

## Old Gods 111

Chapter 111: did you pack... up?

Nearing 11 a.m., the four-member squad finally arrived at the western suburbs of Jinchuan City, coming to the feet of the Divine Sculpture·Desert Drum.

"Tsk tsk~" Chang Ying couldn't help but marvel in admiration.

Ever since disembarking from the vehicle, she had been gazing up incessantly at the enormous Divine Sculpture, unable to take her eyes off it.

Six-class God·Desert Drum!

The form of this Stone Sculpture was that of a robust man.

He stood bare-chested, his long hair tied behind his head, wielding a drumstick in hand, with a giant war drum placed before him.

His facial contours were somewhat indistinct, yet the strong aura of valiance he emanated was palpably genuine!

"I really want to fight," Chang Ying muttered softly, clenching her battle-axe.

At her side, Lu Ran couldn't help but make a strange face.

What Chang Ying had said was true; mere sight of such a Divine Sculpture could stir anyone's emotions surging with fervor!

And what puzzled Lu Ran was, didn't the big girl worship it?

Deng Yutang and Tian Tian beside them weren't Desert Drum believers, but they still performed the proper courtesies.

Deng Tian's pair both placed their hands together, bowing in greeting.

"You are students, right? High school or university?" A female voice reached their ears.

The group looked over to see a soldier sister approaching.

"We're high school seniors this year," Chang Ying responded immediately.

The female soldier walked closer, looking up at Chang Ying and internally nodding in approval.

As the saying goes: Bigger bodies mean greater strength!

Some talents really are a gift from your parents, and others can only envy it.

"Recently, there have been disturbances inside the Demon Cave; we do not recommend high school students enter for training," the female soldier said.

"Ah..." Chang Ying's face fell, "We've come all the way from Rain Alley City!"

"Rain Alley City?"

"Wu Lie River Province," Lu Ran said.

Rain Alley City didn't have much fame, so when traveling, it was better to mention the name of the province.

All of a sudden, Chang Ying asked, "Since we're not allowed to train, then how did our shuttle bus make it into the military camp?"

The female soldier turned and asked, "What are your ranks?"

Chang Ying immediately pointed at Lu Ran, "He's Stream Realm Third Rank! The three of us are Stream Realm Second Rank, about to ascend to the next."

Deng Yutang quickly joined in, "That's right, that's right! Any minute now!"

"Your strength seems decent," the soldier mused for a moment before continuing, "What kind of believers are you?"

As everyone introduced themselves, the female soldier felt a bit stunned.

She even took a few more glances at Lu Ran.

The strongest and highest-ranked individual of the team was actually a Nine-class God-Immortal Sheep believer?

Typically, the higher your natural talent, the more likely you are to catch the attention of higher-ranked deities.

This ...?

The female soldier was confused.

Even more regrettable to her was that the girl with the most explosive physical talent was actually a believer in spirits?

Although the rank of the Spirit Sign deity was indeed high, being a lofty Four-class God,

The believers of Spirit Sign...

This team's roster was truly baffling!

To put it nicely: A group of kind folks and gamblers banded together!

To put it bluntly: Cowardly sheep and gambling dogs mixing and scrabbling around?

This... can they even fight?

The initially unnoticed Deng Tian duo turned out to be the backbone of the team?

For a moment, the female soldier felt sympathy for the two Sword Lotus believers and Immortal Sheep believers.

"Our strength is not bad," Lu Ran noticed the soldier's hesitation, "Later, when we register, you can check our believers' points."

Believer points couldn't be faked.

As high school students, their points came from a single source - school exams.

In other words, they hadn't muddled through by "volunteering" or other such activities.

"That's right!" Chang Ying slapped her chest, "Ever since becoming believers, our team has always been first!"

Tian Tian: "..."

Deng Yutang: "..."

Yes, this team had always been at the top of the list, but what did that have to do with her?

"Hmm," the female soldier, while still full of questions, did not believe the girl was lying.

After all, once registered, the soldiers would check their student information and everything would be verified.

"Ma'am, what has happened in the Demon Cave?" Lu Ran inquired.

The female soldier explained, "Since the fifteenth, the Black Lamp Clan has become unusually active.

We are short-handed and unable to take good care of groups of trainees like you."

On hearing this, Lu Ran instantly perked up.

What did that mean?

No instructors accompanying the team?

Wouldn't this mean he was going to have the time of his life?

"Ma'am, we can take care of ourselves!" Lu Ran declared immediately.

The female soldier nodded, "If you insist on entering the Demon Cave for training, you must strictly abide by the rules and only operate within the designated area, absolutely not crossing any boundaries."

"No problem!" Chen Ying quickly responded.

Ever since she saw the Six-class God-Desert Drum statue, her blood had been boiling, and she couldn't wait to swing at something.

Just as she had said in the vehicle before - my axe is very thirsty!

"Come on, let's register first." The female soldier turned to leave, and the group promptly followed.

As they entered the building, Lu Ran also noticed the difference.

The reception staff inside the hall were relatively few, and the human troops stationed there were indeed short-handed.

At a counter, several students handed over their ID cards and student IDs one by one.

The female soldier stood behind her colleague, eyes fixed on the computer screen, and in just a few seconds, she frowned slightly.

The tall girl she had initially favored had 74 believer points.

How to describe these points? Barely passable, you could say.

If it were anyone else, that would be quite good, considering these students had only been believers for under four months.

The problem was, Chang Ying had just been boasting as if it was an earth-shattering achievement!

What the female soldier didn't know was that Chang Ying's 74 points were thanks to Rain Alley City having undergone two special events.

The school didn't rank students twice in a row; as long as you survived, you were first on both lists!

In other words, Chang Ying had made a tremendous leap in points thanks to two special events, gaining a total of 40 points!

"Not bad," the soldier gave a nod of affirmation.

Then, the soldiers looked at Tian Tian and Deng Yutang's points, which were 86 and 88, respectively.

Tian Tian joined the team later; when Lu Ran's team was first placed, she was in Ma Tianchuan's team, which won second place in the group.

Seeing these two's points, the female soldier nodded in approval.

Don't think that 74 points compared to 86 or 88 points isn't much of a gap.

The school's assessments always had a safety net, to make sure most students could graduate smoothly.

That means, a student's points couldn't fall too low.

But exceeding others? Gaining just 1 more point was quite difficult!

Tian Tian and Deng Yutang were prime examples.

Their scores were seemingly only two points apart, but in reality, this was the difference between first and second place in the group.

"Huh?" the female soldier suddenly uttered in perplexity, her expression extremely surprised!

Even the soldier operating the computer widened her eyes.

The Nine-level God-Immortal Sheep believer, Lu Ran... had 132 believer points?

points?!

Were these points... fake?

Where did they all come from?

Today was the nineteenth day of the ninth lunar month, which meant that Lu Ran could have participated in a maximum of three city-defense missions.

Because students were not allowed to join the city defenses on the fifteenth of the seventh lunar month.

Even if Lu Ran had been first on both lists every time, he would have only gotten 60 points at most!

And the homework assigned by the school each month had fixed, guaranteed points.

If others had 70 or 80 points, that would be considered pretty good, but you shot up to 132 points?

I just said that the points of fellow believer students couldn't be too low or too high, but this...

The female soldier looked at Lu Ran, "Did you repeat a grade?"

Lu Ran: ???

In Da Xia Country, which high school allowed believer students to repeat a year?

Are these points so unbelievable?

Mixing more with the Moon Gazers wouldn't allow this?

"Our team leader is amazing!"

Chang Ying chuckled and stepped forward, wrapping an arm around Lu Ran's shoulder: "Even on the fifteenth of July, he didn't miss his patrol duties."

Lu Ran: "..."

The last time Deng Yutang had to deal with a plastic bag, Lu Ran was still holding a grudge.

And now another quick talker, Chang Ying?

The female soldier looked doubtful, "You participated in the city-defense on the fifteenth of July, or a patrol?"

Lu Ran slowly began to speak, but Chang Ying blurted out, "It was an extra test from the Divine People Bureau!"

Lu Ran: "..."

Damn!

From now on, do I have to fight even to pull out a plastic bag?

Chang Ying continued, "We were still sophomores then!"

In our Rain Alley City, our team leader was the first student in history to be extra tested during his sophomore year."

The two soldiers looked at each other in disbelief.

If it were just the points, they would naturally consider the student a genius among geniuses!

But the fact that "Immortal Sheep Believer" was written next to Lu Ran's name on his information card was very strange!

Lu Ran turned his head to look at Chang Ying, with a rare hint of reproach in his eyes.

"Alright, alright, I won't talk anymore, okay?" Chang Ying got it wrong, assuming that Lu Ran didn't want to be too ostentatious.

She muttered under her breath, "Really now, you're so mighty, why be so low-profile?

If it were me, I would've soared to the skies long ago~"

Hearing these words, Lu Ran nearly spat blood!

Is it that I want to stay low-profile?

A table full of savory dishes, with braised pork and spicy boiled fish, soup and all, you take them all away.

You won't even let me pack it by hand!

Seeing Lu Ran remain silent, Deng Yutang aptly said, "We will abide by the rules and only train within the designated area."

"Alright." The female soldier's gaze swept over them once more, reassessing the team, "Follow me."

"Ah, there, there, don't be mad, I won't talk next time!"

Chang Ying coaxed and acted coy, pushing Lu Ran to follow the soldier's pace.

Tian Tian gaped in disbelief, feeling overwhelmed.

Such words should come from a petite girl, right?

You, as a big woman, doesn't find that jarring?

People's first impressions are indeed deep-seated and hard to change in a short time.

Recalling her first day stepping into high school, the little Tian Tian was indeed shocked by the sight of Chang Ying.

"Tian Tian?" Just as Chang Ying turned her head and saw the dazed girl, she called out, "Don't just stand there, come!"

"Oh." Tian Tian hurriedly caught up.

"Hurry up." Chang Ying waited for a moment and reached out for the girl.

As the large hand approached, Tian Tian got startled!

Immersed in her emotions, she blurted out instinctively, "Don't, don't eat me!"

Chang Ying: ???

Chapter 112: Gamblers' Daily Routine

"Whish~"

In the central building of the military camp, Lu Ran was following the soldiers when he suddenly heard a noise behind him.

He turned around and saw Chang Ying holding a Mountain Opening Axe in one hand and clutching a phantom Sign Holder in the other.

Divine Technique·Spiritual Sign!

This Divine Technique, sharing the name with Divine·Spiritual Sign, was the most basic Divine Technique of the Spiritual Sign Sect.

It was used for everyday life, not for battle.

Anything you need to ask!

Marriage, education, wealth, career and more, anything you can think of, a believer of the Spiritual Sign can divine for you!

There were five signs inside the Sign Holder, namely: top sign, high sign, middle sign, low sign, and lowest sign.

"Whoosh~"

In no time, a sign shot out from the holder.

It bore a single large character—"Middle!"

"Middle is auspicious, lucky and satisfying!" Chang Ying shook her head, muttering to herself, "Not bad, not bad~"

She really seemed a bit like a charlatan.

If you replaced her Mountain Opening Axe with a fortune-telling flag, she would look even more the part.

Lu Ran laughed and said, "Middle means auspicious?"

"Yes, indeed!" Chang Ying replied earnestly, "Any difficult situation you encounter, you can... stay... stay..."

Chang Ying suddenly furrowed her brow, mumbling softly, "What was that phrase again?"

Lu Ran: "..."

The female soldier leading the way sighed internally and thought to herself, 'Just as I suspected!'

No matter how she reassessed this small team, a gambler was still a gambler and couldn't become a responsive True Divine Being.

"Oh, right!" Chang Ying shook her head again, continuing her chant, "Any difficult situation you encounter can be calmly faced.

You will turn misfortune into fortune, turn danger into safety."

Lu Ran walked down the spiral staircase, circling around a pillar and said casually, "Have you ever drawn the top sign?"

"Of course I have!" Chang Ying immediately responded.

Lu Ran asked smilingly, "Did the predictions come true?"

