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Kai did not answer.

His gaze was fixed ahead; through the mist, vague shapes were faintly visible.

They were twisted, irregular forms—resembling either dead, withered trees or the wreckage of collapsed structures.

“Is anyone there?” Xuan Zhenzi tentatively called out.

The voice echoed through the grey expanse, fading into the distance, yet no reply ever returned.

A faint tremor rose from beneath Kai’s feet.

At first, it was subtle—a rhythmic pulse like a heartbeat—but it gradually intensified, surging from the soles of his feet, past his knees, and racing up his spine to the crown of his head, as if the very space around them were a living creature breathing.

“It is watching us.”

Kai spoke softly. “Whatever it is, it knows we have entered.”

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

After walking for the time it takes an incense stick to burn, they came upon an open clearing.

Countless white objects lay scattered across the ground; at first, Kai mistook them for rubble, but upon closer inspection, he realized they were bones. 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.

Kai 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…were all people sacrificed here?” Jiang Xuelan’s voice trembled slightly.

Kai 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 an extremely 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.

Kai 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.”It wasn’t just a matter of being devoured…” Kai said in a low voice. “They were killed. Slain in a single blow.”

Jiang Xuelan’s gaze swept over the remains; her icy-blue eyes held a heavy, chilling sternness. “If it was a sacrifice, why bother killing them?”

“It was their souls that were sacrificed, not their bodies.”

Kai stood up and looked toward the deeper reaches of the gray mist. “That thing only wants souls; the physical bodies are worthless to it.”

Xuan Zhenzi rubbed his tingling arm and lowered his voice. “Mr. Chen, we really ought to leave… the longer we stay here, the more wrong it feels.”

Just as Kai was about to speak, a faint whimper drifted out from the mist ahead.

The sound was as soft as the wind whistling through a crack, yet it rang out with startling clarity in the deathly silence of the space.

All three of them instantly tensed.“Someone’s there.”

Kai’s voice was barely audible as chaotic energy slowly circulated within him, and he silently gripped the hilt of the Dragon Slayer Sword.

The whimpering sound rang out again. This time it was clearer and closer, as if it came from the shadows of the pile of bones ahead.

Kai 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 mountain of bones, Kai saw her.

It was a young ghost woman, huddled 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 were a deep blue, but now they were filled with extreme fear, like a young animal driven to the brink of despair, suddenly raising its head at the sound of footsteps.

Kai recognized her—it was the same girl who had been escorted to the crevice and pushed in earlier.

She was still alive.

The moment the girl saw Kai and the other two, her pupils contracted sharply, and she recoiled violently, pressing her back against the ribs of the demonic beast 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.

Kai 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?”

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

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,”

Kai 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…”

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

Kai’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 and knelt down in front of her, her icy blue eyes shining gently. “Don’t be afraid, we’ll take you out.”

The young girl, Youlan, looked into Jiang Xuelan’s icy blue eyes and her cool yet gentle face, like a fledgling bird frozen in a blizzard finally finding a branch to lean on 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 Kai: “Mr. Chen, this girl is incredibly lucky to be alive. The owners of those skeletons weren’t as fortunate as her.”

Kai 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.”

Kai 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, Kai 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…”

Kai’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?”

Kai'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!" Kai shouted, grabbing Youlan's wrist and turning to rush in another direction.

Jiang Xuelan and Xuanzhenzi followed closely behind, the four of them fleeing 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 by invisible threads.

"This thing is indestructible!"

Xuanzhenzi's voice held a hint of horror, "It can be broken and then pieced back together!"

Kai 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! Lao Xuan, protect the flanks!”

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

Gray light exploded around him as if it were tangible. The moment the Dragon Slayer Sword was drawn, a gray-purple sword beam swept out, cleaving the three bone puppets charging at the front in half.

Shattered bones scattered everywhere, and dark purple fireballs fell from their chests, bounced a few times on the ground, and quickly went out.

But more bone puppets had already surged forward. Their numbers were increasing, emerging continuously from the gray mist, like an unstoppable tide.

Kai swung his sword continuously, each strike precisely shattering the chest of a bone puppet, completely crushing the dark purple fireballs within.

But his spiritual power was also being rapidly depleted, each swing of the sword overdrawing his chaotic origin.

His breathing became rapid, fine beads of cold sweat seeped from his forehead, and his wounds were also scratched by the bone claws during the battle.

Jiang Xue Lan attacked from the flank. The icy blue aura transformed into dozens of ice needles, precisely piercing the dark purple fireballs within the chest cavities of the bone puppets.

The moment the needles pierced the fireballs, the aura froze the dark purple light into ice crystals, which then shattered into powder.

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

Xuan Zhenzi's fighting style was even more brutal; his cyan palm prints struck repeatedly, sending the approaching bone puppets flying.

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

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

"Too many..."

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

His chaotic power erupted again, and an even stronger sword beam swept 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 continued, but not as densely as before.

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

They had barely stopped to catch their breath, and before they could even assess their surroundings, an eerie dark purple light shone beneath their feet.

The light seeped from the ground, illuminating their surroundings... He could feel the patterns affecting his perception—the surrounding gray mist began to shift, the images distorting and blurring, unfolding like a dream before his eyes.

He saw a familiar scene before him: the mountain gate of Qingyun Cave, the blue stone archway gleaming faintly in the morning light.

"Mr. Chen!" Xuanzhenzi's voice came from behind, but his figure was becoming blurred in Kai's eyes, as if seen through a layer of mist.

Kai abruptly closed his eyes, the power of chaos flowing rapidly within his body.

The power of chaos was the source of all laws, and illusion was also a kind of law, but before him, all laws ultimately returned to the origin of chaos.

He circulated the power of chaos, transforming it into the purest spiritual protection, and then abruptly opened his eyes.

The illusions shattered layer by layer under the scouring of the power of chaos.

The mountain gate disappeared, the blue stone archway disappeared, replaced by streaks of dark purple light, like countless intertwined chains, sealing the entire space tightly.

Behind each layer of illusion array lay another, layer upon layer, like an endless maze.

Those who entered the rift, even if not killed by the bone puppets, would be forever lost within these layers of illusion arrays, unable to find the exit, until their spiritual energy was exhausted and they died in despair.

No wonder no one could return alive.

“Close your eyes!”

Kai’s voice carried a hint of urgency. “Follow my voice! Don’t look at anything around you!”

He pushed the power of chaos forward, the gray light like an invisible carving knife, drawing gray-white trajectories in the void ahead.

Where those trajectories passed, the dark purple light patterns shattered layer by layer like torn spider webs, and a narrow passage slowly emerged in the illusion array.

