A Man Like None Other Novel

Chapter 6746

Stepping out of the Netherworld Elder's cave, the dark red glow of the mineral shone through the cracks in the stone steps, casting dappled light and shadow beneath David's feet.

A chilling, eerie aura, carrying a faint whimper, slowly surged from the abyss below, brushing against his clothes, but unable to dispel the churning doubts in his heart.

He had promised the Netherworld Elder he would no longer concern himself with the rift, but that pitch-black rift, which had devoured countless ghost cultivators, was like a grotesque brand, etched firmly into his mind.

The ghost race's sacrifices over ten thousand years, the fall of nearly a thousand cultivators, that "unrecognizable" mysterious aura, and the weariness and bitterness that the Netherworld Elder couldn't hide in his eyes—everything about it was eerie.

David didn't believe in the so-called "rules of the ages," nor did he believe that the rift appeared out of thin air and could only be suppressed by human sacrifice.

Any balance that required the sacrifice of lives to maintain must conceal unknown conspiracies and forces, and David was least afraid to uncover these truths hidden in the darkness.

Back at their lodgings, Jiang Xuelan was sitting cross-legged in the center of the cave, meditating. Ice-blue spiritual energy flowed around her, resonating

strangely with the yin energy within the cave, making her aura increasingly refined.

Hearing footsteps, she slowly opened her eyes, a hint of concern in her ice-blue pupils: “You went to see the Old Man of the Underworld? What did he tell you?”

David sat down opposite her, not hiding anything, and told her everything the Old Man of the Underworld had said about the rift, as well as the sacrificial scene he had witnessed.

Jiang Xuelan’s brows furrowed, a hint of anger flashing in her icy blue eyes: “Using the lives of our clansmen to suppress the rift—this rule is too cruel. Has the Ghost Clan really had no other way after all these years?” “

The Netherworld Elder said that three thousand years ago, a Lord of the Abyss tried to stop the sacrifices, which resulted in a violent surge of Yin energy, causing heavy casualties.”

David lightly tapped his knee, a cold glint in his purple eyes. “But I always feel something’s wrong. There must be something hidden behind this rift; it’s not just a simple surge of Yin energy. I plan to investigate secretly.”

“Investigate secretly?”

Jiang Xuelan was slightly startled. “The Netherworld Elder and Ghost Seven both warned you that the rift is dangerous, and this is an internal matter of the Ghost Clan. Won’t your rash intervention cause trouble?”

“Trouble will naturally arise, but I can’t stand idly by.”

David looked at her, his tone firm. “That crack is devouring countless lives, and I have a feeling that what lies behind it is not simple. I must find out.”

Jiang Xuelan said, “The Netherworld Elder will definitely send someone to watch you secretly; he won’t let you interfere.”

“Don’t worry.”

David nodded slightly, condensing a wisp of chaotic power at his fingertips and merging it into his divine soul. “Chaotic power can perceive the laws of all things. As long as someone is following me, I can detect them immediately.”

“I won’t act so quickly. I’ll first secretly investigate and see if I can get some information from other ghost cultivators.”

For the next two days, David behaved extremely well. He

meditated and cultivated in the cave during the day, occasionally taking walks along the suspension bridge, automatically detouring when he saw the direction of the crack in the distance.

The ghost cultivator sent by the Netherworld Elder to secretly observe him returned and reported that Mr. Chen seemed to have given up his curiosity and was no longer approaching the crack. The Netherworld Elder breathed a slight sigh of relief.

But David didn’t give up.

He simply changed his approach.

On the third day, he began to “wander” through the ghost clan’s settlement, chatting with ordinary ghost cultivators living in the caves on the edge of the seventh level.

Most of the ghost cultivators were taciturn, but they were relatively friendly to David, the guest who had saved Ghost Seven and gained the approval of the Netherworld Elder.

He subtly inquired about the rift, and at first no one was willing to talk, but gradually, he heard some fragmented information.

“That crack has been there for a long time… older than all of us combined…”

“No one who went in has ever come out, and we don’t know what’s inside…”

“During the last Yin energy upheaval… my father died in that upheaval…”

“Don’t ask, this isn’t our concern…”

All the information was fragmented, but David gleaned a crucial, unique piece.

An old man sitting on the edge of the cliff, smoking a black pipe, narrowed his cloudy eyes when he heard David inquire about the crack, and said something that made David’s heart tighten: “That crack you’re talking about… I’ve heard a strange story. Many years ago, someone went in and came out.”

