward him.

Ye Qing's nerves grew taut. If the bronze mirror came too close, he was absolutely going to send it flying with his fists, to hell with the consequences.

He didn't think he was being overly sensitive or cautious. Even now, he couldn't help but recall his experience two hours ago with trepidation and fear, and the culprit behind it all was headed straight toward him. Of course he was nervous about it.

It was then Ye Qing noticed something shocking. As the bronze mirror continued to roll toward him, the surroundings began changing drastically. The furniture aged, the floor grew tattered, the beads on the curtain turned dim and dirty. Dust and cobwebs were everywhere.

Ye Qing realized with a start that the room wasn't what it seemed to be. From the start, everything he saw... was an illusion?!

Ye Qing swallowed as he did his best to wrestle his shock. He felt tense enough to break a muscle.

The bronze mirror stopped when it was about one meter away from Ye Qing. Then, it fell to the ground face up and produced a line of bloody words on its surface:

*Not again. Please don't tell me that I'm caught in an illusion again!*

Ye Qing frowned deeply as he caressed his chest. He let out a sigh of relief when he felt the Annon Sutra.

*But why is it telling me to go to the third floor? Is the fog gone?*

Ye Qing hesitated for a moment before poking his demonic thought out of the door. He was right. The fog had disappeared before he knew it.

Unfortunately, the bronze mirror formed a new line of bloody words before he could take action. It was as if it could read his thoughts:

Ye Qing bowed his head thoughtfully for a moment. In the end, he decided to obey the mirror's command and picked it up with his left hand.

The bronze mirror felt a little cold to touch, and it looked shiny and new like it was cleaned very often.

His thoughts were simple. One, he wanted to live very much. Two, the pipa player's advice, while not entirely truthful, did help him survive a fatal crisis. He was inclined to believe that the bronze mirror wasn't asking him to leave this safe room for nothing. And three, after everything he had experienced so far, he was fairly sure the bronze mirror could kill him with ease. To reject its offer was to commit suicide.

His earlier impulse to give the bronze mirror the slip was just that, an impulse.

With that in mind, Ye Qing put away the bronze mirror and cautiously opened the door. When he looked left and right and confirmed that the fog had indeed disappeared, he let out a third sigh of relief and stepped out.

The rooms on the second floor didn't look too different from what he remembered. Most of them were locked, and not a peep could be heard just like as before.

Ye Qing didn't hurry to the third floor. Instead, he went back to the room he forced open earlier and peeked inside.

It looked like a mini war had been waged inside the room. The furniture and items were all crushed, the walls were covered in deep marks, and there were a few strands of black hair on the ground. It must've been quite the fierce struggle.

"Heh..."

Having satisfied his curiosity, Ye Qing turned a corner and found a staircase leading up to the third floor. However, he was certain it didn't exist when he ran around the second floor a couple hours ago.

He sent his demonic thought over to the staircase, but he wasn't able to sense anything out of the ordinary. Ye Qing wasn't surprised by this. Since arriving at this place, his demonic thought had become far less effective than what it used to be. For example, he had scanned the bronze mirror's room thoroughly as soon as he entered the place, but he never saw through the illusion until the mirror lifted the spell itself.

Ye Qing still didn't go to the third floor even though the way was open to him. Instead, he leaped back down to the stage, dashed through the exit, and appeared on the deck. Who knows, maybe there was another way out.

It was dark and foggy outside of the ship, but the fog itself felt different from the one that flooded into the ship. Although it was still terrible and icy, it lacked the anomalous, rotten, evil energy that it exuded earlier.

Ye Qing lifted an eyebrow and threw a punch. The Burning Wind roared and scattered large patches of fog. The corpses floating on the lake were revealed once more.

Nothing had changed. The corpses were still floating face up, and they were still wearing an eerie, bone-chilling smile on their face.

"Should I ask the Annon Sutra about this?"

Unfortunately, as soon as his fingers made contact with the piece of vellum, his heart immediately started racing unnaturally. When he removed his hand, the strange sensation disappeared immediately.

Ye Qing understood why. It meant that the ship contained one or multiple Strangers who were powerful enough to sense the Annon Sutra should he use it. If he ignored its warning, he would most likely lose the Annon Sutra and his life.

"Sigh..."

Ye Qing shrugged, but he wasn't too disappointed. He figured this might be the case since almost everything he encountered in this place seemed capable of killing him.

Reluctant to give up, he was just about to take another spin around the ship when suddenly, he saw a thick fog rising from the bottom of the ship. There were silhouettes pacing back and forth inside the fog.

"Again?!" Ye Qing cursed under his breath and dashed back into the ship immediately. He jumped to the second floor and dashed down the corridor to hide in the bronze mirror's room, but...

"What the fuck?"

The room was gone. Literally, gone. Ye Qing found himself staring at a blank wall where there should've been a room. He swore loudly, "Motherfucker! She's forcing me to go to the third floor!"

Ye Qing had no doubt that the female Stranger had hidden the room to prevent him from going back in.

“Fine, dammit!” Ye Qing uttered through gritted teeth and ran up to the staircase leading up to the third floor. By now, the first floor was completely engulfed, and the fog was pouring up the second floor rapidly. Ye Qing glanced at it once before dashing up the third floor.

Unlike the second floor, the third floor only had one room. The board set on top of the room looked pretty intact, and the words “Eternal Longing” were etched on it. It was an excellent name.

In this world, there were certain tunes that shared a common name, and “Eternal Longing” was one such name. It was interesting that the owner of this room had decided to name their room this way.

Ye Qing was dashing toward the room when he suddenly skidded to a halt. It was because the room was pitch black until he got to a certain range, and it suddenly lit up like someone had lit the candles.

“What are you waiting for, scion? Come in!”

A warm, gentle voice came from inside the room. It was as graceful as the spring wind blowing across green waters, and as crisp and refreshing as a mountain spring. If this was anywhere else, Ye Qing would’ve thought that the speaker was a soft woman so devastatingly beautiful that she could topple states and countries with her looks alone.

But this was a ghost ship. He would sooner believe that the speaker was a pink skeleton than an actual human. Even if she was human, he wouldn’t be surprised if she was a monstrous man-eater. Possibly literally.

Indecision gripped Ye Qing for a moment. The woman inside the room didn’t urge him to make a decision either. She patiently waited for him to make up his mind.

Unfortunately, time wasn’t on his side. Already, the fog was pouring up the third floor and creeping toward him.