But the light patterns at the edge of the passage twisted violently, like countless struggling venomous snakes, trying to mend the gap.

“Follow!”

The four of them quickly moved forward along the passage.

Jiang Xuelan tightly protected Youlan, whose eyes were tightly closed, her face covered in tears, but she gritted her teeth and didn’t utter a sound.

Xuanzhenzi brought up the rear, his azure palm prints shattering the light patterns behind him that were trying to reassemble, but his spiritual power was almost depleted, and each strike was more strenuous than the last.

They passed through layer after layer of illusion arrays, each more complex and bizarre than the last.

In the final illusion array, Kai saw his fear—the shattered void, Mr. Shi’s fallen figure, and Su Yuqi’s vanished silhouette.

The images were incredibly realistic, every detail like a real memory.

The impact of the chaotic power caused his soul to tremble violently. He bit his tongue, the sweet taste of blood briefly restoring his consciousness.

But he could feel his will being constantly eroded, each breakthrough of the illusion array impacting his soul.

He knew that if this continued, they would all die here.

“Old Xuan! Xuelan! Retreat three zhang behind me!”

Kai raised the Dragon-Slaying Sword high, the chaotic power compressed to its limit within his body, gray light condensing on the sword as if it were solid.

He wasn’t breaking the illusion array, but forcibly tearing open the spatial barrier of this rift.

His gaze pierced through layers of illusion arrays, and through the perception of chaotic power, he vaguely sensed the aura of the Netherworld Abyss outside.

It was the unique coldness and dampness of Yin energy, seeping in from an extremely fine spatial crack several feet away.

“Open!”

The Dragon-Slaying Sword slashed down fiercely, the power of spatial origin squeezed to its limit, and a huge gray-white crack was forcibly torn open in the void.

The edges of the crack emitted a sharp, ear-piercing sound like metal tearing, and the world seemed to pause for a moment, then the surging Yin energy poured in like a flood, carrying the unique coldness and dampness of the Netherworld Abyss.

That Yin energy contained a familiar aura belonging to the Netherworld Abyss, like a bridge connecting this desolate space with the real world outside.

“Go!”

A metallic taste rose in Kai’s throat. He didn’t swallow it, letting the blood trickle from the corner of his mouth, not even bothering to wipe it away, and with his last strength, he pushed Youlan out of the crack.

Jiang Xuelan followed closely behind, with Xuanzhenzi last. He glanced back the instant he leaped out of the rift.

The bone puppets were closing in behind them, countless grayish-white bone claws slowly descending amidst dark purple light patterns, like tentacles from the abyss.

Then the rift abruptly closed behind them, isolating the dark purple light on the other side, leaving only the Yin energy of the Netherworld Abyss and the dark red glow of the minerals enveloping them once more.

The four of them crashed onto the rocky ground at the boundary between the seventh and eighth levels, gasping for breath.

Yin energy flowed slowly around them, and Netherfire flickered in the distance; everything returned to normal.

Youlan curled up on the ground, trembling, tears streaming down her face.

Jiang Xuelan reached out and pulled her into her arms, gently patting her back. Xuanzhenzi

sat on the ground, his back against the rock wall, eyes closed, panting, too weak to even speak.

Kai knelt on one knee, his Dragon-Slaying Sword planted in the ground, supporting his almost exhausted body.

His spiritual energy was almost exhausted, his soul was reeling, and his mind was still buzzing, as if countless cicadas were chirping in his ears.

But a smile played on his lips—the crack was no longer an incomprehensible mystery.

He had seen its essence, and knew what lay within.

He stood up and glanced back at the crack.

It still stood silently on the rock face, as black as ink, its edges… Before the cave of the Old Man of the Underworld

, two figures, like two burning black flames, surged with suppressed rage under the dark red glow of the mineral.

They were a male and a female ghost cultivator, their faces aged and haggard, their ghostly aura churning like boiling ink.

Their withered fingers were clenched into fists, nails digging deep into their palms, dark red blood dripping from between their fingers onto the ground with a soft hissing sound.

The male cultivator's voice was hoarse and rough, like sandpaper rubbing against iron: "Hand over my daughter! Hand over my daughter!"

His wife stood beside him, silently weeping, her dark blue eyes swirling with a mixture of despair and rage.

She didn't roar like her husband, but her silence was heavier than any roar, like a silent, imposing blade pressing down.

"You Shan, You He, calm down."

Gui Qi walked over from the other end of the suspension bridge, his black robe billowing, his dark blue eyes falling on the two of them, his voice tinged with helplessness. "This is the clan rule, you know it. Sacrifice is a rule established by the successive Abyss Lords, not targeted at any one person."

"Clan rule? Clan rule can just take my daughter's life?!"

You Shan's voice suddenly rose, his ghostly aura exploding, sending surrounding rocks tumbling down. "She's only sixteen! She did nothing wrong! Why should she fill that crack!"

You He finally spoke, her voice hoarse and broken, yet carrying a resolute determination that made people afraid to look directly at her: "Gui Qi, if you don't hand over my daughter today, I'll die here. I'll self-destruct my ghost core, we'll all perish together. I'm not joking."

Gui Qi's brows furrowed. He could feel the ghostly aura within You He's body being compressed wildly—she wasn't threatening, she meant it.

That power was compressed to its limit, ready to explode like a powder keg at any moment.

The self-destruction of a Grand Luo Golden Immortal would at least destroy the seventh level.

“Calm down.”

Gui Qi took a step forward, his voice tinged with an unusual urgency. “Your daughter has already been sacrificed. Even if you self-destruct, it won’t change anything. You still have other clansmen…”

“Other clansmen?”

You Shan smiled bitterly, his laughter filled with despair. “Do you think we don’t know? Those who were sacrificed were all nearing the end of their lifespan or were seriously injured.

Those people at least had enough years left to live, but my daughter is only sixteen! She still has a long life ahead of her, why send her in!”

Gui Qi opened his mouth, wanting to say something, but in the end, it only turned into a sigh.

He really couldn’t find any words to refute it. Those who were sacrificed were indeed people in their clans whose lifespans were nearing the end, but You Lan didn’t belong to that category. She was young and healthy; her fate shouldn’t have been like this.

But he couldn’t change anything either.

Just as the two sides were on the verge of exchanging blows, and the ghostly energy within You He’s body had expanded to a visible extent, a series of chaotic footsteps came from below the stone steps.

“Father! Mother!”

The cry pierced the deathly silence of the Netherworld Abyss, like a rift torn open in the darkness.

You Shan and You He froze, turning their heads simultaneously to look in the direction the sound came from.

You Lan stumbled down the stone steps, her body covered in wounds, her black robe tattered, but her deep blue eyes were filled with tears, and with the relief of surviving a calamity.