David’s body tensed abruptly: “ Came out? Who?”

The old man exhaled a puff of black smoke and shook his head: “I don’t know. I heard it from the older generation, it was a long, long time ago.

After that person came out, he went mad, talking nonsense, and died not long after. But the nonsense he left behind before he died… some people say that the thing in that crack can talk.”

“Can talk?”

“Yes.”

The old man tapped his pipe, knocking out a few specks of blackened ash. “The madman kept repeating the same sentence before he died—’It’s awake, it’s hungry, it saw me’—and then he breathed his last.”

David fell silent, his palm pressed against the cold rock wall, feeling the subtle tremors from his fingertips. He remained motionless for a long time, as if something deep within the rock wall was resonating with him through the millions of years of sedimentation.

Then he continued to ask, “Where is that person buried?”

The old man’s expression grew even more solemn, his chapped lips pursing several times before he managed to squeeze out a sentence: “The old cemetery on the west side of the seventh level. There’s no tombstone, just a mound of earth. His descendants, afraid of being tainted by bad luck, didn’t even carve his name.”

David thanked him and turned to walk down the stone steps.

He found the cemetery.

On a secluded recessed wall on the west side of the seventh level, dozens of low mounds of earth were scattered about, most of them almost fused with the rock wall by the erosion of yin energy.

He found the mound of earth without a tombstone in the corner, squatted down, and ran his fingers over the cold soil.

There were no clues left there, but David didn’t need any. He only needed to confirm one thing: there was indeed something alive in this crevice, and that thing could talk.

That night, David made a decision.

He would go in.

But entering the crevice wasn’t a blind suicide mission.

He needed to prepare—to prepare sufficient strength, to prepare contingency plans for the unknown, and, more importantly, he needed an opportunity to enter without being discovered by the Ghost Clan.

David began searching the Ghost Clan’s records for more information about the crevice.

The Netherworld Abyss had an ancient library cave, located in a spacious cavern at the junction of the seventh and sixth levels, containing various records left by the Ghost Clan's successive Abyss Lords.

Ghost Seven had taken him in once, saying, "Guests are welcome to browse freely."

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David spent three whole days immersed in the Library Cave, searching through mountains of bamboo slips and animal hide scrolls for any trace of the rift.

Most of the records matched what he had heard from the Old Man of the Underworld:

the rift appeared ten thousand years ago, required sacrifice, and the investigation team never returned.

But on a tattered animal hide scroll, mostly eaten away by worms, he found a passage that stood out from the others.

It was written in an extremely ancient ghost script, the characters hasty and hurried, as if carved by the writer in a state of extreme fear:

"The twelfth group of explorers, seven entered the rift, six were forever trapped within, one returned from the rift three days later, his soul shattered, his mind gone… The returning one's entire body was filled with reversed Yin energy, his meridians severed, only he kept repeating one word…"

That word was traced over a dozen times, the strokes overlapping to the point of being almost illegible.

David leaned closer and made out two characters among the overlapping strokes—

“Seven Nights”.

“Seven Nights?”

David frowned.

He had never heard of this name before.

It wasn’t a name of any ghost race member, nor a known cultivation technique or deity.

He repeated the words several times, feeling a rhythm that seemed ancient and out of place in this era.

He copied the entire scroll of animal hide, folding it up along with the blurred text.

Back in the cave, he sat under the dim red light, repeatedly examining the inscription on the hide.

He considered various possibilities: “Seven Nights” could be a name, a code name, or perhaps—the self-designation of the thing within the rift.

“Seventh level, rift, seven nights…”

David murmured, tapping his fingers on the stone table. “The number seven represents reincarnation and death in ghost race culture. Seven nights… seven nights? Or does it signify some kind of cycle related to seven?”

He had no answer yet, but at least he had a direction.

Over the next few days, he secretly observed the selection process for the ghost race cultivators to be sacrificed.

He discovered that this wasn’t a random selection. Every month, the Old Man of the Underworld would choose one person from his clan, and these people

all shared the common trait of being “nearing the end of their lifespan, or suffering from incurable injuries.”

In other words, those sacrificed were clan members who “wouldn’t live much longer anyway.”

The Old Man of the Underworld used this method to try to find a balance between necessary sacrifices and the suffering of his clan.

But this discovery made David even more uneasy.

If the thing in the rift truly needed living sacrifices, why choose those who were about to die?

