

Stranger 691

Chapter 691: Unusual Paddy Field

Ye Qing took a moment to consider his next step. Then, he chose a random direction, carefully pushed the wheats aside, and walked along the clearing, all the while making sure that he did not accidentally trample the plants.

Although he hadn't sensed any danger or anomalies from the paddy field, that was no reason for him to lower his guard and act as he pleased. He did not try to harvest or trample the wheat either.

No amount of caution was too much in a place like this.

“Scarecrows...”

A short walk later, Ye Qing noted that there were a lot of scarecrows in the paddy field; one per square to be exact.

Just like the paddy field, the scarecrows felt ordinary to his senses. And yet, his instincts were telling him that there was something strange about them. Exactly what it was, he couldn't identify it as of now.

“Hahaha, I finally—what the... is this a spirit field? Look at all these spirit wheats!”

It was at this moment three presences suddenly appeared in the paddy field. Clearly, they had been teleported inside just like him.

They were two men and one woman. The older man looked to be in his sixties and carried a luopan and a ruler around his waist. His wizened, weather-beaten face and dirty rags gave him a lethargic appearance.

The younger man looked to be in his thirties. He had a slender body, a thief's eyebrows and a mouse's eyes. Out of all his features, his arms were the most eye-catching of them all. They were so long that they stretched past his knees, and he had six fingers on each hand. Each finger was as clean as jade and as slender as leek. For whatever reason, his fingers looked prettier and nimbler than even the fingers of a woman in her prime.

He was also the one who spoke up just now.

The woman wore a red scarf and a red martial outfit. Her skin was darker and more rugged than normal, but that gave her a valiant and formidable-looking appearance that was unique to the women of the north.

“This place is overflowing with spiritual qi, but I also sense hidden danger and inauspiciousness. I know what you're thinking, Six Fingers, but stay cautious and keep your hands to yourself,” the old man noticed the restless look on the middle-aged man's face and warned.

“Relax. I understand.”

The middle-aged man, Six Fingers answered before eyeing the woman. However, at least one of his eyes was constantly eyeing the spirit wheats with greed.

The old man turned to the woman next and saluted her. “I am Pedant Earth, and this is Six Fingers. May we know your name, miss?”

“Pedant Earth and Six Fingers! Your fame spreads far and wide.”

The woman returned the salute and answered, “I am Shangguan Hongjin. Well met, you two.”

Pedant Earth and Six Fingers were a pair of famous tomb raiders in Mo Bei. The name of their occupation sounded pretty cool, but they weren’t much different from a Mountain Bearing Raider or a grave robber. They all profiteered from a dead man’s treasures.

Pedant Earth was an expert in fengshui, weather divination and astrology. His role was to check the fengshui of a place, foretell the weather and divine meaning from the stars. Six Fingers was born with twelve very nimble fingers, and he was a master in lockpicking and neutralizing traps. He also acted as the scout of their little group.

In ancient times, Mo Bei used to be a country. That was why there were a lot of ancient cities and massive tombs in the region. The duo had plundered many such tombs until they naturally became famous for their exploits.

It should not need to be said, but the dangers lurking in these ancient cities and tombs were no joke. The fact that they managed to profit from these ventures long enough to make a name for themselves proved that they were skilled warriors.

Grave robbing was generally believed to be an immoral way of living, but the duo usually robbed ownerless cities and tombs only. That was why their reputation was better than most of their peers—not that a pair of grave robbers could ever hope to have a good reputation, of course.

“Oh! You’re Shangguan Hongjin, leader of the Flying Red Scarf? Do forgive my impertinence!” Pedant Earth exclaimed in surprise. Even Six Fingers temporarily looked away from the spirit wheats and gave the woman his full attention.

The Flying Red Scarf was a famous Lulin[1] force that operated in the borders of Yan. They were famous for two reasons. One, the Flying Red Scarf was a band of heroic outlaws who performed many good deeds such as robbing the rich to support the poor, eliminating evil people or Strangers and more. They enjoyed an extremely good reputation because of this. Second, they had a female leader who was heroic, generous, loyal, principled, and strong.

Shangguan Hongjin was a very famous person, but this was the first time they saw her in person.

“All meetings are destiny, and this is a dangerous place. If you don’t mind, would you like to join us for this venture? There is strength in numbers, no?” Pedant Earth suggested.

Although Shangguan Hongjin was a Half-Step Grandmaster just like them, Pedant Earth still desired her cooperation. For one, there was strength in numbers. Second, he and Six Fingers were not the combative type of half-step Grandmasters. In a head-on clash, they might not be able to defeat Shangguan Hongjin even if they fought her two on one. That was why he wanted to recruit her. Her strength would definitely prove valuable in their survival.

“Very well.” Shangguan Hongjin agreed after a moment’s thought. “I look forward to our partnership.”

The reason Shangguan Hongjin agreed to Pedant Earth’s offer was equally simple. One, the two men enjoyed a fair reputation despite digging graves for a living. And two, she was confident she would be able to handle anything they might throw at her should they betray her.

“So do I, Miss Shangguan.” Pedant Earth smiled.

“What do we do now, Pedant Earth?” Six Fingers asked. “Do we start walking, or?”

“There’s no hurry. Allow me to observe our surroundings first,” Pedant Earth said while grabbing a handful of dark, yin-rich soil from his bag. Then, he put it into his mouth and chewed slowly.

A short while later, Pedant Earth abruptly spat out the earth he ate. The bits and pieces of earth immediately transformed into dozens of infant-sized birds and scattered in every direction.

A dozen or so breaths later, Pedant Earth slowly opened his eyes.

“So? Did you find anything?” Six Fingers asked.

“No. I found nothing at all.” Pedant Earth shook his head seriously. “Something feels wrong about this place though.”

“I don’t understand. It’s a good thing that you didn’t find anything, isn’t it?” Six Fingers asked.

“It is precisely because I didn’t find anything that I’m wary,” Pedant Earth replied with a frown. “In any case, I don’t see a reason to remain at this paddy field, so I suggest that we leave immediately. What do you think, Miss Shangguan?”

“I agree that this place feels off, so yes, let us be gone.” Shangguan Hongjin offered, “I’ll lead the way.”

“Very well. Be careful, Miss Shangguan,” Pedant Earth said.

With that, Shangguan Hongjin took the lead, and Pedant Earth and Six Fingers fell behind her. They formed a triangle as they made their way forward.

At first, the trio were careful to avoid damaging or trampling over the spirit wheat. However, nothing happened as they slowly navigated through the paddy field, so they slowly but surely relaxed their guard.

Some time later, Pedant Earth suddenly looked at Six Fingers and asked, “What’s wrong, Six Fingers?”

“Nothing?” Six Fingers shook his head while scratching his elbow.

“Really? You’ve been scratching yourself non-stop since a while ago. Are you sure you’re alright?” Pedant Earth raised a dubious eyebrow.

“Yeah, I’m not sure why, but I’ve been feeling itchy here and there. It’s fine though!” Six Fingers waved him off and said, “Let us be off.”

Since Six Fingers insisted that he was fine, Pedant Earth let it go, and the trio resumed their journey.

Unfortunately, it wasn’t long before Pedant Earth stopped in his tracks again. It was because Six Fingers’ scratching had not stopped for even a moment since their last talk. If anything, his movements were growing more and more aggressive.

“Six Fingers, what the hell is going on?” Pedant Earth walked up to Six Fingers with a deep frown on his face.

“I... I don’t know why, but I’m itching all over! It’s really bad!” Six Fingers replied while still scratching himself. It eventually got to the point where he was drawing blood with each scratch.

“Stop moving!” Suddenly, Pedant Earth grabbed Six Fingers’ arm and ordered seriously.

“What... what’s wrong?” Six Fingers asked and stopped moving, though he squirmed here and there due to how itchy he was. The sensation was horribly uncomfortable.

“Your wounds... they’re...” Pedant Earth muttered while staring at the scratch marks covering Six Fingers’ arms and neck. His eyes widened like he just saw something horrifying.

Beside them, Shangguan Hongjin was wearing a serious look as well.

Chapter 692: Scarecrows

“What... What’s wrong?”

Six Fingers uttered through gritted teeth, his face contorting because he was beginning to itch inside his mouth and throat as well. “Just tell me already!”

“I think... I see wheat inside your wounds!” Pedant Earth said seriously.

“Wheat? What wheat?” Six Fingers forcibly ignored his itch for the moment and looked at one of the bloody scratch marks on his elbow. To his shock and horror, he saw wheats peeking out of the wound instead of flesh and blood.

The blood slowly drained away from Six Fingers’ face. He was so busy scratching his itch just now that he didn’t notice. Gritting his teeth, he ripped off an entire chunk of flesh from his right arm.

The wound did not bleed profusely as he imagined it would. It was because his blood had been replaced by wheat before he knew it.

“How... How could this be?”

Six Fingers' eyes widened as he cut another wound on his left arm. Again, there was only wheat.

“How could this be?!”

Six Fingers ripped off his own shirt and looked down on himself. There was no mistake. Every wound he had left on his own body was slowly but surely filling up with wheat.

Yes, the wheat was growing inside his body by the second. As if alive, they were slowly but surely piercing through his skin and taking over his flesh and blood.

This was why he was itchy all over. The wheat was slowly taking over his flesh and scratching the insides of his body.

“Am I... Am I turning into a scarecrow?”

When Six Fingers looked into himself, he discovered in greater horror that it wasn't just his outer flesh that had transformed into wheat. His internal organs, meridians and bodily points had transformed into wheat before he knew it as well.

“Why is this happening?!”