The Sign Holder in Chang Ying's hand vanished, and her expression turned somewhat odd.

Lu Ran didn't get a response for a long time and couldn't help asking, "Chang Ying?"

"It's weird." Chang Ying looked at Lu Ran's back, "The few top signs I drew seemed to be related to you."

Lu Ran: "Ah?"

Chang Ying pondered, "Those first couple of days when we became believers, I wanted to ask what the future held for teaming up with you."

Saying this, she put a hand on Tian Tian's head, using it like a human crutch while walking down the steps:

"That was my first time!"

Lu Ran: "..."

What sort of scandalous statement was that?

Deng Yutang asked, "Your first time at what?"

Chang Ying confirmed, "That was the first time in my life I drew a top sign!"

Hearing this, Lu Ran also recalled the words Chang Ying had said when she approached him to form a team while he was being punished in the playground.

Lu Ran had always thought that Chang Ying was just bluffing.

So she really had calculated it?

Chang Ying continued recalling, "In the months that followed, I never drew such a good sign again.

Until a few mornings ago, the top sign popped up again.

It totally stunned me, I forgot what I had asked.

It was that very night..."

Lu Ran suddenly interjected, "Did the class instructor create a small group for us?"

"Exactly~" Chang Ying nodded with a smile, "It seems you really are a lucky star!"

While chatting, everyone continued their descent.

Encouraged, Tian Tian built up the courage to lift her small hands and push away the big hand resting on her head.

She expected Chang Ying to be displeased or to say something.

But unexpectedly, Chang Ying didn't seem to mind or even notice, and kept chatting with Lu Ran:

"Things related to you tend to yield good signs!"

Mid-conversation, Chang Ying's hand unwittingly raised and landed back on Tian Tian's head.

Tian Tian: "..."

So frustrating!

This person is really barbaric. When will Sister Ruyi come back...

During command in battle later, I must keep this wild woman away from me.

"Whoosh~"

The group walked into the Starry Sky Curtain, and gusts of night wind blew by.

Lu Ran's short hair fluttered as he used his Extreme Vision to gaze at the mysterious Demon Cave under the night sky.

Below his feet stood Stone City, and torch processions winding in all directions, reaching as far as the end of the night sky.

Lu Ran had been to Evil Dog Village, which was an endless wasteland with barren land.

He had also been to the Soul-splitting Demon Cave, where there were giant Black Soul Wood forests, with humans wandering amongst them like tiny ants.

And this Black Lantern Demon Cave had undulating mountainous terrain.

It was said that within this region, the various hills might have bizarre forests of stones.

The odd thing was, the rocks were mostly shaped like rectangular prisms, much like the tombstones in a cemetery...

And the Black Lantern Clan happened to gather here.

This also led to the military's torch-lit paths intersecting several "graveyards."

"Let's stop here." The female soldier led everyone to the ground and said, "You go through the north gate, move northward, and gain experience.

And remember, you must not stray from the torch-lit path.

Moreover, calculate precisely—you can only cross nine Black Grave Mounds.

When you see the tenth, you are not allowed to go any further."

The so-called "Black Grave Mound" was a hill filled with tombstones where the Black Lantern Clan gathered.

Therefore, this Black Lantern Demon Cave also had another name—Black Grave Mound.

The female soldier continued, "Keep track of the time. You must report to the nearest Stone City every day.

Before the 10th day of the lunar month next month, you must exit the Demon Cave; otherwise, our side will dock your believer points."

"Understood." Lu Ran nodded.

Apart from needing to check in daily and having a clearly designated activity area, the other rules were no different from other Demon Caves.

"Good luck." The female soldier left.

Lu Ran turned to Tian Tian, "What do you say, Commander?"

Tian Tian: "Then... shall we go too?"

Lu Ran smiled encouragingly, "You're the commander, most of the time, you don't need to seek others' opinions.

You have to decisively give orders, and everyone will follow your arrangement."

Jiang Ruyi had asked Lu Ran to look after Tian Tian before she left.

Now, Lu Ran was putting that into practice.

Tian Tian extended her small hand, poking Deng Yutang's back and said, "Let's go."

Deng Yutang: "..."

The group of four quickly headed towards the north gate and stood before the familiar torch-lit path.

Lu Ran also took a red scarf from his pocket and covered his eyes with it.

Chang Ying looked curiously at Lu Ran but said nothing.

After all, she had witnessed Lu Ran's powerful battle instincts during the Night of Ghosts.

"Shall I go ahead?" Lu Ran's eyes were covered with the red scarf strip as he picked up his twin blades and looked behind him.

"Be careful." Tian Tian whispered.

Lu Ran, of course, heard her loud and clear and stepped into the darkness.

Chang Ying couldn't hold back and whispered, "Does he always fight like this in the wild?"

Tian Tian raised her head to look at Chang Ying, "Stand 1 meter... 3 meters behind me!"

Chang Ying, holding her axe, obediently stepped back two steps.

"Let's go!"

Tian Tian waved her small hand, quite satisfied with her decision.

Chang Ying felt terrible!

She used to charge boldly at the forefront.

Now, at the back of the team, she even had to shorten her strides, lest she catch up with Tian Tian...

Tian Tian suddenly said, "When we encounter an Evil Demon later, you try first."

"Sure!" Chang Ying's eyes lit up, and her axe felt ready.

Who would have thought, Tian Tian then said, "Use more Five Treasure Signs and Six Treasure Signs, let us familiarize ourselves with the strength of your Divine Technique."

At that time, Chang Ying was at Stream Realm Second Rank and had mastered three Divine Techniques.

The first Divine Technique-Spiritual Sign was the life skill she had just displayed.

The second Divine Technique-Five Treasure Signs was a Divine Technique that integrated five types of abilities.

The third Divine Technique-Six Treasure Sign was an advanced version of Five Treasure Signs, each sign having a higher spell intensity.

The troublesome part was that there was one "rotten sign" in the Six Treasure Signs!

Once drawn, Chang Ying would immediately fizz out.

The energy she needed to cast spells would triple, and the cooldowns would triple too!

That rotten sign would also stick around Chang Ying, like an annoying fly buzzing around...

As everyone knew, believers of the Spiritual Sign would enter a three-minute cool-down period after each draw.

It wasn't just a single skill cooling down but all Divine Techniques cooling entirely.

Why was it so?

This was a rule set by the Divine-Spiritual Sign's lord.

According to the lord himself: The Divine Techniques of the Spiritual Sign Sect were too powerful; if used recklessly, it would be against the harmony of heaven.

An old saying went: To go against the harmony of heaven is to invite great disaster!

Thus, if you continuously cast spells, the lord of the Spiritual Signs would not approve.

Regarding this, Lu Ran thought... it was complete nonsense!

Such old charlatan's words, not a single word could be believed.

If you really had that much capability, start by making the probability play a fixed play!

The principle of "losing nine out of ten gambles," who doesn't understand it?

And to say, "Divine Techniques are too powerful, it goes against the harmony of heaven," give me a break!

Why did Lu Ran think so?

Because, the believers of the Spiritual Sign couldn't waste these three minutes of cooldown time.

Simply waiting was not an option!

You must pray devoutly to the lord of the Spiritual Signs to count the cooldown duration of the skills.

If you don't pray and don't give the Power of Faith to the Spiritual Signs, your skills would be in cooldown for a lifetime!

Simply put, wasn't this just a means to fish for faith?

If you fish openly and honestly, nobody would say anything.

The principle is the same as making money; it's not embarrassing.

But the Spiritual Signs, with their great truths and little philosophies, package themselves very well.

As for the believers of the Spiritual Signs... well, they're just willing to endure, I suppose.

"An Evil Demon spotted!" Deng Yutang's voice suddenly came from ahead, "A solitary one."

Tian Tian immediately said, "Let's see Chang Ying's strength, shall we?"

Deng Yutang lowered his raised spear, "Alright."

"Go for it." Tian Tian turned her head to look at Chang Ying.

"Just watch~" Chang Ying stretched her long legs, gripping her axe, and charged forward.

"Use more Divine Techniques." Tian Tian shouted.

"Swoosh~"

Chang Ying immediately grasped a Sign Holder, rushing towards a Black Lantern, "Spiritual Sign bless me, bless me!"

No more support signs, I don't need to recover Divine Power!

Attack signs, control signs, Summoning Signs, anything works.

"Whoosh~"

From the Sign Holder, a Spiritual Sign shot up high and suddenly enlarged!

This time, it wasn't a support sign, but a defense sign?

Chang Ying looked up, a bit bewildered.

"Chang Ying?" From the darkness in the distance, Lu Ran's voice came as a reminder.

"Right!" Chang Ying quickly snapped out of it.

She raised her hand high and then brought it down hard.

So what if it was a defense sign?

It could still crush someone!

Under Chang Ying's control, the defense sign became like a giant fly swatter, smashing down on the Black Lantern...

Chapter 113: Am I All Gods?

"Slap!"

The oversized Spiritual Talisman crashed the Black Lantern forcefully to the ground.

In an instant, dust and smoke rose in all directions.

Chang Ying immediately raised her hand, and the Spiritual Talisman followed, flying up.

With the girl's hand falling, the fly swatter smashed down again.

"Slap! Slap! Slap!"

In the pitch-black wilderness, Lu Ran pulled down his red headscarf and looked towards the battlefield.

Goodness.

This huge wooden plank made the ground tremble.

If it hit someone's butt, wouldn't that be terrible?

"Chang Ying! Chang Ying?" Tian Tian's voice grew higher and higher.

Chang Ying finally stopped.

The Black Lantern was already shattered, and even the mist had been dispersed...

Tian Tian, being a sensitive and thoughtful person, hesitated for a moment before asking, "Chang Ying, are you unhappy? Don't you like your position in the team?"

"No," Chang Ying said, waving away the large Spiritual Talisman with a hand and frustratingly scratching her head, "I just can never draw the talisman I want."

Lu Ran looked at Chang Ying and smiled secretly.

Look at the state the kid's been pushed into.

Using defense talismans as if they were attack talismans.

Spiritual Talismans, oh Spiritual Talismans, you really are... wait.

Lu Ran suddenly realized something.

In the future, in his God Demon Sculpture Garden, Spiritual Talisman Divine Sculptures would also be activated.

And all sculptures in the garden, whether of Evil Demons, would ultimately be under my control.

So, my personally executed Spiritual Talisman Divine Technique·Five Treasure Signs...

Could it mean I can draw whatever I want to?

Is the principle of this Divine Technique truly a matter of chance, or is there a deity playing tricks behind it?

"Hmm..." Lu Ran pondered to himself, feeling it was more likely the latter.

After all, the greed of the Divine·Spiritual Sign was obvious to everyone.

So now the question is!

If I can freely draw talismans with my own activated Divine Sculptures, why should Chang Ying continue to worship the True God·Spiritual Sign?

Why doesn't she switch to following me, Lu Ran?

Why not come and believe in me, in the "Fake God·Spiritual Sign" in my Sculpture Garden?

The more he thought about it, the more shocked Lu Ran was by his own idea!

Does this imply that the believers of all sects in the world could switch to my side?

This...?

Lu Ran touched his chin.

Oh, no!

Have I become a deity?

No, more precisely said...

Have I become All Gods?

"The odds are clear, only one in five," Deng Yutang's voice came from not far away.

"I will draw again in a moment!" Chang Ying muttered discontentedly, "I refuse to believe it will still be a defense sign."

"You are already very impressive," Tian Tian, who rarely took the initiative to approach Chang Ying, whispered, "The defense sign is quite powerful in your hands."

"Hehe~" Chang Ying's face changed instantly, and she suddenly became cheerful again.

"Quickly cool down the Divine Technique, we should go," Tian Tian urged.

"Yes, ma'am!"

While the two of them were still talking, Lu Ran abruptly turned his head towards an even darker place in the distance.

There, a Black Lantern was wandering far away.

The black wooden handle hanging above it was horizontally suspended as if someone was holding it.

Could this Four-sided Lantern be rotating just like a carousel?