Her steps were unsteady, and she almost fell several times, but she ran towards her parents with all her might.

The ghostly energy in You He's hand suddenly dissipated. She stood there, stunned, her lips moving slightly, as if trying to confirm that what she was seeing was not an illusion, and then she suddenly rushed forward.

"Lan'er!"

You He hugged You Lan tightly, pressing her into her arms with such force that she almost mashed her into her own body, "Lan'er! You're alive! You're alive..."

You Shan was stunned for a moment, then rushed forward as well. The three of them embraced each other, crying their hearts out.

Youlan nestled in her mother's arms, her voice hoarse and trembling: "Father... Mother... I thought I'd never see you again... I was scared... I was so scared..."

"Don't be scared, don't be scared, your father and mother are here..."

Youhe's voice trailed off, tears soaking Youlan's black robe. "If anyone dares to touch you again, your mother will fight them to the death."

Youshan didn't speak, only held his daughter tightly, tears streaming down his wrinkled face, mixed with dust and sweat, making him appear exceptionally old and weary in the dark red light.

Kai stood in the shadows above the stone steps, not stepping forward.

He simply watched this scene quietly, his purple eyes swirling with complex emotions.

Jiang Xuelan stood beside him, her icy blue eyes slightly moist.

Xuanzhenzi, unusually silent, simply chewed on a dry blade of grass, watching silently.

Gui Qi was stunned.

His gaze lingered on Youlan for a long time, then fell on Kai, his dark blue pupils slightly contracting: "Mr. Chen... you... you went in?"

Kai didn't answer, only nodded slightly.

Gui Qi's body tensed. His lips moved slightly, but no words came out.

His expression was a complex mix of shock, lingering fear, and an indescribable mix of emotions.

Just then, the black curtain at the cave entrance was lifted.

The old man of the Netherworld emerged from the shadows, his hunched back appearing even more aged in the dark red light.

His gaze swept over Youlan's family, lingered on Kai for a moment, and finally settled on the three ghost cultivators responsible for escorting the sacrifice.

The three cultivators were huddled in a corner, their faces filled with bewilderment and shock.

They had clearly pushed Youlan into the crevice with their own hands, watched her disappear into the darkness—how could she still be alive?

The old man's voice was hoarse and deep, carrying an undeniable authority: "You three, what happened? How did she get out?"

The middle-aged cultivator knelt down with a thud: "Lord Yuan! I really pushed her into the rift! I watched her disappear with my own eyes! I don't know why… how…"

"I went in and brought her out." Kai's voice came from above the stone steps, calm and clear.

All eyes turned to him simultaneously.

The old man looked at Kai, his deep blue eyes swirling with complex light: "You went in?"

"Yes,"

Kai said, "not just me, Xue Lan and Lao Xuan went in too. We found You Lan and brought her out."

"Impossible."

The old man's voice carried a rare urgency, "No one has come out of that rift alive for ten thousand years, except…"

? The old man's pupils contracted slightly: "You…you know him?"

"I've inquired about him."

Kai descended the stone steps and stood before the old man. "The reason that madman was able to get out is because he's insane."

The old man's brows furrowed sharply: "Insane? What do you mean?"

"There's something inside that crevice,"

Kai said. “Gray mist, bone puppets pieced together from skeletons, and layers upon layers of illusion arrays.

What truly prevents people from getting out isn’t the bone puppets, but the illusion arrays.

These arrays, layer upon layer, conjure up the deepest fears and obsessions in people’s hearts, causing them to lose their way and never find the exit.

Most people who go in either die at the hands of the bone puppets or are trapped in the illusion arrays, exhausting their spiritual energy and dying.”

His gaze swept over everyone present: “But that madman is different. He went insane after entering the crevice.

His consciousness was chaotic, and the illusion arrays couldn’t effectively interfere with him.

So he was able to pass through the illusion arrays and find the exit. But even after he came out, he couldn’t return to normal.”

The old man fell silent.

The three escorting cultivators exchanged bewildered glances. The middle-aged cultivator’s voice held a hint of uncertainty: “Then… how did she get out? Did she go mad too?”

“She was lucky,”

Kai said. “We went in shortly after she was sent in, before Youlan died. We helped her block the bone puppets and led her through the illusion array.”

The Netherworld Elder stared at Kai for a long time.

Complex emotions surged in his azure eyes: shock, doubt, a certain inexplicable sense of relief, and a faint, almost imperceptible realization that he had finally found the answer.

“Come in,”

the Netherworld Elder turned, lifting the curtain. His voice was hoarse and deep. “I have something to ask you privately.”

Kai glanced at Jiang Xuelan, who nodded slightly, indicating that he should go ahead.

He followed the Netherworld Elder into the cave.

The curtain fell behind them, shutting out the dark red light and the clamor of voices.

The Netherworld Elder sat back on his black stone bench, his hunched figure appearing like a frozen sculpture in the dim light.

He remained silent for a long time before speaking, his voice hoarse: “That crack… do you know what’s inside?”

“A sleeping demonic soul,”

Kai said. “Or rather, it was once a demonic soul. It’s absorbing the souls of those who sacrificed themselves to restore itself.”

The old man’s body trembled slightly.

His fingers tightened on his knees, and he remained silent for a long time: “It… has awakened?”

“Awake,”

Kai nodded, “but not fully recovered. Its power is still very weak; it can only manipulate those skeletons to piece together bone puppets to guard the crack.

If it fully recovers… the entire Netherworld Abyss might be devoured by it.”

The old man closed his eyes.

His wrinkles appeared even deeper in the dark red light, like an old piece of paper repeatedly folded and unfolded, each crease etched with the weight and weariness of ten thousand years.

He opened his eyes: “How did you break the illusion array?”

“The power of chaos.” ”

The power of chaos is the source of all laws, and illusion is also a kind of law. I can see the patterns of the laws, tearing them apart layer by layer,” Kai said.

The Old Man of the Netherworld looked at Kai with a complex expression: “That rift has existed for ten thousand years, and the Ghost Clan has sacrificed for ten thousand years. We always thought it was a natural disaster, something beyond our control. We never imagined… it was man-made.”

“Not man-made.”

“It was an ancient demonic soul. It was cleaved into the abyss by the Immortal Emperor, its remnant soul sinking into the void rift.

It used the sacrificed souls to recover itself. Although it didn’t actively set up illusion arrays, its power leaked out, naturally forming those illusion arrays,” Kai explained.

The Old Man of the Netherworld remained silent for a long time.

His gaze was fixed on the dark red ore at the top of the cave, his voice carrying a weariness that came after ten thousand years: “In these ten thousand years… how many people of the Ghost Clan have died?