Panicking, Six Fingers hurriedly channeled his true qi to expel the anomaly only to realize that he couldn't. After all, his insides had already been replaced with wheat. Forget channeling qi, it was a miracle that he was still alive.

Not giving up yet, Six Fingers produced all sorts of talismans and Strange Artifacts from his Nature's Shell and tried to cure his condition with them. Unfortunately, nothing was working.

Pedant Earth hadn't just been standing there and watching his companion transforming into a scarecrow, of course. He too was pulling all sorts of healing, blessing, exorcism, or protection pills, talismans and Strange Artifacts in hopes of treating Six Fingers, but once again, nothing was working.

Six Fingers and Pedant Earth might be lacking in the combat department, but they had decades of experience in dealing with Strangers, Anomalies, and unusual occurrences because of their occupation. Normally, treating an anomalous condition like this would fall right within their area of expertise. It was inevitable when their job entailed exploring and plundering all sorts of ancient cities and tombs, all crawling with things beyond one's imagination. Otherwise, they would be dead a long, long time ago.

However, none of their methods were working right now. Not a single one.

“Save me, Pedant Earth! Save me!”

At first, Six Fingers was able to keep calm and do his best to treat his condition. But when he tried everything and discovered that he couldn't even slow down the spread of the wheat, much less treat them, he finally lost his shit. He tried to reach out to Pedant Earth in his despair and panic but realized abruptly that his fingers—the fingers that were his pride and identity—had already turned into wheat. They were stiffer than they had ever been in his life.

In fact, his whole body was stiffer than they had ever been.

“I... I...”

Pedant Earth subconsciously backed away from Six Fingers. His face looked as white as a sheet.

It wasn't that he didn't want to save Six Fingers. He had already tried everything, but nothing was working. He hadn't seen any Stranger or felt any unusual presence either. Even with his vast wealth of knowledge and experience, he had no idea how or what he could do to save Six Fingers.

“Miss Shangguan...”

Pedant Earth looked to Shangguan Hongjin for health, but the woman cut him off before he could continue, “I'm sorry, but I don't know anything that might save him either. In my opinion, the one and only thing you can do for your friend right now is to kill him and end his misery.”

“Miss...”

Pedant Earth thought that killing Six Fingers would be missing the point, but before he could say anything, Shangguan Hongjin added, “Never mind. It's already too late.”

Pedant Earth turned to look at Six Fingers and saw wheat growing out of his neck, face, and skull.

“Ugh... save... me...”

At this point, Six Fingers could barely maintain his consciousness. The light in his eyes was fading, and his voice had become much quieter and raspy than before. Even as he was speaking, wheat was growing out of his mouth, nose, ears, and even eyeballs. It was horrifying to put it mildly.

A hint of pain and sorrow flickered in Pedant Earth's eyes. Then, he produced a talisman and launched it at Six Fingers. As soon as the talisman made contact with the man's body, it burst into flames and engulfed him in ferocious crimson flames that purified all evil.

He had worked together with Six Fingers for many years. While he could not say that he would die for the man, they were close enough that it pained him to have to kill him. However, it was worse to have to witness Six Fingers succumbing into pain and despair as he slowly but surely transformed into a scarecrow. As Shangguan Hongjin said, the only thing he could do to help his longtime companion now was to end his misery as soon as possible. That was why he ultimately steeled himself to do the worst.

On another note, he also suspected that Six Fingers' transformation was caused by some sort of Stranger. He might not be able to locate it, but assuming that it was possessing Six Fingers right now, he could certainly try to expose it or better, burn it to death.

The talisman he used to burn Six Fingers was no ordinary attack talisman. Created from a blend of Nine Yang Cinnabar, nine-years-old cock blood, nine-years-old virgin boy piss, Nine Fire Sandpaper and other objects of supreme yang, the Nine Yang Talisman was one of the strongest talismans he could afford to purify evil and repel devilry.

Unfortunately, almost as soon as the flames had engulfed Six Fingers, it abruptly went out as if it was snuffed out by some sort of power. As if that wasn't enough, Pedant Earth and Shangguan Hongjin discovered in shock that Six Fingers wasn't burned in the slightest.

Logically speaking, wheat was extremely flammable and would catch on fire with the slightest spark, much less the Nine Yang Talisman, which was hot enough to melt even metal and stone like snow. In reality, the Nine Yang Talisman had failed to damage the wheat even a little. It was unusual to say the least.

A few breaths after the flame went out, Six Fingers fully transformed into a scarecrow. He had no heartbeat, no breathing, and no life force. If they hadn't witnessed his transformation with their own eyes, they would have believed that he was a scarecrow from the beginning.

"Don't you think that this scarecrow looks a little familiar?" Shangguan Hongjin said suddenly.

"What?" Pedant Earth jolted out of his shock and sorrow and asked instinctively.

Instead of clarifying her meaning, Shangguan Hongjin muttered to herself, "Scarecrow? Yes, a scarecrow."

Pedant Earth frowned in confusion. Thankfully, Shangguan Hongjin did not keep him in suspense any longer and explained, "Do you remember the scarecrows we saw earlier? Don't you think they look just like Six Fingers?"

"Scarecrow?"

Pedant Earth recalled the scarecrows they saw on the way as his expression slowly turned ugly. "Could it be..."

Pedant Earth didn't finish his sentence, but Shangguan Hongjin could guess what he was trying to say. After all, she was thinking the exact same thing.

Could it be that the scarecrows they saw earlier used to be human like Six Fingers?

Was every scarecrow on this paddy field formerly a human?

Both warriors gradually turned pale when they possibility occurred to them.

Chapter 693: Ye Qing's Plan

Assuming that their fears were reality, assuming that every scarecrow was formerly a human, then something terrible must be lurking in this paddy field.

"Let's leave immediately," Shangguan Hongjin declared.

"Very well."

Pedant Earth shot Six Fingers a glance, sighed, and got ready to leave.

This was no time to be hesitant. The sooner they left this dangerous place, the better.

However, a voice entered their ears before they could take a single step. "You better not step on the wheat and damage them."

"Who are you?!"

Pedant Earth was already like a startled bird ready to take flight at the slightest noise due to the horror that overtook his companion. As soon as he heard the unfamiliar voice, he shivered and subconsciously tried to back away from the source.

The next moment, he felt a hand grabbing his shoulder and keeping him in place.

“Who are you?”

Shangguan Hongjin asked as she looked behind Pedant Earth. A young man had appeared out of seemingly nowhere and grabbed the old man before she could do anything. Her expression hardening into steel, she draped her hand loosely over the hilt of her sabers and gathered her energies. If the young man tried anything, then she would act immediately.

“Who... who are you, scion?”

Cold sweat poured down Pedant Earth’s forehead as he kept as still as possible, not daring to draw even a big breath. He could feel the strength coming from the hand grabbing his shoulder. Like a mountain, it pinned him in place and even choked out his spirit and energies.

He might not be a good direct combatant, but that didn’t mean he was weak in the slightest. In fact, he possessed an outstanding spirit and energy sense thanks to his unique area of expertise. In fact, he was better than many Grandmasters in terms of danger sense.

However, he hadn’t detected any unusual change in the air from the start until the end. He never noticed when or how the young man had appeared behind his back until it was too late. This could not have been possible unless his opponent far outclassed him.

That was why he didn’t dare to move a muscle, much less plot a retaliation.

“Calm down, you two. I bear no ill will toward you.” A clear chuckle rang behind Pedant Earth. “Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Joyless Ye.”

The young man was, of course, Ye Qing. He meant to assuage the duo with his words, but they only grew more wary and nervous.

“Relax. If I wanted to kill you both, I would’ve done so already. There is no need for me to wait, is there?”

Ye Qing loosened his grip on Pedant Earth’s shoulder. As soon as he regained control of his body, the old man immediately tried to dodge sideways. However, he was just starting to channel his energy when a weight settled down on his shoulder and crushed his resistance once more.

Seeing this, Shangguan Hongjin pulled her sabers half an inch out of their hilt; the cold gleam of the blades a clear warning of her intent.

“Calm down. I was just saving his life.”

Ye Qing explained to Shangguan Hongjin before looking down on Pedant Earth once more. “I’m going to let you go, but for heavens’ sake, steer clear from the wheat. Otherwise, not even an almighty god would be able to save your life, understand?”

Ye Qing let go of Pedant Earth after he gave an affirmative response, and this time, the old man did not try to dash off like a rabbit. Instead, he carefully set his foot on an empty clearing and strode away.

When Pedant Earth confirmed that Ye Qing did not try to restrain him a third time, he finally let out a sigh of relief and believed Ye Qing's claim that he did not mean any ill will.

Shangguan Hongjin too sheathed her sabers—though the wariness in her eyes remained strong—and asked, “Why did you tell us to steer clear of the wheat, warrior?”

Ye Qing answered, “That is because I believe that anyone who tramples or damages the wheat would transform into a scarecrow.”

“What?” Pedant Earth exclaimed in shock, “Are you saying that Six Fingers transformed into a scarecrow because he damaged these wheat?”

“Most likely!” Ye Qing nodded affirmatively.

“And what makes you say that?” Shangguan Hongjin asked.

“Because both of you are fine, while your friend is not.”

Ye Qing explained, “Earlier, I saw him trampling over the wheat and stealing some of them while you weren't looking.”

“Let me get this straight: You're saying that Six Fingers transformed into a scarecrow because he trampled over the wheat and stole them?”

Pedant Earth believed Ye Qing's words instantly. “Damn it all! I told him to be careful and keep his hands to himself! Just why won't he listen to me?!”

“The fool! The fool!”