Lu Ran confirmed several times that no one was around, then he raised a hand.

"Huh~"

Energy surged, and canine teeth appeared.

From the Evil Dog Clan, the Evil Technique·Evil Tooth!

The crisp sound traveled far and wide.

With just one hit, the Black Lantern shattered, turning into streams of mist.

A mere Mist Realm·Black Lantern simply couldn't withstand the powerful Stream Grade Skill.

"This is too satisfying."

Lu Ran looked at his hand and suddenly felt that everything had become so simple.

Indeed!

The team instructor's limitations have stifled my performance!

"Ah, I got it! I really got it!"

From a distance behind, the joyful shouts of Chang Ying could be heard.

Lu Ran turned to look, seeing a total of five Spiritual Talismans revolving around Chang Ying.

Had she finally drawn an attack talisman?

The attack talisman, just like the defense talisman, had turned into a wooden object after flying out of the talisman cylinder.

"Lu Ran!" Chang Ying called out loudly, "Lu Ran?"

"What?" Lu Ran shouted back.

Chang Ying urged, "Quick! Help me find an enemy!"

The attack talisman won't last long, it'll disappear soon!"

Lu Ran: "..."

In this desolate wilderness, and not near Black Grave Mound, it would be good to see a wandering Black Lantern now and then!

I've just secretly killed one, where should I find one for you?

"Hurry up, the attack talisman is going to fade!"

Chang Ying was desperate, eager to show her new teammates her strength.

Lu Ran snorted, "How about attacking me then?"

"That's not good," Chang Ying hesitated, "You may not realize it's made of wood, but the pointy end at the front is very sharp.

Once it starts moving, its lethality is no less than a Sword Cultivator's flying sword!"

Lu Ran replied irritably, "I was just saying, do you really want to kill me?"

"Don't be nasty," Chang Ying pouted, dropping her hand.

Five regular-sized Spiritual Talismans circled around her, lightly dancing.

They fluttered past Chang Ying's neck, through her armpits, across her waist, and around her legs...

The key point was, the speed of the five Spiritual Talismans was incredibly fast!

Such a scene left the three of them astounded!

What a terrifying Divine Technique?

It had given Chang Ying such incredible control!

Last month, during their training, Lu Ran had also witnessed a similar scene.

Sword One's follower, Guan Yiren, had summoned flying swords that danced playfully around her, obedient as children.

Yet the display that Chang Ying now showed was no less remarkable than a Sword One follower's!

Why else would the Divine-Spiritual Sign be ranked fourth?

Even with such a heavy "gambling" element, its Divine Technique is truly strong!

"Huh?" Lu Ran turned sharply, his eyes bright, "It looks like there's a Black Lantern over there, I'll draw it over for you!"

"Ah..." Chang Ying looked troubled.

"How so?" Lu Ran turned his head and caught sight of the Spiritual Talismans entwined around Chang Ying, collapsing into nothing.

Everyone: "..."

"Give me three minutes, it will be ready soon!" Chang Ying said in haste, immediately closing her eyes.

Deng Yutang frowned slightly, thinking it wasn't good to linger here.

But seeing that Tian Tian remained silent, he also suppressed his impatience and swallowed his words.

The three minutes passed in a flash.

"Rustle!"

Chang Ying summoned the talisman cylinder first thing, shaking it vigorously.

"Heavenly Sprite, Earthly Sprite, rise, great Spiritual Talisman!"

Muttering to herself, suddenly, Chang Ying's voice rose, "Attack talisman, obey my command, you shall come out!"

"Huh~"

Under the expectant gazes, a ghostly Spiritual Talisman floated mid-air, slowly rotating.

Then, streams of mist stretched down, flowing towards Chang Ying's body, replenishing her Divine Power.

Chang Ying's eyes widened, her entire being petrified in place, as if struck by lightning!

Assist sign?

The assist sign that replenishes Divine Power for the target...

With a "plop," Chang Ying sat on the ground, her gaze blank, completely dejected.

Above her head, the assist sign continued to rotate slowly, dutifully supplying Divine Power to its master.

Deng Yutang turned his head away, his expression one of secondhand embarrassment.

In the shadows, Lu Ran also placed a hand on his forehead.

A gambling addict... indeed a gambling addict.

"Chang Ying." Only Tian Tian felt sympathetic and consoled her, "It's all... well, it's all chance, it's okay."

What else could they say?

They couldn't tell her it was fate!

Tian Tian stepped forward, "We have twenty more days of training here, you'll have plenty of chances to shine."

"Hmm." Chang Ying nodded slowly, regaining her composure and getting up, "Let's go, move out!"

"Okay!" Tian Tian immediately nodded.

Seeing this, Chang Ying let out a sigh of relief.

She'd been a believer for over three months; how could she not know her own performance when drawing talismans?

She was already used to it!

It was just a lingering hope.

And the play must go on.

Because letting everyone wait three minutes for nothing required some explanation...

While the trio was preparing to set out, Lu Ran had already quietly approached the direction of the Black Lantern.

"Huh~"

On a dark hilltop, the Black Lantern suddenly changed direction.

It was hard to distinguish the front, back, left, and right of such a Four-sided Lantern.

But the lantern's handle above provided Lu Ran with a clue.

With the black wooden handle suspended horizontally, one might imagine an invisible person holding the lantern.

"Zzz—"

Mist erupted under Lu Ran's feet, and he slid backward sharply.

"Bang!"

As expected, when the Black Lantern detected humans, it chose to explode first.

Threads of Black Fire spread, completely merging with the dense night.

Evil Technique·Disaster Fire Cage!

Killing a thousand enemies at the cost of injuring oneself by eight hundred.

Too bad, the little lamb had run too fast!

The Black Lantern only hurt itself by eight hundred, totally missing the human...

"Zzz—"

The fog rose once more, and the airflow surged.

Lu Ran's pitch-black eyes shimmered with a strange luster.

Eerie and terrifying.

He, who should have slashed with the blade, suddenly stopped his Divine Technique·Immortal Hoof and raised his foot instead?

"Break!"

Lu Ran could barely contain his excitement, a wave of energy churning under his foot, kicking hard against the lantern.

From the Soul-splitting Demon Clan, the Evil Technique·Soul-splitting Demon Hoof!

This Technique was equivalent to War Trample, supposed to be stomping on the ground and blasting away surrounding creatures.

Instead, Lu Ran chose to stomp directly on the lantern!

"Bang!!"

The sound of explosion rang out.

The lantern instantly shattered, and the airwave tumbled!

Lu Ran landed, sliding sideways on the ground to ease the momentum.

In one word: exhilarating!

Lu Ran knew he should have used a blade for an easier and more efficient attack.

Even better, he should use long-distance casting, directly throwing out the Evil Tooth, biting the lantern apart with its vicious fangs for safety!

But...

Exhilaration was all that mattered!

I've killed so many Evil Demons, activated two Evil Sculptures.

Now that the nights are clear of crows following, can't I enjoy myself?

"Thrilling~"

Lu Ran felt refreshed.

There were twenty more days of fun ahead!

Leading Evil Dogs and carrying Soul-splitting Demons...

I'm going to storm your Black Grave Mound!

Chapter 114: Cage Fire

Three days later, at Black Grave Mound.

This was the seventh Black Grave Mound that Lu Ran and the others had seen.

Looking around, the little hill was dotted with mounds of earth, with tombstones standing crookedly.

This special terrain really resembled a chaotic burial site!

The night wind, when passing through here, turned into gusts of a chilling breeze.

Additionally, black lanterns floated about the graveyard, creating an even more terrifying scene.

"Kill!"

At the path lit by torches, Deng Yutang roared.

Fear?

The word "fear" simply did not exist in the dictionary of the Red Turban Believers!

Retreating ten thousand steps, even if there were indeed ghosts in this graveyard...

Amidst Deng Yutang's impassioned Battle Roar, everyone had the courage to take up arms and charge!

Blessed with the Red Turban, nothing was taboo.

With the great banners fluttering, just get it done!

In truth, the combat strength of the Black Lantern Clan wasn't very formidable, especially at the initial stages where they posed little threat.

However, there was one Evil Technique that everyone needed to be wary of—Illusion Fire Cage.

This spell could cause hallucinations!

It could confuse the target's mind, blurring the line between illusion and reality.

This was the Evil Technique equipped by the Black Lantern Clan at Stream Realm Third Rank. Once humans were afflicted, it was truly problematic.

Nevertheless, the weaknesses of this technique were also clear.

Once you realized something was amiss, you simply had to close your eyes.

As long as you avoided looking at the faint glow emitted by the Black Lanterns, you wouldn't be hallucinated.

For instance, if you noticed the scenery of the graveyard in front of you constantly switching with the image of your own bedroom, it was time to close your eyes!

You were about to be affected!

If you looked any longer, the images in your eyes would no longer switch—you'd "return home" for real!

Perhaps, you'd even hear your mother's knocking from behind, softly calling you out for a meal...

If you followed her, then in reality, your physical body would leave the path and enter the pitch-dark graveyard.

Could you resist?

It would be difficult.

Because at the moment you were afflicted, your mind would already be muddled.

Aside from the Evil Technique·Illusion Fire Cage, the other Evil Techniques of the Black Lantern Clan weren't so extraordinary.

Just healing, explosions, release of black smoke, and so on.

In these three days, the trio of Deng, Tian, and Chang worked their assigned roles continuously, their coordination growing more seamless and their efficiency in killing enemies rapidly increasing!

Why a trio?

Because that stray lamb, also known as Lu Ran, always lingered in the shadows.

Lu Ran seemed to shun the light, wandering through the rolling hills and drifting in the gloomy graveyard.

More ghostly than ghosts!

From another angle, Lu Ran, who was always in the dark and following the trio of Deng, Tian, and Chang...

Could this not be considered another form of "relentless haunting"?

"Soul, return."

In a pitch-dark graveyard, Lu Ran extended one hand and murmured under his breath.

Four canine teeth appeared out of thin air, and a black lantern close by was bitten to pieces.

"What is the 'four sides'?"

With eyes like Dead Sheep Eyes, Lu Ran uttered eerily chilling words for summoning souls.

The soul of the Black Lantern floated from afar and was absorbed into Lu Ran's Pupil of the Dead World.

Without the "camera" around, Lu Ran's combat strength had soared!

The feeling of unrestrained use of Evil Technique...

Exciting!!

Normally during battle, Lu Ran would shuttle back and forth across the battlefield, engaging enemies in close combat.

Who would have expected that today he was able to get things done just by standing in one place!

The joy of a caster,

I have felt it...

"Uh~"

Lu Ran's form wavered slightly as he was jolted awake.

The souls of the Black Lantern Clan had been collected in sufficient numbers, activating the Black Lantern Evil Sculpture!

He quickly scanned his surroundings, tossing out a few canine teeth before immediately connecting with the God Demon Sculpture Garden in his mind.

"Hum!"

Within the Sculpture Garden, a huge Black Lantern sculpture trembled slightly.

Lu Ran keenly felt the connection with the activated Evil Sculpture.

"Disaster Fire Cage, Disaster Fire Cage..."

Lu Ran quickly grasped the first Evil Technique of the Black Lantern faction.

In just over ten seconds, a dark flame quietly ignited in Lu Ran's hand.

"Huh?" Lu Ran's mouth slightly agape.

This is Evil Technique·Disaster Fire Cage?

There's only fire, where's the cage?

Oh, right!

The Black Lantern Clan itself was the lantern!

The names of the Evil Demon Clan and the Evil Techniques were mostly given by humans.

It made sense for people to call those exploding Black Lanterns "Disaster Fire Cage."

But when Lu Ran, as a human, performed this Evil Technique...

What he summoned was just a pitch-black flame!

Clearly, the Black Lantern Clan caused the fire to explode, thereby hurting themselves and others.

"Shoot," Lu Ran dared not move!

He was afraid that the dark flame would explode in his own hands!

So, am I also supposed to inflict a thousand points of damage on the enemy at the cost of eight hundred points of my own?

In the future, if someone annoys me with their smart mouth, I'll just slap it right on!