So many clansmen sacrificed, so many Abyss explorers died… yet they don't even know who their opponent is."

Kai didn't reply.

He simply looked at the Old Man of the Netherworld, waiting for him to continue.

The Old Man of the Netherworld withdrew his gaze and looked at Kai: "Can you destroy it?"

"Yes,"

Kai replied firmly, "but it will take time. I'm not strong enough yet; I need the strength of a Great Luo Golden Immortal to completely destroy that demonic soul. However, before it recovers, I can at least suppress it. There won't be any more sacrifices."

"No more sacrifices? Then the entire Netherworld Abyss will be in turmoil, even collapse…"

The Old Man of the Netherworld frowned slightly.

"If you trust me, then listen to me. From today onwards, stop the sacrifices. Wait for the Yin energy in that crack to cause turmoil in the Netherworld Abyss."

"Inside that crack, although I'm no match for that thing, outside, I'm not afraid of him,"

Kai said confidently.

Kai knew that no matter how powerful the Yin energy or demonic energy was, he could digest it.

After all, Kai possessed several demonic techniques.

The Old Man of the Netherworld sat on the black stone bench, his deep blue eyes fixed on Kai, remaining silent for a long time.

His fingers tapped lightly on his knees, producing a soft thumping sound—a habitual gesture he made when deep in thought, like the slow, unchanging swing of an ancient bell.

The sound echoed through the cave, each tap like a collision with an invisible chain.

The dark red light from the cave ceiling shifted silently, casting their shadows, sometimes long, sometimes short.

The old man of the underworld looked down at his withered fingertips, etched with lines of time, each like a crack deep within the abyss.

Ten thousand years—a full ten thousand years—he had sat in this spot, guarding this crack, watching one clansman after another be sent into darkness, watching wave after wave of explorers disappear into the illusionary array.

He had told himself all this was an inescapable fate.

But now someone was telling him that this fate could be broken.

“Are you sure?”

The old man’s voice was hoarse and deep, like the sound of water rising from the bottom of a deep well. “Once the sacrifices stop, the Yin energy in the cracks will surge out in large quantities, and the turmoil in the Netherworld Abyss will affect all the ghosts. Can you guarantee you can suppress it?”

“I can’t guarantee absolute certainty,”

Kai’s voice was calm, but his eyes showed no evasion. “But I can guarantee I will do my utmost. Continuing the sacrifices is only giving…”

The Old Man of the Netherworld fell silent, something flickering slightly deep within his azure eyes.

“At first, it was once every ten years,”

the Old Man of the Netherworld’s voice was almost inaudible. “Then it became five years, three years, one year… and now, it’s unpredictable, requiring sacrifices every few days.”

The Old Man of the Netherworld was utterly helpless; the sacrifices

had become increasingly frequent. “It’s getting stronger and stronger. Each sacrifice accelerates its recovery, which is why the sacrifice intervals are getting shorter.”

“Continuing to sacrifice will only lead to death,”

Kai’s voice was clear and calm. “Rather than watching it slowly recover and then devour the entire Netherworld Abyss, it’s better to strike proactively before it fully recovers.”

The Old Man of the Netherworld closed his eyes.

His wrinkles, under the dark red light, resembled cracks in an abyss, each etched with the weight and weariness of millennia.

He remained silent for a long time. Only the silent flow of dark red mineral light filled the cave, and the faint cries of joy from the Youlan family could be heard outside.

The cries, muffled and distant through the thick rock walls, pierced the last line of defense in the Old Man of the Netherworld’s heart like a fine needle.

He opened his eyes: “Alright. I trust you. From today onwards, the Netherworld Abyss will cease its sacrifices.”

As he finished speaking, his body hunched slightly, as if a tremendous burden had been lifted, yet also as if he had lost the crutch that had supported him for many years.

Complex light surged in his deep blue eyes—a mixture of relief, worry, and a resolute determination, like finally taking the first step off a cliff.

Kai stood up and bowed to the Netherworld Elder: “Don’t worry, senior, I will handle it.”

The Netherworld Elder waved his hand, his voice weary as if a tremendous burden had been lifted: “Go. I should rest too.”

Kai turned and walked out of the cave.

The moment the curtain was lifted, dark red light surged in again, casting his figure as a long, slender shadow.

The noise outside the cave instantly became clear—the cries of the Youlan family, the chatter of the onlookers, the creaking of the suspension bridge in the wind—all flooded his ears.

Kai stood on the stone steps at the cave entrance, his gaze sweeping over the ghost cultivators.

His voice wasn’t loud, but it reached everyone’s ears clearly: “From today onwards, the Netherworld Abyss will cease its sacrifices. I will handle the matter of that crack.”

A deathly silence fell upon these words.

The few ghost cultivators standing closest to the bottom of the stone steps were the first to react. Their faces, under the dark red light, were like frozen ice, which then suddenly cracked open.

Some gaped, some stared wide-eyed, and some took a half-step back as if processing the weight of those three words.

Then, like dry tinder being ignited, the entire seventh level of the Netherworld Abyss erupted in chaos.

“Stop the sacrifices?! Really?!”

“No more sacrifices? No more sending people to their deaths?!”

“It was Mr. Chen who said it! It was Mr. Chen who saved Youlan who said it!”

“The Abyss Lord agreed? The Abyss Lord really agreed?!”

Cheers, cries, and laughter mingled together, echoing through the abyss, causing the cliffs on both sides to vibrate and hum.

Some of the ghost cultivators huddled together, weeping bitterly, their withered shoulders trembling violently, as if they were releasing all the grief and anger accumulated over ten thousand years;

others knelt on the ground, kowtowing towards the entrance of the Netherworld Elder’s cave, their foreheads striking the rocks with dull thuds, yet they seemed oblivious to the pain;

still others gazed up at the dome, their lips moving, seemingly thanking some deity.

A young cultivator excitedly tossed his magical artifact into the air, only to be caught and slapped by an old man beside him, who roared, “You spendthrift! That’s a magical artifact!”

But the old man himself was smiling, a smile that stretched across his wrinkled face, like ice frozen for ten thousand years finally cracking, revealing warmth beneath.

You Shan, embracing his wife and daughter, bowed deeply in Kai’s direction.

He didn’t speak, but his hunched back was bent to its limit, his forehead almost touching his knees, his withered back bulging like a mountain ridge beneath his black robe.

Youhe bent down as well, and Youlan, nestled in her parents’ arms, sobbed and cast a grateful glance at Kai.

The cries of the three mingled together, but were no longer the weeping of despair, but the relief of surviving a catastrophe.

Gui Qi stood at the edge of the crowd, his azure eyes fixed on Kai, his lips slightly parted.