He had worked together with Six Fingers for many years, so he was well aware of the man's vices. Six Fingers was a selfish, greedy man who, during their expeditions together, had accidentally triggered some traps or alerted some enemies because he just couldn't control himself. However, they had always been able to neutralize or survive the dangers they encountered.

Maybe it was because surviving those close encounters gave Six Fingers a false sense of confidence, or maybe he was just a selfish, greedy bastard. Pedant Earth thought for sure that Six Fingers would be able to control himself this time—this place was unlike any city or tomb they had ever explored after all—but in the end, he succumbed to his vices and paid the ultimate price.

Six Fingers had no one but himself to blame.

Pedant Earth was both angry at Six Fingers' foolishness and relieved that he wasn't as selfish, greedy, and careless as he was. If he had succumbed to his greed, or if he was careless enough to trample over the wheat, then he would be dead just like Six Fingers.

“I see. You've been following us from the beginning.”

Shangguan Hongjin's attention wasn't on Six Fingers' fate, however. A hint of scorn entered her eyes as she spoke, “You were using us to scout out the dangers of this place, weren't you?”

Ye Qing replied without batting an eyelid, “I don't understand what you're trying to say, miss.”

Ye Qing wasn't going to admit that that was exactly what he did, of course. This place was obviously dangerous, and he had no intentions of risking his own hide if he could help it. Since the heavens were kind enough to give him three foddors, why wouldn't he use them to sweep the landmines so to speak? That was how he discovered Six Fingers' crime and punishment and the true danger of this paddy field, wasn't it?

Of course, he was well aware that his action wasn't very moral, which was why he appeared to warn Shangguan Hongjin and Pedant Earth. Pragmatically speaking, it also made no sense to waste their lives on a danger he already knew about. This was just the starting line, and he was sure that their strength—or, if the situation called for it, their lives—could prove useful further down the line.

Finally, he was worried that allowing these two to trample over the wheat wantonly might awaken a worse danger. It was one thing if he wasn't dragged into their mess, but if he was, then he would only have himself to blame, wouldn't it?

That was why he showed himself and lent them a hand. Not that he was going to admit that he was using them, of course.

“Regardless of your intentions, it is the truth that you saved our lives.”

Shangguan Hongjin gave Ye Qing a nod and declared candidly, “I, Shangguan Hongjin, am not one to mix up resentment and kindness. You saved my life, so I will repay the favor one day.”

Ye Qing could not help but shoot her a look of surprise. He could feel that she was telling the truth. She wasn't lying to his face or putting on a show for the sake of it.

“Yes, yes. Thank for saving our lives, warrior.”

Pedant Earth also thanked him, though it was clear that his thanks was much less sincere than Shangguan Hongjin's.

Ye Qing saluted them. “You're welcome, Miss Shangguan, senior, but I just happened to be at the right place at the right time. You don't need to take it to heart.”

Pedant Earth hurriedly corrected him, “Heavens above, please do *not* call me senior. My name is Pedant Earth. Just address me by my name.”

“Will you two stop arguing over pointless stuff already? We're still in danger here. You can talk all you want after we leave this place behind,” Shangguan Hongjin said impatiently when she noticed that the duo's conversation was showing no signs of ending.

“Miss Shangguan is right. Let us begone before anything else happens.”

Ye Qing nodded. “Allow me to take the front!”

“No need. I'll take the lead, the two of you can cover my back.” Shangguan Hongjin waved him off while walking to the front.

Ye Qing raised his eyebrows again. This woman really was as brave and forthright as most men, if not better.

Chapter 694: Abandoned Village, Dead Bones

Thanks to Six Fingers' deadly demonstration, they were able to figure out the true danger that lurked within the paddy field. Even so, the trio did not dare to relax in the slightest as they slowly and carefully made their way toward the outskirts, all the while avoiding the scarecrows just in case they decided to come to life or something.

Thankfully, nothing bad happened. An hour later, the trio finally left the paddy field and arrived at a small path.

Upon arriving at the exit, the trio turned around and stared at the paddy field surrounding the small path on both sides for a moment. The paddy field stretched from end to end, the wheat shone like gleaming gold, and the scarecrows stood out like stars in the night sky. The scenery only looked even more gorgeous when a wind blew across the paddy field and caused the wheat to ripple like a golden sea.

This would've been a scenery to remember if they hadn't witnessed Six Fingers' transformation into a scarecrow.

Well, that wasn't quite accurate. It was a scenery they would remember until they reached the end of their lifespan—just one that struck fear into their very heart and soul.

A short while later, Shangguan Hongjin finally looked away and gazed into the distance. "There's a village up ahead. Do you guys want to check it out?"

"Why not? Lead the way."

Ye Qing had spotted it as well. The village looked blurry from where they were because it was covered by a layer of mist.

The small path led straight to the village. With their speed, it took them almost no time to reach it.

The village was located before a cluster of small, green hills and surrounded by a river. It looked beautiful, peaceful, and tranquil. Unfortunately, it was also abandoned as evident from the dilapidated houses and overgrown weed surrounding the place.

"This village is surrounded by waters that looked like a blue dragon conferring a blessing upon it, and its rear is covered by a cluster of hills like a man sleeping on a bed of gold and jade. Even the air flows smoothly and vigorously. This is the type of place you want to build a home at!"

Pedant Earth could not help but praise when he saw the village, "The villagers must have had strong bodies and excellent relationships with their friends, family, and neighbors. They must have been blessed with good luck and a longer-than-average lifespan as well. Truly, this is a most auspicious place!"

"Perhaps, but it's still abandoned in the end," Shangguan Hongjin remarked before stepping toward the village.

Pedant Earth did not take her deflating comment to heart. He was too caught up in excitement and interest to be offended right now.

The village's state of disrepair grew even more obvious after they passed through the gates. Everywhere they looked, there was only rubble, weed, and more rubble.

The village was pretty huge and laid out in an organized manner. Back in its prime, it must have been flourishing and full of people. The paddy field they just left must have belonged to the villagers as well. Considering the excellent fengshui of this village and the kind of food they ate, it was only natural that the villagers enjoyed a long, happy, and peaceful life.

Unfortunately, that was all in the past. Now, not a single soul lives in this place anymore.

“This village really had—*has*—excellent fengshui. What a shame! What a shame!”

Pedant Earth could not stop shaking his head. “Does anyone care to venture a guess why the village was abandoned? And where did you think the villagers disappeared to?”

“They’re probably dead,” Ye Qing answered after a moment of silence.

“Dead? And how would you know?” Pedant Earth looked surprised.

Ye Qing walked up to a pile of rubble and stomped the ground lightly. The rubble collapsed, and old, yellowish bones were exposed under the sunlight.

“This is the proof.”

“So, you’re saying that these bones belong to the villagers?” Shangguan Hongjin asked.

“Yes, but not all of them.” Ye Qing said slowly as he examined the pile of dead bones. “Some of these bones might belong to outsiders.”

“If you look at some of the collapsed houses, you might notice that they haven’t collapsed naturally. It looked like they were destroyed in a fight. See this? That’s obviously a blade mark.”

“Of course, there is the possibility that a civil war had broken out, and the villagers had killed one another. I don’t think it’s very likely though.”

Shangguan Hongjin nodded. “I agree. Some of these bones have spiritual qi in them. It’s clear that they were powerful warriors when they were still alive.”

Suddenly, Pedant Earth spotted a golden skull amidst the ruins and exclaimed in surprise, “Wait a second... this is a Buddhist’s Golden Lapis Lazuli Bone!”

The skull was as resplendent as gold and crystal clear like lapis lazuli. Not even the dirty soil it was buried in could cover up its splendor.

When a Buddhist monk had cultivated their body to a certain extent and forged a golden body of Buddha, their bones would transform into the so-called Golden Lapis Lazuli Bone. Without exception, any Buddhist monk who successfully forged a golden body and transformed their bones into lapis lazuli was an enlightened monk.

Therefore, the owner of this Golden Lapis Lazuli Bone must have been quite powerful when he was still alive.

“Is that... a Dustless Jade Bone?!”

It was at this moment Pedant Earth dug out another bone. It was a hand bone, and it was smooth, flawless, and cold like actual jade.

When a Taoist warrior had reached a certain level, their body would become free of all impurities, and their bones would take on a jade-like quality. That was what they called the Dustless Hade Bone. It was pure and naturally resistant toward most Stranger powers.

“First, an enlightened Buddhist’s bone, now an enlightened Taoist’s bone...?” Ye Qing rubbed his nose thoughtfully.

Boom!

Suddenly, a loud boom interrupted his train of thoughts. When he looked, he saw Shangguan Hongjing blowing a pile of rubble and the bones within it away with a palm strike. When the dust settled, he saw a broken sword.

The broken sword was covered in blood and emanating a terrifying killing intent. As soon as it appeared, its killing intent crushed the dead bones still flying through the air into fine powder.

Shangguan Hongjin extended an arm, and the broken sword flew into her hand. As soon as she grasped its hilt, the sword began ringing and shaking violently as if it was trying to struggle free, the sword qi it unleashed drawing deep marks on the ground.

Unfortunately, it was unable to break out of Shangguan Hongjin’s grasp no matter what it tried. Eventually, it settled down.

“You’ve found quite the treasure, Miss Shangguan. Its sentience is still present, and it is overflowing with sword qi.”

Pedant Earth moved closer to Shangguan Hongjin with bright, curious eyes. “Hmm, it looks like this sword was forged using Taibai Gengjin Metal. It’s definitely a Phenomenon-class Strange Artifact—an outstanding one no less—before it broke.”

“A shame. If it wasn’t broken, it could have been upgraded into a Disaster-class Strange Artifact.”

“A shame. A shame.”

Pedant Earth was proving that he was an expert tomb raider without even knowing it. He had more or less identified the material and the class of the broken sword in one glance.