What could it gain from them?

Or… did it have some specific criteria for selecting sacrifices?

He had no answers, but the thoughts of speculation, like a venomous snake coiled in his heart, constantly gnawed at his attention.

What truly made him decide was the discovery that the descendant of that mad ghost cultivator was still alive.

A young ghost woman named “Youying” was actually the seventh-generation great-granddaughter of that mad ghost cultivator. She had a cold face, was taciturn, and lived in a secluded cave on the edge of the seventh level.

David approached her proactively, initially using the pretext of “wanting to learn about the history of the Ghost Clan” to strike up a conversation.

Youying’s personality was more aloof than that of ordinary Ghosts, but every time David mentioned the rift, her slender fingers would tighten slightly, as if pulled by some invisible force.

On their seventh meeting, Youying spoke without warning, her voice as cold as a knife submerged in ice water, her eyes piercing David: “You’re investigating that rift.”

David didn’t deny it: “Yes.”

A complex emotion flashed in Youying’s eyes: “Do you know how my ancestor went mad?”

David looked at her face, which flickered in the dark red light: “I heard he went mad after coming out of the rift.”

“He only lived for seven days after coming out,”

Youying’s voice was soft, “For seven days, he repeated the same words every day—’It silences everyone, it doesn’t need sound, it only needs silence. I heard the sound of water, a very dark sound of water, and below were all open eyes.’ After saying these words, he died.”

“Open eyes?” David pressed, “What kind of eyes?”

“Nobody knows.”

Youying looked at him, her abyssal blue eyes, similar to Gui Qi’s, swirling with an unfathomable light. “But when that madman died, his eyes were open. They were never closed.”

That night, when David returned to his cave, Jiang Xuelan was sitting under a dim red light, flipping through an ancient book borrowed from the Library Cave.

She looked up, her icy blue eyes reflecting David’s face: “You went to inquire about that rift again?”

David didn’t hide anything: “I plan to go in and take a look.”

Jiang Xuelan was silent for a moment, then closed the ancient book and placed it on her lap, looking up at David intently: “I’ll go with you.”

“No.” David said, “I have absolutely no idea what’s inside.”

“That’s why you need someone with you.” Jiang Xuelan’s voice was calm and firm, “In case you can’t get out, at least someone will know what happened to you in there.”

David looked at her for a long time, and finally didn’t refuse.

He needed more help.

He found Xuanzhenzi and briefly explained the situation.

Upon hearing this, Xuanzhenzi dropped the dry grass from his mouth three times, slapping his thigh and saying, “Mr. Chen, are you going to your death?! Even the Ghost Clan themselves don’t understand that rift. For a human cultivator like you to rush in is like throwing good money after bad!”

“So you’re coming with me.”

Xuanzhenzi opened his mouth, wanting to say something, but looking into David’s calm purple eyes, he ultimately said nothing: “This old man’s bones… alright, alright, consider it as me collecting your corpse.”

David smiled and patted his shoulder: “I won’t let you collect my corpse.”

David told Xuanzhenzi and Jiang Xuelan to wait for his news; he was going to investigate the rift before taking action.

That night, the “night” of the Netherworld Abyss was even darker than the daytime.

The dark red light of the ore dimmed, and the ghostly blue flames danced on both sides of the suspension bridge, casting the ghost cultivators' shadows long and thin, like phantoms.

David changed into a black robe, concealing his presence to the extreme, and silently emerged from the cave like a shadow blending into the darkness.

He didn't head directly to the crack, but instead followed the stone steps along the cliff face to a hidden platform near it.

This platform, located in a recess in the cliff face, was covered by dense Yin Spirit Grass, connected to the outside world only by a narrow stone path—an excellent observation point he had discovered during his daytime reconnaissance.

David lay prone among the Yin Spirit Grass, his gaze fixed intently on the crack not far away.

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The crack remained as black as ink, its edges smooth as a mirror, emitting no light or fluctuation of energy, as quiet as an ordinary rock fissure.

Yet, this seemingly ordinary crack had devoured the lives of countless ghost cultivators.

He held his breath, circulating his chaotic power and spreading his divine sense.

Chaotic power, inherently the source of all laws, could perceive all the laws and auras of the world, but the moment his divine sense touched the crack, it was like a mud ox entering the sea, instantly swallowed up, without transmitting any information.

David's heart tightened; this crack was indeed extraordinary, capable of blocking divine sense probing.