He wanted to say something, but in the end, it only turned into a barely audible sigh.

That sigh carried relief, gratitude, and a hope he had never dared to hope for.

He had lived for thousands of years, witnessing countless members of his race disappear into the rift. Every year, as he saw one member

of his race depart, he watched with his own eyes as those young or old faces were swallowed by darkness. He thought this was a fate he could never escape, until today, until this outsider from the human race told him—fate can be broken.

Kai didn’t say much, only nodded slightly, and turned to walk towards his cave.

In the following days, the atmosphere in the Netherworld Abyss was noticeably different.

In the once somber and oppressive abyss, sounds rarely heard before have emerged—children’s laughter echoes across the suspension bridge, crisp and clear like wind chimes;

the idle chatter of old men drifts from the cave entrance, accompanied by the puffing of pipes;

the rapid, light footsteps of young cultivators running across the bridge seem to be making up for all the joy they've missed over the years.

The gloom of sacrifice, like clouds dispersed by the winter wind, though not completely gone, has already revealed a long-lost glimmer of light.

When the ghost cultivators see Kai, they invariably stop.

Some bow, some give a slight curtsy, some simply cast a grateful glance and whisper, "Thank you, Mr. Chen."

Their gazes no longer hold scrutiny or distance, but genuine closeness and gratitude, like melting ice water in spring—cold yet full of life. The

young Taoist boy has also become much more active these past few days, spending his days running around the suspension bridge with the ghost children.

He was shorter than the ghost children, but exceptionally agile, treading the edge of the suspension bridge as if it were flat ground.

The ghost children were initially a little reserved, but they were quickly led by the young Taoist boy and began to move freely. The small figures darted between the suspension bridges like nimble little monkeys.

Xuanzhenzi sat on the platform at the edge of the cliff, a dry blade of grass between his teeth, watching the young Taoist boy's figure, muttering, "This little rascal is having more fun than I am... I never saw him this energetic when I was helping him escape back then."

Kai sat cross-legged among the Yin Spirit Grass near the rift every day, circulating his chaotic energy and sensing the changes within.

He could feel that with the cessation of the sacrifices, the dormant power deep within the rift was stirring.

What?

On the fourth night, the change began.

At first, only a thin, faint wisp of black yin energy seeped from the edge of the crack, like a silent breath, almost imperceptible in the dark red light.

That wisp of yin energy slowly climbed along the rock wall, like a tiny black snake wriggling.

But soon, a second, a third, a tenth… more and more yin energy surged from the crack, like a spring suppressed for millennia finally finding its outlet, gushing forth in a frenzy.

This yin energy was different from the yin energy of the Netherworld Abyss itself—it was denser, more violent, carrying a decaying and ancient devouring power.

That power was like a venomous snake that had slumbered for millennia finally awakening, spreading outwards with hunger and greed.

Where the Yin energy passed, black frost flowers condensed on the rock walls, resembling black moss, covering the rocks with a faint hissing sound;

the light of the Netherfire dimmed and flickered, like a candle burning in the wind;

even the air became viscous, as if filled with an invisible glue, each breath feeling as if something heavy was blocking the lungs.

“Mr. Chen!”

Gui Qi’s voice came from above the suspension bridge, tinged with urgency, “Yin energy is starting to seep out of the crack!”

Kai stood up, his purple eyes fixed on the crack.

The crack was no longer a calm, pitch-black fissure; its edges were constantly overflowing with black Yin energy, like a gaping wound bleeding.

The Yin energy surged and spread in the air, extending outwards.

The Yin spirit grass around the crack withered, curled, and turned black at a visible speed, finally turning into a pool of black liquid that seeped into the ground.

More and more ghost cultivators were alarmed.

They poured out of the cave, crowding the suspension bridge, stone steps, and platforms, their figures packed tightly into every available space.

Their eyes were fixed on the crack from which yin energy was seeping out, their faces, which had only recently relaxed, were once again covered by fear.

“Yin energy… so much yin energy…”

“Faster and more intense than any previous uprising!”

“Didn’t Mr. Chen say he would deal with it? Why isn’t it stopping?”

“It’s over… it’s over… if only the Abyss Lord were still here…”

“Is he incapable of handling it? We’ve been deceived?”

Fear spread through the crowd, like a drop of ink falling into clear water, quickly staining the entire surface black.

Some cultivators began to retreat unconsciously, their footsteps making a frantic sound on the suspension bridge;

some gripped their magical artifacts tightly, their knuckles turning white from the force;

some prayed softly, their lips moving rapidly;

some looked around blankly, helpless, like travelers trapped in a sudden blizzard.

The ghost cultivators, who had only enjoyed their brief moment of joy, were once again gripped by that age-old fear.

They thought they could escape this cage of fate, only to find that the moment the cage door opened a crack, darkness rushed out.

Kai ignored the whispers and fearful gazes.

He took a step forward, and gray chaotic power surged around him, silently devouring, assimilating, and purifying the approaching Yin energy.

That layer of gray light acted like an invisible barrier, intercepting all the Yin energy attempting to approach.

He raised his hands, fully circulating the Mind Concentration Technique within his body. The chaotic fire in his dantian surged high, gray flames burning fiercely in his chest.

He began to absorb the Yin energy. The

black Yin energy, as if finding its home, surged into Kai's body, flowing through his meridians into his dantian.

The sensation was like thousands of fine needles piercing his meridians simultaneously, carrying a cold, stinging pain, yet upon entering the dantian, it was fiercely burned by the chaotic fire, transforming into a warm current that flowed into his limbs and bones.

The violence and decay within the Yin energy were stripped away and purified layer by layer under the scorching heat of the Chaos Fire, like iron ore forged in a raging fire, impurities burned away, leaving only the purest refined iron.

The influx of Yin energy made the Chaos Fire burn even more fiercely, a deep, dark luster faintly seeping through the gray flames, like refined iron after quenching, becoming increasingly condensed.

Kai could feel his meridians being washed, widened, and tempered by the Yin energy.

Each meridian was like a dried-up riverbed being suddenly opened up by a torrent, the riverbed widened and deepened, able to carry more water.

Each absorption made the chaotic power within his body become thicker and purer.

Although his cultivation remained at the fourth rank of the Golden Immortal Realm, his foundation was being polished by the Yin energy accumulated over ten thousand years, becoming as solid as rock.

The feeling was like repeatedly folding and forging a piece of rough iron; each fold removed impurities, each forging increased density, and although the external appearance remained unchanged, the internal workings were completely transformed.

The surging Yin energy, as if finding an outlet, stopped spreading outwards and instead flowed continuously towards Kai.

A gray vortex formed around him, drawing in all the black Yin energy, like a bottomless black hole devouring everything.