“This is mine.”

Shangguan Hongjin ignored the covetous look in Pedant Earth’s eyes and threw the broken sword into her Nature’s Shell.

“Please don’t misunderstand, Miss Shangguan. I’m just—” Pedant Earth was going to explain himself when he was cut off by a sudden burst of energy. They

both turned to look and saw Ye Qing stepping out of a half-collapsed building while carrying an oil lamp with one hand.

The oil lamp was black and rugged in appearance as if it was forged from stone. It was covered in oil stains and, at first glance, looked no different from an ordinary oil lamp.

Shangguan Hongjin and Pedant Earth could sense a strange, indescribable energy from it though. It was clear that it was anything but ordinary.

“It looks like a lot of treasures are buried in this village,” Ye Qing commented while staring at his new spoil.

Pedant Earth’s eyes lit up at the remark. Without hesitation, he dashed toward the nearest house.

Shangguan Hongjin also gave Ye Qing a nod before walking off in a different direction. She wasn’t stupid after all.

Ye Qing did not try to stop them. The entire reason they entered this place was to seek fortune after all, not to mention that they were strangers who got together purely for the sake of survival. He neither had the right nor the reason to stop them from seeking out their own fortune.

A few breaths later, Pedant Earth emerged from the house with a broken palm-leaf fan in his hand. Judging from the happy look on his face, it was clear that the fan was extraordinary despite its broken state. Ye Qing could tell that the fan had mysterious runes engraved on its surface, and it was constantly surrounded by a gust of yin wind. Its anomalous aura made it clear that it was some sort of Strange Artifact.

Having scored his first Strange Artifact, Pedant Earth did not hesitate to rush off toward another house. Meanwhile, Shangguan Hongjin walked out of her building with an impressive-looking stone mill in her hand.

Instead of scouring the place for treasure like Pedant Earth and Shangguan Hongjin, Ye Qing slowly made his way deeper into the village. He was also deep in thought.

So far, all the loot they obtained—barring the bones, of course—all looked like ordinary household items. They most likely belonged to the villagers.

Power and wealth come hand in hand. The villagers had been wealthy enough to occupy such an excellent location, own a ludicrously vast spirit paddy field, and even use Strange Artifacts as household items. Naturally, they must be powerful warriors in their own right.

Judging from the bones and the signs of battle, the villagers had most likely been killed by outsiders. This meant that the outsiders were even more powerful than them.

Unless he was gravely mistaken, the owners of the Golden Lapis Lazuli Bone and the Dustless Jade Bone most likely belonged to the outsiders.

This brought up a question. Why had these outsiders attacked and killed the villagers?

Was it because of vengeance?

Was it because of greed?

Or was it for something else?

Chapter 695: My White Hair Spans Farther Than The Horizon

“... A memorial hall?”

Ye Qing had finally arrived at the village center when something caught his attention.

It was a building that was preserved better than most of the houses in the village. Built out of dark red stones, it was big, tall, and rugged in appearance. A broken, cobweb-covered board hung on top of its dilapidated door. He could barely see the word “Hall” inscribed on it. That was how he came to the conclusion that the building was a memorial hall.

The door to the memorial hall was half-open[1]. When he peered through the gap, he could see collapsed offering tables, memorial tablets that were scattered all over the place, and thick, thick layers of dust.

His demonic thought told him that nothing was wrong with the memorial hall, and yet his heart was heavy with unease and an odd feeling he couldn't describe.

What is it? Why am I so uneasy?

Ye Qing was still trying to identify the source of his discomfort when a cool breeze blew, and the sound of a bell ringing appeared from above. It sounded both melodious and solemn.

Ye Qing looked up and found that the ringing was coming from a pair of bronze bells hanging on a corner of the memorial hall. Not only that, it was emitting invisible ripples that contained invisible silhouettes that looked like birds. Their wonderful flight and melodious chirps matched the bell ringing perfectly and formed a musical piece that was both soothing to hear and beautiful to watch.

“Huh... I can't believe I almost overlooked it.”

Ye Qing was surprised. He had, in fact, noticed the bronze bells earlier. However, they were dirty, covered in rust, and seemed perfectly ordinary to his demonic thought. That was why he had glossed over it.

It wasn't until the bronze bells revealed its own power that he realized that it was a Strange Artifact. From the looks of it, it was quite the amazing Strange Artifact too.

Ye Qing did not hesitate. He leaped into the air and grabbed the pair of bronze bells.

Right before he was about to land, a streak of something black suddenly appeared behind him and attacked the back of his head.

The strange object looked like human hair, and it moved soundlessly yet swiftly through the air. An instant later, it skewered Ye Qing without any resistance whatsoever.

“Hehe. Can't believe someone could be this unguarded in a dangerous place like this. What a fool...”

On a rooftop not far away from the memorial hall, a thin, small man was lying on the tiles and toying with a clump of hair. The black object that was about to skewer Ye Qing was, in fact, his hair.

The man had a head of long, black hair that any woman would've envied. It was black like tar, long like a waterfall, and soft and smooth like silk. The way it surrounded the man made it look like he was floating on a dark, bottomless lake.

It was at this moment the man's laughter abruptly cut short. It was because he saw the young man he just skewered fading away into nothing like a mirage.

Clearly, his assassination attempt had failed. The person he skewered was just an illusion.

The next moment, the man flinched and turned pale. His black hair abruptly rolled toward the back and spread out as if a powerful wind was lifting them into the air.

As the hair floated, they turned harder than steel and sharper than a needle. Then, it stabbed out in every direction like a porcupine shooting its quills.

However, the man grew even paler. It was because he had suddenly lost sensation of a portion of his hair; the ones directly behind him to be exact. It was as if they had sunk into some sort of unknown space and become completely cut off from him.

At the same time, a terrible aura crashed toward him from above.

With a thought, the man turned his hair back to normal and withdrew them. They immediately wrapped around him and formed some kind of black, impenetrable cocoon.

Finally, the young man's fist struck the cocoon. The fist had cut through the air without a sound, but when contact was finally made, it was like a thunderclap had erupted through the sky. One part of the cocoon abruptly caved inward, and every strand of black hair abruptly grew as taut as a qin's string. An invisible shockwave washed out and toppled all nearby buildings.

Bang bang bang...

Strand by strand, the black hair began snapping in two as if they could not bear the weight of the young man's fist. It wasn't like the hair was weak either. The severed strands of hair had cut through the air and sliced the roof tiles as easily as tofu.

A muffled groan broke out from the cocoon of black hair as it fell toward the ground alongside the tiles and bricks.

The man wasn't done, however. His hair quickly formed a series of intricate webs in front of him, and any debris that fell on it were sliced clean through like paper.

Clearly, the hair was sharp enough to cut rock like it was mud, much less a flesh and blood body. If his attacker dared to jump down the rooftop to end his life, then his hair would carve him into many tiny cubes for sure

“Interesting...”

Standing on the rooftop, Ye Qing withdrew his fist and stared at the webs of hair with a smirk on his face.

Not only was his ambusher a late-stage Spirit Master, his hair was stronger than your conventional Phenomenon-class Strange Artifact. When it was hard, it was tough enough to cut through metal and jade like mud. It could even pierce astral qi. When it was soft, it resembled spider silk in the sense that it was incredibly tenacious. It was impervious to water or fire, and even the sharpest blades would find it difficult to find purchase on it.

Of course, as deadly and tenacious as the hair was, it wasn't strong enough to hurt his body. That said, it didn't mean Ye Qing was going to jump right into the trap his opponent had laid for him though. He had no wish to waste his energy unnecessarily.

Instead, Ye Qing raised his foot about half an inch and brought it down, triggering a mighty crash that felt like an earthquake that shook the nine heavens.

Boom!

The entire structure began crashing down on the man. It was one thing if it was just a normal building collapse, but this one was powered by Ye Qing's force. He let out a strange cry and just barely escaped the debris before it could crush him like a pancake.

"A misunderstanding! It's just a misunderstanding, friend!"

After the man ran out of the building, his hair joined together to form countless limbs. Like a spider, he began crawling away from the village center at high speed, covering sixty meters in just the blink of an eye.

"Is that so? Remember that it's just a misunderstanding when I stand over your dead body later!"

Ye Qing chuckled as he chased after the man. The reason he was so relentless was because one, the bastard had tried to kill him, and two, the man wasn't the only person in the area. He could also sense several beams of malice directed at him. Killing the man would teach these people not to fuck with him.

He had just taken a few steps when suddenly, his yin god hurt like someone had just cut it with a blade. Ye Qing lifted an eyebrow and expanded his demonic thought, he realized that the man had left behind a trail of invisible hair as he ran. Like a spider's web, they encompassed the whole area and completely walled off the area.

This was what had cut his Yin God earlier. These invisible, formless strands of hair somehow possessed the power to cut one's mind and spirit.

"Fool! You think I, Thousand Feet Inferior[2], would be afraid of you? Hahaha!"

The man also stopped in his tracks when he noticed that Ye Qing had skidded to a stop. He turned around and glared at Ye Qing with scorn and bloodthirst. As he spoke, the crisscrossing webs of hair rushed toward his enemy like a giant net.

The formless hair strands were his Yin God and his Magia. By combining his spirit and his Yin God, he could form a massive web of formless, invisible hair. Any enemy who fell into it would have nowhere to run or escape just like an insect who had become caught in a spider's web. Their fate was to become his food.

His Magia even had a very poetic name: "Ten Thousand Feet[3] of White Hair".

My white hair spans farther than the horizon,

For my sorrow is that deep and strong.