Just then, a soft sound of footsteps came from afar.

David immediately withdrew his divine sense, lying motionless within the Yin Spirit Grass.

He saw three ghost cultivators dressed in black robes, escorting a young ghost woman, walking towards the crack.

The girl looked no more than sixteen or seventeen years old, her face pale, her eyes filled with despair and fear. She cried out repeatedly, "I don't want to go! I don't want to be sacrificed! Please, let me go!"

A middle-aged ghost cultivator holding her down spoke in a cold, hard voice, "Shut up! This is the clan rule. When it's your turn, it's your fate. Struggling is useless; it will only make you suffer more."

"Clan rule? Why should I have to use my life to uphold the clan rule!"

The girl struggled, her nails digging deeply into the middle-aged cultivator's arm. "My parents are waiting for me! I don't want to die! What right do you have to decide my life or death!"

"What right? Because you are a member of the ghost clan, because this Netherworld Abyss needs someone to sacrifice to maintain peace."

Another elderly cultivator spoke, his voice numb. "Three thousand years ago, the Abyss Lord stopped the sacrifices, triggering a turmoil of Yin energy that killed nearly a thousand people. Do you think we wanted to do this? It was a last resort."

"A desperate measure? Then why don't you sacrifice yourselves!"

the woman cried, tears streaming down her pale cheeks. “I’m still young, I have so much to do, I don’t want to just disappear into the darkness like this!”

The elderly cultivator didn’t speak further, only waved his hand. The middle-aged cultivator and another young cultivator grabbed the woman and forcibly dragged her to the crevice.

The woman desperately tried to pull back, her feet leaving white marks on the rock face, but her strength was no match for the two adult cultivators, and she was ultimately shoved hard into the crevice.

“Ah—!”

A shrill scream rang out from the crevice, but it only lasted for a moment before disappearing completely, as if swallowed up by the darkness.

The crevice remained silent, without any movement, as if nothing had happened.

The three escorting cultivators stood before the crevice, silent for a moment, then turned and left.

Their backs appeared somewhat hunched, their faces expressionless, only a barely perceptible heaviness hidden deep in their eyes.

Only after the three had gone far away did David slowly rise from the Yin Spirit Grass.

He walked to the crevice, gazing down into the dark abyss, his purple eyes churning with anger and confusion.

The woman’s scream had clearly reached his ears. Yet,

no struggle echoed from within the crevice, nor did any breath escape, as if it were a bottomless black hole, capable of swallowing all life and sound.

David reached out, his fingertips lightly touching the edge of the crevice.

The icy touch, like touching millennia-old ice, sent a slight tingling sensation through his fingertips.

At the same time, a faint, almost imperceptible, eerie aura entered his body through his fingertips.

This aura was neither yin energy, nor divine power, nor immortal spiritual power; it carried a decaying, violent, and devouring force, resonating subtly with the power of chaos.

“This aura…” David’s heart stirred. He immediately circulated his chaotic power, enveloping the eerie aura and examining it closely.

However, the aura was too weak and extremely cunning. The moment it was enveloped by the chaotic power, it vanished instantly, leaving only a faint trace.

David frowned. This aura was indeed as the Old Man of the Underworld had described—unidentifiable, yet carrying a familiar feeling, as if he had seen it somewhere before. Chen

Ping returned and explained the situation to Jiang Xuelan and Xuanzhenzi.

Then, the three of them silently left the cave, following the most secluded suspension bridge and stone steps along the cliff face, heading towards the crack.

The night wind howled in the abyss, and the suspension bridge swayed gently beneath their feet.

David walked at the front, his steps extremely light, each step landing precisely on the suspension bridge’s support points, making almost no sound.

Jiang Xuelan followed behind him, her icy blue aura compressed to its limit, leaving only a faint frost flowing from her fingertips.

Xuan Zhenzi brought up the rear, clutching a glowing luminous pearl in his hand and a withered blade of grass in his mouth, but his expression was more solemn than ever before.

The crack stood silently at the boundary between the seventh and eighth levels, as black as solidified ink, its edges smooth as a mirror.

The light from the luminous pearl shone towards the crack's entrance, but the light seemed to be swallowed up, unable to illuminate its interior.

David stood before the crack, his purple eyes reflecting the dark fissure.

"Let's go," he whispered.

He stepped into the crack. Jiang Xuelan followed closely behind, and Xuan Zhenzi took a deep breath, stepping in third.

