

Longevity 21

Chapter 21 Searching the corpse is the only way to sudden wealth!

Tao Qian let out a low shout, and the old goat adept in the Subterranean Evasion Technique, Yang Ding, was reduced to ashes, without even a moment's struggle.

If others had witnessed this scene, they might have mistakenly believed Tao Qian was a deeply hidden expert.

But in fact, Tao Qian himself was still bewildered.

A second later, he finally regained his senses.

A multitude of thoughts swirled in his mind, searching for a rational explanation.

"This old man had just finished casting, and was in the midst of paying the price, at his most vulnerable."

"Furthermore, his lack of combat skills, when unexpectedly ambushed by me, made his lack of resistance quite normal."

"There's also the fact that the Bo Dragon Bloodline is indeed extraordinary, as described in the Record, the 'Sound Attack' Divine Skill was in no way exaggerated."

"I merely let out a low shout and it scattered the old man's Soul. If I were to fully release it, with a voice that could suppress everything within several miles, could I truly make a group of demons yield?"

"Wait a second, the old man didn't leave anything behind, so doesn't that mean my reward too would be..."

As Tao Qian pondered, he suddenly remembered something and his expression instantly soured.

Though Tao Qian didn't plan to claim the reward at the government office personally, whether through an intermediary or some other method, evidence was always needed.

A corpse or a head would do, but tattered clothes were unlikely to be recognized by anyone.

Thinking of the "two hundred silver coins" slipping away, Tao Qian felt as though his heart was being sliced with a knife.

Intent on recovering any loss he could, however small, Tao Qian grimaced and began to search through the pile of clothes on the ground.

This action is commonly known as searching a corpse.

Quickly, Tao Qian's face showed a look of surprise, and when he got up, his hands held several more items.

A money pouch containing several silver coins, a few silver dimes, and dozens of copper coins.

There was also a dung-ball-shaped object, as well as an extremely thin booklet.

The silver coins brought Tao Qian some joy, but it was the two items that gave him a palpable thrill that truly delighted him.

Yes, both were transcendent.

Upon touching them, Tao Qian had sensed detailed information which still appeared in that strange format.

[Name: Qu Worm Feces Stone]

[Record Type: Exotic Treasure.]

[Record: Qu Worms, common underground insects, are not particularly rare and are typically unsuitable for supernatural use. However, should these worms be touched by celestial signs and begin to show Abnormality, they will gather millions beneath the ground, about a yard deep, mating and devouring each other ceaselessly, day and night. After seven days, they will burst through the surface and excrete

feces stones, numbering in the hundreds or even thousands. These stones are supernatural and have many wonderful uses, all for a meager price.]

[Note one: The stone must not be consumed. Anyone who does will be defiled by the dung qi within and die vomiting.]

[Note two: Carrying this stone on one's person may emit a foul stench, but in cases of Earth Dragons turning over, landslides, and other disasters, it can provide an early warning.]

[Note three: This stone can detoxify. For those severely poisoned, a piece the size of a fingernail, placed under the nose, will induce vomiting for half a day, until the stomach and intestines are clear and the poison is resolved.]

[Note four: For those practicing Exotic Skill related to earth or dirt, using this stone can mitigate part of the Exemption Cost.]

[Note five: Exemption Cost is waived!]

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[Name: Earth Element Manual.]

[Record Type: Exotic Treasure.]

[Record: This manual was created by a strange person of the worldly society, steeped in heresy and heterodoxy. Although their cultivation was not low and their talent was remarkable, they still could not cure a particular quirk. This person loved to steal, targeting only common households, stealing old clothes, pots and pans, leftovers and the like. To facilitate this, they created this Magic Skill. After practicing, one could escape underground for several miles, even tens of miles.]

[Note one: Upon acquiring this skill, each use will defile the body with the Earth Element qi. Over time, one will adopt some Earth Elemental behaviors, such as avoiding light, preferring darkness, eating rotten things, until eventually, irreversibly, adopting all of the Earth Element's behaviors, burrowing underground, never to see the sun again.]

[Note two: To train in this skill, one must consume one Earth Centipede daily. The more consumed, the higher the success rate.]

[Note three: Exemption Cost is waived!]

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The information was complex, but Tao Qian, who was already entirely familiar, absorbed it all in the blink of an eye.

Then, a complex look appeared on his face.

Without a doubt, both items were valuable.

The stinky dung stone, if one could overlook its origin and shape, would be an Exotic Treasure, especially with no associated cost to use.

And so would the Earth Element Manual.

Who among those who proclaim, "The meek method is the true path," would refuse an Earth Escape Technique?

What made Tao Qian hesitate was that although he could exempt the technique's cost, he could not negate the rule that one must consume Earth Centipedes to train in it.

So-called Earth Centipedes, they didn't sound like tasty critters.

After some thought, Tao Qian heaved a deep sigh, and then pocketed both Exotic Treasures.

Afterward, Tao Qian once again merged into the shadows, silently waiting.

About a few minutes later, a "dull yellow" brilliance suddenly lit up the dark alley again.

A mass of yellow shadow burst from the ground, quickly forming a tangible body in mid-air.

Was it pretty boy Zhang Xian?

Indeed, it was.

But at this moment, a transformation of tremendous magnitude had overtaken his body.

Originally a frail, pale-faced youth, he had now bloated into a round and chubby figure, his robe stretched to the limit with something squirming inside.

Behind him, approximately four fresh red flesh tentacles, still wrapped in mucus and resembling python snakes, swayed.

Three of these tentacles were binding a garishly dressed, plump woman, while the remaining one swayed in front of the woman's face. The tip of this flesh whisker even had a bloodied mouth, capable of spewing out a white smoky unknown gas.

It seemed that the woman was in a constant state of confusion because of the gas.

Witnessing this scene, Tao Qian had no doubts left.

This "Zhang Xian's" so-called hypnotism Exotic Skill was nothing but an effect derived from the body alteration Magic he cultivated.

As Tao Qian conceived this idea, Zhang Xian, now indistinguishable from a monster or demon, also sensed something awry.

Yang Ding had disappeared.

Zhang Xian's brows furrowed, and he became alert at once, intending to take some action.

Unfortunately, it was too late.

A figure had somehow appeared at his side.

"You beast, you truly disgust me."

As Tao Qian uttered these words, another low shout penetrated Zhang Xian's mind.

The distance between the two was indeed very close.

If Tao Qian wished, he could let Zhang Xian experience what it felt like to be torn asunder by the Power of Bo Dragon.

He had originally planned to do so, but upon seeing Zhang Xian's revolting appearance, Tao Qian abandoned the idea.

He longed for a hearty and visceral fight, punch for punch with his opponent.

But that also depended on who he was fighting. In front of this thing? Tao Qian declined.

A Bo Dragon Sound, far more formidable than the one previously dealt to the old sheep-whiskered man, was sent by Tao Qian into Zhang Xian's ears.

"Who are you...?"

"Ah!"

When Zhang Xian realized he was under sneak attack, he had many contingency plans.

His experience in worldly society was not something Tao Qian could compare with. He had originally planned to interrupt the assailant and then escape.

He had even begun to relax the three bloodied flesh tentacles behind him, preparing to hurl Miss Zhou, using her as a makeshift weapon.

If necessary, he was even ready to turn back to the Zhou Mansion to take hostages.

He had many thoughts, and if he could find a gap, his chances of success were very high.

Unfortunately, he encountered an unreasonable opponent and an equally unreasonable mode of attack.

"Roar!"

Bo Dragon Sound struck his ear, like a barbaric drum reverberating violently.

The same thing that Yang Ding had experienced, he now endured as well.

In a daze, he saw the terrifying Exotic Beast, a mixture between a dragon and a Bo, charging with the force of a storm, thunder, and lightning, brutally shattering his Spirit and Soul, followed by ripping and tearing until everything was utterly and thoroughly destroyed.

As the leader of the gang, Zhang Xian actually possessed some methods unknown to the other three.

He had some protection for his Spirit and Soul.

But alas, he had not yet entered the true Energy-Introducing Realm.

The gap between their Cultivation and Divine Skills was too great.

With just one sound, Zhang Xian was dead.

Unlike the old goat-whiskered man who died in a state of Subterranean Evasion, Zhang Xian's body still remained.

Yet in a blink, deprived of its master, all "Mutated" traits retracted as blood gushed from the seven orifices.

Thud, thud—two bodies hit the ground.

One was Zhang Xian, and the other the somewhat more substantial Miss Zhou.

Tao Qian first made sure that the Zhou family's daughter was unharmed, simply bewildered by the hypnotic gas.

Then, he rubbed his hands together and walked straight toward Zhang Xian.

Killing the first Heterodox Mage, Yang Ding, Tao Qian had felt somewhat uncomfortable.

In a short time, having killed a second one, he had completely adapted.

Of course, it might also be because, for both sneak attacks, he used the Bo Dragon Sound; had the fight been hand to hand, Tao Qian might have felt differently.

Approaching the corpse of Zhang Xian, which had returned to its original state, Tao Qian touched it briefly.

The triggered sense of information confirmed for Tao Qian the beast's death.

Afterward, his face lit up with a hint of anticipation as he slowly reached out his hands.

Search the body—akin to opening a mystery box, it could become addictive.

Especially when there were gains, Tao Qian could hardly suppress the joy on his face.

For example, in the next moment, his hands stumbled upon something he couldn't help but smile at with a radiant curve.

Chapter 22 Reaping the Rewards

Seeking Immortal County, in a dark alley beside the grand courtyard of the Zhou Family, a distinguished and affluent household in their own right.

A somewhat bizarre scene was unfolding.

On the ground lay a pile of clothes and the bodies of a man and a woman, one dead and the other alive.

And a lean, handsome scholar, with a brilliant smile, was counting the spoils of battle in his hand.

As the leader of the gang, Zhang Xian indeed seemed wealthier than that old man.

Tao Qian had a total of five items in his hands.

A thin manual, a crude iron plate, a piece of skin resembling human skin from an unknown creature, a pill as large as a red date, and a purse.

What excited Tao Qian was that among these, the manual, the skin, and the pill all gave him a thrilling sensation.

With a heart full of anticipation, Tao Qian touched them.

In an instant, three streams of information, triggered by Extraordinary Perception, were sorted in Tao Qian's mind into that strange format.

The first to catch Tao Qian's attention was naturally the manual that resembled a Cultivation Secret Manual.

"Record Name: Meat Demon Possession Technique."

"Record Type: Alien."

"Description: Two hundred years ago, there was a Heterodox Practitioner named 'Wu Wuji.' As his lifespan neared its end, and he was soon to die, he sought Life Extension by any means possible. Rejected by the Daoist and Buddhist communities, and humiliated by the great families, in his grief and anger, he made a grand vow to create his own method for Longevity. If he could extend his life and pass through tribulations without death, he would certainly avenge the humiliations the Daoist, Buddhist, and the great families inflicted upon him that day... Years later, this person vanished without a trace, only to reappear one day in the Imperial City, scattering a hundred copies of the 'Meat Demon Possession Technique' before dying violently in the marketplace."

"Note 1: This technique is extremely complex, requiring one to first collect the eggs of a water insect known as the 'Meat Demon Eel,' found only in battlefield corpse pits and wasteland devil lands. This

creature is rumored to live up to three hundred years and is skilled in the art of change. It can exhale hypnotic gases. Once the eggs are collected, one must use meditation to concentrate day and night until incorporating one or two parts of one's own Essence Qi into the eggs."

"Note 2: Once the injection is complete, swallow the eggs into the stomach, drink fresh human blood to stimulate it. Within several days, the egg will hatch, and within a few breaths, it will devour the host's body, reaching a state of Spirit and Body Unity. The cultivator can then fully control the Demon insect's Divine Skills. If the body ages, they can transfer and reincarnate once more, not confined to any species, or bound by age or gender."

"Note 3: If one practices this technique, every morning and noon, they will suffer the torment of the Demon Eel gnawing at their heart. Moreover, they cannot live without human blood. If they do not consume it for one day, the next day they will go mad and lose themselves."

"Note 4: Exemption Cost can be waived!"

...

"Sss"

Having observed peculiar Cultivation Techniques like the Bai Qin Play, Immortal Fish Technique, and Earth Element Manual, Tao Qian thought he had seen it all and wouldn't be amazed by any other Magic Skills.

But now, Tao Qian realized he was wrong.

This technique called the "Meat Demon Possession Technique" had once again broadened his horizons.

His palms trembled slightly as he held the manual, as if holding a hot potato, and a surge of impulse arose from within to destroy the book.

"Heresy and heterodoxy, true to its name."

Tao Qian uttered an eight-character judgment and then shoved the manual into his bosom.

Whether to destroy it was not something to ponder at this moment; he decided to postpone it.

Blinking his eyes, the other two streams of information emerged in his mind.

"Record Name: Mountain Ghost Skin."

"Record Type: Alien."

"Description: There is a rumor in the Miao Region of a mysterious barren mountain with a black ghostly cave on its waist. Travelers once spent the night in the cave, comforting themselves in their loneliness, and the relics they left behind caused the ghost cave to become pregnant. The next day, a stone

membrane swelled up, and upon opening it, they found a Mountain Ghost Baby. This infant grows a year with every breath, and within a short time, becomes indistinguishable from an adult, intelligent and kind, knowledgeable about mountain paths and discerning of danger, swiftly leading its father out of the barren mountains, leaving behind a little bit of gold and silver, and medicinal materials, then vanishing without a trace."