*Screw it! If this kills me, then so be it!*

Throwing all caution to the wind, Ye Qing pushed the door open and stepped inside. But to his surprise, he didn’t find a pink skeleton or a blue-faced ghost. What he found... was a painting.

A painting that was floating in the air.

There was a woman inside the painting. She wore a white dress and held a peach flower in her hands. She was standing next to a blooming peach blossom forest where countless pink petals fell.

Her white dress looked like snow, and the peach flower fire. The blend was as phantasmal as it was beautiful.

The woman was showing only half her face. Even so, Ye Qing could tell that she was incredibly beautiful.

“Please take a seat, scion!” The woman in the painting offered.

“Dare I ask who you are, miss?” Ye Qing saluted her and asked warily.

“I am Longing. It’s a pleasure to make your acquaintance, Scion Ye.” Longing gave him a small bow and repeated gently, “Please, take a seat. I promise I will tell you everything that’s happening on this ship.”

This time, Ye Qing did as she requested and asked another question, “You know who I am, Miss Longing?”

Longing answered, “Your name is known to me from the moment you set foot in the Boat of Longing, Scion Ye.”

“The Boat of Longing? A good name,” Ye Qing paid the woman a compliment.

“Thank you.” Longing smiled gently. “However, the Boat of Longing has a different, more notorious name. You might even recognize it.”

That piqued Ye Qing’s curiosity. “Oh? What is it?”

Longing said slowly, “The Corpse Ship.”

“The Corpse Ship?” Ye Qing frowned for a second. Then, his eyes gradually widened into saucers, and disbelief colored his expression. He was so shocked that he shot to his feet and blurted, “This is the Corpse Ship?”

“That’s correct,” Longing confirmed.

“I’m... inside the Corpse Ship?!” Ye Qing repeated stupidly. That was how shocked he was.

The Corpse Ship was both a ship and an Anomaly. It was ranked pretty highly in the Pacification Bureau’s case files, and it was named the “Corpse Ship Incident”.

The reason it was named the “Corpse Ship Incident” was because witnesses claimed to see a huge ship surrounded by an entourage of corpses. Often found in rivers and lakes, a huge fog would spread, and anyone who was unfortunate enough to be caught inside the fog would disappear every time it manifested. When next it reappeared, the victims could be found swimming among the sea of corpses as one of them. That was why it came to be known as the Corpse Ship.

The Corpse Ship’s threat level and anomaly level was extremely high. It had vanished entire towns and villages in the past. Although the Pacification Bureau spared no effort to search for the Corpse Ship and end its threat once and for all, the results were mediocre at best.

For one, the appearance of the Corpse Ship was completely random. It didn’t appear at the same location either. Anywhere with a lake or a river could be visited by the Corpse Ship. Although the Corpse Ship’s appearance was always accompanied by a thick fog and endless bodies, it hardly helped the Pacification Bureau to narrow their search at all.

Two, the Corpse Ship was beyond dangerous. Countless Pacification Bureau elites had ventured into the Corpse Ship accidentally or intentionally, but no one had ever lived to tell the tale. It was a huge loss to say the least.

The Pacification Bureau had tried dispatching Grandmasters to resolve the case before, but when they entered the fog, they couldn't find the Corpse Ship no matter what they tried. It was almost as if the ship was intentionally hiding from them.

As a result, the strong couldn't find the ship, and the weaklings weren't strong enough to solve the case. Over time, it became a cold case that not even the Pacification Bureau could do anything about.

Ye Qing was shocked because he had read about the case before. He was especially horrified learning that he had stumbled into an Anomaly that had supposedly no survivors.

Chapter 417: Request

"Don't be afraid, scion."

Longing noticed Ye Qing's pallid complexion and shot him a gentle, soothing smile. "I can help you leave this place."

Her words surprised Ye Qing, but he didn't allow himself to get overly excited. Instead, he calmed down and said, "You must have a request for me then."

"Astutely observed, scion." Longing smiled widened like a blooming flower. "You are correct. I do have a request for you."

"I... would like you to save me and my sisters," Longing said with a half-bow.

"Please rise." Ye Qing made a lifting gesture. "Why don't you tell me what is going on first? If it is within my capabilities to help you, then I shall."

Not that he could turn her down even if he wanted to.

"You are a kind man, scion. I thank you on behalf of my sisters." Longing saluted him again before beginning, "Are you aware how the corpse ship came to be, scion?"

Ye Qing shook his head. Since it wasn't written in the files, he doubted that there was anyone in the Pacification Bureau who knew about it either.

Longing lifted her head a little and gazed to the distance with a forlorn, reminiscing look. "As I've told you before, the Corpse Ship used to be called the Boat of Longing. Eternal Longing is the greatest form of longing, which is why this room is named Eternal Longing, and I, its master, am the leader of this ship."

"The Boat of Longing used to be a pleasure boat that was famed for its song, dance, and entertainment. We have visited every land and water under the heavens, and it is not an exaggeration to say that we were famous throughout the world. But then, we encountered a terrifying incident forty years ago."

"That day, we were passing through Jin River on our way to Jin Xiu[1] when one of our crew spotted a drowned body in the river. I was a wanderer who traveled wherever I pleased, which was why I couldn't tolerate seeing a body being fed by fishes and

prawns. So, I ordered my men to fish out the body so we may bury it at a proper place later.”

“Little did I know, my goodwill had unwittingly damned the whole ship.”

Fear and regret flickered across Longing’s face. “Ever since we fished the body up the boat, it began leaking a strange fog that quickly enveloped the whole ship.”

“No matter which direction we traveled, and no matter what method we tried, we were unable to go beyond the boundaries of the fog or reach the pier. Moreover, one or more crew would go missing when the fog floods into the ship’s hold every night.”

“Luckily, I had acquired a wide set of skills thanks to my travels, so I set up a restriction in every room that prevented the fog from entering. That was how we were able to survive its threat... for a time.”

“At first, the fog flooded into the ship only once every two or three weeks, but over time, the intervals kept getting shorter and shorter. It went from half a month to several days, then several days to every day, then a day to every few hours. Even now, that time is still getting shorter.”

“Add to the fact that the ship was unable to leave the fog, and our food reserves were declining every day, the crew inevitably slid into fear, starvation and despair. Some people succumbed to despair and committed suicide, some people turned cruel and robbed their fellow sisters of their food. When there was literally nothing left to take, they even feasted on human flesh. Some people charged into the fog in hopes of finding a way out, and I don’t need to tell you what happened to them... even the handful who survived gradually lost their minds and humanity to the fog and transformed into Stranger-like creatures.”