Darkness instantly swallowed everything.

The moment he entered the crack, David felt an extremely intense downward force, as if falling into an abyss.

The surrounding darkness was so thick it was almost tangible, squeezing his limbs and chest, making it nearly impossible for him to breathe.

Chaotic energy circulated automatically within him, a gray light creating a small space that barely resisted the consuming force.

The fall continued for about a dozen breaths before his feet suddenly touched solid ground.

He steadied himself and looked around.

Before him lay a dark, gray space, devoid of sky and earth, only a hazy gray mist swirling around him.

Beneath his feet was a dark, black ground, with a fine, gritty feel, like a dried-up riverbed.

An ancient, stale aura permeated the air, like stagnant water that hadn't flowed for millennia.

"Here..."

Jiang Xuelan's voice came from behind, "I can't sense the outside world anymore. The laws of spacetime are distorted here."

Xuan Zhenzi rubbed his sore backside as he got up, looking at the gray mist around him: "Goodness, this place... it feels even more eerie than the Netherworld Abyss?"

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David didn't answer.

His gaze was fixed ahead, where he could vaguely make out some blurry shadows in the mist.

Twisted, irregular shapes, like withered trees or the wreckage of collapsed buildings.

"Is anyone there?" Xuan Zhenzi called out tentatively.

The voice echoed in the gray space, growing farther and farther away, but there was no reply.

A faint tremor came from the soles of David's feet.

At first, it was very slight, a rhythmic beat like a heartbeat, then it gradually intensified, shooting from the soles of his feet through his knees, up his spine, and straight to the top of his head, as if this space itself were a living thing breathing.

“It’s watching us,”

David said softly. “Whatever it is, it knows we’re in.”

They continued forward. The gray mist slowly closed behind them, as if it had never been disturbed. After

walking for about the time it takes for an incense stick to burn, a wide open space appeared ahead.

Scattered on the open space were countless white things. At first, David thought they were rubble, but as he got closer, he realized they were skeletons.

Countless skeletons, some intact, some broken, lay scattered on the black ground like carelessly discarded trash.

Some skeletons appeared to be thousands of years old, their white bone surface weathered and blackened;

others were relatively intact, even showing faint traces of clothing fragments on the skeleton.

David crouched down, carefully examining a relatively intact skeleton at his feet.

Its chest had a perfectly round hole, its edges smooth as a mirror, as if pierced instantly by some intense heat.

The inner wall of the hole was covered with a dark brown substance, completely calcified, its original appearance unrecognizable.

“These…are all those people who were sacrificed here?” Jiang Xuelan’s voice trembled slightly.

David nodded: “And those investigation teams. They all died here.”

Xuan Zhenzi crouched beside a skeleton, reaching out to touch a relatively intact one.

When his fingertips touched the skull, the skeleton suddenly emitted a very faint cracking sound, and a fissure appeared in the skull.

Then the entire skeleton collapsed into a pile of white powder like quicksand, raising a cloud of fine ash, leaving not a single intact bone behind.

Xuanzhenzi recoiled as if burned: “Holy crap! This thing… it shatters at the slightest touch?”

The skeletons lay scattered on the black ground, like carelessly discarded withered branches.

David crouched down and examined several more skeletons closely, discovering that each one had a perfectly round hole in its chest, the edges smooth as a mirror, as if pierced by some incredibly precise force.

The holes were all precisely in the center of the heart; the precision of the attacker was simply unbelievable.

“They weren’t just devoured…” David said in a low voice, “They were killed. Killed in one blow.”

Jiang Xuelan’s gaze swept over the skeletons, her icy blue eyes filled with a heavy chill: “If it was a sacrifice, why kill them?”

“What was sacrificed was the soul, not the body.”

David stood up, his gaze fixed on the gray mist deeper within. “That thing only wants the soul; the body has no value to it.”

Xuan Zhenzi rubbed his numb arm and lowered his voice: “Mr. Chen, let’s hurry up and leave… this place is getting increasingly strange.”

Just as David was about to speak, a faint whistling sound suddenly came from the mist ahead.

The sound was as soft as wind blowing through a crack, yet it was exceptionally clear in the deathly silence.

The three of them tensed up simultaneously.

“Someone’s there.”

David’s voice was barely audible as the power of chaos slowly circulated within him, and he silently gripped the hilt of the Dragon Slayer Sword.

The whistling sounded again. This time it was clearer and closer than before, as if it came from the shadow of the pile of bones ahead.