"Note 1: Hearing this legend, a Heterodox Mage went to great lengths to find the ghost cave and cause it to become pregnant, similarly giving birth to a Mountain Ghost Baby. In a moment, the baby grew up, leading the mage out of the mountains. The mage took the opportunity to bind the Mountain Ghost, intending to force out its secrets. Suddenly, its body split apart, a stubborn stone fell, leaving only a skin sack with no hair, no color, but containing some Special Ability."

"Note 2: This skin has its own Special Ability. With a thought, it can cover the whole body, defend against sharp blades, resist water and fire, and even make it so that poisonous insects and snakes cannot approach."

"Note 3: While wearing this skin, one will be unable to conceive offspring."

"Note 4: Many unscrupulous people have copied the mage's actions, each obtaining a Mountain Ghost Skin, and thus this item is not rare in the world."

"Note 5: Exemption Cost can be waived!"

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"Record Name: Corpse Blood Elixir."

"Record Type: Alien."

"Description: In the land of Xiangxi, zombies often roam. If one encounters a Black Zombie or a Fur Zombie, they must be careful to avoid them. However, if one encounters an intelligent 'Floating Corpse,' it can be considered a stroke of luck. Floating Corpses like to acquire residences, go out at night to play, and return before dawn. If someone hides beside its zombie house and blocks its doorway when the Floating Corpse returns home, then with polite pleading, they might have a chance to receive this Blood Elixir from the zombie."

"Note 1: This elixir cannot be consumed. Whoever takes it will immediately be corrupted by the Corpse Qi within the elixir, dying on the spot."

"Note 2: If worn on the body, this elixir can resist the aura of Corpse Poison and defend against attacks on the Divine Soul, but one must chant the spell 'Floating Corpse aid me' for it to be effective."

"Note 3: For those who practice Exotic Skills related to zombies, this elixir can eliminate some of the costs."

"Note 4: If one possesses the elixir for too long, the body's joints will become increasingly rigid, a fear of the bright sun will develop, and a preference for darkness will arise. Upon seeing human blood, they will go mad, no different from a Floating Corpse."

"Note 5: Exemption Cost can be waived!"

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In the blink of an eye, some complex information was fully assimilated by Tao Qian.

Because he had first seen the "Meat Demon Possession Technique," even though the Mountain Ghost Skin and Corpse Blood Elixir were also very bizarre, he had grown accustomed to it.

Under the premise of exemption from cost, these two items were actually pretty good treasures.

Tao Qian stuffed them into his bosom in one go, then casually opened the money bag.

To his surprise, the real treat suddenly came.

In the money bag, there weren't many silver coins, silver dimes, or copper coins.

But there was a thick stack of banknotes, with patterns and designs that, to Tao Qian, were simply too beautiful for words.

Indeed, banknotes existed in this world at this time, just rarely seen by the average civilian.

You should know, one silver coin weighed seven mace and three fen.

If there was a transaction involving "over one hundred silver coins," the weight would quickly exceed over 70 taels; even a large household with servants couldn't possibly carry that much silver around at all times.

Therefore, in the market, if there was any major transaction, they usually used the banknotes of banks or bank drafts from money houses, both of which coexisted at present.

The stack of banknotes in Tao Qian's hands had two denominations: fifty yuan and one hundred yuan.

A quick count totaled a value of over one thousand yuan.

Holding the banknotes, Tao Qian's mood instantly brightened, his smile grew more radiant, and in the dark night, he flashed a set of large white teeth.

"The Zhou Family is one of the richest in Seeking Immortal County, with three generations dealing in silk, and they have opened quite a few silk stores even in the province capital. It's perfectly reasonable for them to use banknotes to pay back such a large sum to their own daughter."

"This scoundrel really doesn't act like a son, sneaking into someone's mansion in the middle of the night to steal their daughter and their money; utterly despicable and rotten to the core; he deserves more than death."

"Speaking of which, this sum of money is just enough to match the bounty of the Four Beasts of She County."

Muttering the last sentence, a light flashed in Tao Qian's eyes.

Then, quite naturally, he stuffed the stack of banknotes into his bosom as well.

Standing there, his gaze swept back and forth several times between Zhang Xian's body and Miss Zhou, who was still in a state of confusion.

Tao Qian remembered something and went straight over, extending a finger to touch the Zhou Family's daughter.

Indeed, she also gave Tao Qian a tremor of excitement.

Very weak, but that indeed indicated she was no longer a mortal and belonged to the realm of the transcendent.

The feedback came very quickly.

Unlike other items with detailed information, the Extraordinary Perception triggered by Miss Zhou consisted of only a few sentences.

However, among them was the information that Tao Qian wanted to know.

[Name: Zhou Yan.]

[Record Type: Abnormality.]

[Record: This girl is awakening a blood-related Abnormal Trait. She has been noticed by the Major Sect "the Xiu Family." A branch of the Xiu Family in Southern Yue Province is dispatching a clan elder to receive her.]

As the key information surfaced, Tao Qian immediately made his decision.

His previous concerns stemmed from the crude iron token.

The inscriptions carved on it revealed the Four Beasts' identity within the Devil God Army, known as "Abnormal Catcher," whose duty was presumably to capture such Abnormalities for the Devil God Army.

With this token, it indicated that the Four Beasts indeed had the protection of the Devil God Army.

He was uncertain whether the Devil God Army would seek revenge after receiving the news of the Four Beasts' execution.

But it was always good to be cautious, and Tao Qian didn't want his attack to lead to the annihilation of another family.

But now, having sensed the change in Miss Zhou, he could put his mind at ease.

"According to the Nameless Secret Manual, those Major Sects have the power comparable to Daoist and Buddhist; they are the Huge Monsters that truly blend with and stand above the secular world."

"Though the power of the Devil God Army is not bad, they probably wouldn't have any advantage against those Major Sects that have been passed down for a thousand years."

"Moreover, even if the Devil God Army were foolish, they wouldn't possibly become enemies with the Xiu Family, which has been in existence for eight hundred years, over a mere four dead beasts."

"The Zhou Mansion was originally just a large family in Seeking Immortal County, but if they could connect with the Xiu Family, they would probably become a powerful family in Southern Yue Province in the future."

"Well, that's good. Trading money for the daughter's safety and also getting the credit for the subduing of the Four Beasts, the Zhou Family really made a great fortune."

"As for those transcendent items, such as secret books and treasures, they naturally all belong to this benevolent person who does good deeds without seeking recognition and leaves once complete."

"Hehe!"

Several thoughts flashed through his mind, and Tao Qian quickly decided on his plan.

He still didn't wake Miss Zhou, but he adjusted her sleeping position with care, so she wouldn't drool on her clothes.

If it were any other girl in the middle of the night, half asleep in a dark alley, she would certainly freeze half to death.

But Miss Zhou, a heavyweight and still awakening some kind of blood-related "Abnormal Trait," didn't have to worry about that; she was sleeping blissfully sweet.

Once everything was settled, Tao Qian turned and swept toward the other two Beasts not far away.

Before attacking Yang Ding and Zhang Xian, Tao Qian was somewhat worried about his combat abilities as a newcomer.

But after slaying two Beasts in a row, Tao Qian fully understood what kind of ecological niche this fish was in among those low-level Heterodox Demon Magick practitioners who hadn't even entered the Energy-Introducing Realm.

Without being modest, to them, Tao Qian was no different from a man-eating giant shark.

Chapter 23 Heroic Couple, Court Hawks

Seeking Immortal County, at the edge of East Street, inside a dim alley.

The carriage was larger than ordinary horse-drawn carriages and was pulled by a docile yellow-maned horse. Suddenly, the curtains flung open.

A man dressed in shorts and muscles bulging from all over his body stepped down.

He was reeking of alcohol and a bit dazed, thus walked unsteadily.

From inside the carriage, behind him, a middle-aged man with a turban wrapped around his head, full of disdain, complained from the back:

"People always say that lazy people have more excrements. Daniu, you lazy fellow, you're so big, how can you even not hold a bit of 'yellow soup'."

"Walk farther to pee, don't let the wind blow your piss stench over here, it stinks too much."

In just two simple sentences, it was evident that this man had a close relationship with the muscular Daniu and also had a zest for life.

The despised Lu Daniu did not respond; he just pouted and obediently went into the alley next door.

He stood with his legs apart, relaxed his pants, and tinkled, dripping steadily, and soon after he breathed a sigh of relief as he finished.

Lu Daniu, having tightened his belt, was about to head back to the carriage.

It was at this moment, a not very bright but clearly visible "silver light" flashed past the corner of his eye in the night.

Because of his sensitivity to silver coins, the muscular man immediately turned his head.

Indeed, in a corner at the end of the alley, a shimmering silver coin was lying.

Although he was no ordinary man, at this time and age, the purchasing power of a single silver coin was still considerable—it could buy plenty of good food and even be used in the flower boat districts.

Moreover, finding money on the road, how could he, a man who trained his muscles more than his brain, refuse?

Thus, Lu Daniu cracked a grin and scurried over, squatting down to pick up the freely found silver coin.

Almost at the same moment he touched the silver coin, from his shadow behind him,

accompanied by a breath, a pale fist suddenly smashed out.

The target; the naive-looking, actually heartless man's back.

Unlike previous stealth attacks, this man named "Lu Daniu" specialized in melee combat.

As Tao Qian made his move, Lu Daniu's face suddenly changed dramatically.

His body, even faster than his brain, sensed the imminent danger.

In an instant, Lu Daniu's body started showing visible "mutations," changing incredibly quickly, nearly complete before Tao Qian's punch could land.

Accompanying the "sizzling" eerie noise, scalding steam actually sprayed out from Lu Daniu's pores.

His body started to swell, his stature already reaching 1.8 meters, now shooting towards 2 meters.

Well-defined muscles bulged, strands of sinew burst forth across sections of his shoulders, back, and abdomen, strange red tumors appeared.

His body hair also fell off in an instant.

His skin roughened, emitting a red and black mixed luster.

In a moment, before Tao Qian would stand a muscle monster that seemed unrelated to humans.

Although his feeling towards him was far from comparing to that of Cao Gang Seeking Immortal Leader Hong Heihu at the docks.

At this moment, Tao Qian still felt a slight hint of danger.

However, this danger came quickly and was resolved just as quickly.

Lu Daniu's transformed state seemed terrifying and likely formidable in a fight.

But, unfortunately for him, Tao Qian specialized in surprise attacks.

Lu Daniu realized he was being assassinated and his body mutated first, but still couldn't stop Tao Qian's fist from smashing into his back.

"Boom!"

With a muffled sound,

Tao Qian seriously infused the Power of Bo Dragon from within his body into Lu Daniu.

If Lu Daniu could perform Inner Vision at that moment, he would have seen his backside directly concaved, the horrifying force ripping through his rough skin, shattering all the flesh beneath it, including his strong and forceful heart.

Suddenly paused, reduced to minced meat.

The roar Lu Daniu almost uttered never came.

In the alley, a "sizzling" sound rang out, and as that scalding steam dispersed, his body retreated from mutation, even beginning to excessively shrink.

In a short while, only a dwarfish corpse remained.

Tao Qian did not immediately reach out to search the body, but once again merged into the shadows, drifting towards the carriage.

The night wind blew by, bringing a drop in temperature that took away the scent of blood and also Tao Qian's presence.

Despite only one person remaining, Tao Qian maintained his careful precautions.

He approached the carriage side and, with his enhanced senses, confirmed that the one called "Zhao Dou" inside, the final beast, had a normal heartbeat and breathing.

Tao Qian then feigned a staggering gait and casually flipped open the carriage curtain.

Inside, Zhao Dou was counting some silver coins and copper coins, his face full of greed.

Hearing the sound of the curtain flipping, and without looking up, he said:

"Done with your piss yet? The boss and Old Yang are probably about to succeed and come back, no more drinking, stay alert..."

Halfway through speaking, Zhao Dou realized something was amiss.

He suddenly looked up, not seeing Lu Daniu's honest face but another unfamiliar and handsome scholar's face.

Zhao Dou's expression changed abruptly, his killing intent surged.

But just as he was about to make a move, Tao Qian had already struck a fatal blow.

Without any unnecessary words, even before Zhao Dou could finish speaking,

Tao Qian's hand had already lightning-fast slapped on the top of his head.

After killing several people, Tao Qian grew gradually familiar with this job, and his control over his inner power became more proficient.

The power of the Bo Dragon Bloodline surged from his palm, reducing Zhao Dou's brain to a mushy state, which then trickled out from his ears and nose.

He was even less capable than Lu Daniu, not even having the chance to display which Evil Technique he had cultivated.

Tao Qian was actually somewhat curious, but for such a small curiosity, it wasn't worth the risk.

In his past life, he had learned from watching various films and dramas that whether one is a villain or a hero, once they've decided to make a move, they shouldn't waste time talking.

Talking too much is often the cause of many powerful figures' deaths.

After silently criticizing this, Tao Qian first moved Lu Daniu's corpse over and didn't forget to take back that one silver coin used as bait.

Then, as usual, he searched the body.