Longing paused for a moment to recover from her heartache. The peach flower she was holding had withered before Ye Qing knew it. “Left with no choice, I chose to lock them up and seal them inside their rooms. The Stranger you ran into on the second floor was my servant, scion.”

Ye Qing hurriedly apologized, “I didn’t know that she was your servant. I’m very sorry that my recklessness resulted in the fog trapping her and killing her. I hope you’ll forgive me.”

“There is no need to apologize, scion,” Longing said sadly. “Honestly, I don’t know if I made the right choice back then. Maybe it would’ve been better if they died.”

“Thank you very much for your understanding.” Not wanting to dwell on the subject of death any longer than was necessary, Ye Qing hurriedly changed the subject, “So, how did you manage to preserve your consciousness, miss?”

Longing shot him a tragic smile. “Having observed the fog for a long time, I came to realize that it only reacted toward the living. During my travels, I picked up a secret art named the ‘Soul Detachment and Attachment Art’ that allowed me to abandon my flesh and blood and attach my

soul to a physical object and decided to learn it as a last resort. Of course, the object we attach our souls to must share a deep bond with us, or our souls would perish very quickly.”

“Pushed to the brink, me and few remaining sisters decided to give up our bodies and attach our soul to a cherished object. The painting you see is what I had attached myself to.”

Ye Qing thought for a second before producing the pipa and the bronze mirror from Nine Heavens. “In that case, these items must be the objects your sisters have attached their souls to.”

As soon as Ye Qing said this, two silhouettes appeared on the pipa and the bronze mirror. The first silhouette was none other than the pipa player he saw on the first floor, and the second silhouette was a woman with a cool and elegant appearance. She was the woman inside the bronze mirror.

“I am Hua Mei. A pleasure to meet you, scion,” The pipa player bowed and introduced herself.

“I am Jue Yan,” The woman on the bronze mirror also introduced herself.

After the introductions were over, Longing said gently, “Hua Mei and Jue Yan were testing your strength earlier. It was my idea that they check if you are strong enough to help us. I hope you will forgive us for our transgression.”

Hua Mei and Jue Yan bowed again to express their apology.

“I accept your apology, so please, raise your heads.” Ye Qing returned the salute. “It is my honor to be able to help you three, so, what do you need me to do?”

Longing didn’t keep him in suspense. “We would like you to help us eliminate this fog.”

There was a moment of incredulous silence as Ye Qing scratched his nose. He knew that Longing’s request couldn’t be simple, but this? She might as well ask him to commit suicide!

Ye Qing let out a bitter chuckle and said, “I have no qualms carrying out your request, but don’t you think you’re asking for the moon? All three of you are much stronger than me, but even you are unable to eliminate the fog. How can I possibly do what you cannot?”

He knew from experience that Hua Mei and Jue Yan possessed the strength to snuff him out like a bug, and he was willing to bet Longing was even stronger. Despite this, they were unable to break the fog’s spell. How on earth was he going to succeed where they had failed?

“Patience, scion. Allow me to tell you my plan.”

Longing began her explanation, “To tell you the truth, my sisters and I were just ordinary people who knew a number of small tricks to protect ourselves when we were still alive. We weren’t even Vessel Augmentors back then. The reason we became so strong today is all because of the fog.”

“We were able to survive after giving up our physical bodies, but the ‘Soul Detachment and Attachment Art’ has a major flaw. We would never be able to leave this ship and especially the three objects our souls are attached to. The further we are away from our objects, the weaker we become.”

“At first, we were so weak we couldn’t even leave our rooms. However, the fog took over the ship and traveled to all sorts of places to consume more prey. For whatever reason, we too grew in strength until we were finally able to affect the ship to a certain extent. That is why you were able to board our ship.”

A short pause later, Longing continued, “Despite this, we were unable to eliminate the fog once and for all. And so long as the fog persists, we will never be truly free.”

“Where is this fog coming from?” Ye Qing asked, but the answer occurred to him before Longing could answer. “Was it that corpse you fished out of the river?”

“An intelligent deduction. That is correct.” Longing nodded. “The corpse is the root of everything.”

“So, this would all end if it’s destroyed, right?” Ye Qing asked.

“We believe so. But...” Longing explained, “Maybe it was because our existence is similar to the fog’s, but we would lose our direction as soon as we forced our way in. If we stay inside it for too long, we would even lose consciousness and become assimilated with it. Although we knew exactly where the corpse was left behind on the ship—the orlop deck[2]—we were unable to locate it no matter what we tried. Naturally, we were unable to end the fog at its roots.”

“Not only that, I highly suspect that the corpse possesses some level of consciousness. Part of the reason we couldn’t find it is because it’s hiding from us. In our opinion, it is proof that the corpse is afraid of our strength. If we can find it, we could most likely kill it and end our misery permanently.”

Ye Qing rubbed his nose thoughtfully. According to the Pacification Bureau’s case files, the biggest reason their Grandmasters were unable to end the threat was because they couldn’t find the Corpse Ship even after they entered the fog it created. This seemed to support Longing’s claim that the corpse possessed a will.

“So, you want me to locate the corpse for you?” Ye Qing asked.

“That is correct.” This time, it was Hua Mei who spoke up. “According to our observation, all warriors possessed some measure of resistance toward the fog. In the short term, we believe you can enter the fog without losing your way or become corrupted by it.”

“We want you to store the items that host our souls inside your Nature’s Shell so that the fog could not detect our presence. Once you have located the corpse, you may release us into the open. We’ll deal with it ourselves.”

“Of course, we promise a generous reward if the corpse is destroyed. You will be free to leave the ship as well.”

Ye Qing remained silent for a moment before chuckling. "It can't be that easy, can it?"

If it was really that easy, the trio would've saved themselves a long time ago. The one thing this world didn't lack was warriors.

"Of course not." Longing didn't deny it. "As I told you, the corpse in the orlop deck possesses some level of consciousness. It knows when it is in danger and strives to avoid it. If someone beyond its ability were to enter its fog, it would sense it and run away immediately. That is why we can only send warriors below a certain level of strength into the fog."

"However, everyone we asked for help so far was devoured, assimilated, and transformed into the fog's puppet all too quickly. You are the only one we have encountered so far that was both beneath the corpse's notice and resistant to the fog's corruption. That is why we invited you to help us."

Longing couldn't hear Ye Qing's thoughts, of course. She continued, "I won't lie and tell you that you'll be able to approach the corpse smoothly even though you don't draw its attention though. In fact, it may prove to be one of the hardest journeys of your life."