My hand would be a bloody mess, but the other person's mouth should explode into a mess too, right?

Maybe it's a satisfying method?

"Hm?" Something stirred in Lu Ran's mind.

Cage Fire provided a clear response to Lu Ran; it was a unique connection between the Evil Technique and the caster.

After pondering for a moment, Lu Ran tried sending it forward with his hand.

Sure enough!

The Cage Fire drifted slowly forward.

If you put a lantern over it, wouldn't this be a black lantern?

Suppressing his excitement, Lu Ran swayed his palm left and right, and the Cage Fire followed.

Then, he directed the Cage Fire towards one of the Black Lanterns.

"Feels a little delayed, doesn't it?"

Lu Ran knitted his brows.

It proved that the further the Cage Fire was from the caster, the harder it was to control.

"Blast." Lu Ran flicked his right hand harshly to the left.

The dark fire flew to the left side and collided with a Black Lantern.

"Boom!"

The dark fireball exploded.

"Boom!"

Another explosion sounded.

After being hit, the Black Lantern triggered a chain reaction.

If you explode, so do I!

This scene amused Lu Ran.

What I explode is a summon, but you are blowing up your own life!

It only dawned on Lu Ran then: the lantern skin of the Black Lantern Clan was fully enclosed.

They were sealed tight with small gaps, so the dark fire could not escape and had to explode inside the lantern cover.

"Hu~"

Another surge of energy rolled through, and a dark flame ignited again in Lu Ran's hand.

He could feel the Cage Fire was hot.

But Lu Ran wouldn't get burned.

As the caster, he was continuously feeding energy to the Black Fire, the spell intimately linked at the "spell" level.

At least until the Cage Fire left the caster's control and exploded, Lu Ran would not be hurt.

"If that's the case, can I..."

A lively thought crossed Lu Ran's mind as he looked at the twin blades embedded in the ground before him.

Could he continuously cast the spell, applying the Cage Fire on the blades?

Then both blades in his hands would glow with dark flames!

Like an Enchantment!

Whoever he cut would explode!

Black obsidian and black ice materials could certainly withstand such a level of explosion.

It remained to be seen whether Lu Ran himself could endure it...

"Hm." Lu Ran thought and thought, but he didn't dare be too reckless.

For now, the Cage Fire was just a Mist Grade Evil Technique.

Lu Ran needed to nurture the Black Lantern Evil Sculpture in the garden to Stream Realm in order to upgrade the technique to Stream Divine Skill.

And the higher the grade of the Evil Technique, the greater the caster's control over it.

So, Lu Ran decided to hold back a bit longer, becoming more familiar with the technique before attempting anything.

"In my hands, you should stop being called 'Disaster Fire Cage'."

Lu Ran studied the burning Black Fire in his hands.

After all, this name of the Evil Technique didn't quite match the actual spell Lu Ran ended up casting.

"Let's call you 'Cage Fire' then!"

Lu Ran sent his hand forward.

Black Fire wavered, skimming across the pitch-dark graveyard, like a ghostly flame.

"Yo-ho!"

In the distance, Chang Ying's cheer suddenly rang out.

Lu Ran turned his head and saw Chang Ying's head with a phantom Summoning Sign rapidly materialising overhead.

Subsequently, a majestic soldier took shape!

The summon from the Five Treasures Sign!

"Thud," a dull sound echoed.

The soldier descended from the sky, landing heavily on the ground.

He wore a set of copper armor and held a long spear in his hand.

A sense of ancientness and otherworldliness washed over.

Under the bronze helmet, the soldier's face was incredibly vague, almost "faceless."

"Long time no see!" Chang Ying put her hand on the Copper Armor Guard's head, vigorously ruffling it, ecstatic.

During these three days, she had drawn all sorts of signs, except for the Summoning Sign!

The Copper Armor Guard stayed silent, shaken head to toe by the girl's fondling.

Tian Tian was baffled by the sight.

The Copper Armor Guard was more than 1.8 meters tall, with sturdy armor and a formidable presence!

Such a mighty warrior was being treated like a pet by Chang Ying?

Well... indeed, the soldier was also a human-shaped summoned beast.

"Is there a time limit for the Copper Armor Guard?" Deng Yutang asked loudly.

Chang Ying replied, "Yes, five minutes!"

"To your left front!" From the darkness, came a reminder from Lu Ran.

Chang Ying's eyes lit up, and with a grand gesture, she commanded, "Go, kill for me!"

"Hum!"

The Copper Armor Guard's body vibrated with a humming sound, as if responding to the commander.

He obeyed and charged forward, spear in hand.

At the fringe of illumination provided by the torch-lit path, the Copper Armor Guard picked up his spear and thrust at a Four-sided Lantern.

"Boom!!"

The Black Lantern erupted mightily.

The Copper Armor Guard was terrifyingly formidable!

Not even the blast forced him back a single step.

The soldier once again raised his spear, ruthlessly piercing through another Black Lantern, giving the Evil Demon no chance to catch their breath.

"Amazing." Tian Tian whispered.

Deng Yutang, however, had a strange expression watching the fearless Copper Armor Guard.

Since you have him, what do I do?

Fortunately, the Copper Armor Guard could only exist for five minutes.

And the chance of drawing out the "Summoning Sign" wasn't that high either.

"That fierce?" In the dark graveyard, Lu Ran leaned against a gravestone and seated himself upon it.

Of course, it wasn't a real gravestone but a stone resembling one.

Perhaps Lu Ran had no reverence for the divine.

But if there were any humans resting in peace here, he wouldn't possibly show such disrespect.

"Ho?" Lu Ran's gaze didn't leave the battlefield for a second, appreciating the prowess of the Copper Armor Guard.

The Copper Armor Guard wasn't at all clumsy; his sense for battle was extraordinarily sharp, and he even possessed martial skills!

The soldier moved with purpose, his spear technique was practiced, and his style was bold and expansive.

Nothing less could be expected from the Summoning Sign, the hardest to draw among the Five Treasures Sign!

He was simply too powerful, almost like a "heavenly soldier"...

"Friends over there! Friends over there!" Suddenly, an urgent voice called out.

Lu Ran turned to see a middle-aged woman sprinting down the torch-lit path in the distance.

Running out of breath, she waved her arms frantically, "Help, please help us, save us!"

What realm are you..."

Chapter 115: Yin Ancient Residence

"What realm are you from..."

Before she could finish her inquiry, the woman's expression became incredibly stiff.

As the distance closed, she discovered to her astonishment that these were a group of seventeen or eighteen-year-old youths?

High school students?

With all the recent turmoil inside the Black Lantern Demon Cave, how did high school students manage to infiltrate it?

"Don't panic, start with the specifics!" Deng Yutang shouted loudly.

"We, we were caught by..." The middle-aged woman spotted the presence of the Copper Armor Guard and her eyes immediately lit up.

Right!

Since this group of high school students were permitted to enter the Demon Cave, it meant their strength had to be formidable!

This team was likely a frontline squad from some high school in the city!

With that thought, the woman ran even faster, "My daughter has been taken control of, controlled by the Yin Fire Cage!

She can only stand there in her water flow armor!

Unable to fight or flee..."

On hearing this, everyone was taken aback.

Evil Technique·Yin Fire Cage was a spell the Black Lantern clan could employ in the River Realm.

"A single person is controlled?" Deng Yutang quickly deduced, "That means it's a Black Lantern from the River Realm·First Rank.

At most, River Realm·Second Rank?"

If the Black Lantern was of the River Realm·Third Rank, it would be equipped with the Evil Technique·Yin Lamp Array.

That kind of spell was a group control technique, and nobody would be able to escape!

"Yes, probably River Realm·First Rank! What's your realm? Can you help us?" As the woman spoke, she couldn't help but keep glancing towards the Copper Armor Guard.

"We're in Stream Realm, second and third rank," Deng Yutang said, turning his head to look at Tian Tian, "Command?"

"Stream Realm, second and third rank..." The middle-aged woman's heart sank.

Although she had been mentally prepared, knowing that these high school students couldn't be that strong,

hearing their realm still caused her heart to sigh with lament.

"Chang Ying, you take the rear with the Copper Armor Guard and draw the enemy's attention," Tian Tian, kind-hearted as she was, couldn't stand by and watch someone die, "We'll go take a look!"

Such a decision was clearly made subconsciously.

It was only after Tian Tian's words had fallen did she remember to look for Lu Ran.

"Alright!" Chang Ying waved her hand grandly, and the Copper Armor Guard immediately broke off from the fight, beginning to draw the enemy's attention.

"This way, this way!" the woman hastily beckoned to everyone, somewhat desperately seeking help in her panic.

These students were the closest people around, and the battlefield waits for no one!

She wouldn't have time to find other reinforcements now, would she?

"What kind of Believers are you all?" the middle-aged woman asked between heavy breaths as she led the way.

"Divination Sign, Sword Lotus, and Red Cloth!" Chang Ying responded loudly and continued to stride forward.

"Good, that's fantastic!"

Listening to the names of one deity after another, hope rose again in the woman's heart.

"Eh?" Tian Tian, with her short legs, watched in amazement as Chang Ying ran past her at a great pace.

"I'll carry you." Chang Ying looked back at her commander and immediately stretched out a long arm.

"Mm." Tian Tian let out a light cry.

Her petite body was scooped up by Chang Ying and tucked at her waist.

Tian Tian felt strange, but... now was not the time to dwell on it.

"We also have an Immortal Sheep Believer," Deng Yutang's voice came from ahead.

"Good... uh, Immortal Sheep Believers are pretty good too," the woman stammered, then hastened to add, "Young man, you must be a Red Cloth Believer."

When we engage, you open up the Red Cloth Domain to help us divide the battlefield!"

"Can do," Deng Yutang immediately nodded, "How much further?"

"Just ahead, right ahead!"

After a short sprint, the woman suddenly pointed to the distance, "There, can you see it?"

Deng Yutang looked up and saw that on a distant torch-lit path, there was a large area of pitch-black smoke spreading.

Deng Yutang's expression grew solemn.

The situation was far more severe and dangerous than imagined!

The striking density of the black mist was the hallmark of the Black Lantern clan's Evil Technique: Smoke Fire Cage.

The Black Lantern clan was peculiar; they had no facial features, and it was unknown how they sensed the world.

This meant that the Black Lanterns wouldn't be affected by the smoke.

But not so for the Human Clan!

Deng Yutang and his peers couldn't see clearly onto the battlefield; charging blindly into the black mist would be tantamount to suicide!

The Black Lanterns, that type of Evil Demon, were highly explosive.

And Deng Yutang and his group were in the Stream Realm, totally lacking water flow armor; if they touched a Black Lantern, their bodies could be blown to pieces!

"Please help, young man!" the middle-aged woman was exceedingly anxious, "Auntie only has this one daughter!"

Auntie begs you, you must help me... that's right, Divination Sign Believer!

Miss, send your soldiers in first, Auntie's going to cover your retreat!"

"Chang Ying, send in the Copper Armor Guard!" a voice came from Chang Ying's waist, "Deng, hurry and call for Lu Ran!"

"Brother Lu!" Deng Yutang bellowed, peering into the dark night, "Brother Lu?"

That dense black mist battlefield was no place for humans.

Apart from the fearless Copper Armor Guard, only Lu Ran could go in!

"Where's Lu Ran?" Chang Ying also started shouting, gesturing ahead to command the advance of the Copper Armor Guard.

"Boom!"

"Boom!!" From the thick black mist, a series of intense explosion sounds emerged, causing everyone to tremble with fear.

More terrifyingly, the noise attracted more Black Lanterns to gather.

If this continued, even the trapped members of the Human Clan with water flow armor would sooner or later be blown to smithereens.

The Copper Armor Guard charged ahead, directly heading for the black mist battlefield.

Tian Tian struggled to the ground and pushed out nine lotus petals from her hands, flying towards the mass of Black Lanterns entangled with the Copper Armor Guard.

"Right!" The middle-aged woman clenched her fists, repeatedly comforting herself, "The Copper Armor Guard doesn't need eyes to see the world.