It didn't take long to achieve a result, a somewhat disheartening result.

Treasures, Cultivation Secret Manuals?

Neither was found.

What Tao Qian found were merely some silver coins and a few bottles of liquor.

This outcome made Tao Qian doubt his own hands.

Previously, searching Zhang Xian and Yang Ding had yielded considerable gains.

How could it be that with the genuinely combat-skilled Lu Daniu and Zhao Dou, there was not even a little bit?

From a lucky hand to an unlucky one, the transition was too swift.

Although there were some silver coins, silver dimes, and such, having obtained a large stack of banknotes, the now affluent Tao Qian looked down upon them.

After perceiving the corpses of the two men, Tao Qian understood the reason:

"The bounty for the Four Beasts of She County is not bad, and they even managed to mix into the Devil God Army in positions like 'Abnormal Catcher'; although they haven't entered the Energy-Introducing Realm and remain at the bottom of the Cultivation World, their level is higher than that of Wu Ming of Seeking Immortal Hermit."

"All four had extraordinary encounters, but taking a serious count, Zhang Xian and Yang Ding were the only two with inheritances, although severely incomplete and merely scraps."

"As for the combat-skilled Lu Daniu and Zhao Dou, one had devoured an alien in childhood and gained augmentation of flesh, while the other was even unluckier, taken by an evil Magician in childhood for human modification, though he survived, both actually had no future and knew no cultivation, just acting on instinct."

"In the Cultivation World, there are too many such individuals."

"That's why they so desperately wanted to acquire true scriptural inheritances."

"Just that they did too many unconscionable things and happened to run into me."

After slaying the Four Beasts, gaining practical experience, and collecting several secret books and treasures, Tao Qian was completely satisfied and concluded this mission.

It wasn't complicated; he simply dumped the corpses of the three beasts next to Miss Zhou.

Then he used the stench of the Qu Worm Feces Stone to wake her up.

Upon hearing Miss Zhou's scream echoing through the heavens, Tao Qian, with his bulging loot, drifted away into the distance.

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Leaving Zhou Mansion on East Street, Tao Qian headed directly for Vegetable Market Street.

But his destination wasn't the end of the street where Chengyou Bookstore was located.

Instead, it was the heart of Vegetable Market Street, recently often used as an execution ground.

There, a wooden post called "Soul Summoning Pole" was erected.

Hanging on the post were the heads of several Heroes, including one of the original bodies Tao Qian had possessed when he reincarnated.

When Tao Qian first arrived or borrowed a scholar's body to be reborn,

he was as powerless as a chicken, also devoid of any authority or wealth to leverage.

Even with anger in his heart, he was unable to act.

But now, everything was completely different.

With the contributions from the "Four Beasts of She County," Tao Qian fully knew what kind of power he now possessed.

So, the things that should be done, needed to be done.

"A dark and windy night is most conducive for action."

As Tao Qian uttered this, his figure had already neared the destination.

His original intention for coming here was to help collect the heads of the Heroes; what to do afterward would depend on his further adaptation to the world and additional information gathered.

Before this, Tao Qian had learned from an old clerk.

The officials from Seeking Immortal County Government planned to use these heads to fish for other Heroes.

Just like in the Immortal Realm, Tao Qian knew it was "bait," knew it was a trap, yet he still planned to dive into it.

In the Immortal Realm, Tao Qian relied on his Abnormality to freeload off the realm's master.

But here, Tao Qian wasn't planning to freeload; he intended to dismantle the trap entirely.

If this group of individuals from the official violent institutions of this world, also known as "court hawks," were too ruthless, Tao Qian wouldn't hesitate to decisively eliminate some of them.

Having acquired the life experiences and memories of both a Hero and a scholar, Tao Qian held not a shred of goodwill towards these people.

Just as he made up his mind and approached his destination, suddenly, a disturbance came from ahead.

The sounds of numerous footsteps, shouts of killing, and the clashing of weapons in battle carried by the night wind entered Tao Qian's ears.

"Hmm?"

Startled, his hidden figure had already appeared in a shadowy corner of Vegetable Market Street.

Looking out, he saw a battle drawing to its close.

However, the numbers of the two sides were vastly different, with the disadvantaged side about to be defeated.

One side consisted of several tens of people, mostly constables from the county government, but the core was a group of about seven or eight worldly society figures, including three dressed as monks.

The other side consisted of two 'fish' that had swum into the trap, a man and a woman, both of exceptional bearing and appearance, seemingly a couple.

Chapter 24 Tao Qian Showing Saint, The Might of the Bo Dragon

Whether they were the heroic couple or those worldly society fighters,

none could elicit in Tao Qian the precise "flutter of excitement," only a very faint perception.

This situation was similar to the previous incident at Seeking Immortal Pier, when a young Daoist lured Hong Heihu into a mutated state with a group of assassins.

They were not people of the Cultivation World, but they had contact with transcendent, cultivation-related matters, such as practicing some martial arts skills related to Cultivation Techniques and secret books.

Their displayed combat power corroborated this.

Like the man and woman, who both wielded fine steel longswords and, in their coordination, cut graceful figures with sword Qi slashing through the air, resembling an immortal couple.

And those worldly society fighters who took the lead each demonstrated their extraordinary powers, like those three monks, chanting scriptures with their bodies immediately turning a golden color, like three moving Vajra. The clanging sound that followed was them withstanding the sword Qi without any harm to their bodies.

The scene before them was just like a martial arts blockbuster.

On-site and observing, Tao Qian quickly recalled the origins of such a crowd.

In the "Nameless Secret Manual," there were numerous descriptions:

The Nine Cultivation Realms, the first realm being Energy Introduction, refers to drawing indescribable Source Qi into the body, remolding oneself.

This realm is the first deadly pass, historically, countless cultivators have perished without explanation upon the introduction of Source Qi.

Thus, to increase the chances of success, whether it be Daoist and Buddhist families or Heterodox Sects, all started to research some precautionary measures.

Among them, a reasonably effective method was to transform the cultivator's body in advance, making it more suitable for the type of Source Qi they would draw in.

For instance, the Major Sect of Buddhism, West Temple, would distribute to new monks a simple Magic Skill called "Marrow Cleansing Power." After successful practice, the monks already possessed various extraordinary powers; then, when cultivating the Westward Life Destiny Scripture, the majority could pass the first realm.

Or, one of the Heterodox Sects, Nine Toad Sect, would provide novices with a Magic Skill called "Golden Toad Force," with a similar effect, to assist new disciples in entering the Energy-Introducing Realm.

Such simple magic skills were widespread in the Cultivation World, naturally, many permeated into the mortal world, either intact or fragmented, thereby creating a sizable group that lay between mortals and cultivators, the so-called worldly society fighters.

Tao Qian had just steadied himself and started to assess the situation.

The killing surrounding the "Soul Summoning Pole" was also coming to an end.

Those county government constables were merely serving as a backdrop; the real fishers were the recruited worldly society fighters.

And the ones to deliver the final blow were the three monks.

They, like three dazzling golden Buddhas, rushed forward, withstood the sword Qi at close quarters, and each landed a punch. After three thuds, the couple was wounded and spat blood, unable to hold their longswords as they fell, weakened, to the ground.

They were quickly enveloped in the large net tossed by the constables.

The woman in the net, dressed in black, with fine eyebrows and cold eyes, seemed to have sustained lighter injuries and was able to speak, showing no fear of her predicament.

She glared with anger at the group of worldly society fighters, especially the three monks,

and with full contempt said,

"The Iron Buddha Temple outside Seeking Immortal City, at least within Southern Yue, has some reputation. How come you have surrendered yourself to the corrupt officials?"

"I heard your monks from the Iron Buddha Temple practiced the Golden Buddha Power, which originated from Vajra Temple, and to practice such a skill, one must uphold many precepts. If you have entered the civilian realm, that's one thing, but to have entered the county government, can you withstand the influence of authority? Can you bear the reproach of your conscience?"

"And you all, who boast of being heroic figures of worldly society, now nothing more than court hawks."

"Pah!"

After she spoke, the faces of the few worldly society fighters responsible for the encirclement turned quite ugly.

But they couldn't retort and simply glowered in silence.

The three monks, after exiting the "Golden Buddha State," appeared full of woe and without offering a defense, simply bowed their heads in prayer.

Meanwhile, the constables, seeing the tough ones captured, began to chuckle coldly.

The leader among them, a middle-aged constable with a sleazy face and a large black patch on his chin, approached and began pointing at the couple's appearance.

It was clear he recognized them and said proudly,

"Oh, isn't this the heroic couple-turned-bandits whose fame has recently skyrocketed? Robbing wealthy households is not enough, assassinating court officials, now you've even got your sights set on the heads hanging from this execution ground's Soul Summoning Pole."

"Well, it's just as well, not having caught the other accomplices of the rebellion, capturing you two thieves is also a big catch."

"The county chief will surely reward us."

As the noise persisted, Tao Qian could no longer restrain the urge to take action.

He had already decided to collect the heads of these heroes.

The unexpected event before him had only momentarily interrupted him and did not affect Tao Qian's movements.

He had not yet acted, but suddenly a new idea came to him.

Since he swallowed that "Bo Dragon Pearl Fragment" in the Immortal Realm and acquired part of the Power of the Bo Dragon Bloodline, he had yet to fully display the power within his body.

When he first attacked the Four Beasts of She County, Tao Qian was cautious, fearing he might be too reckless.

Though during the process, he played the part of cunning and strategic.

After killing the four, Tao Qian vaguely understood his ecological niche in the Cultivation World.

A Heterodox Mage possessing transcendent, abnormal powers no longer caused fear or caution in Tao Qian, let alone these useless constables and a few worldly society fighters who only touched the edge of cultivation?

What Tao Qian had in mind was to unleash a significant force to display and exude the will of the heroic original spirit he felt when beheaded that day.

With a great breath, Tao Qian suddenly surrendered to the Bo Dragon Driving Origin Qi within his body.

He was already in the Energy-Introducing Realm, in the Body Refining Stage.

With a surge of the mind, he let the Source Qi rush through and fully unleashed the Power of the Bo Dragon Bloodline.

The "mutated" scene that would astonish the ordinary observer immediately manifested upon his body.

His eyes instantly turned gold; his body began to elongate, and intricate dragon scales spread across his entire body...

At the same time as the abnormality occurred, the Source Qi within his body unexpectedly stirred the celestial phenomena.

BOOM!

Without any warning, the entire Seeking Immortal County was suddenly awakened by a thunderbolt.

A vast expanse of dark clouds rolled in, as if a storm that could overturn everything had arrived, and a torrential downpour began to fall straight from the sky.

The blinding lightning, like countless massive and sharp thunder spears, completely split the sky above Seeking Immortal County.

The sudden change came too fast.

No one had a chance to react.

But even the useless constables instinctively knew that something unusual was about to happen.

The next moment arrived.

"ROAR"

A roar that everyone in Seeking Immortal County could hear suddenly resounded.

As the roar came, throughout the county, whether it was birds or beasts, or demons and other abnormalities, all fell silent in that instant.

The entire city seemed to have been dragged into a barbaric age, enveloped by strong winds, torrential rain, thunder, lightning, and strange lights...

However, those who felt it most deeply were the crowd under the Soul Summoning Pole at Vegetable Market Street.

They all seemed to faintly see a beast somewhere between a dragon and a Bo existing in between the wind, rain, thunder, and lightning, ensue by a rainbow glow up and down its body.

Amidst the roaring, the creature seemed to charge through the storm, bringing along wind, rain, thunder, and lightning.

Whether it was the constables or the group of worldly society individuals, the three monks from the Iron Buddha Temple, at that moment, they all lost control over their bodies and souls.

Their bodies became rigid, and their souls dazed and confused.

As the storm passed, they appeared to have returned to the execution ground of the day before, seemingly hearing the last roars of the heroes who had their tongues cut off.

An unknown amount of time passed, the thunder ceased abruptly, and the wind and rain stopped.

In Vegetable Market Street, a group of constables, worldly society individuals, and three monks all woke from their deep palpitations.

It took a long time to come back to their senses.

Before they had time to rejoice that they were still alive, suddenly, one of the constables seemed to see something.

His face was full of terror, as he pointed at the Soul Summoning Pole and trembled, "Gone... all gone!"

Everyone turned to look and saw that on the wooden stake which had been covered with heads before, there was now nothing.

Everyone realized something and quickly looked down at the ground.

Indeed, the heroic couple that had been captured before had also disappeared without a trace.

...

About half an hour later, in a bookstore at the end of Vegetable Market Street, a travel-worn Tao Qian returned.

At this moment, the "mutated traits" on his body had all disappeared.

After washing up with some water and changing into a new set of clothes,

he sat down again in the partitioned area, Tao Qian's mind recalled the events he had just caused.

The Record stated that after Tao Qian swallowed the Bo Dragon Pearl Fragment, he was equivalent to a Bo Dragon hatchling.

The terrifying celestial event that had just appeared in the skies over the vast Seeking Immortal County corroborated this.

At full strength, Tao Qian could create the commotion of a Bo Dragon hatchling on the move.

However, it was just the commotion and nothing more.

Those wind, rain, thunder, and lightning actually had little killing power.

If it had been a real "Bo Dragon hatchling," the outcome would not have been so mild.