"First, the corpse is constantly surrounded by a thick fog, and the puppets and Strangers it controls are everywhere. Second, the fog itself is overflowing with anomalous energies of rot, corruption, and death, so if you are weak in body or spirit, the fog will corrupt you very quickly. If you're lucky, you might get away with just a damaged mind. If you're not, your mind would be extinguished, and your body would be puppeteered for eternity. Worse still, the fog and corruption grows stronger the closer you get to the corpse."

"Third, the fog also possesses incredible hallucinatory effects. What you see inside the fog may not necessarily be the truth. For example, you might think you had found the corpse, but it could be just a hallucination in your mind or an illusion created by the fog. That is why our chosen warrior must possess not just a strong spirit, willpower, and acumen, but also the ability to pierce illusions."

"Finally, we are unable to help you in any way before you truly find the corpse. If even a hint of our presence is leaked, the corpse would be alerted to our ploy, and we would all be in danger. In other words, you only have one shot at this."

"Obviously, no ordinary warrior could accomplish this. However, you have more than proven your strength by overcoming both Hua Mei and Hue Yan's tests with ease. I am certain that you are the one who will free us from this eternal misery."

Chapter 418: Soaring Celestial Silk

"You flatter me, Miss Longing."

Ye Qing smiled politely. Now that she mentioned it, Hua Mei was probably testing his physical strength with her pipa performance, and Jue Yan his mental strength and ability to pierce illusions.

It was all to confirm if he was qualified to venture into the fog and help them.

Had he failed either one of the tests and proven himself unworthy, he would probably be dead already. And judging from how practiced their methods were, he had no doubt that they had tested countless warriors for heaven-knows-how-many years.

Obviously, those people were long dead.

“Besides that, we are running out of time. The corpse is growing stronger with each person it devoured using the Boat of Longing and the fog. We can tell that it is slowly but surely catching up to us. It won’t be long before the corpse revives, and when that happens, me and my sisters will surely perish, and humanity will suffer a great calamity. We beg you not just to free us, but also save those who would fall victim to this monster from tragedy.”

All three women bowed to him again with pleading in their eyes.

“But of course. It is my natural responsibility to save fair maidens such as you three and prevent a calamity from befalling my people,” Ye Qing declared with a solemn expression.

That was what he said, but if he had a choice, he would never help them in a million years. The way they phrased their words, you would almost think that they hadn’t kidnapped him, threatened his life with their “tests”, and were now sending him off to his death. In the end, they were just doing this for themselves. He was just the tool they were using to achieve their goals.

Of course, he had no choice but to agree to their plan. It might look like they were treating him cordially right now, but that was only because they needed him to save themselves. If he dared to reject him, he had no doubt they would kill him faster than he could say, “Fuck you!”

That was just the way it was. This was doubly true since he was no match for either one of them, much less the three of them together.

It was also why he had agreed to their request in such a sanctimonious tone. He was doing this one way or another, so he might as well make himself sound as agreeable as possible. Dropping pretenses at this point of time wouldn’t help anyone.

All three women wore grateful looks on their faces. “What a benevolent man! If you really can save us, then we swear to repay your kindness a hundred fold.”

“You’re welcome. Like I said, it is my natural responsibility.” Ye Qing waved his hand before asking, “So, we will begin the mission after the fog is gone, right?”

To his surprise, Longing shook his head and said, “No. We begin now.”

“Now? But that killer fog is everywhere right now!” Ye Qing frowned. Although it was only a matter of time before he ran into the fog, it was obviously easier and safer to find the corpse after the fog was gone, right?

Jue Yan replied, “Unfortunately, you won’t be able to find the corpse if the fog is gone.”

“I don’t understand,” Ye Qing voiced his puzzlement. “You said you left it in the orlop deck, right?” Even considering how big this vessel was, it wouldn’t take him more than ten minutes to scour the whole area.

“Yes, and no.” Longing gave him an enigmatic answer. “It is true that we had placed the body at the orlop deck, and we had, in fact, tried to search for it multiple times while the fog was missing, but for whatever reason, it was nowhere to be found.”

“Over time, we came to realize that the corpse only appears when the fog is present. If the fog fades, the corpse would disappear with it.”

“I see.” Ye Qing frowned deeper. In other words, the corpse only existed in its self-made space, the fog. This was looking dicier and dicier.

He had no choice though. It was his only chance at escaping this place.

“Very well, but can I have a moment to rest and recuperate?” Ye Qing asked.

“But of course.” Longing smiled before swinging her sleeve, causing a few items to fly out of the painting and land in front of Ye Qing. “These items may be of use to you. Please accept them.”

Longing had given him a total of five items. They were two Strange Artifacts, two pills and a piece of silk.

“What are they?” Ye Qing could tell that they were extraordinary just by probing them with his demonic thought.

Longing began her explanation, “These two Strange Artifacts are Hatred-class Strange Artifacts. The crown is called the Mao Day Crown, and the accessory is called the Heart Moon. They’re both protective equipment that can clear the mind and protect the soul.”

“The two pills are known as Resurrection and Renewal. Resurrection can heal any physical injuries and restore your vitality, whereas Renewal can restore your spiritual power.”

“Resurrection and Renewal?!” Ye Qing exclaimed in shock. Created exclusively by the sect known as the Valley of the Medicine God, both medicinal pills were outstanding medicines that sold for at least thousands of gold a pop. They were also so rare that only the wealthiest and most influential could get their hands on them.

Resurrection, as its name might imply, could heal even the worst injuries in just a short time so long as the person was still alive. Hence the name. Renewal could not just restore one’s spiritual power, but also heal their mind if it was damaged. This effect was so rare that it was far more precious than even Resurrection.

“This piece of silk is called the Soaring Celestial Silk. I’m sure you’ve heard of its name.”

When Longing introduced the final item, Ye Qing’s eyes bulged like he was stunned beyond words. In fact, he was.

The White Jade Capital had even made a historical remark that was remembered to this day: What does gender matter when your sword triumphs above all?

The Flying Snow Sword Celestial wasn’t just stronger than any man or woman, her heart was bigger than most as well. Before she passed away, she inscribed her life’s work and insight into twelve pieces of silk so that everyone else in the future could benefit from it.

As mentioned before, each silk contained exactly one wisp of sword intent and one sword technique of the “Soaring Celestial Sword Sutra”. Those who grasped both the technique and the intent would become the owner of one of the twelve sword techniques. If someone was lucky enough to obtain all twelve Soaring Celestial Silks, then they would have a shot at mastering the sword art that once took the world by storm.