He must find... Ah?"

The middle-aged woman suddenly cried out in shock!

In her line of sight, a figure emerged, sweeping out sideways from the dark graveyard?

The person was dressed in black, ghost-like, with eyes blinded by a red cloth, wielding twin blades.

Under his feet, dense white mist was ejecting, his pace extraordinarily fast!

"Brother Lu!" Deng Yutang's eyes lit up.

He had been anxious before, but seeing this figure, Deng Yutang was completely reassured.

"Has Lu Ran arrived?" Tian Tian, facing backward to block the pursuers, quickly asked.

"He has!" Chang Ying gaped, dumbfounded, "He just... went in?"

The situation within the black mist was invisible to everyone.

But beyond the black mist, everyone could see clearly!

So many Black Lanterns were drifting there, as if a lantern array!

For the Copper Armor Guard to charge into the black mist cluster, it would have to put in quite an effort!

Yet, that red-blindfolded figure carved a bizarre path for himself within the lantern array, darting back and forth, zigzagging, and then he plunged into the black mist!

"Good heavens!" the middle-aged woman was completely stunned, "What... what was that?"

Deng Yutang said gravely, "The Immortal Sheep Believer I mentioned earlier."

The middle-aged woman looked shocked, "Ah?"

"Rumble!"

Suddenly, an explosive sound erupted from the thick black mist.

The vibration made everyone tense.

No one knew that this commotion emanated from the Evil Technique·Soul-Splitting Demon Hoof!

On the battlefield engulfed in black mist, Lu Ran stomped heavily on the ground.

The violent surge of air sent Black Lanterns flying in all directions, as if clearing the field!

"Boom!"

"Boom..." The group of Black Lanterns reacted in a chain, exploding one after another after taking damage.

"Lu Ran!"

At the torch-lit path, Chang Ying couldn't help but step forward, calling into the black mist.

Deng Yutang's expression grew even more solemn as he gripped his long spear tightly.

"Whoosh—"

The sound of rushing air came again.

The middle-aged woman reacted with both alarm and joy!

She saw the young man in black, carrying a slender figure, shooting out from the black mist.

"Quick!" Chang Ying abruptly raised her hand.

As if invisible threads extended from her fingertips, she manipulated the distant Copper Armor Guard.

The Copper Armor Guard immediately charged forward, sweeping his long spear from side to side, fiercely clearing the way for Lu Ran.

"Whoosh—"

Mist sprayed from Lu Ran's feet as he brushed past the Copper Armor Guard.

In an instant, the Copper Armor Guard spread its arms wide, becoming a flesh shield to confront the oncoming barrage of explosive airwaves.

"Rise!!"

As the wind carried waves of black mist surging towards them, Deng Yutang let out a fierce shout and grabbed a large flagpole in his hands.

Red Cloth Divine Skill·Red Cloth Domain!

The flagpole was planted firmly into the ground, and a red cover immediately stretched out.

Everything, along with Black Lanterns and the thick black mist, was completely isolated outside.

Lu Ran immediately changed his posture, from charging forward to sliding sideways, even stabbing his blade into the ground to significantly slow his momentum.

"Whew~"

A gust raised dust, and the figure slowly came to a halt.

"Xianxian!"

The middle-aged woman rushed over anxiously and took her daughter from Lu Ran's shoulder.

"Wow, Lu Ran!" Chang Ying also hurried over, supporting Lu Ran's shoulders and inspecting him, "Are you alright?"

"I am," Lu Ran finally removed the red cloth from his eyes but didn't look at the others; instead, he walked towards the left, ahead of him.

"Brother Lu?" Deng Yutang noticed Lu Ran's odd behavior.

"What's wrong?" Chang Ying immediately followed, joining Lu Ran at the edge of the Light Red Cover.

All Chang Ying could see beyond the torchlit path in the graveyard was the Black Lanterns that fluttered in their direction.

She naturally thought that Lu Ran was watching the pursuers.

But that wasn't the case!

Ever since they had approached this battle group, Lu Ran had been smelling an extremely intense Ghost Energy!

But because he had to save someone in the black mist, he had to blindfold himself first, listening carefully.

Now, Lu Ran was finally able to look over, and with this look...

Lu Ran felt a shiver run down his spine!

What had he seen?

Was that... was that an ancient mansion?

In the darkness, on the edge of the distant graveyard, stood a large old-fashioned Chinese mansion.

The ominous mansion gates were wide open!

On the gates hung several pitch-black lanterns, gently swaying.

Streams of black mist were spilling out of the mansion gates.

From within the courtyard, columns of black mist soared into the sky, drifting out in all directions like threads.

Gusts of yin wind blew, and the ghostly presence was overpowering!

"Holy shit..."

Lu Ran's Adam's apple moved up and down.

Such an ominous old mansion gave Lu Ran a tremendous visual shock.

In his mind, he even imagined the sound of cold, solemn, and penetrating funeral suona music!

Unwittingly, he had goosebumps all over.

This, this...

Chapter 116: Severe Illness Sky

Evil Nest?!

Lu Ran felt a chill run down his spine.

He wasn't entirely sure whether the classical Chinese mansion shrouded in heavy Yin energy was the so-called "Evil Nest."

But within this pitch-dark Demon Cave, other than the undulating hills, were only the Black Grave Mounds.

Where had there ever been an ancient mansion?

Thus... it was very likely this was the Evil Nest!

As the name suggests, the Evil Nest was the lair of the Evil Demon Clan.

This lair could produce a large number of Evil Demons in an extremely short time!

As everyone knows, each Evil Demon's life was granted by the Evil Demon's Original Statue.

The "Evil Nest" was one of the methods used by the Evil Demon's Original Statue to create Evil Demon minions!

In the early 1980s, when the Evil Demons first arrived, various kinds of Evil Nests would always descend onto the human realm.

As divinity descended and suppressed the Evil Demon's Original Statue, driving it deep into the Demon Cave, the so-called "Evil Nests" rarely appeared in the human world anymore.

At least for Lu Ran's generation, they had never seen an Evil Nest in the city they lived in.

Lu Ran could only learn about this concept through books and online, and he couldn't even find related images or videos.

In Lu Ran's eyes, this massive haunted mansion, hanging with Black Lanterns, surely appeared to be an Evil Nest of the Black Lantern Clan.

Of course, if a Yan Zhi emerged from this dark mansion...

It would be unreasonable, but certainly fitting.

Four big characters: She deserves it!

Without the filter of hostility, looking again at this grand classical Chinese mansion, it truly appeared ancient, elegant, and luxurious.

The Black Lantern Clan could act as decor, but if they were the masters of the manor, something would still seem lacking.

You place a dignified and noble Yan Zhi at the front of the manor, wouldn't that uphold the aura?

"Let's go, let's go back!"

Lu Ran had many thoughts, but contemplation happened in an instant; upon seeing the special mansion, he immediately called to the others.

"Thank you, young man..." The middle-aged woman was emotionally stirred, her eyes slightly red as she looked at Lu Ran.

In the woman's arms, the slim and slender girl was already free from the control of the Yin Fire Cage.

She appeared to be around eighteen or nineteen, probably a university student?

Her beauty was extraordinary, almost on par with Jiang Ruyi.

However, her complexion was very poor at the moment, and it nearly seemed like fire was about to burst from her beautiful eyes!

"There's no time for thanks now, hurry up, hurry!"

Lu Ran urged everyone to leave.

Those around hadn't the ability to see in the dark, so naturally, they couldn't see the massive ancient house at the edge of the graveyard.

However, there were a lot of Black Lantern Clan around, and more were gathering; to the others, Lu Ran's behavior seemed quite normal.

"My war hammer is still in there."

The girl suddenly spoke, her voice clearly carrying a roiling anger.

"Xianxian, let's not worry about the weapon now, let's head back; our lives are the most important!" the middle-aged woman hurriedly said.

"I'll go get it." The girl stepped forward, casually summoning a ghostly, long-handled war hammer.

Chang Ying looked at the warhammer and blurted out, "Fierce Heavenly believers?"

The name Fierce Heavenly silenced everyone.

This slender girl was one of the Fierce Heavenly believers?

Seventh-class God·Fierce Heavenly, commonly referred to as "Fierce Sky Hammer."

His Divine Sculpture depicted a burly man wielding a war hammer, rugged and fierce!

The Fierce Heavenly Sect's Divine Techniques almost entirely focused on output, with shockingly strong killing power!

The god Fierce Heavenly himself was explosively powerful; even considering his combat ability alone, he was not inferior to a First-class God!

But why wasn't Divine·Fierce Heavenly ranked at the very top?

Why did Fierce Heavenly rank only seventh, not even making it into the top three?

Because from top to bottom, from god to believer, almost all members of the Fierce Heavenly Sect had severe personality flaws.

Their nature was like fierce fire, irascible and easily angered!

Strictly speaking, this shouldn't even be called a "flaw."

There are countless humans, each with different dispositions: some are calm, some are cunning, some are fiercely violent.

This is quite normal.

But the issue is, those already quick-tempered and easily angered people, upon joining under Fierce Sky Hammer, would be deeply influenced by the god's temperament...

And that really makes things uncontrollable!

This also led to the rarity of Fierce Heavenly believers.

From a certain perspective, like the Immortal Sheep believers, they were not well-liked.

The difference being, Immortal Sheep believers are scorned due to their cowardice.

Fierce Heavenly believers, however, are shunned due to their excessively violent nature.

Who would want a ticking time bomb in their team?

Especially one that explodes upon contact?

Not only do student teams avoid Fierce Heavenly believers.

You'd rarely see them in military units or within the Divine People Bureau-Watch Moon teams either.

Even if such believers had combat abilities that broke through the heavens, it wouldn't matter!

After all, the military prioritizes discipline and strict orders first and foremost—that's the premise!

"Si Xianxian!" The middle-aged woman shouted sharply, "It's just a hammer, stop being so willful!"

Si Xianxian's footsteps abruptly halted, her chest heaving dramatically.

It was evident she was forcefully suppressing the raging anger in her heart.

From earlier, when Si Xianxian was accidentally affected by illusions and struggled violently to free herself, only to be controlled again, and then massively bombarded by the Black Lantern army...

Si Xianxian was already on the verge of "berserk."

"Snap!"

The woman suddenly unleashed a Bamboo Whip, coiling around her daughter's waist and pulling her backwards as they ran towards the orderly retreating group.

"Ah! Ah! Ah!"

Si Xianxian was really about to explode!

The virtual war hammer in her hand materialized, and she viciously smashed it into the ground.

"Boom! Boom! Boom!"

Flames surged!

A tidal wave of fire roared and surged forward.

The retreating group, seeing this scene, couldn't help but feel their hearts race.

Damn...

The output was just too damn explosive!

Officially a Seventh-class God believer, but actually a First-class God believer!

Honestly, it was only because Si Xianxian was still River Realm-Second Rank, and her mother could still somewhat manage her.

If her strength were a bit higher, and she were more heavily influenced by the god...

There probably wouldn't be anyone in this world who could control her.

This type of believer, easily blinded by rage, one could imagine the outcome.

In fact, from the moment a Human Clan member joined under Fierce Heavenly...

This person had already embarked on a path of "self-destruction."

"Damn!"

Lu Ran, who was sprinting with the team, suddenly changed color!

The influence range of the Evil Nest was shockingly large.

Especially those rising wisps of black fog from the courtyard, like black satin ribbons, dancing wildly.

There were a great many "black fog satin ribbons", one of which swept across the path the group was charging through.

As the black fog spread, a myriad of Black Lanterns emerged.

"Ah?"

"What kind of Evil Technique is that?"

"Holy shit!!" Panic erupted within the team.

This prompted everyone to realize something was amiss.

"Is this... is this an Evil Nest?" Si Xianxian's mother reacted quickly, her face shocked.

Strictly speaking, this middle-aged woman hadn't seen an Evil Nest in the human world either.

She was born in the early '80s, and by the time she had memories, the Evil Demons had already been driven deep into the Demon Cave.