The Yin energy condensed, surged, and swirled on his body, then was decomposed, purified, and absorbed by the power of chaos.

The fear in the crowd gradually turned into shock.

“He…he’s absorbing that Yin energy?!”

“Such dense Yin energy, and he can actually swallow it directly? Isn’t he afraid of bursting?”

“When that Yin energy touched him, it didn’t corrode his soul…it was as if he ate it up…”

“This…what kind of technique is this?”

Some people began to step forward, trying to see more clearly.

The crowd that had retreated gathered again, all eyes focused on Kai.

The black Yin energy surged around him, like countless black snakes coiling around his body, but when it came into contact with the gray light, it was silently melted, purified, and absorbed.

The Old Man of the Underworld emerged from the cave at some point, standing atop the stone steps. His hunched figure, bathed in the dark red light, resembled an ancient stone statue. His

deep blue eyes were fixed on Kai, watching as the surging Yin energy was peeled away, purified, and absorbed layer by layer by Kai’s chaotic power, like muddy water being filtered into a clear stream.

His lips moved slightly, his fingers clenching gently in his sleeves. The lingering worry deep within his eyes finally subsided somewhat at this moment.

“He actually managed to do it…”

Old Man of the Underworld? Gui Qi stood half a step behind him, his dark blue eyes also surging with shock: “Mr. Chen’s chaotic power is the source of all laws. Yin energy is also a kind of law, and before him… it will ultimately return to its origin.”

The Yin energy continued to surge for three full hours.

From dusk to midnight, from midnight to dawn, the crack was like an unhealable wound, constantly flowing out black blood.

Kai stood like a silent fortress in front of the crack, blocking, swallowing, and dissolving the surging darkness.

His face was somewhat pale, and fine beads of sweat appeared on his forehead, sliding down his chin and dripping onto the black rock with extremely faint pattering sounds.

His purple eyes, however, grew brighter and brighter, like gems that had been repeatedly polished, reflecting a deep light under the dark red glow.

The chaotic fire within him burned brighter and purer, each breath bringing out a wisp of faint gray mist.

Xuanzhenzi squatted on the edge of the suspension bridge in the distance, the withered grass he was chewing in his mouth having been replaced several times, each time because he had chewed it up in his nervousness.

His eyes, however, never left Kai's direction, a rare seriousness and admiration surging in his cloudy gaze.

He muttered under his breath, "Goodness... this kid can really swallow... I've lived my whole life, and this is the first time I've seen someone eat yin energy like it's food... If those divine cultivators saw this, they'd probably be furious..."

The little Daoist boy squatted beside him, his hands supporting his chin, his little face full of seriousness: "Master, Mr. Chen is really amazing."

"Nonsense, if he wasn't amazing, how could he be your master's boss?"

Xuanzhenzi tapped the little Daoist boy's head, but the force was very light. "Learn from him, you'll have to have this ability in the future."

"I don't want to swallow yin energy..." the little Daoist boy pouted, "It looks scary..."

"Pathetic!" Xuanzhenzi tapped him again.

At dawn, the yin energy surging from the crack finally began to weaken.

At first, it visibly faded, changing from a thick, inky black to a grayish-black, like diluted ink;

then it turned a light gray, as thin as morning mist;

finally, only a few faint wisps remained, drifting out from the crack's edge before dissipating in the air, like the summer morning sun dispelling the last wisp

of fog. Kai slowly finished his practice, the gray chaotic energy circulating around his body before returning to his dantian.

The gray light receded like a tide, revealing his slightly pale face.

He exhaled a long breath, the breath like a black arrow piercing the air, emitting a faint hissing sound and leaving a lingering black trail in the air.

Although his face was still somewhat pale, the light in his eyes was much brighter than before, like a blade that had been repeatedly tempered and polished; although the blade had not yet fully regained its luster, one could already feel its sharp inner edge.

His meridians were slightly hot, like iron pipes scorched by a raging fire, needing time to cool and recover.

But that burning sensation carried an unprecedented sense of fulfillment; the chaotic power seemed to have been infused with new life, flowing faster and condensing more intensely.

"It's over."

Kai turned around, looking at the wide-eyed ghost cultivators, his voice tinged with weariness yet still calm. "For now, there won't be any more Yin energy surging out."

The crowd fell silent for a moment.

No one spoke, no one moved; everyone seemed frozen in that instant, their faces still bearing complex expressions of fear, shock, and doubt.

Then, someone shouted first—

“Long live Mr. Chen!”

That shout was like a pebble thrown into a lake, creating ripples.

Immediately afterward, a second, a third, a tenth, a hundredth… countless voices rang out simultaneously, converging into a massive wave of sound, echoing like a mountain roar and a tsunami reverberating between the cliffs of the seventh level of the Netherworld Abyss: “Long live Mr. Chen! The ghost race will never forget you!”

Kai didn’t speak, only nodded slightly, and walked towards his cave.

His steps remained steady, but only he knew that the meridians within his body were slightly burning, like iron pipes scorched by a raging fire, needing time to cool and recover.

Yet he showed no sign of fatigue, his steps deliberate as he walked past the cheering crowd.

Jiang Xuelan quickly caught up, reaching out to support his arm.

Her icy blue eyes held concern and heartache; she could feel the slight tremor beneath Kai’s arm: “How are you feeling?”

“I’m fine,” Kai’s voice was soft, so soft that only Jiang Xuelan could hear it, “Just a little full.”

Jiang Xuelan paused, then couldn’t help but laugh: “You really… you dare to stuff anything in your stomach.”

Kai also laughed, a faint smile, yet radiating a relieved ease: “I had to pretend; I couldn’t just watch those yin energies destroy the Netherworld Abyss.”

They walked side by side into the cave, the curtain falling behind them, shutting out the still-cheerful sounds.

Xuanzhenzi stood up, dusted himself off, and grinned at the still-cheering ghost cultivators: “Disperse! There’s nothing more to see! Those who need to cultivate, cultivate; those who need to sleep, sleep!”

The ghost cultivators dispersed, but each face carried a long-lost sense of ease and hope.

Some glanced back at Kai’s cave as they walked, while others whispered about the miracle they had just witnessed.

Some couldn’t wait to run back to their caves, eager to tell their families who were too afraid to come out and see.

The Netherworld Elder remained standing high, looking towards Kai’s cave, his deep blue eyes swirling with complex emotions.

He didn’t speak, but slowly turned and walked back to his cave.

The moment the curtain fell, a smile, unseen for millennia, finally appeared on his wrinkled face.

The smile was faint and gentle, like the first drop of water seeping from the bottom of a riverbed that had been dry for millennia, yet undeniably real.