I wonder, when I look into the world,

Where does my misery come from?[4]

Chapter 696: Memorial Tablets That Weep Blood

“It always amazes me how small fries think that their petty tricks would kill me.”

Ye Qing smirked in ridicule and disdain as he stared at the layers and layers of invisible hair surrounding him from all sides.

His eyes slowly turned black as tar, and he tapped the space in front of him like he was knocking on the gate of heavens.

Buzz...

A strange vibration washed over the web of hair, shaking them a little like the wind. It looked like Ye Qing had done nothing at all, but the next moment, every strand of hair began snapping as if they were under great duress.

The hair had snapped into two soundlessly in the real world, but inside Thousand Feet Inferior's headspace? It was like a thunderstorm was brewing inside his head. Every time a strand of hair broke, a thunderclap would break out and stun his thoughts. When the rest of his hair snapped in unison, all he could hear was rumbling thunder.

By the time it all ended, Thousand Feet Inferior's headspace was in total chaos, and his Yin God was damaged beyond recognition. Outside his headspace, he stared at the smirking young man with widened eyes, opened his mouth as if he tried to say something, but collapsed before he could get anything out. He was dead.

“Heavens...”

In the shadows, everyone who was watching the battle and thinking about playing the fisherman gasped inaudibly when Thousand Feet Inferior collapsed to the ground. The chill spreading from their core was such that the flame of greed flickering inside their heart was snuffed out in an instant.

Ye Qing ignored the gazes around him and walked up to Thousand Feet Inferior's lifeless corpse and waved his hand. After the man's Nature's Shell floated into his palm, he turned around and began walking back toward the outskirts.

After Ye Qing was gone, the hiding warriors finally emerged from the shadows and glanced at Thousand Feet Inferior's corpse. Then, every single one of them rushed toward the memorial hall as if they had communicated their action beforehand.

That wasn't the case, of course. They were running in unison simply because they happened to share the same thought: if the pair of bells hanging outside the roof were already this powerful, then what about the items stored inside the memorial hall?

Surely they would be even more valuable, right?

Although they didn't know why that young but powerful warrior hadn't entered the memorial hall, they saw no reason to give up on their fortune. That was why they rushed inside the memorial hall as soon as Ye Qing was gone.

“Hahaha! I knew there would be treasures inside!”

“Heavens... there are so many...”

“I’m rich! I’m rich!”

Everyone was expecting to find at least one or two treasures inside the memorial hall, but what they found still stole their breath away. It was because the exterior of the building did not match the interior at all.

They saw portraits glowing with spiritual power on the walls.

They saw radiant ritual objects sitting at the corners of the room.

They saw censers with hidden power sitting next to the offering tables.

They saw all sorts of spiritual fruits just lying on the floor.

Even the murals on the walls and the floor were twinkling slightly with power.

“Hahaha... it’s mine... all mine!”

One man could not resist laughing out loud when he saw the hoard of treasures in front of him. However, his laughter came to a swift and sudden end when a hand punched through his back and out of his chest. When he looked down, he saw a bloody hand gripping his still beating heart in its grasp.

A second later, the hand tightened and crushed his heart like an overripe fruit.

“Hmph. That’s what I thought.”

An eerie, ridiculing voice behind the man’s back.

The blood and voice were like a spark that lit the fuse of greed and bloodthirst in everyone’s heart. The next moment, everyone began fighting and spilling each other’s blood in the memorial hall; a place that should’ve been filled with peace, calm and tranquility. The bodies began to pile up rapidly.

No one noticed that the memorial tablets slowly began to bleed like they were alive, however. They were also shaking slightly.

It was as if they were weeping, vengeful spirits.

“Stop! Something’s not right! Stop fighting now!”

Finally, someone noticed the anomaly happening inside the memorial hall and called for a ceasefire. The survivors noticed the bleeding, trembling memorial tablets and felt an involuntary chill in their spine despite themselves.

“Hmph! It’s just some memorial tablets. Watch me!” [1]

The atmosphere was growing oppressive when a big, muscular man with a thick mustache let out a grunt and stepped out. He kicked a corpse blocking his way to the side before swinging his massive axe at the memorial tablets.

Boom!

The altar carrying the memorial tablets instantly exploded into smithereens. Most of the memorial tablets were either broken or thrown off by the impact as well.

“See? There’s nothing to be scared of, you cowards.” The big man scoffed in disdain while putting his axe back on his shoulders.

As if on cue, the big man suddenly trembled for seemingly no reason, and blood streamed down his widened, shocked eyes. Then, he let out a bloodcurdling scream.

As he screamed, bulges began growing out of the big man’s forehead, face, neck, limbs—his whole body, really. It was almost as if something was attempting to push their way out of his flesh and blood.

“Ahhhh! Ahhhhhh! AHHHHHHHHHHH!!!”

The big man kept screaming, but he was unable to move a muscle as if someone had cast an immobilization spell on him, much less stop whatever was happening to him from happening. He could only watch in helplessness and despair as the bulges kept growing bigger.

No one tried to help him. They all seemed too shocked by this sudden occurrence to lend a hand.

Pssh!

Finally, the man’s flesh split open and sprayed blood everywhere. A sharp object crawled out of the big man’s forehead and stretched upward.

A few breaths later, it became clear exactly what the object was. It was... a memorial tablet. One that was exactly the same as the memorial tablets placed on the memorial altar earlier. The only difference was that the memorial tablets on the altar had names, birth dates and death dates inscribed on their surfaces, and the one that just pushed its way out of the big man’s body was blank.

As the spine-chilling noise of ripping flesh continued to resound throughout the memorial hall, more and more memorial tablets pushed their way out of the big man’s body. They were all blank.

In just the blink of an eye, the big man was completely covered in memorial tablets.

Right now, it felt as if the big man had become the memorial altar. Just one that was made of flesh, blood and bone.

Maybe it was because of the man’s terrible screams, maybe it was because of the sounds of the memorial tablets tearing through flesh and blood, maybe it was because of the swarm of memorial tablets covering the big man like mushrooms, or maybe it was because of all of the above. In any case, not a single person in the room could say a word for a time.

The memorial tablets did not stop growing until they had reached the pedestal. Naturally, the big man resembled a pincushion that was bleeding all over.

Even so, the big man was still alive and screaming at the top of his lungs. Painful, tragic, and horrified, it was such a scream that even the most indifferent man could not help but empathize with the big man.

“Look! The tablets... they’re...”

Someone exclaimed in surprise. When the warriors turned to look, they saw rows and rows of blood text appearing on the once blank surface of the memorial tablets.

“Zhong Zhen, born at 3 pm on May 12th in the third year of Lingfeng, died at 1.15 pm on March 3 in the fifth year of Chunhua.”

“Gong Xiangzhao, born at 9.45 am on December 5th in the sixth year of Wulong, died at 1.15 pm on March 3rd in the sixth year of Jingrui.”

“Yu Dazai, born at 11.30 pm on April 9th in the ninth year of Qingyuan, died at 1.15 pm on March 3rd in the sixth year of Jingrui.”

“Suo Yidao, born at...”

.....

“Zhong Zhen? That’s me! That’s my birth date as well!”

A man exclaimed in bewilderment as he stared at the bloody text on one of the memorial tablets.

“Gong Xiangzhao... that’s me!”

“I’m Yu Duzai...”

“My... my name is Suo Yidao...”

“Why are our names and birth dates appearing on the memorial tablets?”

“That’s not all! There’s a death date as well! 1.15 pm on March 3 in the fifth year of Chunhua... 1.15 pm on March 3rd in the sixth year of Jingrui[2]... that’s today, isn’t it?”

Chapter 697: Strange Deaths

“That’s today, isn’t it?”

As soon as the man was done speaking, the memorial hall fell as silent as death. A chill like nothing the warriors had ever felt before washed over their entire body.

The reason the year of the death dates was different was because they hailed from different countries and regions. They were essentially the same day.

“A-Also... 1.15 pm[1]... that’s right now, isn’t it?”

Someone stuttered and broke the silence. Everyone shivered and turned deathly pale when they heard that.

“W-We need to leave!”

Finally, someone could not bear the oppressive, terrifying atmosphere any longer and raced toward the exit. After all, what was a hoard of treasure compared to one’s own life?

The man had the right idea, but unfortunately, it was far too late. He had just reached the exit when his head suddenly exploded like an overripe watermelon.

The sudden death was so sudden and anomalous that no one in the memorial hall was able to react in time. Those who were standing close to the exit even got a full face of blood and brain matter for their troubles. Of course, they screamed.

No one here was a timid person. The death was just that sudden and terrifying.

That wasn't the end of the horror, however. Where the man's head was a moment ago, a memorial tablet was standing on top of his severed neck. No one knew how or when it had gotten there. It was almost as if the tablet had replaced the man's head.

As if that wasn't enough, the name, birth date and death date on the memorial tablet stated:

“Zhong Zhen, born at 3 pm on May 12th in the third year of Lingfeng, died at 1.15 pm on March 3 in the fifth year of Chunhua.”

“Impossible! That memorial tablet was on Fang Fu's body! How did it appear in Zhong Zhen's head?”

The man who lost his head was none other than Zhong Zhen. On a related note, the big man whose body was crawling with memorial tablets was called Fang Fu.

“It's gone! Zhong Zhen's memorial tablet is gone!”

The survivors immediately turned to look at the big man, but to their shock and terror, the memorial tablet that belonged to Zhong Zhen was nowhere to be found.

More accurately, the memorial tablet had somehow—in just an instant—left Fang Fu's body and appeared inside Zhong Zhen's head.

That wasn't important though. The important question was: if Zhong Zhen's memorial tablet could suddenly appear inside his head... Did this mean that every single one of them was currently facing the same fate as well?