Of course, even so, the people from the county government, the monks from Iron Buddha Temple, and a group of worldly society individuals, as well as all the residents of Seeking Immortal County, had all felt an unprecedented shock.

"This time, it seems I played a little too big,"

Tao Qian muttered to himself.

His tone held no hint of regret.

He had not only taken all the heads of the heroes but also rescued the heroic couple known as "Yin Juejun" and "Duan Qiu," and together with them, made proper arrangements for the heroes' heads; if they still had family alive, they would be sent discreetly by the couple.

After completing this, Tao Qian bid farewell to the two and hurried back.

Although Tao Qian also noticed that the two seemed to want to say something, at that time, Tao Qian still maintained some of the Bo Dragon traits.

He looked not quite human, not quite Bo, not quite dragon.

Although the two were not from the Cultivation World, they had some contact and knew that every act of cultivation and transcendence had its price, an iron law.

In the end, the couple said nothing.

Naturally, Tao Qian would not actively ask for anything. He had only been in this world for a few days, still slowly adjusting, and could not do without this small bookstore that provided shelter from the elements and a temporary place to live.

"Once I fully adapt here, then I will think about the road ahead,"

After uttering these words, Tao Qian pushed away the distracting thoughts.

Then his gaze turned once more, falling upon the tabletop before him, where all of Tao Qian's gains from tonight were placed.

He had been extremely busy tonight, obtaining treasures and Cultivation Secret Manuals from killing four people and showing for the first time the full force of the Power of the Bo Dragon Bloodline, which gave rise to many inspired thoughts in Tao Qian's heart.

Now that he had some free time, it was just right to rethink and ponder.

Chapter 25 The path forward is unclear, where to find the Great Book?

Tao Qian studied the narrow table before him, on which lay stacks of banknotes amounting to thousands of yuan, a small pile of silver coins, silver dimes, and copper coins—the remnants of his actual gains.

All of them related to the transcendent and abnormal, acquired by him through the arduous task of scavenging corpses.

"Qu Worm Feces Stone, Earth Element Manual, Meat Demon Possession Technique, Mountain Ghost Skin, Corpse Blood Elixir... plus the previously obtained Bai Qin Play Fragment, and the Immortal Fish Technique."

"For me to have gained so much in the past two days, I must be considered fortunate among those in the Cultivation World."

"At least compared to my predecessor, Seeking Immortal Hermit Wu Ming, I'm definitely blessed."

"But in the end, these are all thanks to my strange Golden Finger."

"It's just a pity... these items cannot clear the path ahead for me, nor let me discern the Great Dao."

Tao Qian spoke with a hint of regret, though not overly so.

Clearly, he was well aware that if buying a couple of books and killing four marauders could grant access to the Great Dao, such cultivation techniques would be far too cheap.

He mumbled to himself while contemplating the uses of these items.

"The Bai Qin Play Fragment is still unusable; I can be exempt from the cost required to learn the technique, but not the basic conditions of cultivation."

"The simplest forms such as Pig Form, Sheep Form, Chicken Form, etc., require not ordinary bird blood, but the elusive wild spirit bird essence, where on earth could I find such blood?"

"Besides, even if I did cultivate them, their power would likely fall far short of that of the Bo Dragon Bloodline."

"Only the Ape Form Elephant Form poses some potential."

With this thought, Tao Qian set down the fragmented books.

He then planned to put aside the Earth Element Manual and the Meat Demon Possession Technique, two Secret Techniques.

The latter goes without saying—it is a spell from the Heterodox Side Door and among the more malevolent ones. Tao Qian could exempt himself from the cost but would never cultivate it.

As for the former, the cost could be exempt, but its prerequisite: consume one Earth Element daily—the more consumed, the higher the chance of success.

Clutching the manual, Tao Qian thought for a moment, then moved it back in place.

With a distressed expression, he clenched his teeth and said,

"I possess the Bo Dragon Bloodline, and with all my strength, I can briefly command the forces of wind, rain, thunder, and lightning to control the sky, but at an immensely high consumption rate. Just now, feigning for a moment, my Source Qi was nearly drained; it's simply too risky... If I add one more Subterranean Evasion Technique as an escape card, that would be ideal."

"Besides, isn't it just eating bugs? What's the big deal?"

"Their protein content is extremely high, and if fried before eating, they would be even crunchier. Perhaps I could even grow to like the taste."

Having said that, Tao Qian pinched the ball-like Feces Stone again, his face twisted in conflict.

Although the time was short, Tao Qian had already experimented.

"All other costs for this Feces Stone can be exempted; wearing it can counteract poison, and in the future, I can use it to offset some costs of cultivating Earth-related Exotic Skills."

"The only problem is that the stench is irremovable. Could it be that the fecal smell is not a cost, but a prerequisite condition?"

"Never mind, I'd rather stink than be poisoned to death someday."

"Moreover, it's actually not too bad. It seems the foul smell targets only the wearer; others can't smell it, which spares me from social death—a great blessing."

Pinching his nose, Tao Qian acknowledged another treasure.

Next was the "Mountain Ghost Skin," which greatly resembled human skin and truly captivated Tao Qian's heart.

"The skin is similar to a concealed Treasure Armor, and it has many functions."

"Yet, it's such a pity that the good condition of being unable to conceive offspring upon wearing it—which would have been a favorable cost—was negated by my Special Ability; the contraceptive effect was thus nullified."

"What an ironic twist of fate!"

As he spoke, Tao Qian flung the skin onto the back of his hand.

Astonishingly, the hairless, colorless "abnormality" squirmed and stretched as if alive, quickly covering Tao Qian's entire body.

To his surprise, he felt no discomfort; on the contrary, he felt even lighter.

As for the final item, the Corpse Blood Elixir that was as large as a date, there was actually little to be said.

After understanding its origin and function, Tao Qian placed it in his bosom, allowing the Mountain Ghost Skin to envelop it along with the Feces Stone.

Then, Tao Qian remarked with a sigh, "Floating Corpses are fine zombies, indeed. If I have the chance, I'll seek one too; not to block their path for gifts, but a chat would be nice."

Having accounted for his gains and their applications, Tao Qian was not completely satisfied.

In his mind, he quickly replayed the night's multiple attacks, summarizing a bit of experience and mistakes.

Finally, Tao Qian's thoughts focused on the conversation he overheard before taking action, especially the critical sentence spoken by Zhang Xian: "The reward of Silver Coins is a small matter; the true significance lies in whether one can be granted a cultivation scripture and technique."

This sentence fully expressed the endless hardship of the lower ranks within the Cultivation World.

The Evil People from the Four Beasts of She County were the same.

And so was the hermit Wu Ming, who had sought immortality for thirty years and died in a daze.

"The so-called cultivation scriptures and techniques refer to those cultivation manuals that have completeness, a clear path ahead, smaller costs, or methods within the manuals to offset those costs."

"Such tomes, in the Cultivation World, are the true essence of the foundation."

"Be it the Daoist, Buddhism, Martial and Divine Cultivation, or the countless Heterodox Sects and Side Doors, all depend on a large number of such tomes to occupy the upper echelons of the Cultivation World's ecological hierarchy."

"A more colloquial name for them is... the 'Lifebound Scripture'!"

"Since it is called Lifebound, naturally, they are not mere thin volumes; almost all of them are profound and complex, directly connected to the Heavenly Dao's Great Books."

"Most are named as Scriptures, Books, Records, and so forth."

"Like the Cao Gang's top-secret 'Blood River Scripture', or the legendary Daoist 'Old Lord Ascension Scripture', the Buddhist 'Great Reincarnation Scripture', the fabled Heterodox 'Infant Scripture'... these are all things that every cultivator dreams of obtaining."

"Even among Lifebound Scriptures, there are levels of strength."

"Any Magic Skill capable of cultivating a True Immortal is controlled by major powers without exception."

"Books like 'Blood River Scripture', abundant in methods but hopeless for pursuing the immortal path, are also controlled by forces of the 'Cao Gang' caliber."

"My current Cultivation of the 'Immortal Fish Technique' has nothing to do with a Lifebound Scripture, a more accurate description would be that it's akin to an admission ticket, an entry pass. With it, one can merely enter that terrifyingly peculiar Fairyland Fish Pond to vie for the chance to be 'fished' by formidable existences, truly a fate most dire."

At this thought, Tao Qian's eyes revealed a trace of bitterness.

Although he had entered the Energy-Introducing Realm, he had not obtained a single 'Lifebound Scripture' suitable for cultivation.

There was a saying in the Cultivation World:

A day without a Great Book,

is just an existence akin to an ant!

Tao Qian knew how precise this saying was from what he had learned from Seeking Immortal Hermit Wu Ming and Rigui Daoist Lin Xiaohua.

As recorded in the 'Nameless Secret Manual', one day a large group of low-level cultivators gathered to discuss how to resist a 'True Cultivation Disciple' from a Great Sect.

They thought with their overwhelming numbers, even if they couldn't win, they should've been able to put up some resistance.

However, the outcome was that the True Cultivation Disciple waved a hand and a dazzling rainbow light obscured the sky; the group of low-level cultivators vanished in the blink of an eye, not even a complete corpse was left behind.

Tao Qian, having obtained the Bo Dragon Bloodline, was indeed a proper Energy-Introducing Realm cultivator.

But this did not change the fact that he was at the bottom of the Cultivation World.

What if one day, he also encountered a disciple from a Great Sect and accidentally ended up with the same fate?

With these thoughts, Tao Qian grew even more disheartened.

He couldn't help but think about ways he might obtain a Great Book or Lifebound Scripture at this stage.

"The 'Immortal Fish Technique'... that Fairyland is the fishpond of some terrifying being, even using something like the 'Bo Dragon Pearl' as bait; one day using a Great Book as lure wouldn't be out of the ordinary."

"Others surely would not dare to take the bait, but I am different. The joy of freeloading is momentary, but everlasting freeloading is constant joy, even if I could freeload a Lifebound Scripture, that would be unbelievably thrilling."

These two thoughts flashed through his mind, and Tao Qian's expression grew complicated.

After consuming the Bo Dragon Pearl Fragment, he had originally intended to be cautious and avoid that Fairyland Fish Pond.

But now, it seemed he still had to take the risk.

"Hmm?"

"Actually, there's another more conventional, orthodox method, which is to seek the Dao and ask questions like Wu Ming; however, I need to have a clear goal."

"Which of the Twelve Major Daoist Sects, the 3,800 Buddhist temples, the numerous Martial and Divine Cultivation clans, the thousands of sources from Heterodox Sects, and the most mysterious Demon Sects should I choose from?"

"Choose correctly, and there's a chance to cultivate into a True Immortal."

"Choose incorrectly, and one might lose their life."

"If only that accomplished Rigui Daoist Lin Xiaohua were here, it'd be good to have a senior's leg to cling to for advice. After all, that big leg had promised to pass on a method to enhance that ability, right?"

"But the guy is also cautious, though within Southern Yue, he did not specify where in the province he could be found. How am I to find him?"

Thinking up to this point, Tao Qian scratched his head.

With no choice but to temporally set aside those thoughts and an unclear path ahead, at least he had a direction now.

The next step, finding a Lifebound Scripture!

"It's probably difficult to get it in one step, but I can continue to explore within the Cultivation World."

"Now that my cultivation level also makes me a proper cultivator."

"I should visit some of the cultivator gathering places mentioned in the 'Nameless Secret Manual.' If I'm not mistaken, there's one nearby Seeking Immortal County."

"That place is called 'Tengshe Town,' originally a mortal dwelling until disaster struck and wiped out the entire town. It was then occupied by a Heterodox power and turned into a sort of marketplace for the mutual exchange of goods and Magic Skills."

"The tricksters and evil people there are plenty, though. The poor Seeking Immortal Hermit was swindled terribly there and almost had his Essence Blood sucked away by some charm-type Abnormality."

"If they could be so cruel to an old man, I, a tender new cultivator, must be even more cautious upon going there, lest I fall prey to those sweet-talking seductresses with ample bosoms and long legs."

"Remember, remember!"

...

Having finished his planning, Tao Qian knew where to go after closing his stall the next day, and contentedly secured all the banknotes and silver coins.

He didn't go to sleep but instead sat cross-legged on the bed, slowly recovering the Bo Dragon Source Qi that he had excessively expended from his showboating that night.

Chapter 26 Half-dragon Half-man, Night to Tengshe

The next morning, after a hard night's work, Mr. Tao awoke refreshed, washed up, and opened the door.

Now, endowed with cultivation power and carrying a huge sum of money,

common sense would suggest it was time to close down Chengyou Bookstore and venture elsewhere.

Yet, after much deliberation last night, Tao Qian decided to stay a bit longer in Seeking Immortal County, living as a scholar as he had before and making plans later.

He had thought about seeking the Great Lifebook Scripture last night, but the world was indeed too dangerous.

The tragic tales of Seeking Immortal Hermit Wu Ming were enough to serve as a warning for Tao Qian.

It was best to plan carefully before acting.

With such thoughts, Tao Qian naturally tidied up the bookstore and tasted some street breakfast foods.

Being in the bustling Vegetable Market Street, the marketplace atmosphere was intensely strong.

Tao Qian didn't need to do much, just watching was enough to gradually dissolve the already thin barrier.

However, it was somewhat frustrating that due to the previous day's purchases, various pictorials and books were sold out.