He sat on the black stone bench, the only light in the cave the silent glow of the dark red minerals.

He closed his eyes and whispered, “So… it really doesn’t matter anymore.”

The words were spoken so softly, as if afraid of shattering the silence.

Inside the cave, the dark red ore glowed silently, casting Kai's long shadow on the stone wall as he sat cross-legged.

His eyes were closed, and the Mind Concentration Technique slowly circulated within him. The chaotic power, like a fine net, enveloped the Yin energy he had just absorbed in his dantian, beginning its final refinement.

The Yin energy, which had entered his body like a raging flood, was now much gentler.

Under the repeated burning of the chaotic fire, the violence and decay within the Yin energy were peeled away layer by layer, transforming into strands of pure energy that merged into his meridians and dantian.

Kai's breathing was steady and long, and with each inhale and exhale, he could feel his internal power subtly increasing.

But just as he was about to complete the final refinement, his brow furrowed sharply.

Deep within the Yin energy, there was an extremely weak yet incredibly stubborn force, like an iron nail hidden in a crack in the stone, unmoved by the onslaught of chaotic power.

That force was different from Yin energy, different from demonic energy, and did not belong to any law he knew.

It possessed the gentle warmth and softness of flowing water, yet also the all-pervasive and unstoppable penetrating power of water.

Kai attempted to envelop it with the power of chaos and then refine it.

The gray light, like an invisible giant hand, grasped the wisp of power in its palm and then tightened its grip.

But the power, like a slippery fish, twisted and struggled within the gaps of the chaotic power, escaping control several times before sinking back into the depths of his dantian, like a stubborn rock submerged in deep water, no longer moving.

“It escaped again…”

Kai muttered to himself, a hint of seriousness flashing in his purple eyes.

He circulated the power of chaos again, enveloping the wisp of power once more, and then summoned an even more powerful chaotic fire to burn it.

Gray flames rose in his dantian, enveloping the wisp of power within.

But the power was like wood soaked in water; no matter how the flames burned it, only the surface heated slightly, while the inside remained cold and hard.

He tried seven times, each ending in failure.

That wisp of power, like a mischievous child, wandered freely within Kai’s dantian. When he tried to grasp it, it would lie dormant; when he relaxed his guard, it would reappear silently.

It neither harmed Kai’s body nor interfered with his cultivation, but simply existed stubbornly, refusing to be refined or expelled.

Kai slowly finished his cultivation, opened his eyes, and a rare hint of confusion lingered in his purple pupils.

He stood up, without disturbing Jiang Xuelan who was meditating, lifted the curtain, and walked up the stone steps towards the Netherworld Elder’s cave.

The Netherworld Elder seemed accustomed to Kai’s frequent visits.

He remained seated on the black stone bench, a slender black pipe held between his withered fingers, a ghostly blue flame burning within, emitting a cool yet invigorating fragrance.

Seeing Kai enter, he slightly raised his eyelids, his voice hoarse: “Young friend Chen, it’s so late, is something the matter?”

“Senior, I encountered some trouble while refining that Yin energy.”

Kai sat down opposite him and described the wisp of power in his dantian that he couldn’t refine. “That power doesn’t belong to Yin energy, nor to demonic energy. I can neither refine it nor expel it. I’ve wrapped it with chaotic power seven times, but it escaped each time.”

The old man’s brow twitched slightly. He didn’t answer immediately, but placed his pipe on his lap, his dark blue gaze lingering on Kai for a moment: “Let this old man take a look.”

Kai nodded, gathering his chaotic power and letting the aura of the wisp of power in his dantian naturally overflow.

The old man raised his withered finger, a wisp of dark blue Netherfire condensing at his fingertip, and gently touched Kai’s brow.

The wisp of Netherfire flowed into Kai’s dantian along his meridians, like a beam of dark blue light shining into dark water, accurately capturing the wandering power.

A moment later, the old man withdrew his finger, a complex light flashing in his deep blue eyes: “The power within you… is neither Yin energy nor demonic energy. It belongs to the Water Clan.”

Kai’s brows furrowed sharply: “The Water Clan?”

“Deep within the Void Sea lies an ancient race, who call themselves the Water Clan.”

The old man's voice was hoarse and deep, like bubbles rising from deep water. "They are born in symbiosis with water, and are proficient in all laws related to water.

Their power is extremely unique—gentle, soft, and all-pervasive, like flowing water that cannot be forcibly bound or refined. The power within you is the primordial power of the Water Clan."

A hint of surprise flashed in Kai's eyes: "How could the power of the Water Clan appear within the Yin energy of the rift?"

The old man shook his head: "I don't know either. But I can tell you one thing—the Water Clan is not a native race of the Celestial Realm. They came from beyond the Celestial Realm."

Kai sat up slightly: "Beyond the Celestial Realm?"

"Long ago, a sage from the Celestial Realm left to travel the universe. He wandered for ten thousand years in the endless sea of stars, and in a remote star region, he encountered the Water Tribe."

The old man's voice carried an ancient, hoarse quality, as if turning the pages of an ancient book. "That sage fell in love with a Water Tribe girl, but the Water Tribe did not allow its people to marry outsiders, so the sage took the Water Tribe girl and fled back to the Celestial Realm."

Kai did not interrupt, listening quietly.

"The aquatic race sent pursuers, all the way to the Celestial Realm,"

the Netherworld Elder continued. "But the Celestial Realm has strict legal barriers, preventing the aquatic pursuers from entering on a large scale; they could only send a small elite force.

Once inside, due to the conflict between the Celestial Realm's laws and those of the outer realms, these pursuers were unable to leave or return home. So they stayed in the Celestial Realm, searching for a suitable place to live." "

The Void Sea?”

“That’s right,” the Netherworld Elder nodded. ”

The Void Sea’s aquatic environment is closest to their homeland. They established settlements deep within the Void Sea, and after tens of thousands of years of reproduction, they became the aquatic race we know today.”

Kai was silent for a moment: “They can’t leave the Void Sea?”

“Once they leave the water, the Celestial Realm’s laws begin to suppress their bodies,”

the Netherworld Elder said. “Their power will rapidly dissipate, and their bodies will gradually decay. Therefore, the aquatic race rarely sets foot on land; even when they occasionally appear on the coast, they don’t venture too far inland.

This is why you’ve stayed in the Netherworld Abyss for so long and have never seen the aquatic race.”

Kai looked down at his palm, his purple eyes swirling with thought. “Senior,”

Kai looked up, “how far is the Void Sea from here?”

The Netherworld Elder looked at him, a knowing glint in his deep blue eyes: “You want to go and see the Water Clan?”