But every once in a while, the Soaring Celestial Silks would resurface every once in a while and trigger yet another bloody massacre.

Sometimes, the road to hell was paved with good intentions.

Ye Qing never thought that Longing would own a Soaring Celestial Silk. Considering what she told him earlier, it had most likely been “donated” to her by one of the unlucky bastards who were kidnapped to this place.

“As I thought, you’ve already heard of the Soaring Celestial Silk. In that case, I won’t waste your time.” Longing smiled. “The sword intent contained within this silk can suppress the fog to a certain extent as well.”

“On a related note, this Soaring Celestial Silk will be part of your reward if you succeed.”

“Thank you kindly for your generosity.” Ye Qing didn’t hesitate to accept all the goods. He was doing their dirty work after all. It was only natural that they paid him appropriately for his services.

After that, Ye Qing sat down and meditated right in front of the three women. He wasn’t worried that they would try anything.

Longing, Hua Mei and Jue Yan exchanged a glance with each other. No one said anything.

A little over an hour later, Ye Qing finally opened his eyes. His earlier fatigue was completely gone.

Longing floated up to Ye Qing and asked, “Have you recovered, Scion Ye?”

“Yes, I have,” Ye Qing answered. “Now, please tell me how the Boat of Longing is structured, where the corpse is supposedly located, and anything I might need to know to ensure the success of this mission in detail.”

“But of course,” Longing replied with a small bow. All three women would spend the next ten minutes or so telling Ye Qing everything he needed to know.

At the end of their explanation, Longing added, “Be warned that the fog is anomalous and everchanging. We cannot promise that what we told you is absolutely true. You’ll need to be ready for anything.”

“Understood.” Ye Qing nodded and took a moment to digest everything he heard. Finally, he said, “If there’s nothing else, then let us depart.”

“We’re counting on you, scion Ye.” Longing, Hua Mei and Jue Yan gave him a solemn bow.

“Don’t worry. It will be done.” Ye Qing gestured. “If you may...”

The three women nodded and flew back into their objects. Then, Ye Qing stored the pipa, the bronze mirror and the painting inside his Nine Heavens.

After he put away the items, Ye Qing sucked in a deep breath and mustered his courage. Then, he opened the door and stepped out of the room.

As soon as Ye Qing left the room, the fog flushed in and caught him in its disgusting embrace. It felt cold, humid, and evil. His skin hurt like it was being eaten by acid, and the rotten stench ravaging his nasal cavity was vomit-inducing to put it mildly. Even his mind felt a little slower and blurrier than normal. Clearly, he was suffering from minor corruption.

If he was weaker, there was a huge chance he might be corrupted and decayed as soon as he entered the fog. He would lose his consciousness and perish just like that.

The good news was that this much was within his limits to endure. Besides that, he noticed that the filthy energies in the fog was somewhat beneficial to his demonic thought.

The “Paranirmitavaśavartin Heavenly Demon Sutra” was a demonic art, and it grew stronger by feeding one a person’s negative emotions. Negative emotions also greatly accelerated the practitioner’s cultivation speed and the power of one’s demonic thought.

However, Ye Qing had a small cache of golden dragon-serpent runes. That was why he rarely cultivated the “Paranirmitavaśavartin Heavenly Demon Sutra” this way besides that one time at the Demon’s Tomb. There wasn’t nearly enough negative emotions in his surroundings for him to grow his strength in a meaningful way anyway.

That said, the energies within the fog were too varied, confused, and full of madness. Only a small portion of it could actually be used to improve his cultivation art. The rest weren’t just useless, but a grave threat to the purity of his mind and soul. That was why he didn’t dare to refine it willy-nilly.

While he couldn’t refine the fog for his own use, this discovery meant that his resistance was much higher than another warrior’s. He certainly wasn’t going to complain about it.

Ye Qing stepped deeper into the fog while maintaining a tight shield of demonic thought around his person. However, he had just taken a few steps when countless silhouettes appeared in the distance and rushed him without warning. They were incredibly fast!

Although the silhouettes were right in front of him, Ye Qing still couldn't see their faces. That was because they didn't have a face. They were merely indistinct shadows.

Not stupid enough to underestimate the silhouettes, Ye Qing lifted Red Sleeve and executed a saber technique. Crimson light manifested into existence before splitting into a thousand lines like the spring wind spreading out across the land, gentle and soothing. The lines then passed right through the shadow's necks.

This was one of the three ultimate moves he created using the "Saber of Spring Wind and Fine Rain" as the foundation, and the "Soulchasing Saber" and his own martial insight as the supplement. Its name was "Spring Wind".

However, the saber force failed to inflict any damage to the silhouettes whatsoever. It was almost as if they didn't exist. They continued to charge him unimpeded and unharmed.

Caught off guard, one of the silhouettes managed to grab Ye Qing by the shoulder.

Chapter 419: Danger At Every Step

"Argh!"

The grab didn't injure his shoulder, but Ye Qing felt so much pain that his face was contorted, and veins were bulging on his forehead.

*"Heavenly Demon Captures The Soul"*

Gritting his teeth, Ye Qing clenched his fingers and knocked the space in front of him. A ripple of demonic thought immediately washed out and destroyed all of the silhouettes attacking him, turning back into fog.

"Heavens, these damn shadows are quite dangerous."

It took a couple deep breaths before Ye Qing's face finally returned to normal. His complexion was pale though.

As it turned out, the silhouettes attacked the soul, not the body. When the silhouette grabbed his shoulder, he felt like his soul was being torn apart. The pain was such that he would prefer if the silhouette had ripped his arm off his sockets, not to mention that the attack had also inflicted a small amount of corruption inside his soul.

Besides that, the silhouettes seemed immune to conventional weapons and even astral qi. It could only be damaged by spiritual power.

Had he known this, he would've made preparations for it. What a "great" start this was.

"Bloody bitches. I can't believe they didn't tell me something this important. If only I can just leave them in the fog..." Ye Qing cursed under his breath.

The idea had entered his mind as soon as Longing mentioned that they would lose their way as soon as they entered the fog. If necessary, he could just leave them in the fog and escape.

It was just a fleeting thought though. He wasn't actually planning on doing it. For one, it was possible that Longing was lying to him. Even if it was true, he still couldn't leave this fucking place

because of the fog. He would be pissing off the only people who—assuming they were telling the truth—might be able to release him from this hell.

Tempted as he was, Ye Qing ultimately pushed down the desire and marched on.