Chengyou Bookstore's business was once again bleak.

But now, Tao Qian knew how to do business, and with over one thousand yuan in cash and silver coins in his pocket, he wasn't the least bit worried.

The morning passed without many visitors,

except for the familiar neighbors, Li Sanyu and Jia Qiang, the owners of neighboring shops.

These two were also idle and seemed to treat Tao Qian's modest bookstore as an essential stop on their wanderings, specially making time to chat.

Their main point was to share some gossip,

such as the two major events that happened last night in Seeking Immortal County.

The two painted a vivid picture, seeming to have some inside information.

"Tao Scholar, I know you scholars talk about avoiding discussions on supernatural and paranormal matters, but last night's event, the whole county heard it."

"That Dragon Roar sounded like drums from the barbaric lands; even if you slept like a pig, you couldn't have missed it."

"I have another top-secret piece of news for you. I have a distant nephew who works as a constable at the county government. Last night he saw a strange dragon carrying wind, rain, thunder, and lightning across Seeking Immortal County. It seemed to be moved by the heated blood of the heroes on the Soul Summoning Pole, and actually intervened to save their heads and also rescued two heroic thieves with the same intention."

"An omen of a nation's demise is always followed by devils, but who knows whether this strange dragon is a menace or an omen of good fortune?"

"Anyway, today, only a few old officials stayed at the county government. That cowardly official hid early in the morning, clearly terrified of being attacked by the strange dragon in broad daylight, haha."

"Besides that, you definitely don't know about another strange incident last night."

"It's said that Miss Zhou of the wealthy Zhou Family was kidnapped last night by the notorious devilish sorcerer 'Four Beasts of She County.' Fortunately, at the critical moment, a strange person passed by, not only rescuing her but also killing the Four Beasts."

"Early this morning, Zhou Mansion delivered the bodies of the Four Beasts to the county government. Even though the Zhou family is influential, they didn't care about the reward; instead, they announced that as long as the strange savior comes forward to accept thanks, the Zhou Family is willing to pay tens of thousands of yuan."

"As soon as this news came out, the threshold of the Zhou Mansion was nearly broken by a mob of thugs pretending to be the benefactor. These fools almost got smashed into meat pies by the furious Miss Zhou."

"Miss Zhou said, although last night was dark, she clearly saw that her savior was extremely handsome, like a banished celestial being."

"If another crooked guy shows up, she might just hammer him to death."

...

With Tao Qian's competent assistance, the two gossip-sharing shop owners left fully satisfied.

Tao Qian himself, however, was somewhat puzzled.

He was quite sure of how well he had handled the two events last night.

"Miss Zhou definitely couldn't have seen my face, at most she might have seen me walking away."

"She mentioned someone extremely handsome, like a celestial being... probably the benefactor's halo effect."

"Still, there were some oversights, like forgetting to cover my face, which really shouldn't have happened."

"Next time something like this occurs, concealing my identity will be the top priority."

Tao Qian reflected on his experiences of mischief from the night before, passing the morning without much disturbance.

At noon, Tao Qian didn't hesitate to close the shop.

Before leaving, he grabbed a piece of white paper and wrote:

"Out buying books, will reopen in the afternoon. Upcoming: Lady's Pictorials, Mysterious Books, Martial Arts Mysteries, Western Foreign Books... Limited stock, buy quickly if interested."

A bit wordy, but certainly eye-catching.

Tao Qian patted his hands with satisfaction and turned toward the Seeking Immortal Pier's book market, his gaze filled with anticipation.

The day before yesterday, he had scored the Bai Qin Play Fragment and the Immortal Fish Technique at the book market.

It was natural to have some expectations about heading there again.

Unfortunately, finding such bargains, like having "Golden Eyes," requires an external boost,

and even more so, being in the right place.

Though the book market was somewhat related, it was still a place of the Mortal World; finding Cultivation Secret Manuals there wouldn't be so easy.

Throughout the afternoon, Tao Qian watched as customers filled his shop, but he felt incredibly bored.

Collecting the clinking, shiny silver coins, he thought to himself:

"It seems unrealistic to expect to find bargains at the book market; I should probably try Tengshe Town instead."

"With my acute Extraordinary Perception and the odd format of information, there might be a higher chance of finding Cultivation and extraordinary items in such a convergence of Cultivation and supernatural affairs."

"As described in the Secret Book, Tengshe Town is truly a place of indulgence, with all sorts of spectacular shows... I can hardly wait."

Hours passed quickly as Tao Qian collected money and dreamed away.

As the sky began to darken, Tao Qian ruthlessly ousted a group that tried to finish reading those pictorial magazines in his shop.

Freeloading, this had now become Tao Qian's forte.

Others thinking they could freeload off Mr. Tao was wishful thinking.

After closing the shop, Tao Qian turned back to his partition, placing the brightly polished copper mirror on the narrow table.

Tonight he was set to head to Tengshe Town, a place unlike the book market, truly a transcendent territory.

The Nameless Secret Manual described the town as filled mostly with cultivators of heresy and heterodoxy, and also inhabited by demons, ghosts, and all manners of strange creatures.

Though there was some order, it was faintly pitiful.

Newcomers with little experience could easily lose their belongings without careful attention.

For instance, all their essence blood.

Or even their own life.

Learning from last night's lessons, Tao Qian decided to apply makeup before leaving.

Though he had no cosmetics, nor knew any sorcerous transfiguration techniques, he had his own subtleties.

Facing the copper mirror, Tao Qian began to concentrate, willingly guiding the "Bo Dragon Driving Origin Qi" inside his body.

He was currently in one of the Nine Cultivation Realms, the Body Refining Stage.

As Source Qi flowed with his will, any part he focused his spirit on underwent corresponding transformations.

For example, passing through the skin would slowly grow Bo Dragon scales.

If it lingered on his face, soon his pupils and teeth would turn golden, and his hair and whiskers would emanate a cyan glow.

This same principle applied to the hands, feet, chest, abdomen, or other hidden areas.

Honestly, Tao Qian was quite familiar with this sort of play.

Except unlike playing games in his previous life, this was real operation.

Moreover, the transformation of the body by the Bo Dragon Source Qi was not without cost; besides the continuous consumption of the Source Qi itself, it also brought pain, itching, and more.

Such immediate costs were not something Tao Qian's special ability could exempt.

Within moments, he lost his playful mood.

Enduring some discomfort, Tao Qian made some "modifications" to ensure no one could recognize him as the sour scholar owner of Chengyou Bookstore.

After Seeking Immortal County truly fell into night, a vague mist arose in a dark alley of Vegetable Market Street, blending into the sky with the night breeze.

About a few minutes later, outside Seeking Immortal County.

Beside a mountain path leading to distant dark mountains, a figure suddenly descended from the sky.

By the moonlight, one could vaguely see his appearance.

His height had surged to nearly two meters, and though he wore the long robe of a scholar, the muscles beneath the robe could not be fully concealed.

Not the bulky, overlaid kind of muscle, but a form filled with terrifying explosive power and primal allure.

But what truly caught the eye was his face.

He had human-like "facial features," but many more resembled... a dragon?

His skin toughened by embedded dragon scales, golden vertical pupils, decidedly prominent dragon teeth, and exceptionally elegant, cyan-lit hair and whiskers.

And most distinctly, an almost palpable faint aura of might, unique to a stronger life form.

Any normal person who saw Tao Qian at this moment—

The first thought would undoubtedly not be that he was human.

Rather, they would guess that this was either a demon or some type of alien creature.

"Whether it's the narratives inside the Nameless Secret Manual or what Lin Xiaohua, the Rigui Daoist, said, it's clear that although the Cultivation World is mostly human cultivators, there are also not a few non-human life forms."

"There are countless strange creatures, endless demons, exotic beasts, ghosts, and evil objects."

"Additionally, there are originally humans who later transformed into indescribable, incomprehensible immortal gods."

"My half-human, half-dragon appearance would cause a sensation in the mortal world, but it's probably nothing unusual in the Cultivation World."

"Too many conditions could lead to such life forms."

"Like cultivators whose Secret Cultivation Methods go out of control, humans who have swallowed alien objects, or demons trying to transform into humans."

...

Letting his thoughts surge, Tao Qian, in this monstrous form, utilized the cover of the night wind to venture deeper into the mountains.

Although Tao Qian had extensively studied the Nameless Secret Manual and knew roughly where Tengshe Town was as well as the many rules for entry,

It was still his first visit without anyone to guide him.

It took him a full hour, but with his "Extraordinary Perception," after he crossed over a mountaintop, he saw flickering lights not far ahead.

There, unmistakably, was a town of modest scale, many structures built against the mountains, stretching from the foot of the mountain to its darkest summit.

The dark summit, in shape and contour, indeed resembled the legendary exotic beast, "Tengshe."

And those buildings, from a distance, seemed almost like parasites residing within the armor of Tengshe, the flickering lights eerily suggestive of sucking on flesh and blood, invoking an inexplicable sense of disgust in onlookers.

Chapter 27 Mortals Stumble upon Tengshe Mountain, Plague Golden Toad Speaks Human Language

Outside the Seeking Immortal City lay a range of mountains.

The further one ventured into the depths, the harder it was to see any traces of human habitation; crossing several more mountain peaks, one could hardly find any sign of people at all.

In the previous years, there had been a town named Tengshe Town, built against the mountains, conveniently located at the intersection of Seeking Immortal County, Wending County, Shou City, and Shanli County. Travelers and traders passing through were plentiful, making it a prosperous place.

Unexpectedly one day, the town suffered from a demon calamity. A horde of demons passed through and, in a single night, slaughtered the entire town to the ground.

If that were all, there would be refugees, disaster victims, willing to resettle there.

However, after that night in Tengshe Town, strange occurrences frequently happened. Mortals who stayed there would inevitably die violently within a few days.

As such, the town rapidly fell into desolation.

Until it was occupied by a heterodox force known as Joyful Tower, and it was unknown by what means they cleared all the evil spirits and eerie entities from Tengshe Town.

A few days later, Joyful Tower announced that Tengshe Town had been opened as a workshop, welcoming guests from all directions.

In the entire Longevity Heavenly Dynasty, Joyful Tower wasn't considered among the top powers, but within Southern Yue, it was still a local overlord.

Thus, it didn't take long for Tengshe Town to revive.

Within Southern Yue Province and the surrounding provinces, "Tengshe Town" was known as a place of exchange and commerce.

Most low-tier cultivators loved to delve into such workshops.

Just like commonplace markets, mostly consisted of ordinary people.

Tao Qian recalled the descriptions from the Nameless Secret Manual, soon traversed the wild forests and valleys, and arrived at the dark foothills.

And as he neared his destination, Tao Qian's Extraordinary Perception began to violently react.

"Thump, thump, thump,"

A series of throbbing sensations merged into one.

It made Tao Qian feel as if there were giant bells and drums resonating in his mind.

After a great deal of effort, Tao Qian suppressed his perception.

When he regained his senses, his figure had already emerged from the dense forest, appearing beneath the flickering lights.

At the same time, Tao Qian also saw a large number of "companions."

Coming from all directions, there were beings of various forms.

The reason he didn't refer to them as human cultivators was that among those Tao Qian could see, those with human shapes scarcely accounted for half.

The rest of the lifeforms were non-human.

There were demons with a few pieces of cloth hanging on them, chests bared, holding weapons; giant apes gnawing on chunks of bone and flesh; Evil Ghosts with twisted limbs, moving forward with shrieks; Alien Charms lifting red lanterns, dressed in red bridal garments; Snake Women with disheveled hair, moving forward with a Beautiful Head atop them... these were still considered normal.

What truly surprised Tao Qian were some "Abnormalities."

Even now, as his gaze touched those alien entities, his heart skipped with fear, almost compelling him to turn around and flee.

He wanted to record these abnormal appearances into his memory immediately.

But after merely blinking, he found he had forgotten them all.

Such Abnormalities weren't many, disappearing at the foot of the mountain in a flash.

When Tao Qian tried to take a closer look, he only caught a glimpse of one of their figures.

She was a woman with skin as pale as snow, her beautiful body exposed, and a visage akin to that of a holy Snow Woman, yet no presence in the vicinity harbored lecherous thoughts toward her form.

For upon that body's surface, densely packed, were countless pores from which red parasitic worms resembling "pork tapeworms" extended, each reaching several meters in length, writhing in the air, and emitting a "hissing" sound.

With each step she took, the pristine white feet immediately birthed a bright red, vivid mist with a strong fragrance underneath.

The scarlet mist carried her forward, and if one were to ignore her naked form, it would seem as though some fairy was passing by.

If someone came too close, hearing too much of those alien sounds and smelling too much of the exotic fragrance,

they would immediately fall to the ground, their eyes bulging as they vomited, along with the acidic water from their stomachs, a mass of insect eggs surged forth.

When she disappeared at the foot of the mountain in a manner difficult for anyone to comprehend,

all the demons, evil spirits, practitioners of heresy and heterodoxy, and other cultivators at the scene heaved a heavy sigh of relief.

Tao Qian was also among them.

Encountering this incomprehensible "abnormality," the many demons gathered at the foot of this mountain suddenly seemed almost endearing.

But soon enough, the true ferocity of the demons displayed itself.