Did this mean that their heads would explode just like Zhong Zhen?

The terror in their hearts grew tenfold when the realization struck them.

“A memorial tablet just disappeared! I saw it with my own eyes!”

A sudden cry pulled everyone back to reality. They hurriedly looked at the dead Fang Fu once more.

The crier was right. They saw Gong Xiangzhao's memorial tablet slowly disappearing into nothing.

“That's my...”

Gong Xiangzhao blanched a little when he saw this, but he quickly calmed down and met the others' eyes. He puffed up his chest and declared confidently, “Let me tell you that I, Gong Xiangzhao, am not one to cower before death. I refuse to believe that—”

Before he could finish, his head exploded into a shower of blood and gore.

As his lifeless body dropped to the ground, everyone saw a memorial tablet sitting snugly on his neck.

Everyone in the memorial hall turned as white as a ghost.

At this point, they could no longer pretend that Zhong Zhen's death was just a fluke. Gong Xiangzhao's death had proven a pattern.

When the corresponding memorial tablet disappeared from Fang Fu's body, it would reappear inside their head and kill them.

“Motherfucker! Let's destroy these memorial tablets together, everyone! Otherwise, we're all going to die!” Someone shouted.

If escape was impossible, then they might as well try to destroy the source. It might be their only way of surviving this.

No one dared to hold back as their lives were on the line here. They immediately launched their strongest attacks at Fang Fu.

Pssh! Boom! Crack!

Sword and saber qi skewered the big man from every direction. Just a moment later, he looked more like a beehive than a human.

There was just one problem, however. Their attacks had failed to damage the memorial tablets even a little.

The memorial tablets themselves weren't particularly strong—or at least, they didn't look like it. The reason their attacks failed to do any damage at all was because the memorial tablets seemed to be existing in a different space. This was proven by the fact that the sword and saber qi had passed through the memorial tablets harmlessly and hit Fang Fu instead.

“Argh!”

It was at this moment Fang Fu opened his eyes and let out a cry of pain. The big man should have been long dead, and yet, there was no denying that he was screaming right now.

“Argh!”

“Argh!”

Argh!”

His cry seemed to pierce all the way to the depths of their soul. At the same time, everyone in the memorial hall screamed in pain as if the sword and saber qi they just unleashed hadn't just hit Fang Fu, but also themselves.

Physically, they were perfectly unharmed. There was no mistaking the pain, however.

It was at this moment two more memorial tablets disappeared. Not a moment too soon, they reappeared in the corresponding victims' heads and killed them.

“We're doomed. What do we do? We're doomed!”

They could neither escape nor damage the memorial tablets. What else could they do under these circumstances? For a time, everyone had fallen into the pits of despair.

Pop! Pop!

The march of death was as unrelenting as it was gory. Another two warriors lost their heads and gained memorial tablets as replacement.

“Ahhhhhhh!!!”

“I don’t want to die... I don’t want to die!”

The two warriors’ deaths were the last straw. They all started racing toward the exit, caution be damned. However, as soon as they set foot outside the memorial hall, their heads immediately exploded one after another like water sacs and revealed the blood-soaked memorial tablets standing on top of their necks.

Even stranger, the warriors remained upright despite losing their heads and dying. It was almost as if the memorial tablets had become their new heads. It was terribly anomalous and evil to say the least.

This was the scene Ye Qing, Pedant Earth and Shangguan Hongjin saw when they arrived at the scene together. Their backs turned as cold as ice to put it mildly.

“What... What the hell happened here?”

They quickly checked out the headless bodies with memorial tablets standing on their necks and the big man whose entire body was covered in memorial tablets.

When they looked at Fang Fu, he slowly raised his head, looked out of the memorial hall, and stared straight at them.

That wasn’t all. The headless corpses littered inside the memorial hall and the exit too turned around and faced toward the exit.

The big man was obviously long dead. Even if he wasn’t, he should not be able to see anything as his eye sockets were completely overtaken by a pair of memorial tablets. As for the headless bodies, they didn’t even have a head, so how the hell could they be looking at anyone?

Ye Qing could feel their gazes as clear as day, however.

The big man was looking at them.

Every headless corpse in the memorial hall was looking at them as well!

“W-Warrior Ye... What the hell are these things?”

Pedant Earth swallowed and asked with fear and trepidation.

Ye Qing did not answer him. His eyes turning as black as ink, he stared intently at the tablet-covered big man and the headless corpses. His mouth felt a little dry.

He was afraid not just because of the tablet-covered big man or the headless corpses with memorial tablets standing on their necks, oh no.

It was because he could see that the memorial hall was jam-packed with people. Their bodies were transparent and wispy like yin souls, and they were all weeping blood and glaring at them with black hatred.

He saw a yin soul raising a blood-stained finger and wrote a person’s name, birth date, and death date on a blank memorial tablet on the big man’s body. Once done, the yin soul ripped out the memorial tablet—the big man actually cried out in pain even though he should be long dead—and teleported to a warrior standing outside the memorial hall. Then, the yin soul grabbed his head.

From the start until the end, the warrior never noticed anything. Not even until his head exploded like an overripe watermelon.

After the yin soul had crushed the warrior's head, it planted the memorial tablet on the dead man's now empty neck. It smiled.

Blood tears streaming down their cheeks, every yin soul in the memorial hall smiled as well.

Chapter 698: Unseenable Strangers

“What just happened?”

“Why is my name on the memorial tablet?”

“Mine too!”

Not everyone in the village had entered the memorial hall, and some of them had just arrived at the village center. It was at this moment someone's head suddenly popped like an overripe watermelon for seemingly no reason whatsoever. On top of that, their names had suddenly appeared on the memorial tablets jutting out of the big man's body. Everyone here was a veteran with decades of experience under their belt, but they still chilled to their very core.

The unknown was always scary after all.

“Motherfucker, the hell is going on here? That's it, I'm leaving!”

“Yeah. There's no reason to stay here while danger is aloof!”

Those with good instincts did not hesitate to leave the village center immediately. There was no need to risk whatever danger was lurking in this place after all. Unfortunately, as soon as they turned around, an invisible silhouette holding a memorial tablet immediately appeared behind their backs. Their personal memorial tablet.

Worse still, not one person seemed to notice the invisible silhouette or the memorial tablet at all.

Pedant Earth looked at Ye Qing. “W-warrior Ye, we should leave as well!”

“It's too late,” Ye Qing replied slowly.

“What do you mean, warrior Ye?” Shangguan Hongjin frowned deeply.

Before Ye Qing could reply, the warriors who tried to leave lost their heads and grew a memorial tablet on their neck just like the one from before.

“What in the...”

The blood drained away from Pedant Earth's face as his eyes widened like saucers.

Shangguan Hongjin had also raised her eyebrows. Her expression was calm, but her shaking fingers proved that she wasn't nearly as calm as she pretended to be.

It was at this moment Shangguan Hongjin realized something and looked at Ye Qing with suspicion. “How did you know they wouldn't be able to escape? Did you know something? Or was this your doing?”

“It would be nice if I’m strong enough to pop multiple Spirit Masters’ heads with a single thought, but no. Of course it wasn’t me.”

Ye Qing did not lose his cool despite her accusation. He explained patiently, “It was them.”

“Them? Who’s them? I’m not in the mood for riddles, young man!” Pedant Earth shivered.

“Looks like you really can’t see them. The memorial hall is overflowing with people. Lots and lots of people!” Ye Qing answered while staring in the direction of the memorial hall.

Even as Pedant Earth and Shangguan Hongjin were trying to make sense of Ye Qing’s words, they noticed that Ye Qing’s gaze was slowly shifting in Shangguan Hongjin’s direction. It was as if he was staring at something that was slowly but surely walking toward the woman.

In fact, that was the truth. From Ye Qing’s perspective, he saw a silhouette carrying Shangguan Hongjin’s memorial tablet and slowly walking toward the woman. But from Pedant Earth and Shangguan Hongjin’s perspective, they could only see Ye Qing staring at nothing in particular while slowly turning his head toward her. It was weird, absurd, and terrifying to say the least.

“Don’t say I didn’t warn you, Miss Shangguan, but one of them is walking toward you.” Ye Qing warned as he narrowed his eyes a little.

“Do you know how much you look like a charlatan right now?”

Shangguan Hongjin scoffed, but her eyes abruptly sharpened as if she sensed something. She did not hesitate to unsheathe her saber an inch with her thumb and envelop the area in front of her in powerful saber intent.

Her saber intent caught the silhouette by surprise, and it was deadly enough that even Ye Qing felt chilled to the bone. However, the silhouette continued to walk toward Shangguan Hongjin as if it couldn’t feel the attack at all.

“Is it unkillable?”

Ye Qing raised an eyebrow. Then, he raised his palm and made a cutting motion at the silhouette.

Red lotuses descended from the sky, and the storm of saber intent was cut into two.

The silhouette was no exception.

“Ahhhh!”

The silhouette let out a bloodcurdling scream, the Red Lotus Hellfire burning it into nothing instantly.

Shangguan Hongjin and Pedant Earth still couldn’t see the silhouette, but they could hear its shrill, painful, and hateful death throes. This time, they knew for certain that Ye Qing wasn’t toying with them.

“There’s really something?!” Shangguan Hongjin looked very confused. “But why can you see them and not us?”

“Unfortunately, I don’t have an answer for you.” Ye Qing shrugged.

He was telling the truth. He had no idea why he could see the silhouettes while everyone else couldn’t. He also didn’t know why he seemed to be the only one who could hurt them.