But Si's mother's parents had, of course, lived through the era when Evil Demons first descended and Evil Nests frequently appeared.

Apparently, she must have heard such stories firsthand.

After the black fog passed, endless Evil Demons emerged; what else could it be but an Evil Nest?

"Bang!"

"Bang!!" In an instant, the clustered Black Lanterns exploded one after another.

Waves of air rolled, obstructing the group's forward movement.

The exploding black fire spread from in front of them all the way up into the night sky.

The black fog satin ribbons continued to wildly wave about, and a vast number of Black Lanterns surged out.

The group went pale.

When had they ever seen such a terrifying scene?

Previously, when venturing into the Demon Cave, soldiers had clearly stated that the inside of the Demon Cave was turbulent, and it was not advisable for students to enter for training.

But turbulence, at least, occurred in the depths of the Demon Cave.

Different Demon Caves each had their own Evil Demon strongholds, also located differently.

Some were on the surface, at the farthest reaches of the night that Lu Ran had never been to.

Others were situated at the bottom of the Demon Cave, possibly even on the second or third sublevel.

No matter which type, the Evil Demon stronghold was definitely far from this location.

But now, there was an Evil Nest right here?

Located in a region controlled by the Human Clan, deeply embedded behind human powers?

What exactly did the Evil Demons want?

Had the Black Lantern Clan grown powerful enough to launch a counterattack against the human world?

"We have to break through, we must break through." Tian Tian shouted urgently, "We have to hurry back to Stone City!"

As she spoke, she pushed out a Nine-petal Lotus, swinging it forward, trying to carve out a path.

But with Black Lanterns densely packed together, forming a solid mass, how could a mere Nine-petal Lotus forge a way through?

Lu Ran's expression wasn't very good; his mind raced, but he couldn't figure out how to solve the predicament.

The Black Lantern Clan had a special structure, devoid of facial features, and completely impervious to his "Sound of Despair"!

Lu Ran couldn't lure the Black Lantern Clan away.

He was indeed confident that he could escape back to Stone City.

After all, the Immortal Sheep Sect's Divine Technique existed solely for the purpose of fleeing.

But what about his teammates?

Lu Ran certainly couldn't leave his teammates behind!

"Screw it, I'll do it!"

An irate female voice suddenly rang out, fury filling the air!

Taking advantage of the Black Lantern Clan's chain explosions, Si Xianxian darted out, her pitch-black hair fluttering.

The seemingly fragile girl summoned a massive war hammer, charging forward ferociously.

Fierce Heavenly Divine Technique·Fierce Sky Hammer!

All the fury in Si Xianxian's heart, desperately needing an outlet!

Who cared about what Evil Nest or deadly situation it was.

She'd vent her anger first!

"Xianxian!" While Si's mother was full of worry, she didn't stop her.

Among those present, the only one truly capable of leading the group to break through this encirclement was this temperamental Fierce Heavenly believer!

Fierce Heavenly believers might not make good teammates.

Indeed, Fierce Heavenly believers might not even be "good" people.

But for breaking through, causing explosions, and assaulting?

You look to Fierce Heavenly for that!

"Hu~"

Si Xianxian leapt high, her extremely beautiful face distorted slightly by the raging fury within.

The long-handled war hammer in her hand was a staggering 3 meters long!

It was hard to imagine that it was a weapon used by humans.

Above the huge and heavy hammerhead, streaked with shattered lines, fiery flames burst forth.

"Boom! Boom! Boom!"

The hammer struck the ground, and the earth trembled.

The sea of fire surged, wave after wave!

Fierce Heavenly Divine Technique·Fiery Earth Thousand Flames!

"Bang!"

"Bang..." The tidal wave of fire swallowed the endless Black Lanterns, the sound of explosions ceaseless.

The violent air waves shook everyone's clothes, forcing them to continuously retreat.

Si Xianxian continued to hammer wildly amidst the raging flames, a cursing voice carrying through:  
"Screw you all! Die!!"

Lu Ran: "..."

Such eloquent words from Da Xia.

Chapter 117: The Fury of the Succubus

"Hum~"

Lu Ran suddenly felt his brain jolt!

In the spiritual world—God Demon Sculpture Garden, the Black Lantern Evil Sculpture that was closely connected to him emitted a strange sound!

What did that mean?

Did the Black Lantern Evil Sculpture level up?

Wasn't this speed a bit too astonishing...

One must know, when the middle-aged woman sought help from everyone, Lu Ran had just activated the Evil Sculpture·Black Lantern.

At that time, Lu Ran had just learned the first Divine Technique of the Black Lantern clan: Disaster Fire Cage (Cage Fire).

And now, the Black Lantern Evil Sculpture in the Sculpture Garden had soared directly from Fog Realm·First Rank to Fog Realm·Fifth Rank?

Once a sculpture was activated, every incremental upgrade required the souls of 100 entities of the same rank.

Which meant, those few hammer blows from Si Xianxian...

Had they obliterated four or five hundred Fog Realm·Black Lanterns?

Hmm... Perhaps not that many.

After all, among the dead Black Lanterns, there would be those of Stream Realm, River Realm, and others mixed in.

And 100 Fog Realm souls = 10 Stream Realm souls = 1 River Realm soul.

Thus, just a few attacks from Si Xianxian nourished Lu Ran's Black Lantern Evil Sculpture to Fog Realm·Fifth Rank... No!

It wasn't over yet!

The Black Lantern Evil Sculpture continued to soar, about to cross into a major realm, heading straight for the Stream Realm!

"Good heavens."

Lu Ran opened his Eyes of the Dead World and murmured to himself.

The scene before him had him completely dumbfounded.

In the roaring inferno that Si Xianxian had whipped up, legions of Black Lantern souls were flying towards Lu Ran!

The so-called Soul Bodies, they clearly did not exist in the same dimension as the world everyone was in.

The Black Lanterns would be incinerated, shattered by the flames, yet their Soul Bodies remained unscathed.

One by one, the souls overlapped, piled into clumps, and rushed into Lu Ran's eyes...

The scene was spectacular!

If the situation weren't so dire, Lu Ran would probably be moaning in pleasure.

This was just too exhilarating!

The constantly trembling Evil Sculpture in his mind served as a "progress bar" for Lu Ran.

Lu Ran was like that player in a team who did nothing but shamelessly leech experience!

And every other member of the team, without exception, gained no experience.

All these souls, all this vast resource, were for Lu Ran alone to relish!

"Oh..." Lu Ran immediately discontinued the Eyes of the Dead World.

It wasn't that he dared not look, but rather the layers of Soul Bodies had reached the point where they obstructed his vision!

Lu Ran even started to worry, could this be considered "absorbing a large number of souls in a short time"?

Would the original Evil Demon of the Black Lantern clan sense it?

"Whoosh!"

The sound of the stick container shaking suddenly came through.

Chang Ying, holding the stick container, shook it frantically: "Attack, summon... anything goes! Spirits of heaven and earth!"

At this critical juncture for their very lives, Chang Ying rarely brought out the Divine Technique-Six Treasure Sign!

This was an advanced version of Divine Technique-Five Treasure Signs, where each stick represents a spell of even greater strength.

"Whoosh~"

A phantom spiritual sign flew out.

In that instant, Chang Ying's face paled!

That phantom spiritual sign was tattered and falling apart.

One of the Six Treasure Signs-Rotten Sign!

The only one of the six spiritual signs that's rotten!

Once this sign was cast, the Divine Power consumed by Chang Ying would triple and the skill cooldown duration would triple.

"Whoosh~"

The phantom Rotten Sign fluttered down.

It was like an annoying fly, darting back and forth in front of Chang Ying's eyes, disrupting her actions.

Damn luck...

Indeed, nine out of ten gamblers lose!

"Si, Si Xianxian!" Lu Ran stepped forward and called out loudly.

"What?" Si Xianxian swung her giant hammer, bombarding indiscriminately, and turned around impatiently.

The rage in her eyes was burning furiously, fierce and threatening!

Unexpectedly, when she saw Lu Ran, her tone softened: "What is it?"

Lu Ran had no time for pleasantries and hurriedly said, "Stay here, we can never kill enough Evil Míes!"

We might all end up dying here.

Break through at the front, Míe, and carve us a path, let's first charge out of this Black Grave Mound!"

Si Xianxian suddenly widened her eyes in shock!

When she saw the person who had saved her life, her attitude had already softened.

Indeed, she was fiery and quick to anger, but this did not mean she lacked a sense of gratitude and grievance.

On the contrary, such people are likely even more clear about favors and grudges!

Especially since Lu Ran's speech was peppered with a bunch of "mías"...

It left Si Xianxian confused and stuttering!

"Got it, Mié?" Lu Ran didn't wait for her response and immediately pressed on.

He was like, "Oh, you've got an unending rage within you?"

Hello,

I'm the succubus exploiting your rage...

Seriously, only someone like Si Xianxian, a River Realm powerhouse with strong mental fortitude, could withstand it.

If she were merely of Fog Realm or Stream Realm, she'd likely have completely succumbed by now!

Look at Chang Ying, Tian Tian, Deng Yutang, and the others—their eyes brimming with emotion, almost overflowing with paternal and maternal love.

It was like they couldn't wait to protect this most vulnerable being within their tribe with their lives.

Lu Ran swiftly took off the River Grade-Divine Power Pearl from around his neck and passed it to Si Xianxian, continuing, "Remember, your Divine Technique must not stop!"

You have to keep the battlefield covered in flames, causing the Black Lantern clan to keep exploding.

You can consume as much Divine Power from the pearl as you need, turn up the heat!"

Lu Ran was crystal clear in his thinking, realizing that everyone must exploit the Black Lantern clan's "highly explosive" nature.

If they gave the Black Lantern clan a chance to catch their breath, and they stopped exploding but instead used Evil Techniques like Yin Fire Cage, Yin Lamp Formation...

Then they would all meet their end right here!

"Okay!" Si Xianxian shouted, her eyes shining.

All along, she had been chastised by her elders and teachers, advised by friends not to act rashly, to cool her temper, and the like.

This time, Si Xianxian encountered someone who added fuel to her fire!

He told her not to stop, to go wild with her bombardment!

For this, Lu Ran even lent her a River Grade-Divine Power Pearl...

"Divine Power Pearl, Divine Power Pearl!" Lu Ran not only lent out his own pearl but also collected all of his teammates' Divine Power Pearls.

Lu Ran also took command of the team outright: "Tian Tian, activate the Nine-Petaled Lotus, shield some of the flames, we have to charge into the inferno!"

Lu Ran, quick and decisive, took advantage of Si Xianxian pausing her assault to stuff a bunch of Divine Power Pearls into her hand:

"Mr. Deng, stay at the back of the team, follow my orders, and be ready to plant the flag at any moment to block the pursuers!"

The middle-aged woman suddenly said, "Auntie has the Bamboo Leaf Clothes, I can help block some of the flames."

Divine Technique·Bamboo Leaf Robe was suitable for Nine Bamboo Sect practitioners at Stream Realm Third Rank.

Clearly, she did not mention the water armor, so she was not of the River Realm.

It was a sad reality.

Who knows how many believers in this world get stuck at a certain rank, unable to make any further progress.

"Auntie, you take the front, help hold the Lotus Shield!" Lu Ran directed systematically.

Without realizing it, his gaze swept over Chang Ying at the side.

In the reflection of the blazing flames, Chang Ying looked embarrassed and wished the ground would swallow her up.

She had already been affected by Lu Ran's Divine Technique·Voice of Compassion, her heart full of pity and sympathy towards Lu Ran, only wanting to protect him at all costs.

Yet, she couldn't do anything.

In front of her face still fluttered that annoying rotten sign.

Clearly, the great Divine-Spiritual Sign was reminding its disciple in its unique way: pray diligently.

As long as you pray sincerely, you not only count down your cooldown but also get the rotten sign to behave and stop pestering you.

"Charge, charge, charge!"

Lu Ran shouted.

Tian Tian obediently executed the command, pushing out the Nine-Petaled Lotus.