For there was a wolf-shaped devil that suddenly discovered a group of humans had infiltrated amongst them.

Not cultivators, but actual humans.

A total of seven, four men and three women, their appearances not lacking in any way, their skin soft and tender, clearly not from impoverished families.

They were all wearing the most fashionable student attire of the day.

The boys in modified robes, quite proper and cultured.

The girls in short jackets and long skirts, looking all the more pitiful in their panic—had they encountered human bandits, they surely would have provoked evil thoughts.

But this place was filled with devils, and evil thoughts did arise, just not of that kind.

Not that kind of desire, but rather a craving for flesh.

The wolf demon let out a howl, drawing the attention of the demons, cultivators, and alien species in the area.

Its fearsome wolf head, with fresh meat still stuck between its teeth, approached the group of students directly, its fetid breath spraying forth as its greedy desire was unabashedly revealed.

The surrounding demons also began to crowd in.

Some of them even spoke in human tongues:

"Tonight I had a whim, left home thinking something good would happen, and here it's come true, I'm about to gorge myself," one said gleefully.

"Look at these few, tender all over, their skin so soft and smooth, they must be top-grade amongst mortals," another commented hungrily.

"Brothers all sniffed out the scent right, here in Tengshe Town, we can eat mortals, but not cultivators, don't eat the wrong thing and give those freaks at Joyful Tower an excuse to catch us. Otherwise, you won't just lose your essence blood source qi but even your soul will be extracted to make into a Desire Soul Slave, tortured ceaselessly for a hundred years," another warned.

"It smells right, no mistake, my innate divine ability allows me to hear these tender young ones' thoughts—they're students from nearby Wending County, stirred by a few volumes of immortal tales, duped by some worldly society sorcerer, and they've actually come to Tengshe Town seeking to consult with immortals," another disclosed.

"Great, just great, my belly is so empty, and it just so happens I need these delicate, tender kids to fill it up," another proclaimed hungrily.

Those who could speak were clearly old demons.

They exchanged words that made the students tremble in fear, and with a tacit understanding, they closed in, facing off with the human cultivators.

Though ignored for a moment, there was indeed a significant number of human cultivators among them.

There were dozens of them, clothed in various garb, including Daoist robes, casual attire, and even fashionable cultivators in barbarian clothing with crew-cut hair.

Among this group of cultivators, one clad in a Daoist robe, carrying a black iron umbrella, and holding a wooden sword, furrowed his brows and looked at the students surrounded by demons, with a few already so frightened that they had wet themselves.

The Taoist did not waste words, nor did he immediately come to their rescue. Instead, he hummed impatiently at the crowd of demons.

He raised his hand, pointing to the pavilion that all who ascended the mountain must pass through.

In the pavilion, a huge black shadow crouched.

Tao Qian peered closely, his pupils contracting slightly. The shadow was unmistakably a huge Plague Golden Toad, as big as a water buffalo, its body covered in festering sores, emitting a foul stink, with a large coin embedded in its forehead.

Memories corresponding to this creature surfaced in his mind.

"The Plague Golden Toad, the guardian beast of Tengshe Town."

"To enter Tenshe Mountain, one must prove to this beast that one is not a common mortal."

"There are no restrictions on the method of validation, but those who fail will be devoured by this creature."

Just as Tao Qian recalled these facts, the umbrella-carrying Taoist spoke up.

"If this were anywhere else, we might not be able to meddle with you demons and monsters."

"However, this place is within the bounds of Tenshe Town. Whether these children can be eaten is not up to us to decide. You should ask the Plague Golden Toad first."

As the Taoist's words fell, the group of demons instantly felt stifled.

At the same time, the Plague Golden Toad, seemingly asleep beneath the pavilion, suddenly awoke.

Its pair of bloodshot eyes, resembling two red persimmons, abruptly stared over.

That eerie gaze swept quickly across all present, including Tao Qian.

As both a cultivator and an abnormality, disguised as a "Half-human Half-dragon" and hiding in the corner of shadows, Tao Qian naturally did not trigger any reaction from the sore-covered Golden Toad.

In the end, it was indeed those few young male and female students who caught the Golden Toad's attention, causing its red eyes to brighten.

In an instant, a long, scarlet tongue shot out.

Skipping over the crowd of cultivators and alien species, it directly wrapped around the seven people and pulled them into the pavilion.

They were dumped onto the ground, and then the Golden Toad spoke in human language,

"Within ten breaths, prove you are not common mortals."

"If you are from the cultivation world, please proceed up the mountain."

"If not, I regret to inconvenience you, but you must stay in my stomach for a while."

Who would have thought? This festering Golden Toad spoke in such an elegant, almost polite manner.

But quickly, the students, who were thrown into disarray, came to their senses.

Their hearts screamed, "To stay inside this monster's stomach for a while would mean turning into a soup of pus and minced flesh, wouldn't it?"

These seven people were already terrified, and now, overwhelmed by the stench emanating from the Golden Toad, were about to cry and faint.

Fortunately, at that moment, the umbrella-carrying Taoist let out a sigh.

He walked over first, followed by the rest of the cultivators, who tacitly blocked the view of those eager demons.

The Taoist approached the pavilion, bowed to the sore-ridden Golden Toad, and then took something resembling an elixir from his bosom and placed it in his palm. His lips moved slightly as if engaging in a transaction with the Golden Toad.

Quickly after, one heard a "swoosh."

The elixir in the Taoist's palm vanished, and a pleased voice of the festering Golden Toad echoed:

"Passed!"

"To continue up the mountain or to leave, please do as you wish."

As soon as the voice ceased, the crowd of demons realized they had been fooled.

They bared their teeth at the cultivators in anger, but the cultivators, paying no mind to them, headed straight up the mountain.

The umbrella-carrying Taoist turned to the students before leaving and said,

"Seeking the path of immortality is not something you can achieve, and the world of cultivation is not as wonderful as you imagine."

"Hurry home, lest you suffer a disaster and lose your lives. I won't be able to save you a second time."

With that, the Taoist also ascended the mountain.

The group of demons, though extremely dissatisfied, respected the rules and could only growl to vent their frustration.

One of them, a Half-human Half-sheep demon, spoke with a raspy voice:

"No matter, let that meddlesome Taoist be. Ultimately, any loss is his own."

"In a moment, the feast will begin. I heard that Joyful Tower has captured some fresh game from the Western Territory, certainly more appetizing than these urine-soaked children."

Having said this, the Sheep Demon stopped eyeing the seven students greedily and turned into a black shadow, dashing toward Tenshe Town up the mountain.

The others nodded in agreement and followed suit.

However, a few demons still lingered.

Like the initial Wolf Demon, its eyes green with malice and dissatisfaction.

They exchanged glances, staying put.

Watching those seven students, terrified and supporting each other, staggering down the distant mountain path to escape.

As the students were about to leave the area of Tengshe Mountain, each demon smirked, poised to follow.

Sadly, these demons failed to notice.

At some point, one among the crowd had vanished from the spot.

Just as they sprang into action, a dazzling red light blazed from the direction the students fled, accompanied by a reckless barrage of Wind, Rain, Thunder, and Lightning.

By supreme coincidence, the light passed over the students and collided directly with the few demons.

"Roar!"

A thunderous sound of a Bo Dragon echoed through the tempest.

In that instant, not only did those lower-level demons stiffen in the air, but even the festering Plague Golden Toad shuddered uncontrollably, filled with dread.

The horrific force of the collision instantly sent the few demons flying.

Midair, they broke bones and spat blood, dying on the spot.

With their dying breaths, they glimpsed a figure filled with primal ferocity, haughty and scornful, as if it held no regard for any demon—a Half-human Half-dragon silhouette.

They also heard the disdainful voice of this alien creature:

"Where did these little devils and monsters come from? Get lost."

Chapter 28 Joyful Money, originally desired for the five indulgences

Tao Qian, with one strike combined with the Bo Dragon Sound, directly claimed the lives of those lower-rank demons.

The scene appeared extremely domineering, yet Tao Qian knew his own circumstances well.

His strength was solely derived from the Bo Dragon Pearl Fragment.

His body was tough, and he could release the Divine Skill, "Bo Dragon Sound", and that was all.

Although on the surface he was a Cultivator in the Energy-Introducing Realm, if one were to strictly assess, he still hadn't truly entered that realm.

Combat experience with other cultivators? None.

Combat skills appropriate for his realm? None.

Knowledge befitting his realm? None as well.

Tao Qian was able to kill the Four Beasts of She County and the few little demons before him by relying on his overwhelming power.

After all, those were the lowest rungs of the Cultivation World's ladder, fragile as insects.

If Tao Qian engaged in combat with truly seasoned entities of the Cultivation World, like those old demons who could speak human language or the Taoist bearing the iron umbrella, his cover would likely be blown soon.

Of course, for playing the part convincingly as someone of the Bo Dragon Bloodline, Tao Qian had no issues.

Fortunately, in this scenario, there was only one audience member left:

The giant Plague Golden Toad with two red tomato-like eyes bulging out under its massive Copper Coin.

This "Plague Golden Toad", an alien species, was not known for how long it had been bred by the Joyful Tower.

It could speak human language and understood human nature.

Its wild nature persisted, including a cannibalistic craving.

And perhaps it possessed powerful Bloodline Divine Skills, serving as a guardian beast of the mountain.

Tao Qian was curious about the creature's level and realm, but unfortunately, he had to maintain his image and couldn't find an excuse to touch it.

Besides, the Golden Toad's body was covered in foul-smelling sores, which suddenly made Tao Qian less inclined to touch it.

At this moment, Tao Qian hesitated whether to check the corpses of those demons.

From a brief contact earlier, Tao Qian already knew the particulars of those Wolf Demons and Bear Demons, which were low-rank devil beings that had fortuitously gained intelligence.

They bore nothing of value on their bodies, only their hides, demon blood, and bones which might still be of some use.

However, there were none of the "Ten Birds" among them, so there was no opportunity for immediate utilization.

Fortunately, the understanding Plague Golden Toad resolved this little dilemma for Tao Qian swiftly.

Being quite attuned to human nature, at first hearing the Bo Dragon Sound, which contained high-rank Bloodline, it got startled and nearly turned to flee up the mountain for help.

After the storm settled and winds died down, it saw a half-human half-dragon, handsomely peculiar figure with green-tinted hair and golden eyes full of arrogance, walking out.

Feeling Tao Qian's Energy-Introducing Realm Cultivation, it sighed in relief internally and thought:

"I thought some great demon had come, turns out it's just a naive kiddo putting on airs."

"But the Dragon Qi on this kid is genuine, resembling a dragon yet not, possibly a mixed Dragon Descendant?"

"Probably an illegitimate child of some great demon, can't be slighted."

In a moment of thought, the Golden Toad's eyeballs rolled suddenly, and it promptly made a move.

Its bright red tongue shot out again, engulfing and packing up the few demons Tao Qian had literally bashed to death, swallowing them whole into its seemingly bottomless stomach, with oppressive gulping sounds that were quite eerie.

Having finished its dessert, the Plague Golden Toad then turned to face Tao Qian.

It spoke with a tone that seemed worldly and smooth, loudly proclaiming:

"Noble guest, such a demeanor, old toad has no recollection of seeing before, you must be new to Tengshe Town."

"Old toad has always admired the 'True Dragon Bloodline', pleased to meet the noble guest today, it's fitting to present a small token of appreciation."

"Although most transactions here in Tengshe Town are barter-based, we've also learned some worldly tricks, creating something akin to human currency."

"This object is called 'Joyful Money', most stalls and Banquet Buildings won't refuse it."

"Old toad took the liberty of converting those mixed-breeds' possessions into a full sum of money on your behalf, please don't mind and keep it well."

The old toad's speech concluded.

The massive Copper Coin on its forehead suddenly burst with golden light, then one could see several shining copper coins falling towards Tao Qian.

Tao Qian instinctively spread his hands and caught them.

Seventeen coins in total, circular with square holes, each inscribed with the words "Joyful Ultimate Happiness".

As soon as they touched his palm, Tao Qian's mind flashed with their description.

[Record Name: Joyful Money.]

[Record Type: Alien Object.]

[Record: Currency issued by the Heterodox Sect's 'Joyful Tower' in Southern Yue Province of the Longevity Heavenly Dynasty, made of pure gold, each containing a joyful mark. Each coin can be traced

by the Joyful Tower, subtly amplifying desires, especially shopping desires, though not strongly. Those with slightly firm willpower can be exempt, but holding too many may cause overwhelming accumulated desires.]

[Note: Cost has been exempted!]

After reading the information, Tao Qian's eyes sparkled slightly.

He grasped the coins and nodded towards the stinky old toad.

Then, perfectly following the role-play rules, Tao Qian walked away with an air of disregard towards Tengshe Town up the mountain.

After he had left, the Plague Golden Toad finally squatted back inside its booth.

Smacking its lips, it muttered:

"Being well-born makes it easy, this kid probably knows nothing, but just relying on that dragon face, most places would welcome him."

"Poor old Plague here, still serving those perverted humans."

"But such inexperienced kids from the Cultivation World, if they encounter someone with a taste for Dragon Blood and Dragon Meat, it'll be quite the show to watch."

...

Tao Qian, of course, didn't know the old Plague Toad was badmouthing him behind his back.