Suddenly, Ye Qing glanced at the memorial hall with narrowed eyes. Maybe it was because he had killed the silhouette, but every single silhouette in the memorial hall was now looking at him with hate and vengeance. A second later, the silhouettes swarmed the big man and wrote Ye Qing’s name, birth date and death date on the memorial tablets.

Even as they were busy writing Ye Qing’s details, the silhouettes continued to stare at him unblinkingly. Some silhouettes’ heads were twisted a hundred and eighty degrees to the back, some of their necks were stretched all the way up to the roof, some heads were squeezed so tightly that they were almost deformed... In any case, it was not a pretty sight.

“Ye... Ye Qing? Is that your name, warrior?”

Pedant Earth and Shangguan Hongjin couldn’t see the silhouettes. What they could see was that every memorial tablet was weeping blood and forming words on its surface. Ye Qing’s details to be exact. It was a terrifying and anomalous sight.

The memorial tablets slowly disappeared after the writing was complete, leaving behind the big man who was somehow still spasming and screaming despite being dead.

That was all Pedant Earth and Shangguan Hongjin could see, but Ye Qing could see a lot more. He saw the silhouettes ripping out the memorial tablets from the big man’s body before falling into an organized formation. Then, they began walking toward him with uniform footsteps.

Pedant Earth and Shangguan Hongjin shivered involuntarily despite not being able to see a thing. They felt as if they had suddenly plunged into a lake of ice.

“Are those things coming toward us?!”

Veins appeared on Shangguan Hongjin’s hands as she crouched down a little. Deadly saber intent surrounded her even though she hadn’t unsheathed her sabers yet.

“That’s right.”

Ye Qing did not wait. He immediately executed the “Hellfire Red Lotus Saber Art” and summoned a hail of red lotuses.

The “Hellfire Red Lotus Saber Art” was a purifying art that worked best against sinful souls, and the silhouettes before him were the perfect prey. They instantly disintegrated into ash without any resistance.

However, more silhouettes carrying memorial tablets immediately exited the memorial hall and strode toward him with uniform footsteps.

Once again, Ye Qing executed the “Hellfire Red Lotus Saber Art” and annihilated them all. This time though, he was frowning a little. He wondered if it was his imagination, but the second wave felt a little harder to kill than the first one.

His enemy gave him no time to think. A third wave emerged, and Ye Qing was forced to fight again.

It didn’t take long for Ye Qing to realize that he was in a predicament. No matter how many silhouettes he killed, they just kept pouring out of the memorial hall in increasing numbers. As if that wasn’t bad enough, it turned out that his previous feeling wasn’t an imagination at all. The silhouettes really were growing stronger and stronger. At first, he was able to kill them as easily as a cook cutting some vegetables on the cooking tray. Now, it actually took effort to achieve the same outcome.

“What the hell are these things? How annoying!”

Ye Qing’s eyebrows were locked together in a deep frown. Already, he was planning to make a run for it.

Assuming that these silhouettes kept growing in strength and numbers, it was only a matter of time before they overwhelmed him. In that case, running away was clearly the superior option.

Shangguan Hongjin and Pedant Earth couldn’t see anything, so they couldn’t lend him a hand. They could only get out of the way and watch helplessly as Ye Qing fought against thin air.

“What do we do, Miss Shangguan? Should we help him?” Pedant Earth asked.

“And how do you propose we help, exactly? We can’t even see the damn things!” Shangguan Hongjin scoffed at the stupid question.

Ye Qing had helped her once at the paddy field, and she told him that she owed him her life and would repay the favor one day. Unlike most warriors, she meant every word she said. The idea of escaping alone had never crossed her mind, and she was currently racking her brain for a way to help Ye Qing.

Unfortunately, she was unable to do anything even though the enemy was right in front of her. She also knew that attacking blindly would only worsen Ye Qing’s situation. This feeling of helplessness was despicable to say the least.

Chapter 699: Ghost Shrine

“What the hell are these things? Why can he see them and not us? Does it have something to do with that monster still inside the shrine? I’m gonna kill him!”

Shangguan Hongjin was a woman of action, so she immediately took off toward the memorial hall. Halfway there, she lifted her thumbs, unsheathed her sabers, and transformed her vast saber intent into two snow white dragons. She then launched them straight toward the big man covered in memorial tablets.

Her saber intent instantly crushed the big man into mincemeat. However, Shangguan Hongjin also let out a muffled groan of pain before collapsing on the ground, spasming. Her contorted expression suggested that she was in deep pain, and her energies were in complete shambles.

“Miss Shangguan!” Pedant Earth exclaimed in shock. He immediately ran up to her and dragged her away from the memorial hall.

Ye Qing noticed Shangguan Hongjin’s action as a matter of course. In fact, he had been planning to do the exact same thing until Shangguan Hongjin did it for him.

Unfortunately, it looked like the counterattack had ended in abject failure. He could see the mincemeat scattered across the floor of the memorial hall slowly gathering together and transforming into a ball of flesh due to some sort of unknown energy. The memorial tablets on the flesh ball remained unchanged, nor were the silhouettes affected in the slightest.

If anything, it was Shangguan Hongjin who suffered huge damage for her effort. He could feel her being assaulted by an unimaginable wave of pain after she turned the big man into mincemeat. It was such a pain that she had nearly fainted there and then.

Thankfully, her life wasn’t in danger.

“Hah... hah... what the fuck was that? That hurt!”

At the sidelines, Shangguan Hongjin cursed loudly between heavy pants.

“Are you alright, Miss Shangguan?” Pedant Earth asked urgently.

“Do I look alright to you?” Shangguan Hongjin sounded fed up to put it mildly.

“That hurt so bad I could’ve died there and then!”

The second she turned the big man into mincemeat with her saber intent, a massive wave of pain had assaulted her. She felt as if someone had crushed every flesh, blood and bone in her body. It was no wonder the pain had nearly killed her.

“Oh right, did that monster die yet?” Shangguan Hongjin asked.

“No. I think that thing is unkillable,” Pedant Earth answered slowly and thoughtfully.

“What? Are you saying that I suffered all that pain for nothing?!”

Shangguan Hongjin was so pissed that her voice rose an octave. “It’s bad enough that these monsters are invisible, but you’re telling me they’re unkillable as well? What do I need to do, destroy the fucking memorial hall?”

“Destroy the memorial hall? That’s it!”

Shangguan Hongjin was just venting, but her words sparked a memory in Pedant Earth. He hurriedly shouted in Ye Qing’s direction, “Warrior Ye, leave those things alone! They’re endless no matter how many times you kill them, so just forget them and attack the memorial hall!”

“The memorial hall?”

Ye Qing was seconds away from calling a retreat when Pedant Earth’s cry reached him. Without hesitation, he knocked back an entire swathe of silhouettes with his sleeves before jumping into the air and launching a palm strike at the memorial hall.

Buzz...

The air shook, and demonic qi rolled in like clouds. A massive demonic hand covered in demonic runes descended right on top of the memorial hall.

“Nethercall Demon Hand”

“Nethercall Demon Hand” was a palm technique from “Call of the Nether”. To put it simply, the practitioner created a demonic hand from demonic qi and unleashed it at their enemies. The greater one’s spirit and astral qi, the more powerful the demonic hand would become. At the highest level, it was said to be capable of plucking celestial bodies from the sky and crushing the Nine Nether into bits.

For the first time, the silhouettes reacted differently. As if Ye Qing had touched their reverse scale, every single silhouette opened their mouths in a soundless roar and pounced toward Ye Qing. The memorial hall itself was twisting and shaking a little as massive, invisible tentacles extended out of the door and windows to block the descending hand.

Boom!

The two forces met, and the demonic hand was torn to shreds by the tentacles. However, the tentacles were flailing, and the memorial hall was shaking violently from the impact.

The silhouettes in particular suddenly stopped in their tracks as if they had suffered tremendous damage. A good number of them disappeared into nothing just like that.

“I didn’t realize that the building itself was the main body. Interesting.”

If it wasn’t for Pedant Earth’s warning, he would have thought that the memorial hall was just an ordinary structure just like the rest of the buildings in the village. That was because he hadn’t sensed any anomalous presence from the memorial hall until now.

“Hahaha! I knew it! It’s a Ghost Shrine!”

Pedant Earth could neither see the invisible tentacles nor the invisible silhouettes, but he could see Ye Qing’s “Nethercall Demon Hand” suddenly breaking into pieces and feel the twisted energies that suddenly washed out of the memorial hall.

“Ghost Shrine? What’s that?” Shangguan Hongjin asked curiously.

“A building where humans offer sacrifices to ghosts is known as a spirit shrine, a building where humans offer sacrifices to humans is known as a living shrine[1], a building where ghosts offer sacrifices to humans is known as a nether shrine, and a building where ghosts offer sacrifices to ghosts is known as a Ghost Shrine.”

Pedant Earth launched into a lengthy explanation, “The Ghost Shrine is a Phenomenon-class Stranger, but despite its classification, its power is immense and anomalous. On the surface, a Ghost

Shrine looks just like any other shrine. In fact, most people are unable to see or perceive its anomaly just like an ordinary human cannot perceive a ghost. Hence the name.”

“A Ghost Shrine houses ghosts, and most humans cannot perceive its ghosts in any way. The inability to perceive the ghosts also prevents a human from being able to kill the ghosts. The ghosts have no such restriction though. They can harm a human just like normal.”

“Only those who possess a vast reservoir of vigor, strong yang energy, a clear mind, and a bold heart can see the ghosts it produces, and only those who can see the ghosts can kill them.”

“However, so long as the Ghost Shrine itself isn’t destroyed, it can produce an infinite amount of ghosts. Not only that, the longer you fight the ghosts, the stronger they become.”