Two petals shielded the front, three petals on each side guarded everyone, the petals closely connected, forming a defensive wall.

Another petal was placed above everyone's heads, shielding them from the scorching waves.

The middle-aged auntie immediately rushed forward, wearing a green Bamboo Leaf Robe, and supported one of the giant lotus petals with her hands.

Chang Ying also rushed forward!

You could say, this disciple's Divine Technique was weak.

But Chang Ying herself was not!

Without any defensive skills, Chang Ying didn't show the slightest fear; she stood shoulder to shoulder with the middle-aged auntie, moving forward.

While Si Xianxian, who charged at the very front, was much more unrestrained!

Wearing the watery armor, she plunged alone into the raging flames, slaughtering all around to clear the way for the team.

Under the lotus petals' protection, they entered into a sea of fire.

The heatwave hit their faces, suffocating!

"Fierce Burst Sky!" Lu Ran yelled, "Target the sky, don't let the Black Lanterns stop exploding!"

"Boom boom boom!"

"Boom boom boom..." Hammers ablaze, spinning furiously, blasted towards the sky.

The deeply cracked hammers thundered and shattered, flames tumbling.

Fierce Heavenly believers set fire to the heavens, igniting the sky!

Fierce Heavenly Divine Technique·Fierce Burst Sky!

"Mr. Deng!"

"Yes!" Deng Yutang held the flag, plunged it into the ground.

Red Cloth Divine Skill·Red Cloth Domain!

This duel technique was ultimately used for defense.

The Light Red Cover stretched out fiercely, keeping all the disturbances at bay.

Unfortunately, the technique required planting the flag on the ground to be activated.

If the Red Cloth believers could carry the flag on their shoulders and activate it directly, it would have been even more perfect.

"Hum!"

Inside the God Demon Sculpture Garden, the Black Lantern Evil Sculpture trembled wildly.

Stream Realm·First Rank!

Stream Realm Second Rank!

Stream Realm Third Rank...

The blazing flames were undoubtedly the ignition point. Any Black Lantern touched by them would explode on their own.

With the chain reactions, the world trembled with thunder, and the Black Lantern clan simply couldn't stop!

Lu Ran, however, didn't have time to bother with these. As the most intense wave of the assault passed, he commanded:

"Retract the flag, charge! Charge!!"

It was like a suicide mission, as everyone crazily rushed into the sea of fire.

"Miss!" The middle-aged woman saw Chang Ying beside her, her clothes and trousers splattered with sparkling embers.

She hurriedly swung the hem of her Bamboo Leaf Robe in an attempt to extinguish the flames.

"Don't worry about me, go, hurry up!" Chang Ying, holding the lotus petal, resisted the surging heat ahead, striving to stabilize the Lotus Shield.

The group of six cooperated with all their might and cut out a path of life through a sea of fire.

"Stop, Si Xianxian stop! Don't shoot... cough cough, the fire anymore!" Lu Ran suddenly yelled.

"Huh?"

Si Xianxian, her vision blocked, continued her relentless bombardment, casting Divine Techniques as if they cost nothing.

"Stay there, the Black Lantern swarm is above and behind us!" Lu Ran shouted, "Target the sky with your hammer, then cover our retreat!"

The middle-aged woman was inevitably anxious.

Not just because of the battleground of life and death, but also, she was worried about her daughter.

In high school, the school barely managed to assign three teammates to Si Xianxian.

Ever since college, no team wanted Si Xianxian.

Everyone knew about the highly unstable nature of the Fierce Heavenly believers.

Yet what the middle-aged woman did not expect was...

Si Xianxian actually obeyed the command, stood her ground, and hurled her heavy hammer towards the sky behind her.

As everyone pushed past her with the Lotus Shield, she remained standing.

The middle-aged woman couldn't help but feel a surge of excitement and relief!

After all, the daughter cared about her family and her companions' lives, and at this crucial moment, she managed to control her emotions.

"Don't just stand there!" Lu Ran commanded, "Keep up, cover our retreat!"

Upon hearing this, the middle-aged woman's expression changed!

With the Fierce Heavenly believers, you must ask nicely, cajole them, you can't be this forceful.

"!! GOT! IT!" Si Xianxian enunciated every word.

After she flung her hammer into the sky, she violently unleashed a sea of fire towards the pursuers.

Then, Si Xianxian turned to follow the team.

As her daughter rushed over, the middle-aged woman's heart that had been hanging, now settled, and she was utterly bewildered.

This, this... Ah?

Chapter 118: is happy and in pain

Run.

Desperately run.

Out of the blazing inferno, a team frantically fleeing for their lives burst forth.

People emerged sooty and disheveled, with some even having their clothes caught on fire.

But at this life-or-death moment, no one dared to stop. They all knew too well how hard-won this path to survival was.

"Crack! Crack!"

Lu Ran endured the searing pain, sprinting while slapping at the flames erupting on his arm.

Honestly, Lu Ran felt like he was going crazy.

Not because of the pain, but because he was actually exhilarated...

It wasn't the thought of being burnt to a crisp, imagining himself becoming a deliciously roasted whole lamb.

It was because, in the process of breaking through the encirclement, Lu Ran's Black Lantern Evil Sculpture was rapidly leveling up!

Stream Realm·Fourth Rank.

Stream Realm·Fifth Rank... River Realm·First Rank!

Even now that Lu Ran had broken free, his Black Lantern Evil Sculpture continued to absorb a massive nourishment.

Above and behind him, explosions of Black Lanterns rang out everywhere.

These volatile creatures triggered a terrifying chain reaction.

The explosion of one Black Lantern could affect a small area around it, and this small area could in turn affect a much larger group!

It was as if the Black Lantern clan had entered a "self-destruct program."

Following this, a torrent of Black Lantern clan souls surged toward Lu Ran.

However, Lu Ran did not let it go to his head, and he continued to lead his team in a mad dash, away from the battlefield.

This haul, he had struck it rich!

Just one battle had advanced his Black Lantern Evil Sculpture from the Mist Realm·First Rank to the River Realm·First Rank...

It was something Lu Ran hadn't even dared to dream of, and he was starting to worry whether the Evil Demon itself might notice.

"Over here, over here!" the middle-aged woman suddenly cried out for help.

After emerging from the sea of fire, everyone's vision returned to normal, and the middle-aged woman spotted a soldier squad rushing to their aid on the distant torch-lit path.

Oddly enough, above the soldiers' heads, there floated a formation?

The formation was circular and semi-transparent, very much like a huge map?

And it seemed to be a "dynamic 3D" one, with mountains and rivers sprawling and flowing uninterrupted.

"Whew!"

Astonishing energy burst from the immense topographic map.

It felt as if even the earth and sky shook for a moment!

The next moment, Lu Ran couldn't help but click his tongue in amazement.

He saw soldier after soldier magically appearing around the soldier squad!

Creating soldiers out of thin air?

No!

The soldiers were diverse in appearance, with uniform military garb, clearly real, living, breathing people.

Evidently, that huge ethereal map was a teleportation formation!

"Put out the fire! Quickly, hurry and extinguish the flames!" the lead soldier shouted loudly.

As Lu Ran's team and the soldier squad drew closer, streams of water sprayed toward them.

"Me! I... Ah!" Chang Ying plunged headfirst into the water.

The flames consuming her clothes were finally extinguished, and her burning body cooled under the spray of the water cannons.

But Chang Ying hardly felt relief; her body had been badly burned, and she was overtaken with excruciating pain.

As the two groups met, the number of military soldiers had increased by more than fifty, multiplying tenfold!

This teleportation formation was truly extraordinary.

"Immediately heal the wounded!" the team leader continued to command.

Several soldiers quickly spread sycamore branches and leaves over Lu Ran and others.

"Are there any other trainees?" the soldiers asked loudly.

"No, we didn't see anyone else," the middle-aged woman responded at once, her injuries minor under her Bamboo Leaf Clothes.

"Tell me about the situation over there!"

"It must be an Evil Nest, we saw black mist spreading, and a swarm of Black Lanterns emerged from the fog!"

"Indeed, an Evil Nest. Did you see its exact location?"

"No..."

After a brief exchange, the soldier loudly ordered, "Your squad escort them to the nearest Stone City! The rest of you, with me!"

Suddenly, a cry from Lu Ran came from beneath a pile of sycamore branches and leaves, "The Evil Nest should be to the left of the torch path!"

I saw the black fog spilling from a graveyard on the left."

There were those in the soldier squad naturally able to see through darkness, like the Witch Crow Believers.

But regardless of the value of the information Lu Ran provided, he would definitely share it, never hoarding it.

"Okay." The soldier acknowledged, leading the troops forward.

"Rustle rustle~"

Lu Ran struggled to clear the sycamore branches and leaves piled upon him, looking forward.

Each soldier displayed their powers, with the entire troop breaking down into smaller units, over a dozen squads charging towards the thundering explosion of battle.

"Let's go!" one of the female soldiers said.

Lu Ran just felt the sycamore branches and leaves suddenly tighten around him, lifting his body into the air.

As the soldier squad moved swiftly along the rough terrain, Lu Ran could feel life force wildly pouring into his body.

This Biwu Believer was quite powerful!

Her healing methods went beyond mere "wound treatment," able to soothe the spirit and replenish life force for everyone.

Soon, they arrived at Stone City.

After another check of their injuries and a debrief, the six were forcibly ordered by the military to leave the Demon Cave.

Escorted by a squad of soldiers, they tirelessly crossed over one Black Grave Mound after another, eventually returning to the main city of Stone City without any harm.

As Lu Ran and the others wound around stone columns and climbed stairs, they also saw more and more trainees being summoned back here.

It seemed that everyone had been forcibly removed from the field.

...

Outside the central building, beneath the feet of the Divine Technique·Wild Drums, the crowd bustled.

The majority of the social trainees had no idea what had happened, left to curiously inquire around.

Naturally, people noticed the most distressed group—Lu Ran's team!

These few students appeared thoroughly shaken, their clothes scorched and charred.

Through the tattered clothing, they could see fresh, newly formed flesh.

It cannot be overstated how powerful healing Divine Technique truly was.

If they had been treated with ordinary medical procedures, with burns of such severity, who knows how long they would have laid in the hospital, how much suffering they would have to endure.

And even after recovery, they might have needed skin grafts.

"It's good, everything's okay, it's so good," the middle-aged woman said as she embraced her daughter's tall and slender body, her eyes rimming with tears.

In the dark and daylight-less Demon Cave, people's nerves had been on edge.

Back on Earth, back in the human world, the woman's emotions, long suppressed, finally exploded.

The ordeal they had just gone through could be perfectly described as a narrow escape from death!

"Okay," Si Xianxian's body was somewhat stiff.

After hesitating for a moment, she raised her hand and gently patted her mother's back.

The woman seemed to think of something, turning her head to several young men and women, "Thank you all, thank you!"

By now, she finally understood that within that dark graveyard stood an Evil Nest.

For that reason, the woman was even more aware that if Lu Ran had been even a moment later...

Her daughter would have surely died there!

Not just physical death, but her soul would have likely been burned, enduring untold extreme agony.

"What's your name, aunty?" Lu Ran turned to look at the woman.

"Si, Si Caiqin."

Lu Ran took a deep breath and calmed himself, "Aunty, without you, we couldn't have escaped either."

"No, it's not like that," Si Caiqin shook her head again and again, "If it weren't for us, you wouldn't have approached the Evil Nest, you wouldn't have been put in danger."

"Evil Nest?"

"Was there an Evil Nest in our training area?"

"You've got to be kidding me, how many years has it been since one of those appeared?!" Once the woman spoke out, an uproar erupted outside the building.

After a brief chaos, people realized another thing!

These group of students... had actually survived?

They had fought their way out from an Evil Nest?!

Si Caiqin paid no attention to the crowd; she looked at the few of them, disheveled and battered, "I really don't know how to thank you..."

As she spoke, she supported Chang Ying's arms with one hand, her face full of sorrow as she looked up at the girl.

This girl, who had been at the foremost front of the team, was the most severely burned.