David gave Jiang Xuelan a wink, and she nodded slightly, icy blue aura silently gathering at her fingertips.

The three of them moved slowly forward, their footsteps so light they made almost no sound.

After rounding a pile of bones as large as a small mountain, David saw her.

It was a young ghost woman, curled up behind a huge monster skeleton, her hands wrapped around her knees, her thin shoulders trembling slightly.

Her black robe was torn in several places, revealing pale, almost transparent skin beneath.

Her eyes, a deep blue, were now filled with utter terror, like a young animal driven to the brink of death, jerking its head at the sound of footsteps.

David recognized her—it was the girl who had been forced to the rift and pushed in earlier.

She was alive.

The moment the girl saw David and the other two, her pupils contracted sharply, and she recoiled violently, pressing her back against the ribs of the monster skeleton. Her hands flailed wildly in front of her: “Don’t come any closer! Don’t come any closer! Please… I don’t want to die… I don’t want to die…”

Her voice was hoarse and broken; clearly, she had been alone in the darkness for a long time, and fear had pushed her to the brink of collapse.

David stopped, not approaching any further.

He raised his hands to indicate he meant no harm, his voice as gentle as possible: “We’re not here to harm you. I’m also a human cultivator, I wandered into this place by mistake.”

The girl’s cries paused for a moment, a hint of confusion flashing in her dark blue eyes: “You’re not a ghost?”

David slowly took a small step forward, letting the gray chaotic power glow faintly in his palm: “I’m human. You can see, this isn’t the power of the ghost race.”

The girl’s gaze fell on the gray light, the fear in her eyes subsiding slightly. She spoke tremblingly, “You…you really didn’t come here to sacrifice me?”

“No,”

David said, “I came to investigate this crack. What’s your name?”

The girl hesitated for a long time before answering in an extremely weak voice, “You…Youlan.”

“Youlan, how long have you been here?”

The girl shook her head, “I don’t know…there’s no time here…it feels like a very, very long time has passed…”

Her voice was filled with deep fear, “Something is watching me in the darkness…it keeps watching me…I can’t see it, but I know it’s there…”

David’s heart skipped a beat, “Do you know what happened to those skeletons?”

Fear surged again in the girl’s eyes, and her voice trembled even more violently, “When they…when they started moving, I hid here. I heard footsteps…very heavy footsteps…more than one…”

Jiang Xuelan slowly walked forward, squatted down in front of her, her icy blue eyes shining with a gentle light, “Don’t be afraid, we’ll take you out.”

The girl Youlan looked into Jiang Xuelan’s icy blue eyes, at that clear and gentle face, like a fledgling bird frozen in a blizzard finally seeing a branch to lean on.

Her lips trembled slightly, then she suddenly threw herself into Jiang Xuelan’s arms and burst into tears: “My parents are still waiting for me… I really don’t want to die

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Jiang Xuelan gently patted her back, her voice gentle yet firm: “It’s alright, we’ll take you home.”

Xuan Zhenzi clicked his tongue beside her, lowering his voice to David: “Mr. Chen, this girl is incredibly lucky to be alive. The owners of those skeletons weren’t as fortunate as her.”

David nodded, his gaze never leaving the churning gray mist around them: “Her luck is indeed good, but it also means that thing isn’t nearby. We need to hurry before it returns.”

He helped Youlan up; the girl’s legs were still weak, and she could barely stand.

Jiang Xuelan shielded her behind him, one hand holding her wrist, the other hand’s fingertips never loosening their gathering icy power.

“Stay close to me.”

David walked in front, his Dragon-Slaying Sword half-drawn, its purple light like a dim lamp in the gray mist. “Don’t look back, don’t stop. If you hear any sounds, ignore them.”

The four began to quickly return in the direction they had come from. But after walking for a short while, David suddenly stopped.

A sound came from within the mist. It wasn’t the previous whimper, but a heavier, more rhythmic sound of footsteps.

The footsteps were dull and slow, approaching from afar, like some heavy object dragging across the ground.

“Something’s coming…”

David’s voice was extremely low.

Jiang Xuelan pulled Youlan closer, and icy blue cold air had already condensed into a thin ice blade in her palm.

Xuanzhenzi also abandoned his nonchalant demeanor; a blue light danced in his palm, and all the muscles in his body tensed.

The mist surged, and several blurry outlines slowly emerged from the gray depths.