Now that he knew how the silhouettes functioned, they no longer constituted a threat to him. Every time one or more of them got close, he could destroy them with the “Heavenly Demon Captures The Soul”.

Unfortunately, the fog grew thicker when he got to the second floor. The number of silhouettes lurking in the fog were steadily increasing as well. Ye Qing frowned. Although the silhouettes weren’t difficult to handle, it was going to take forever to get to the orlop deck at this rate. Moreover, Longing mentioned that some of the silhouettes were stronger than most. It would be bad if he killed too many of them and caught the attention of a powerful silhouette.

“Oh right. Maybe I can do it that way?”

Suddenly, a light bulb appeared on Ye Qing’s head. Longing also mentioned that the fog was only interested in living things—or more accurately, the life force present in all living things. If he isolated his life force, then he shouldn’t attract their attention anymore.

Having made up his mind, Ye Qing produced a pair of cloth shoes from Nine Heavens. It looked old, dusty, and tattered. There was even some soil clinging to its fabric.

Something wasn’t right about the soil though. For one, it reeked of deathly energy. Two, it appeared on Ye Qing’s hands as soon as he touched the shoes.

After Ye Qing put on the pair of cloth shoes, patches of soil slithered up his legs rapidly until it covered his whole body. It wasn’t long before he looked like a zombie who just climbed out of the ground.

The cloth shoes were named the Grave Dirt Shoes. Despite its rather unpleasant name, it was a bonafide Hatred-class Strange Artifact. He had obtained it from the *jianghu* warriors he tricked and killed at Luo Shui.

As its name implied, the Grave Dirt Shoes were a pair of shoes that were covered in grave dirt. Anyone who wore it would slowly be covered in grave dirt. Its deathly energy was very effective in concealing one’s life force, and in that sense it functioned the same as the Burial Shirt Of The Dead. However, its concealment effect was much stronger.

Of course, its side effects were that much worse. Its deathly energy wore away at the wearer much faster than the Burial Shirt Of The Dead. If the wearer didn’t possess the tool or resilience to resist its eroding effects, then they would be buried and turned into a grave.

Ye Qing had kept this Strange Artifact because he fancied its ability to conceal one’s life force. Now, it had finally come into use.

As expected, the silhouettes immediately lost interest in him after his life force was isolated. So long as he didn’t intentionally block their way like a nuisance, they wouldn’t pay any attention to him.

Delighted at the success, Ye Qing avoided the silhouettes and slowly made his way toward the first floor.

He was standing on top of the staircase leading to the first floor and about to take a step when suddenly, he recalled something. Then, he gingerly withdrew his right leg.

When he jumped up the second floor earlier, he clearly remembered the stairs being on his right, not his left. Something was off.

### *“Heavenly Demon Captures The Soul”*

Ye Qing tapped the space in front of him, and the staircase slowly faded away like a mirage. As expected, it was an illusion created by the fog. Had he taken that step, he would’ve fallen right off the floor... and into the gaping maw of a Stranger.

Yes, there was a Stranger lying in ambush on the first floor. Through the thick fog, Ye Qing saw that it had a humanoid body. However, it had four legs instead of two arms and two legs. It looked like a square-shaped, four-legged bench the way it was crouching on all fours with its belly facing upward.

The Stranger’s belly was split open from the belly button all the way to the neck. Inside that crack was rows and rows of sharp teeth. The lazy bastard was waiting for its prey to fall right into its stomach.

“Phew...”

Ye Qing broke out in cold sweat. The maw gave him a bad, bad feeling. If he fell into it, chances were he wasn’t going to come out again.

“No wonder Longing said that the illusions and hallucinations are the greatest danger of it all, not the Strangers.”

Ye Qing rubbed his nose and shelved the sliver of arrogance that had been affecting his judgment. He had been perceiving his surroundings with his demonic thought this whole time, but the fog still almost caught him off guard. He thought that his demonic thought would be able to suppress any and all illusions he might experience inside the fog, but clearly he was mistaken. The fog was even more anomalous and dangerous than he thought.

The problem was that not everything he saw with his eyes or felt with his demonic thought was necessarily true or false. The mixture between truth and falsehood, reality and illusion made him so much more susceptible to being tricked. One misstep, and he might never live to see tomorrow’s sun.

“Should have known better. I nearly misstepped both figuratively and literally,” Ye Qing chided himself softly.

Luckily for him, the Stranger on the first floor didn’t notice him for some reason. Ye Qing hid a sigh of relief before turning around and leaving toward the opposite direction.

... Or at least, he tried to. No matter how hard he looked, he was unable to find the staircase in his memories.

“Should I... jump?”

Earlier, he had jumped up the second floor using his movement art. So long as he chose a spot that wasn’t the bench Stranger to jump down, he should be fine.

“Alright!”

Ye Qing picked a spot with the least number of silhouettes and jumped over the handrail. But as soon as he plummeted toward the ground, the scenery before his eyes abruptly transformed into a bottomless abyss.

The wind howled beside his ears, and he felt chilled to the bone as weightlessness gripped him. Helplessness, panic and fear assaulted him all at once.

He knew this was yet an illusion, but the sensation was so real that it was impossible not to feel afraid.

One breath, two breaths, three breaths...

At first, Ye Qing thought the illusion would end very quickly. After all, there was only so much height between the first floor and the second floor. It would take him one or two breaths at most to reach the floor. But dozens of breaths quickly passed, and still he was plummeting toward the abyss. As if that wasn't enough, he was moving faster and panicking harder by the second.

*“Heavenly Demon Captures The Soul”*

Realizing that something was amiss, Ye Qing executed his martial art and shattered the abyss like glass. After the illusion faded, he realized that an unnaturally long, boneless arm was wrapped several times around his waist.

At the end of the arm was a milky, feminine palm, and at the center of the palm was an eye staring intently at him. The eyes were blinking and transmitting intermittent bursts of filthy light into his eyes non-stop.

On the other end of the arm was another arm. It looked like the Stranger was made of two conjoined arms. The other arm was wrapped around a pillar on the second floor and swinging him back and forth like a yoyo.

“What the hell is this?”

No wonder he couldn't reach the first floor no matter how long he waited. This piece of shit was screwing with him!

Luckily for him, his senses told him that the arm was pretty weak despite its bizarre ability. A burst of force was all he needed to break the arm wrapped around his waist into several pieces.

The eye at the center of the palm widened in abject terror. It tried to escape, but a pair of demonic lotuses appeared in Ye Qing's eyes. A moment later, the Stranger's eyes exploded into pieces as well.