“Ghost Shrine and ghosts? Invisible and unkillable? What an anomalous Stranger. This is the first time I heard anything like it,” Shangguan Hongjin commented.

“I read about it from an old book. I failed to put two and two together immediately because I haven’t actually seen it with my own eyes until now.”

Pedant Earth replied, “The Ghost Shrine’s anomalous powers make it nigh unkillable for someone who knows nothing about them. It’s also why it can be more dangerous than even a Disaster-class Stranger despite being classified as Phenomenon.”

“For someone who has heard about the Ghost Shrine though, it is exactly what it is: a Phenomenon-class Stranger.”

That was what he said, but there were very few Ghost Shrines in the world, and even fewer people who had heard about it. If Pedant Earth didn’t plunder ancient cities and tombs for a living, if he hadn’t read countless lost books and ancient records due to his experiences, he wouldn’t have known about the Ghost Shrine as well. It was why most people who ran into the Ghost Shrine met a gruesome end.

“So, you’re saying that destroying the Ghost Shrine is all we need to do to deal with these invisible ghosts?” Shangguan Hongjin climbed to her feet and stared at the memorial hall with excitement.

“According to the books, yes,” Pedant Earth answered while shooting her a strange look. “What are you planning, Miss Shangguan?”

“What else? I’m gonna give it a taste of its own medicine!” Shangguan Hongjin uttered through gritted teeth.

Earlier, she had fallen for the Ghost Shrine’s trap and nearly died from sheer pain. Now that she knew exactly how to kill the Stranger, why on earth wouldn’t she murder the fuck out of it?

She was Shangguan Hongjin, and she did not enjoy her benevolence or vengeance served cold.

Chapter 700: Killing The Ghost Shrine

Shangguan Hongjin took one step forward with her hands wrapped firmly around her sabers.

Her right hand was holding a saber in a forward grip, and her left hand was holding another saber in a reverse grip.

She took another step forward, and both sabers exited their sheaths at the same time.

Her right saber swung from up to down, and her left saber swung from down to up.

A pair of snow white saber beams shot toward the Ghost Shrine. They ripped the earth like serpents and roared like dragons.

Shangguan Hongjin might be a woman, but the twin strike was powerful, vigorous, and magnificent. It was not inferior to any man's strike.

The pair of saber beams threatened to catch the Ghost Shrine in a deadly pincer attack.

As if realizing the danger it posed, the Ghost Shrine's invisible tentacles immediately repositioned to block the attack.

The silhouettes also stopped harassing Ye Qing and formed rings around the Ghost Shrine. They were going to block the attack with their own bodies.

Boooooom!!!

An invisible explosion took place as the saber beam from above severed countless tentacles. However, the resistance diminished its power just enough that it disappeared as it neared the Ghost Shrine's roof.

The saber beam from below also ripped countless silhouettes to shreds, but just the same, it ran out of power and faded right before it would hit the Ghost Shrine's door.

It would seem that Shangguan Hongjin's twin strike—as impressive as it was—had failed to do anything.

The woman wasn't disappointed, however. On the contrary, she withdrew her sabers and started guffawing. "Hahahaha! We've got you now."

Yes, the Ghost Shrine had fallen for her trap hook, line and sinker.

While the Ghost Shrine was busy defending itself against her attack, one man had slipped through the cracks and arrived at its front door.

That man was Ye Qing, of course.

Shangguan Hongjin's twin strike was just a bait to draw the Ghost Shrine's attention away and create an opening for Ye Qing.

Ye Qing was the true blade that would deal the killing blow, not her.

Although Shangguan Hongjin hadn't communicated this with Ye Qing beforehand, he figured out what she was planning the second he saw her move. He did not disappoint her.

Ye Qing's appearance angered the Ghost Shrine as a matter of course. It also felt true danger from his presence.

Countless ghosts tried to squeeze their way out of the door and stop Ye Qing, so much so that the many ghosts were crushed or fused with another ghost. From his perspective, it looked like a giant ball of flesh was blocking the entrance. It was a horrifying sight to say the least.

Ye Qing paid it no attention, however. He simply raised his hand, made a fist, and thrust his fist forward.

What would you do if your path was blocked by an army?

He knew the perfect technique for this situation.

“Break Through”

The fist force punched through the ball of ghosts like paper, its power not diminished in the slightest.

Then, it slammed against the Ghost Shrine’s door frame.

The world grew silent for a moment. Then, the Ghost Shrine twisted and spasmed like a living being, leaving many ripples behind. The invisible tentacles broke into pieces at the same time, and countless ghosts let out a painful wail before disappearing in a flash.

Countless cracks spread across the Ghost Shrine’s surface. At the same time, bright red blood seeped out of the cracks.

“Hahaha! Well done!”

Shangguan Hongjin smiled like a blooming flower when she saw this. “Continue!”

“As you wish, my lady.”

Ye Qing was no saint. The dog was down, and he was going to kick the absolute shit out of it. While the Ghost Shrine was recovering, he drew back his fist about a sixth of a meter and threw another punch.

Thunder roared, and the earth trembled. Both the door frame and one part of the wall shattered from the attack.

Not done yet, Ye Qing withdrew his fist and threw his arm around like a whip. He landed a powerful strike on one of the pillars and snapped it in half like a twig.

The Ghost Shrine was barely hanging on at this point. Twisted, ghastly faces appeared on the crumbled pieces of the wall, screaming.

“Hahaha! Well done! It’s my turn now!”

Shangguan Hongjin had been waiting for this moment. She leaped into the air and fired a cross slash straight at the Ghost Shrine.

This time, the Ghost Shrine didn’t put up any resistance. It couldn’t. Its rooftop was cut into four pieces as easily as tofu.

“Hell yeah!”

Shangguan Hongjin didn't stop attacking there. As she fell, her sabers whirled round and round like a hurricane, and her saber beams manifested everywhere like snowfall. The Ghost Shrine was grievously injured to begin with, and the relentless assault destroyed whatever hope it had at a second wind.

“Hahaha! Revenge is best served hot!”

After the Ghost Shrine had collapsed entirely, Shangguan Hongjin finally landed on the ground, sheathed her sabers, and laughed boisterously.

She was still in the middle of laughing when Ye Qing—the young man was currently standing at the center of the ruins—raised his foot and stomped down hard.

Boom!

A powerful force washed out of Ye Qing and into the surroundings. Every brick and tile in the vicinity dissolved into dust as a result.

“What are you doing?” Shangguan Hongjin cut her laughter short and shot Ye Qing a strange look.

“I'm just making sure it's dead,” Ye Qing explained smilingly.

Looking at the pile of rubble that used to be the Ghost Shrine, anyone would think that it was dead. However, Ye Qing knew it was still alive because he hadn't earned a dragon-serpent rune. That was why he followed up with one final strike and earned himself a gold dragon-serpent rune for his efforts.

“Huh. I didn't know this thing is this tenacious. Is it dead now?” Shangguan Hongjin scratched her head.

“Yeah,” Ye Qing confirmed before thanking both Shangguan Hongjin and Pedant Earth, “Thank you for your aid, Miss Shangguan, senior Pedant. Things would not have turned out nearly as well otherwise.”

Shangguan Hongjin waved him off. “I didn't do much. Pedant Earth's the one who deserves both our thanks. If he hadn't known what the hell this thing was, there is a good chance all of us would have died here.”

Pedant Earth replied in a hurry, “Ahem... you flatter me, warrior Ye, Miss Shangguan. All I did was move my mouth. You two are the ones who did the heavy lifting.”

He was speaking from the heart. If Ye Qing wasn't able to see the ghosts, he would have died a long time ago. He would never have gotten the opportunity to identify the Ghost Shrine.

“You're too humble, senior.” Ye Qing chuckled. “Anyway, let's not waste any more time. The Ghost Shrine is dead, and this village is probably safe for the moment. Let's search the area and collect the treasures before more scavengers show up, yeah?”

“Makes sense.”

“You’re totally right!”

Both Shangguan Hongjin and Pedant Earth’s eyes lit up. Earlier, a ton of warriors had entered the village before they were able to scour the whole place. Later, they were drawn toward the commotion happening at the memorial hall and dragged into a fairly difficult fight. As a result, they weren’t able to obtain much loot.

But now, most of the warriors who entered the village were killed by the Ghost Shrine, and whoever was left were probably no match for the three of them. They were free to scavenge the village as they pleased. The Ghost Shrine itself contained a mountain of fortune as well.

On top of that, anyone strong enough to enter this place must own a lot of good stuff as well. That was yet another major source of income.

And so the trio began dividing the loot. Shangguan Hongjin and Pedant Earth wisely left the bodies close to Ye Qing alone and began looting those farther away from him. Shangguan Hongjin in particular was going through the bodies at a prodigious rate. Judging from her practiced movements, it was clear that she had done this many times before.

Of course, Pedant Earth himself was a tomb raider. He was slower than Shangguan Hongjin, but it was just a small difference.

After the duo were done looting, they gathered the bodies and burned it all into ash. No sense in leaving clues for the latecomers to find. Then, they went back to the village to scour the rest of the houses.

After the duo were gone, Ye Qing too looted the bodies close to him and burned them using the Netherflame. Then, he conducted a search around the area.

No, he wasn’t searching for Strange Artifacts or treasures. He wanted to learn more about this place and check if they were related to the Dark Overlord’s inheritance. If they were, he wanted to find clues that might point him toward its exact location.

After all, the main reasons he came here was one, to break through his limits and become a Grandmaster; and two, to obtain the Dark Overlord’s inheritance.

Those were his two primary objectives. Everything else was secondary.

Unfortunately, he wasn’t able to find anything despite going through the entire village.