He pocketed the Joyful Money, lightly tapped his foot, and turned into a wisp of smoke with the night breeze—an inherent ability of the Bo Dragon Bloodline, neither a divine skill nor a powerful technique.

It was quite suitable for traveling.

After a while, Tao Qian caught up with the main group.

He didn't make a sound, just kept a proud and aloof demeanor, silently following behind.

Tengshe Mountain seemed to have become an abnormality; everywhere were oddly shaped rocks like interlocking canine teeth, with barely a flat spot before entering the town.

There were also no signs of water traces, no creeks or springs, black rubble seemed to cover the entire mountain, not a speck of green in sight.

Groups of demons, cultivators, and other creatures clearly divided, each used their methods, heading towards an area with buildings.

Before long, they all arrived.

As people, demons, and monsters reached the first platform, they all sensed an aura of their own kind.

But ahead, black smoke curled up, with red light bursting faintly, enveloping a special loft uncommon in the mortal world; a series of red lanterns hung in front of the building, with a plaque at the forefront engraved with three striking red characters.

Desire Pavilion!

Crude and primitive, even the uneducated demons and monsters instantly grasped the meaning of this building's name.

Just as everyone settled, the red light that burst from nowhere grew even more intense, and the scenery-obscuring black smoke scattered.

The next moment, the doors of the loft flung wide open, revealing layered stacks upwards, flower windows, soft beds, gauzy drapes, and white jade—all casting seductive figures under the light, appearing even more enticing.

And before them, the building already had numerous guests.

Some, rather impatient, began their amusements right under the public eye without even closing the windows.

Of course, perhaps they did it on purpose.

Just as Tao Qian wondered why no one greeted him, suddenly the red light on the plaque erupted, and in an instant, dozens of figures burst forth.

Including him, everyone was assigned a corresponding host.

And these hosts, seemingly tailored to the guests' preferences, were all different.

There were heavenly beauties and those with large busts, long legs, ample behinds—each catering to a variety of special tastes.

And for those demons, they encountered female and male demons or other shapes that could trigger their desires.

Like that lantern-carrying female ghost devil, who was greeted by a very handsome scholar with red lips and white teeth, head shaking as if carrying a bookcase.

Those seasoned in the scene had long grown used to such sights.

Roughly half were human cultivators, and half were demons and alien species, all chuckling and immediately embracing their hosts, heading into this so-called "Desire Pavilion."

Before Tao Qian, stood a woman with a busty, leggy, ample figure, her appearance also remarkable, dressed in a repressed-fairy-like robe, staring at him with frosty eyes.

Her manner was off-putting, but the words and the voice that came from her stirred an unbearable itch in the listener.

"Guest, it is your first time in Tengshe Town, you must need some guidance."

"If you don't mind, allow me to host you, how about that?"

As she spoke, this repressed-fairy-like woman, undeterred by convention, moved closer and directly hooked onto Tao Qian's arm.

Her demeanor was cold and unapproachable,

but her body was like warm fragrant jade, soft and aromatic, which sparked wild thoughts.

Of course, Tao Qian considered himself not so concerned.

Yet, as they touched, his Extraordinary Perception was automatically triggered, and format information emerged in his mind.

[Record Name: Desire Slave.]

[Record Type: ghost charm.]

[Record: This entity, a ghost charm, was originally a wronged soul, growing more and more confused day by day, losing its true nature. It was later collected by Desire Pavilion using the exotic treasure "Original Desire Five Immoral Banner," which can capture intangible entities like ghost charms, regardless of age or gender, refining them into "Desire Slaves" that, although intangible in essence, can change form at will.]

[Note one: This Desire Slave has an innate divine ability "Desire Attraction" that can trigger and amplify the lust of most lifeforms.]

[Note two: The longer one contacts the Desire Slave, the more joyful the spirit feels, entering a Realm of Ultimate Happiness, but the desires also become increasingly uncontrollable, until the dam of the mind bursts, torrentially flowing.]

[Note three: No cost required!]

...

As this information surfaced, Tao Qian's expression subtly stiffened.

His attention was caught by the line "not restricted by age or gender."

But soon, Tao Qian developed a strange interest.

He slightly turned to face her, imagining another fantasy while happily saying, "Alright, introduce me to this place, like what exactly does 'Banquet Building' mean?"

As soon as he finished speaking, Tao Qian indeed saw.

The originally repressed-fairy-like Desire Slave transformed following his thoughts, turning into a half-human half-dragon figure, only scales covering key parts, with dragon horns on her forehead—a charming yet heroic "Dragon Girl."

Seeing this transformation, the Desire Slave wasn't surprised; she even gave Tao Qian a playful look.

Meanwhile, she softly spoke,

"First-time esteemed guest, you wouldn't know our Joyful Tower's specialties."

"From here to the middle of the mountain, there are dozens of buildings, each with open doors, welcoming guests from all directions, enjoying the myriad joys of the world, together heading towards the Realm of Ultimate Happiness."

"The first building is our Desire Pavilion."

"As the name implies, in this building, esteemed guests can indulge in the most extreme carnal desires."

"As long as the esteemed guest is willing to spend, earthy mistresses, heroines of worldly society, imperial concubines, enchanting demonesses, Buddhist nuns, Daoist female cultivators... Desire Pavilion has them all prepared for you."

"Esteemed guest, are you tempted?"

Chapter 29 Delicious Meat Feast, Eating Book Elder

Outside the Desire Pavilion, before the grand archway.

At first, the Desire Slave was quite diligent, explaining to Tao Qian the many services that the Desire Pavilion could provide.

Soon, however, she sensed something amiss.

This Half-Dragon Demon before her, appearing haughty and proud with noble blood, seemed nailed to the spot. Despite her eloquent speech and impressive oratory skills, she could not make him move a step.

What frustrated her even more was how quickly his thoughts changed.

Initially, she was asked to transform into an abstinent fairy, then into a Dragon Girl, and then she was forced to become a cold and imposing Empress, followed by a weird and quirky heroine, and thereafter, she was coerced into other bizarre forms she had never heard of, with exaggerated bodies and odd clothing, forced to speak a contrived language.

She suddenly stopped her introduction, adopting the unfamiliar form of "Dragon Maid," and stared at Tao Qian.

He was all smiles, squinting his gleaming golden eyes, showing no hint of shame on his face.

"Sir, are you perhaps making sport of this humble servant?"

Utilizing the Desire Slave's Innate Divine Ability to fulfill a minor wish of his own, Tao Qian felt a pang of guilt when questioned this way.

Entering the Desire Pavilion for service was clearly out of the question.

As for compensating the Desire Slave, Tao Qian considered himself a poor and stingy Cultivation novice; the only money he had was the seventeen Joyful Gold Coins given by that wretched giant toad.

"Just seventeen coins in total, I must use them sparingly, cannot give them away, just can't."

Tao Qian muttered to himself.

He then noticed that the other Cultivators and Alien Species had already freed themselves from the Desire Slaves and were heading towards the second Banquet Building.

Acting quickly on a brilliant excuse, Tao Qian then put on a bitter expression, placing his hands earnestly on the shoulders of the Desire Slave:

"How could that be?"

"Just hearing you describe it sets my heart and mind racing."

"But alas, when I left home, my family specifically instructed that under no circumstances should I lose my Primordial Yang."

"If it led to my bloodline being drained, I would surely lose half my life."

"It is truly a pity, such a pity."

As soon as he finished speaking, Tao Qian shook his head, showing a look of reluctance and regret.

Then, gritting his teeth, he turned away from the Desire Slave, swiftly caught up with the main group with a few quick steps.

Perhaps because Tao Qian's acting was too excellent and his emotions highly convincing—and his Dragon Clan's bewitching eyes were deceptive—the Desire Slave initially believed him.

But as a Desire Slave of the Desire Pavilion, greeting guests from all directions, she also knew quite a bit about Cultivation common sense.

She soon realized that any Cultivator or Demon with a decent background should know the "Locking Primordial Yang Technique."

He was indeed just making sport of her.

"Who knows where this dragon cub comes from, such a vile nature."

"This old lady curses you to be spotted by some strong Abnormalities that fancy dragons upon entering the workshop, seizing your Primordial Yang along with all your Dragon Blood and essence."

...

Tao Qian obviously could not hear the Desire Slave's curse.

At this moment, he was in a good mood, having freeloaded an introduction from the Desire Slave, and Tao Qian had a preliminary understanding of each Banquet Building he passed by.

Thus, he made up his mind not to enter any Banquet Buildings.

These so-called Banquet Buildings were akin to entertainment venues in the Cultivation World.

Like the second Banquet Building he was about to encounter, "Gambling God Tower," there couldn't be a more direct and brutal name. Even if you had a fortune, once you entered that building, you wouldn't leave unless you were cleaned out.

Then came the third building, "Blessing Building," which sounded promising at first glance. However, Tao Qian, who came from the Mortal World, quickly grasped the gimmick.

"Well, buddy, gambling and drugs, and that's the trifecta."

Tao Qian inwardly ranted like mad.

The first three Banquet Buildings were like this; how could he dare to enter the rest?

Thus, facing the question from the charming Desire Slave now transformed into a Dragon Maid, Tao Qian could only answer: he dared not move, indeed he dared not.

And beyond these Banquet Buildings, the crowd followed the path upwards.

They also encountered "Illusion Dream Tower," where one could freely dream to the point of addiction, or "Alcohol Bug Tower," which offered an experience of extreme intoxication.

Tengshe Town was right there, opening every night.

Thus continuously, Cultivators, Demons, and Alien Species, all intelligent, Transcendent lifeforms, continued to come from everywhere, constantly enlarging the group, with reinforcements arriving periodically.

But the majority of them, before reaching that truly reciprocal workshop, were seduced by these Banquet Buildings.

With each step, the number of people decreased.

By the time they reached the last Banquet Building, "Food God Pavilion," the so-called flesh feast began, and instantly many were pulled away.

This time, those seduced were mostly Demons and Monster Species.

Previously, an Old Demon claimed that the "flesh feast" would feature fresh goods from the Western Territory.

And at this moment, Tao Qian saw it.

He and a group of human Cultivators stood outside the Banquet Building, watching the hall inside where grilling racks were set up, emitting such a strong meaty aroma that it made one want to eat their own tongue.

And what was being grilled was decidedly humanoid creatures.

Yes, humanoid, but not human.

The Desire Pavilion had rules: whether you were a Cultivator, a Demon, or an Alien Species, you could not eat humans in Tengshe Town; violators would be hunted down.

Those being grilled, enticing droplets from myriad Demons and Monster Species.

The external form was undoubtedly that of a half-human, half-fish creature with sharp teeth, known as a "Deceitful Object." They seemed to possess an extraordinarily mellifluous singing voice, and even as they were being grilled, the sound of the seasoning sprinkling and their wailing cries surprisingly made for a pleasant melody.

Such an experience was unprecedented even for the group of old demons.

They praised the uniqueness and amusement of this meat feast, clicking their tongues.

A few impatient Great Demons, quite simply pushed aside the servants in charge of the grilling and took up the grilling rods themselves, waving their arms about to cook the food faster, almost turning the rods into Wind and Fire Wheels.

Outside the building, Tao Qian, observing this bizarre scene, wore a strange expression.

"Could these mermaids be the Sirens, the cannibalistic abnormalities from the West?"

Tao Qian was somewhat befuddled, clearly struggling to understand this combination of flavors in the delicious barbecue.

Thus, he did not enter the Food God Pavilion to partake of the mermaid meat feast.

As he walked past several Banquet Buildings, the path ahead gradually brightened, revealing a bustling, vibrant street.

Shops lined both sides of the street, offering all kinds of market stalls.

The architectural style and other setups were identical to those in the Mortal World.

Tao Qian immediately knew that this was probably what "Tengshe Town" originally looked like.

However, the throngs of people moving back and forth on the street were not mortals.

Those who maintained a human form, bustling about, were all Cultivators who practiced various righteous and evil magic skills.

They appeared human, but who knew when they "mutated" or paid the price, what horrifying forms they would take.

Just like the Seeking Immortal Leader, Hong Heihu, who looked like a wealthy man before he transformed into a Blood Beast.

Apart from them, the street was filled with demons, ghosts, and exotic beasts.

These "Devils and Strange Objects," which would surely cause a massive disturbance if they appeared in the outside world, were here bargaining with shopkeepers and stall owners just like ordinary mortals.

And the items for sale on this street were all not of the mortal realm.

All kinds of abnormal and transcendent objects were everywhere.

Had Tao Qian not suppressed his "Extraordinary Perception" in advance, his mind would probably be dizzy with the throbbing sensation by now.

After the initial shock, Tao Qian quickly adapted.

Recalling the records in the Nameless Secret Manual, Tao Qian began to wander through this terrifying market.

As he had anticipated, although his avatar as a Half-dragon Half-man Demon was somewhat conspicuous, he blended in quite well.

Those demons, or Cultivator stall owners.

They merely took him for a newcomer, focused on peddling their wares, and did not see through his true identity.

Tao Qian spent half an hour exploring most of the market, leaving only those stores that clearly required Great Demons and Great Cultivators to dare enter.

Those places had too many strong people and strange objects, so Tao Qian temporarily ignored them.

After a few seconds of consideration, Tao Qian strolled over to a particularly unique stall.

This stall was one of the hottest in the market.