“Since that power comes from the Water Clan, we must find its source to solve it,”

Kai said. “Moreover, there might be some connection between the demonic soul deep within the rift and the Water Clan. If we don’t find out, even if we suppress the Yin energy, there might be even greater trouble in the future.”

The Netherworld Elder remained silent for a long time.

His fingers tapped lightly on his knees, as if weighing something.

Finally, he spoke: “The Void Sea is about three days’ journey from the Netherworld Abyss. After passing through the eighth and ninth levels of the Netherworld Abyss, there is an underground river that leads directly to the edge of the Void Sea. If you follow the river, you will reach the border of the Water Clan’s territory.”

“An underground river?” Kai’s eyebrows twitched slightly.

“That underground river was dug by the ancestors of the Ghost Clan for communication with the outside world,”

said the Old Man of the Netherworld. “Although it has been abandoned for a long time, it should still be passable. If you want to go, I can have Ghost Seven take you to the mouth of the underground river.”

Kai stood up and cupped his hands in thanks to the Old Man of the Netherworld: “Thank you, senior.”

The Old Man of the Netherworld waved his hand, his gaze lingering on Kai for a moment: “Young friend Chen, I have something I want to say to you.”

“Please speak, senior.”

“Although the Water Clan lives deep in the Void Sea, they are not friendly to outsiders. You must be careful when you get there.”

The Old Man of the Netherworld’s voice was hoarse and solemn. “They are gentle by nature and do not like fighting, but if their bottom line is crossed, their counterattack will be more ferocious than anyone else’s.”

Kai nodded: “This junior will remember.”

He turned and walked out of the cave.

When the curtain was lifted, dark red light surged in again, illuminating his young and composed face.

His gaze was fixed on the direction of the faintly visible dark waters deep in the Netherworld Abyss, a glint of light flashing in his purple eyes.

Back at their lodgings, Jiang Xuelan was already awake.

Her icy blue eyes shone brightly in the dark red light. “You went to see the Netherworld Elder?”

Kai nodded and briefly recounted the events involving the aquatic tribe. Jiang Xuelan frowned slightly. “You mean… that power belongs to the aquatic tribe? You went to the Void Sea?”

“Yes,” Kai said. “I plan to go and take a look.”

“I’ll go with you,” Jiang Xuelan said without hesitation.

Kai looked at her for a moment, then didn’t refuse. “Where’s Old Xuan?”

“He’s taking the young Taoist boy for a walk on the suspension bridge. I just heard the boy’s laughter,” Jiang Xuelan said. “He should be back soon.”

Sure enough, not long after, Xuan Zhenzi pulled the young Taoist boy in, lifting the curtain to enter.

The old man, seeing Kai’s expression, immediately sensed something was wrong. “Mr. Chen, you look like you’re about to go on a long journey. Is something important?”

Kai explained the situation again.

Upon hearing this, Xuanzhenzi’s expression changed from playful to serious: “The Void Sea? Aquatic creatures? Mr. Chen, this doesn’t sound quite right. If you’re going, I’ll naturally go with you. But this little Daoist boy…”

“Stay in the Netherworld Abyss,”

Kai said. “The Ghost Clan will take good care of him. The Netherworld Elder promised that the Ghost Clan would be responsible for the little Daoist boy’s safety while we’re in the Netherworld Abyss.”

The little Daoist boy looked up, his face showing no fear, but rather a hint of curiosity: “Mr. Chen, are you going to catch fish in the sea?”

Kai couldn’t help but smile: “Not catching fish. I’m going to investigate some things.”

“Then come back soon,” the little Daoist boy said. “I’ll wait for you to come back and tell me stories.”

Kai bent down and reached out to rub the little Daoist boy’s head: “Okay.”

Early the next morning, Kai, Jiang Xuelan, and Xuanzhenzi packed their belongings and arrived at the place designated by the Netherworld Elder, a hidden cave deep within the Netherworld Abyss.

Deep within the cave was a narrow stone door, behind which was a dark passage that stretched downwards, its end nowhere in sight.

The passage was filled with dampness and the smell of earth, a stark contrast to the cold, dry atmosphere of the Netherworld Abyss itself.

Gui Qi stood at the entrance, a rare seriousness in his deep blue eyes: “Mr. Chen, follow this underground river. You’ll reach the edge of the Void Sea in about three days.

There are some low-level water beasts in the river, but with the strength of the three of you, they shouldn’t be difficult to handle.”

Kai nodded: “Thank you.”

“Take care,” Gui Qi said.

The three of them stepped into the underground river passage.

A damp smell assaulted their senses; their feet trod on slippery rocks, and fine water droplets condensed on the rock walls on either side, reflecting a faint phosphorescent glow in the darkness.

The deeper they went, the denser the moisture became, and a faint, salty, fishy smell began to appear in the air.

After walking for about half an hour, the passage widened.

An underground river appeared before them, its waters unfathomable, its surface as calm as a mirror, reflecting the occasional phosphorescent flashes from the ceiling.

The banks of the underground river were wide, rocky beaches suitable for walking, but occasionally, blurry shadows could be seen slowly swimming in the deeper waters.

“Is this the way to the Void Sea?” Xuanzhenzi squatted by the riverbank, testing the water temperature with his hand. “The water’s quite cold.”

Kai stood on the bank, gazing at the dark expanse of the underground river stretching into the distance, a hint of anticipation flashing in his purple eyes.

The Void Sea. The Water Clan.

He gripped the hilt of the Dragon-Slaying Sword tightly and whispered, “Let’s go.”

Three figures walked along the banks of the underground river into the distance.

Damp air swirled around them, and the sound of the flowing water echoed through the passage, like an ancient whisper from the depths of the abyss.

At the end of the underground river, the light gradually brightened.

At first, it was just fragmented light filtering through the cracks in the stone walls, like broken stardust shimmering in the water.

Then the light spots multiplied, becoming denser and denser, dyeing the river water a flowing pale blue.

The oppressive, tomb-like atmosphere in the air gradually dissipated, replaced by a salty, vibrant moisture.

Xuanzhenzi took a deep breath, his cloudy eyes brightening slightly: “This smell… we’re almost there.”

Kai walked in front, his purple eyes fixed on the increasingly bright light ahead, the stone beach beneath his feet gradually widening.

When the last narrow stone wall suddenly parted before him, he saw the Void Sea.

At that moment, even Kai, accustomed to encountering all sorts of wonders, couldn’t help but hold his breath slightly.

The Void Sea stretched endlessly, like a giant crystal embedded in the void.

The water was unbelievably clear; one could see through hundreds of feet into the azure depths, revealing the undulating underwater mountain ranges.

Sunlight pierced the surface, shimmering in the clear water…