The Stranger still wasn't dead, however—or maybe it was a combination of three different Strangers? In any case, the second arm wrapped around the pillar realized that it was in grave danger and slithered into the fog like a snake. It was gone in the blink of an eye.

This time, Ye Qing landed on the first floor without any issue. He looked back at the spot where the second arm had disappeared to and exhaled slowly.

He wasn't expecting to run into yet another Stranger soon. Just how many Strangers and anomalies were hiding inside this fog? He would have to be even more careful from now on.

He pushed his feelings to the back of his mind and began moving toward his destination as Longing had instructed him. The entrance to the lower decks was located at the stern, and this time, he executed “Heavenly Demon Captures The Soul” once every few steps. Despite this, it still took him a full incense stick to reach the door, a distance of two dozen steps at most.

This was because he kept deviating from his path even though he was moving in a straight line inside his mind. He had no choice but to waste a tremendous amount of time and expend a lot of spirit to adjust his direction again and again.

The fog was even thicker after he stepped out of the central hall. If before he could see three to six meters away from him, now he could see nothing but white, plus the dark silhouettes still walking here and there inside the fog.

He kept to the ship’s railing and carefully made his way toward the stern. If things were normal, he would’ve covered such a short distance in less than a second. But once again, it took him over half an hour to finally reach the entrance.

“This is troublesome.”

Ye Qing frowned for the umpteenth time when he arrived at the entrance. It was because the place was jam-packed with silhouettes.

While his Grave Dirt Shoes isolated his life force and prevented him from being detected, there were so many silhouettes blocking the entrance that it would be near impossible to slip in. What should he do?

Some quick thinking later, Ye Qing threw out a Shaping Talisman. The Shaping Talisman would transform into him and emulate his energies for a short time, so he could use it to lure the silhouettes away.

It worked. As soon as the fake Ye Qing raced down the deck toward the bow of the ship, the mindless swarm immediately gave chase. The massive crowd blocking the entrance was gone in the blink of an eye, allowing Ye Qing to dash out of his hiding spot, reach the entrance, and open the door.

## Chapter 420: Spidermen

As soon as Ye Qing opened the door leading down to the lower decks, he was blasted by a disgusting, vomit-inducing stench. Not only that, his exposed skin immediately turned red and cracked, and eyeballs grew within those cracks. When they moved, they leaked smelly yellow pus.

“What a crazy level of corruption.”

Ye Qing frowned as he channeled his vigor. There was a surge of vitality, and the nasty power attempting to take root inside his body was destroyed in an instant. The unnatural eyes popped like pus before the scarring and healing process returned his skin to normal.

After that, Ye Qing sealed his sense of smell and walked down the wet, rotten stairs.

*Cobwebs! So many cobwebs. Are there spiders in this place?* Ye Qing thought. The first thing he noticed upon reaching the first lower deck was that it was covered in cobwebs. The ship had three upper levels and three lower levels, so he needed to go down another two levels if he wished to reach the orlop deck.

Ye Qing narrowed his eyes a little and fired a wisp of force from his index finger, severing three spider threads. *It's no ordinary spider silk*, he immediately arrived at a conclusion. *It's tough and overflowing with corruption. I need to avoid it as much as possible.*

Ye Qing slowly stepped into a patch of shadow and waited for a bit, but nothing happened. Remaining patient, he summoned Red Sleeve into his hand.

A dreamy red flash cut through a massive amount of cobwebs and opened up just enough space for him to walk across the chamber unhindered. He still didn't move, however. He remained perfectly still in his hiding spot.

Rustle rustle...

A few breaths later, a bunch of rustling noises came from deeper within the chamber. Then, a dozen or so half-humanoid Strangers with a spider's legs and bodies crawled out of the wall, the ceiling and more.

The spidermen crawled up to the spot where the cobwebs were severed and made a series of strange hissing noises, but they weren't able to find the culprit who did it. A few seconds later, they spat spider silk from their mouths to reseal this section of the chamber before treading into the darkness once more.

I knew it.

After the spidermen left, Ye Qing finally stepped out of the shadows and smacked his lips.

The cobwebs couldn't have appeared out of nowhere, but he didn't think a normal spider could survive in this place. He was right.

It looks like these spidermen sense their prey through web-borne vibration just like a normal spider, but only if I do too much damage to their webs. Otherwise, I shouldn't draw their attention.

The spidermen hadn't appeared when he cut just three spider threads. They only appeared after he cut down a bunch of cobwebs. So in theory, he could advance forward without alarming the spidermen so long as he snapped only two or three strands at a time.

It would be slow going, but he would be safe. Although the spidermen were only Hatred-class Strangers, he had no way of knowing how many there were or if there was a stronger down the line. It was better to be safe than sorry.

And so Ye Qing slowly made his way down the stairs while cutting three spider threads with Red Sleeve at a time. He made sure to wait several breaths before cutting another three. After all, he was still going to draw the spidermen's attention if he cut down the cobwebs too quickly.

Just half a teatime later, Ye Qing found the wooden door leading to the second level. A smile crossed his lips. For once, things were going his way.

He should've known better. When he reached out to open the door, his body abruptly stiffened, his eyes lost their focus, and his face abruptly became contorted in pain.

Inside his headspace, countless invisible spider threads were wrapped tightly around his mind. They were attempting to drag his mind out of his headspace!

Every time the spider threads pulled, his headspace would shake and roar like an avalanche or a tsunami. His mind would groan, and his consciousness would flicker ominously.

What the fuck? How did the spider threads appear inside my head?!

Ye Qing's expression was ugly. He was being as careful as he could be, and still he failed to avoid whatever trap this was!

### *"Heavenly Demon Captures The Soul"*

While defending his mind with the demonic lotus, Ye Qing executed the "Heavenly Demon Captures The Soul" in an attempt to sever the spider threads. A ripple of demonic thought washed out, shaking the spider threads and causing them to give off a strange, vibrating noise. It caused his headspace to churn violently, and cracks to form across his mind.

"Hmm!" Ye Qing let out a muffled grunt as blood poured out of his orifices. The spider threads were still intact though. For the first time, "Heavenly Demon Captures The Soul" had failed him.

"So, you're tougher than you look, huh? What about this?!"

Cold ruthlessness flickered in Ye Qing's eyes as he honed his spirit into a blade, and his consciousness into the edge. Then, he slashed diagonally at the spider threads.