It occupied a large space, and the number of customers was astonishingly high.

And the stall owner was a Deceitful Object indeed.

In the center of the market stood a partially unfurled, ancient and mottled giant Bamboo Scroll.

Before the Bamboo Scroll, there were already a dozen customers, both Cultivators and Demons.

And in front of them all stood an old man dressed in Confucian robes, his appearance ugly, and his head large, but his eyes exuded wisdom.

A faint white light enveloped the customers and the old man, also isolating their conversations.

As Tao Qian approached, a description from the Nameless Secret Manual automatically surfaced in his mind:

"In the workshop of Tengshe Town, there exists a strange Deceitful Object, self-proclaimed as the 'Eating Book Elder.'"

"Nobody knows whether it is a human Cultivator or some kind of intelligent abnormal object, or an incomprehensible mystical phenomenon."

"Many Cultivators and Demons have attacked it, all ending in failure; however, it does not strike back, seemingly adhering to a peculiar rule of not killing."

"This entity often places a giant Bamboo Scroll in the workshop market. For a single piece of Joyful Money or another item of equivalent value, one can summon an avatar of the old man from the scroll, obtaining a chance to ask a question."

"The inquiries must relate to the contents of books, and the old man does not guarantee a response. Even if he responds, he only divulges some background stories and taboo practices of the book, never revealing any specific content."

"Cultivators who asked about the Great Lifebook Scriptures owned by the Twelve Major Daoist Sects, several major Buddhist temples, or ancient families were met with a cold sneer followed by a 'ptui,' and the Cultivator was expelled."

"However, if asked about common Cultivation Techniques or Secret Skills, the old man usually tells all the background and taboos truthfully."

...

Mulling over these descriptions, Tao Qian had already reached the Bamboo Scroll.

He pulled out a Joyful Money from his sleeve and tossed it directly at the Bamboo Scroll.

As the coin touched the surface of the scroll, a bizarre event occurred - the spot rippled like water, swallowing the Joyful Money.

Then, an old man materialized from within, stepping out.

When he stood in front of Tao Qian, a pale white light simultaneously enveloped them both.

"Esteemed guest, what book or Secret Skill would you like to inquire about? If I am aware, I will surely inform you."

The old man with the huge head, akin to a monster, finished speaking and did not urge Tao Qian; he simply stood patiently in front of him.

Tao Qian considered for half a second, then swallowed back his initial question about the Immortal Fish Technique.

Instead, he politely bowed and directly said:

"Elder, I would like to know about the stories and taboos related to the 'Bai Qin Play.' May I ask if you could inform me?"

Chapter 30 Great Freedom Monk, Wild Fox Zen Scripture

Tao Qian originally wanted to ask about the taboos of the "Immortal Fish Technique," but upon further thought, he realized that though the Immortal Fish Technique seemed low-end, even a true bottom-tier

cultivator like Wu Ming could obtain it—and yet one only had to visit the Fairyland Fish Pond to know its perils.

All things considered, one should start from the basics. Tao Qian decided to first inquire about the first cultivation method he had acquired.

The Bai Qin Play Secret Manual!

While questioning, Tao Qian also took the opportunity to fully observe the Eating Book Elder in front of him.

Indeed, the man was hideous, with rough, loose, aged skin riddled with age spots and long sweat hairs, and his form was so hunchbacked that he seemed on the verge of collapsing to the ground at any moment.

Most striking was the elder's head.

Not only was it huge, but its shape was extremely irregular, much like a large winter melon grown in the corner of a rice paddy.

Yet his murky eyes seemed to possess a power that could penetrate the hearts of men.

Meeting his gaze, Tao Qian felt as though he was being seen through, which piqued his curiosity and made him instinctively want to reach out and touch.

Of course, he quickly suppressed such a suicidal thought.

In the next moment, he also heard the old man's voice, hoarse yet sagacious:

"The Bai Qin Play is a cultivation manual, created eighty years ago by a human cultivator known as the Bai Qin Elder."

"The inspiration for this technique originally comes from the Demon Path's Blood Refining Technique, yet it carves a new path and transforms into a method akin to that of the Buddhist Sect. Practicing this method allows one to obtain the Bloodline Power of over a hundred spirit birds. If not for the startling cost, its rating might be even higher."

"Founded on the Demon Path and cloaked in Buddhism, it is not the Righteous Path."

"Regardless of the means employed, practicing this method inevitably leads to breaking precepts and transforming into demons, almost irreversible."

"Not long after the manual was compiled, it was widely disseminated, causing the 'Bai Qin Chaos' in Tuo County, which brought disaster to tens of thousands of people."

"However, in the midst of that great chaos, numerous Great Demons with the Power of Bai Qin were also born and nurtured."

"Esteemed guest, do you know what the fate was for these once-humans who transformed into Great Demons?"

Here, the murky gaze of the old man rested on Tao Qian, its intent subtly advisory.

Not truly leaving a cliffhanger, the old man sighed and revealed the answer without waiting for Tao Qian's response:

"The Bai Qin Chaos ultimately attracted the intervention of monks from the Great Freedom Temple—one of the most fearsome of the 3,800 temples in the Buddhist Sect."

"On that day, just one monk arrived, bearing an Iron Bowl and wearing a tattered Kasaya. Wherever he went, those human-eating, mountain-moving Great Demons submitted without resistance, falling into line."

"A few days later, all the devils became Dharma Protecting Beasts of the Great Freedom Temple, and Tuo County was at peace."

Tao Qian, on his part, was trying to digest all this information.

Most of it matched his Extraordinary Perception, except for the "follow-up story."

A tale that sounded tolerable at first but turned out to be terribly frightening upon deeper reflection.

"Practicing Bai Qin Play is sure to turn one into a demon... The Bai Qin Chaos of Tuo County... The Great Freedom Temple intervened immediately, quelling the chaos with just one monk and even taking back a group of protector beasts... I'm not into conspiracy theories, but was that Bai Qin Elder really not from the 'Great Freedom Temple'?"

While Tao Qian had long known that the Cultivation World was full of pitfalls and one had to constantly be on guard against them, he was still startled by the horrifying secrets hidden in the Bai Qin Play Secret Manual.

Tao Qian felt that if he didn't have the bizarre aid of the Golden Finger, he wouldn't dare cultivate, and preferred to be a Copycat or manga artist, living a comfortable life rather than inexplicably cultivating some trap-laden technique, being pierced through the nose by someone else's ring, bound by reins, and led away like livestock.

Fortunately, he, Tao Qian, could freeload.

Resolute in thought, Tao Qian noticed that after answering the question, the Eating Book Elder was about to turn back to his Bamboo Scroll.

Seemingly without intent, Tao Qian suddenly reached out and grabbed the elder's sleeve.

At the same time, he took out a piece of Joyful Money, handed it over, and urged eagerly:

"Elder, please wait, this junior has one more question."

"There's a Secret Technique called the 'Immortal Fish Technique' that is said to commune with the Heavenly Dao. Do you know the details?"

Suddenly grabbed, the Eating Book Elder wasn't annoyed.

He took the money first, and then with a strange look, gazed thoughtfully at Tao Qian's dragon-like face.

After a moment of silence, the old man sighed:

"The Immortal Fish Technique involves transforming one's Soul into a fish and entering into the Chaotic Immortal Realm."

"In the Immortal Realm, the air is rich with Soul Nourishing Qi, and various Exotic Treasures and cultivation manuals descend from time to time. With a bit of luck, one can gain strength daily, as if really touching on the ultimate principle of the Heavenly Dao."

"However, with gain comes loss; once this technique is cultivated, one's fortune and life are no longer under one's control."

"Just one day of bad luck, and you could die a nameless death."

"If you grow too plump, you may end up as someone else's meal."

"And the most fatal cost is that once you've cultivated it, it is difficult to break free, let alone transcend and become a true Immortal after reaping the benefits."

"There's a common saying about fish leaping over the Dragon Gate, but have you ever heard of a fish truly making it over?"

"When you ascended the mountain, you must have passed by a place called 'Blessing Building.' Derived from the Mortal World, there is an item called 'Blessing Paste,' which relieves many ailments upon consumption, but once taken, one can't stop, and the Soul Nourishing Qi in the Chaotic Immortal Realm is akin to the Blessing Paste of the Cultivation World."

"If you've tasted it once, you'll want it a second time, and with many temptations within the Immortal Realm, can you resist?"

"Everything in this world desires Longevity."

"But few appreciate how arduous this path is, beyond the reach of ordinary people."

"I've said my piece as gratuitous advice to the esteemed guest."

With these words, the old man touched his winter melon-like head, chuckled, and his body turned to nothingness, vanishing before Tao Qian.

This time, Tao Qian didn't hold him back.

Firstly, because his purpose had been achieved, and secondly, because he didn't have much money—to waste it would be foolish.

Before he digested the information revealed by the elder, he first glanced at the format information that emerged in his mind upon touching the elder's body.

As Tao Qian had expected, a bunch of question marks.

However, there were some useful pieces of information.

[Record Name: ???]

[Record Type: ???]

[Record Description: ...a Daoist Transformed Unknown Existence, its true form hidden in another realm.]

"Daoist Transformation?"

Tao Qian muttered to himself, realizing he had come across a new point of knowledge.

At the same time, he knew that both the bamboo scroll and the Eating Book Elder probably were not his true body.

None of this was unexpected, even Wu Ming's "Nameless Secret Manual" mentioned it.

The Eating Book Elder could appear simultaneously at different markets, and even some trading spots within several nearby provinces all bore traces of him.

Because of this, he was suspected to be some kind of incomprehensible mystical phenomenon.

In short, an unsolved mystery.

"This is the plight of being low-leveled, entering the Cultivation World for the first time, everything is new and fascinating."

Tao Qian noted this knowledge point, then silently made a sarcastic comment.

Only after that did he begin to process the information he had inquired about.

Looking at what he had learned, Tao Qian felt somewhat shortchanged.

Most of the information the Eating Book Elder mentioned was already known to him.

Of course, there were some details worth pondering.

"So, that soul-soothing breath is called Soul Nourishing Qi."

"It turns out to be something addictive like Blessing Paste; this could explain why I was immune nine times but lost control on the tenth. Clearly, the addiction accumulates, and after nine times, the craving would probably be extreme. If I enter the Immortal Realm again, the outcome will be uncontrollable."

"After ten times, would my unusual soul clear the addiction again and start another cycle?"

Tao Qian speculated and felt slightly better.

If this guess was correct, he could be even more unrestrained in practicing the Cultivation Fish Technique, to his great benefit.

"As for the 'Bai Qin Play Fragment,' unlike the Immortal Fish Technique and the Earth Element Manual, it is not just a Cultivation Method that allows one to seize the Spirit Bird Bloodline, but also the Combat Technique Secret Manual that I desperately need."

"I have this powerful body, yet I'm not versed in the Combat Techniques of the Cultivation World."

"The fragment contains exactly ten different methods of demon combat; mastering just one would significantly increase my combat capability."

"Whether to practice it or not will depend on what I gain this time."

"The real business of snagging bargains has not even started yet."

With those thoughts settled, Tao Qian began to feel restless.

If he could pick up the 'Bai Qin Play Fragment' and the 'Nameless Secret Manual' in that "book market," wouldn't this proper Cultivation World marketplace be ripe for the taking?

Tao Qian's whimsical idea was quickly met with a heavy setback.

As he browsed around, he finally noticed.

First, within TENGshe Square, whether it was the stalls or the shops, most goods were clearly priced with their origins and values distinct, leaving little room for deals to be snatched.

Secondly, Tao Qian was very poor, just how poor?

In terms of Silver Coin, he only had fifteen coins left on him.

Although he had thousands of yuan in banknotes, unfortunately, in this TENGshe Town market, those were only slightly better than waste paper.

In this market, Cultivation Manuals were the most expensive, usually sold in shops backed by powerful individuals. Exorbitantly priced as they were, they were mostly not thick volumes but rather common commodities. The only advantage was that they were guaranteed authentic, with no risk of buying fakes.

Other Exotic Treasures, Deceitful Objects, and Cultivation Materials could only be purchased with Joyful Money, or through bartering.

With fifteen coins, perhaps he could buy some bird blood that he wanted.

Cultivation Manuals? That was absolutely impossible.

Fortunately, although opportunities for bargains were few, they were not nonexistent.

Tao Qian's gaze suddenly locked onto a specific area.

It was at the edge of the market, next to a pitch-black cliff; ghostly flames flickered, illuminating various stalls large and small.

Many of these stalls displayed enticing books.

There were quite a few Cultivators and Demons browsing around, busy coming and going, with frequent haggling heard.

As Tao Qian walked there, he recalled the unfortunate experience of his predecessor Wu Ming.

The Nameless Secret Manual stated:

"There is a part of Tenshe Square where swindlers converge, and counterfeit goods are rampant. Only those with extremely perceptive eyes or special abilities should enter, else they will surely be deceived."

"Due to my lack of judgment, I was beguiled by a Fox Demon to spend five hundred Joyful Money on a fake 'Wild Fox Zen Scripture,' draining three years of savings."

"Turning back to find that Fox Demon to settle accounts, I was instead beaten brutally, taunted for my lack of fortune and life, saying that not only longevity but even a natural death would be elusive for me, oh how I lament."