First to appear was a hand—a grayish-white hand, withered like a long-weathered branch, with long, thin fingers and nails as sharp as knives.

Then came an arm, then a shoulder, and then a complete body—it was a "human" shape, but definitely not a living person.

Its body was pieced together from countless shattered bones, connected by dark purple fascia at the joints. A dark purple flame flickered within its chest cavity, like some kind of eerie life force.

And not just one.

A second, a third, a fourth… more and more bone puppets emerged from the gray mist.

Dark purple light danced in their empty eye sockets, their grayish-white bone claws slightly outstretched in the air, carrying an overwhelming aura of decay and violence.

Their steps were orderly and slow, and deep within the chest cavity of each bone puppet, the dark purple flame flickered, as if controlled by the same force.

"Holy crap…"

Xuan Zhenzi's voice changed, "These things… were they pieced together from those skeletons?"

David's gaze fell on the dark purple flame within the chest cavities of the bone puppets, instantly understanding the circular holes in the skeletons' chests.

That “thing” killed everyone who entered the rift, absorbing their souls; the remaining skeletons were then pieced together into these bone puppets, tools to guard this space.

“Run!” David shouted, grabbing Youlan’s wrist and turning to rush in another direction.

Jiang Xuelan and Xuanzhenzi followed closely behind, and the four of them began to flee frantically through the gray mist.

The footsteps behind them quickened, from scattered to dense; the speed of the bone puppets far exceeded what their size suggested.

Bang—!

The first bone puppet caught up with Xuanzhenzi at the back, its grayish-white bone claws reaching for his back.

Xuanzhenzi whirled around, his cyan palm strike colliding with the bone claws with a dull thud.

The bone puppet was knocked back several steps, but its right arm bones, after shattering, quickly reassembled, as if pulled back to life by invisible threads.

“This thing is indestructible!”

Xuan Zhenzi’s voice held a hint of horror. “It can be shattered and then pieced back together!”

David stopped.

He knew running wasn’t an option; these bone puppets were clearly extremely familiar with this space, while they knew nothing about it.

Running would only exhaust them, dragging them into the darkness.

“Xue Lan, take You Lan and retreat! Old Xuan, protect the flanks!”

David took a deep breath, and the power of chaos erupted suddenly in his dantian.

Gray light exploded around him like a tangible force. The moment the Dragon-Slaying Sword was drawn, a gray-purple sword beam swept out, slicing the three bone puppets at the front in half.

Shattered bones scattered everywhere, and dark purple fireballs fell from his chest, bounced a few times on the ground, and quickly extinguished.

But more bone puppets surged forward. Their numbers grew exponentially, emerging continuously from the gray mist like an unstoppable tide.

David swung his sword repeatedly, each strike precisely shattering the chest cavity of a bone puppet, completely extinguishing the dark purple flames within.

However, his spiritual energy was rapidly depleting; each swing was overdrawing his chaotic essence.

His breathing became rapid, fine beads of cold sweat appeared on his forehead, and his wounds were slashed by the bone claws during the battle.

Jiang Xuelan attacked from the flank. Icy blue energy transformed into dozens of ice needles, precisely piercing the dark purple flames within the chest cavities of the bone puppets.

The moment the ice needles pierced the flames, the cold energy froze the dark purple light into ice crystals, which then shattered into powder.

Her technique was precise and efficient, but each ice needle consumed a large amount of her Ice God power.

Xuan Zhenzi's fighting style was even more brutal; his cyan palm prints struck repeatedly, blasting away any approaching bone puppets.

But his hands also began to go numb, and the spiritual energy in his meridians rapidly dwindled like an oil lamp running out of oil.

Youlan huddled behind Jiang Xuelan, her hands tightly gripping Jiang Xuelan's clothes, trembling all over, but she didn't cry out.

"Too many..."

David's voice was slightly hoarse, "We need to find a way to break through!"

His chaotic power erupted again, a stronger sword beam sweeping out, cleaving a gap in the bone puppet horde.

He grabbed Youlan's hand and rushed towards the gap.

The four of them broke out of the bone puppet encirclement.

The footsteps behind them were still chasing, but not as dense as before.

They ran into another gray mist, darker and thicker than before.

They had just stopped to catch their breath, and before they could even assess their surroundings, a strange dark purple light shone beneath their feet.

The light seeped from the ground, forming intricate patterns around them, like countless interwoven snakes.

An illusion array.

David's pupils suddenly contracted.