### *"Hellfire Red Lotus Saber Art"*

A long saber immediately manifested inside his headspace and slashed upward like it split open the heavens, severing the spider threads without a sound. At the same time, red lotuses rained from above and burned the filthy energy infesting his headspace into ash.

The second the spider threads were destroyed, Ye Qing opened his eyes just in time to see an ugly face. Its face was human, but it had eight eyes like that of a spider's. The eyes were also blinking rapidly and constantly spreading some sort of invisible spider threads to the surroundings.

Not only that, the face was opening its mouth and plunging what looked like a mosquito's proboscis into his neck. Then, it injected filthy liquid directly into his body, causing countless pustules to grow all over his body. When the pustules popped, spider eyeballs grew out of them.

Throughout the process, Ye Qing couldn't feel the slightest pain. He must be under some sort of numbing spell, or the disgusting liquid it was pumping into his body contained some sort of numbing agent.

Knowing that his life was in grave danger, Ye Qing couldn't care less about keeping things quiet anymore. He focused his qi, essence and spirit into one point and punched the ugly motherfucker in the face with all his might.

### *"Break Through"*

A lone cavalry could cut through an army of thousands. The full-powered punch shattered the face into pieces, and the giant body behind the face staggered backward and scattered the thick fog behind it.

It was only now Ye Qing noticed that his attacker was a gigantic spider. It was so big that it was nearly as tall as the chamber itself.

Ye Qing's senses returned to him after he shattered the face. He immediately sensed that the whole chamber was jam-packed with invisible threads.

"I see!" Ye Qing exclaimed in realization. The visible threads were just a distraction. The real threat was the invisible threads that could hurt his mind directly!

"Uwargh!"

Frustrated at being thwarted, the gigantic spiderman let out a strange shriek. As it turned out, the spiderman had more than one head, and three more heads spun around to shriek at Ye Qing as well. At the same time, a dozen or so smaller spidermen crawled out of the shadows and pounced toward him.

Ye Qing turned his wrist and summoned Red Sleeve. As he swung the weapon, a crimson light wobbled in the air like thousands and thousands of red leaves riding the spring wind, charming and beautiful. It was quickly joined by a fine drizzle and a red beauty dancing at the center of it all. It painted a gorgeous, soul-stealing image that the weak would only live to see once.

The spring wind was a saber. The fine rain were an innumerable number of saber. For a time, sabers were everywhere.

The smaller spidermen split into countless cubes of rotten, smelly flesh and puss long before they got close. The massive one though, it charged right through the spring wind and fine rain of sabers like they were nothing and brought down a pillar-sized leg on top of Ye Qing.

Ye Qing rooted himself on the floor and swung Red Sleeve upward. The scattered storm of saber forces immediately rolled back to Red Sleeve to form a massive energy saber. It met the falling foot head on.

BOOM!

There was a loud, echoing boom as the energy saber dispersed into nothing. Two joints in the spider's legs snapped like twigs, but there was so much weight behind the attack that Ye Qing's bones popped and cracked ominously, and his whole body felt numb. He also lost consciousness for an instant.

That instant was all the opening the spiderman needed to swing one of its legs and sent Ye Qing flying like a rag doll. He slammed into the wall so hard that it dented a little.

"Cough! Cough!"

Blood flowed freely down Ye Qing's lips as he talked. The blow was so powerful that even his internal organs were hurting a little. There was no time to care for his injuries though. He could see an inescapable web of invisible spider silk flying all over his vision.

The massive spiderman wasn't just strong, its legs were covered in those anomalous spider threads as well. That one blow hadn't just thrown his energies into disorder, it also allowed more spider threads to invade his headspace and entangle his mind, again. Ye Qing had no choice but to execute the "Hellfire Red Lotus Saber Art" once more to sever them.

As soon as he took care of the spider threads inside his mind, Ye Qing rolled to the side just in time to avoid a spider leg from flattening him like a pancake.

Bang bang bang!

Several more spider legs descended in an attempt to crush Ye Qing, but this time he was able to dodge them all with ease. “Illusionist’s Grace” was at its best when its practitioner employed it to avoid enemy attacks by a hair’s breadth, not to mention that Ye Qing had mastered the movement art a long time ago. While there wasn’t much room for maneuver inside the chamber, it was still quite easy for him to dodge the attacks, so much so that he had the time to open Nine Heavens and consume a drop of Nature’s Water to restore his tired spirit and injured mind.

He could have consumed Longing’s Renewal, but he was afraid that it was poisoned or something. What if she implanted a curse in the medicine so that she could use it to control him when all this was done? It was better to be safe than sorry, not to mention that Nature’s Water was more potent than Renewal.

Seven spider legs rained down on Ye Qing like a downpour. There were many smaller spiders who couldn’t get out of the way in time and were flattened like a pancake. However, the human it was targeting remained perfectly unharmed. The heads on the spiderman’s body were so angry at their inability to hit Ye Qing that they screeched again and again.

It looked like Ye Qing was dodging aimlessly, but a closer look would reveal that he was slowly closing the distance between himself and the Stranger.

When he was several inches away from the spiderman’s body, Ye Qing abruptly split into nine silhouettes and spread out. Each silhouette fired a crimson slash at its heads.

Sensing the danger, the heads spat out a bunch of spider webs at the Ye Qings. Most of them were crushed, but none of them were the real thing.

The next moment, the spiderman’s screech came to an abrupt stop. Then, its four heads rolled off its shoulders and hit the floor lifelessly. Right after that, his back facing toward the spiderman, the real Ye Qing faded into existence and slowly put away Red Sleeve.

Thump!

The spiderman’s headless body shook twice before it hit the floor with a loud thump. It would never move again. A small smirk crossed Ye Qing’s lips as he slowly turned around to face the lifeless spiderman.

The gigantic spiderman was probably a Phenomenon-class Stranger. Not only did it possess immense strength, its spider threads were near impossible to defend against even when he knew it was coming.

However, he came to realize that the spiderman’s heads were its weakness while he was killing the small fries. That was why he utilized the “Illusionist’s Grace” to close the distance before ending the fight in one strike.

It sounded simple, but of course it was so, so much more difficult to pull off in reality.

The spiderman’s four heads were covered in invisible spider threads just like its legs. Had he been careless, it would have been him lying lifelessly on the floor. That was why he had severed the invisible threads with the “Hellfire Red Lotus Saber Art” first before cutting off its heads with Red Sleeve.

After ending the giant spiderman's life, Ye Qing took a moment to cleanse the filthy energy inside his body and recover. It was only after he returned to peak form that he opened the wooden door and stepped down into the second level.