Chang Ying, tall as she was, had become a lone shield, providing protection for her teammates behind her.

"Aunty will take you to the hospital, let's go right now," Si Caiqin urged hurriedly.

"We've already been healed," Chang Ying replied softly, her eyes downcast.

Indeed, the injuries had been healed.

But Chang Ying still felt a lingering pain, as if she were still being burned by flames.

The brush with death had undoubtedly affected her greatly.

The normally carefree and laughing Chang Ying was now a bit dazed.

"I want to go home," Tian Tian extended her hand, gently tugging on Lu Ran's sleeve.

"I want to too," Chang Ying turned to look at Lu Ran, "Lu Ran, I want to go home."

Tian Tian's simple words brought all of Chang Ying's grievance to the surface.

Lu Ran nodded, "Yes, let's go home."

Hearing his words, Chang Ying nodded again and again, and Tian Tian gripped his sleeve even tighter.

"You all..." Si Caiqin's eyes were full of pity, she hesitated to speak.

"The military has healed us twice, we're fine," Lu Ran told her, "We need to go home to recuperate."

"Then... then aunty will take you, let's go!"

"There's no need, we live in Rain Alley City, in Wu Lie River Province."

"I'll drive you back," Si Caiqin approached Lu Ran, supporting his arms, "You've helped our family so much, and I've let your parents down as well, I'll take each of you home..."

The middle-aged woman spoke excitedly, full of guilt and gratitude, unsure how to express it.

As a mother, Si Caiqin could more acutely feel the anxiety of parents when their children are out in the world.

In the end, Lu Ran couldn't resist any further and nodded.

Si Caiqin immediately went to arrange the car, and Si Xianxian stood beside Lu Ran.

"Thank you," she said seriously, her gaze sincere.

A stark contrast from her furious demeanor on the battlefield.

Lu Ran quietly nodded, saying nothing.

He stood silently, his gaze gradually becoming distant, lost in thought.

This venture into the Demon Cave, Lu Ran had indeed made a fortune.

The Black Lantern Evil Sculpture had risen to the top!

He had now reached River Realm-First Rank, surpassing both the Evil Dog Evil Sculpture and Soul Splitting Demon Evil Sculpture.

The Black Lantern clan's first four Evil Techniques were all within Lu Ran's reach now!

Healing, hallucination, black smoke...

After returning home, he could find Evil Sculpture to learn them.

Now that Lu Ran had advanced to the River Realm, he could also directly equip the Evil Technique-Yin Fire Cage.

That was the terrifying single-target control method.

This training trip had been enormously rewarding.

But at the same time, Lu Ran had also endured an incredibly perilous brush with death.

Perhaps,

This is the compulsory lesson for the world's Believers?

Lu Ran looked at his teammates, feeling quite apologetic.

After all, it was he who had chosen this place, he who had insisted on coming here.

But they had encountered an Evil Nest...

Damn!

Chapter 119: Tender Night Colors

As evening descended on the Yu Alley residential community,

Lu Ran once again opened the door to his home after four days.

What greeted him was a curious little tabby cat.

"Meow?" The tabby cat tilted its little head as if confirming the identity of the newcomer.

Lu Ran, who ventured out each month for training, normally didn't return for at least 20 days; this time, his return was indeed early.

Of course, with the cat's limited intelligence, it didn't think too deeply about such things.

All it felt was that Lu Ran didn't carry an aura of malevolence, unlike the frightening presence he had after previous trips.

"Good evening," said Lu Ran, smiling wearily as he waved his hand.

As usual, he walked around the tabby cat and headed straight for the bathroom.

What he didn't expect was for the little tabby to follow him?

As Lu Ran showered under the spray, he looked through the slightly ajar bathroom door at the little creature peeking in curiously.

"You're quite spirited," noted Lu Ran, quite surprised.

Could it be that it knows I'm in a bad mood?

"Come." Lu Ran wiped his wet face and crouched down, beckoning to the little tabby.

"Meow~" Sure enough, the little tabby cat scuttled in.

But the moment its body touched water, it ran off "meowing" loudly.

That series of meows, hmm... it almost sounded like cursing, didn't it?

Lu Ran automatically responded with a "baa baa"!

The little tabby suddenly stopped its cursing, its heart filled only with pity and care, and swiftly ran back.

It wasn't afraid of the water anymore and willingly snuggled in Lu Ran's embrace, letting the shower pour over its head, determined to nuzzle and cuddle with its owner.

"I must be a real charmer..."

Muttering to himself, Lu Ran thoroughly washed himself, his blade, and the cat all over again.

The cat wasn't some pampered pet but a sovereign level stray!

Just think, on the fifteenth of July, it endured an entire night's downpour and was chased down the streets by an evil spirit!

And now it's still lively and hopping around~

Half an hour later, Lu Ran, holding a large bath towel, wiped the wet little cat as they both made their way to the shrine.

"Lord Immortal Goat," Lu Ran looked at the shrine, "This trip to the Demon Cave was truly perilous."

After a brief greeting, Lu Ran offered a bow and then went to the small bed and lay down directly.

Utterly exhausted in both mind and body, Lu Ran's eyelids grew heavier and heavier.

The movements of him wiping down the tabby slowed, and he quickly drifted into dreamland.

However, Lord Immortal Goat did not allow Lu Ran to have a peaceful sleep.

Just a few hours later, within the depths of his profound slumber, Lu Ran entered the God Demon Sculpture Garden.

Sniff~

The first thing that "awakened" Lu Ran was the thick Ghost Energy.

Lu Ran opened his eyes, his heart muttering as expected.

In front of him stood a tremendous Evil Sculpture of a Black Lantern.

This Four-sided Lantern was much larger and more exquisite than the ones he had seen in the Mist Realm.

As Lu Ran watched the sporadically disappearing and reappearing souls around the lantern, an idea suddenly struck him.

"Lord Immortal Goat, collecting so many souls in one go, that's okay, right?"

"You've indeed acted improperly, cultivating the Evil Sculpture of the Mist Realm to the River Realm in such a short time," replied a voice, deep and hoarse.

Lu Ran's heart tightened!

Yet, Lord Immortal Goat changed the subject, "However, this is a special case.

Creating an Evil Nest consumes a considerable amount of energy for the Evil Demon itself.

Binding souls during this phase should be permissible."

"Oh, I see," Lu Ran sighed with relief.

The Black Fire Sheep Head silently emerged, floating in the space above and behind Lu Ran:

"If you destroy the Evil Nest and absorb all the 'energy' it contains, then it would be a different story."

Lu Ran: "..."

Are you under some misunderstanding about my abilities?

The fact that I escaped death and came home to kneel before you with a cat in my arms is lucky enough.

Me, destroy the Evil Nest?

Even if that haunted mansion is bigger and more luxurious, it doesn't have Yan Zhi... er, it's not as comfortable as my own little bed!

The Black Fire Sheep Head spoke gravely, "Practice the Evil Techniques, possessing a Healing Technique will also improve your chances of survival."

"Yes!" Lu Ran nodded firmly.

The Black Fire Sheep Head continued, "Furthermore, about the Illusion Techniques of this clan, you can try integrating them into your Immortal Eyes."

"Oh?" Lu Ran's eyes lit up, "Is that possible?"

The Black Fire Sheep Head suddenly said, "You are human."

The out-of-the-blue remark left Lu Ran utterly puzzled!

"Yes, I'm human," he scratched his head, not too confidently adding, "I... I am human, right?"

The Black Fire Sheep Head: "..."

Are you asking me?

After a moment of contemplation, Lu Ran affirmed, "Lord Immortal Goat, your disciple is human!"

For a long while, the Black Fire Sheep Head began to speak slowly, "Humans have grown accustomed to using tools with their hands.

When you cast the first Evil Technique, you also conjured a ball of Black Fire in the palm of your hand."

Lu Ran nodded as if it was only natural.

The Black Fire Sheep Head continued, "That is habit as a member of the Human Clan."

Lu Ran had a thought, "Are you suggesting that the ball of Black Fire needn't necessarily ignite from my palms?"

The Black Fire Sheep Head replied, "You have learned the method of casting spells from the Black Lantern Statue.

Did any of the constraints tell you that you must ignite the fire with your hands?"

Lu Ran immediately said, "No!"

The Black Lantern Clan is very special, not in human/beast form, but purely inanimate objects.

The Evil Techniques of the Soul-splitting Demon Clan still involve concepts like head and feet.

You have to piece together horns on your head when casting Soul-splitting Demon Horn, and you need a forceful stomp when casting Soul-splitting Demon Hoof.

But the Black Lantern Clan?

Their Evil Techniques are all about summoning flames of different nature!

Naturally, Lu Ran doesn't need to be confined by "hands and feet."

"The disciple understands!" exclaimed Lu Ran, "I will comprehend the Evil Techniques right away."

The Black Fire Sheep Head gave no more responses and its figure quietly vanished.

Lu Ran turned around, faced the giant Four-sided Lantern, and slowly closed his eyes.

The first Evil Technique-Disaster Fire Cage allowed the Black Fire to explode, which Lu Ran had already mastered.

The second Evil Technique·Bath Fire Cage could summon warm and gentle Black Fire to heal the wounds of the target.

Just as the name implies!

This fire can indeed help the shattered and broken Black Lantern Clan to be reborn from the ashes!

The third Evil Technique·Smoke Fire Cage could release a massive amount of black smoke.

The fourth Evil Technique·Illusion Fire Cage could release a faint light, trapping the adversary in illusions.

The nature of the Illusion Realm could be freely woven by the caster.

This would consume a bit more spiritual power.

The caster can also let it run its course!

Allow the target to weave their own beautiful dreams, to drown in their deepest desires, to completely let go.

In this case, the caster only needs to continually provide the basis for the illusion for the target.

The downside of this technique, however, is quite apparent:

Firstly, to ensnare an enemy in the Illusions, at the very least, your spiritual strength has to be greater than or equal to the opponent's.

If you ask Lu Ran to cast it on Deng Yuxiang right now...

The Big Nightmare could shred Lu Ran himself, along with the Illusion Realm he created, into pieces!

Secondly, for the technique to take effect, the opponent must possess eyes!

And these four Evil Techniques, when carried out by Lu Ran's hands, have nothing to do with "lanterns"; they are purely flames.

Therefore, Lu Ran has renamed the techniques.

They're all called "Cage Fire"!

Simply add "Disaster, Bath, Smoke, Illusion" after it to differentiate them accordingly.

Lu Ran sat in front of the sculpture, intensely connected to the Evil Sculpture of the Black Lantern, deeply understanding everything.

Until late into the night...

"Hmm." On the small bed in the bedroom, Lu Ran let out a muddled hum.

He opened his eyes groggily, feeling nothing but a pounding headache.

Lu Ran sat up and glanced at the clock to see the hands pointing at 12:23.

Since the time for being emo had passed, there'd be no singing...

Lu Ran didn't know what had woken him; he slept from evening until midnight, but he felt more tired than ever.

"Meow~" Within the large bath towel in his arms, the little tabby kept making small noises.

The roused cat seemed a bit displeased.

"Sorry," Lu Ran bowed his head and kissed the fluffy little head of the tabby.

That kiss made him recall the time Jiang Ruyi kissed the tabby cat in the corridor.

Hmm...

He wondered how she was doing now.

That girl truly lacked compassion, not even sending a message after so many days.

Was she cultivating that diligently?

Busy!

Well, being busy is good...

Lu Ran, holding the little cat in his arms, had a thought, "Shall I show you something nice?"

"Meow?" A little cat paw peeked out from the bath towel, as if to touch Lu Ran's mouth.

"Whoo~"

Lu Ran lifted a hand, igniting a ball of Black Fire in his palm.

Indeed, Lu Ran was human, his ancestral genes embedded within him, affecting him, driving him to use tools.

"Meow!" The little tabby was fully jolted awake.

The sudden black flames had almost no illuminating effect.

But it wasn't pitch-black inside the room, and the dark flames could still be seen faintly.

Moreover, the energy surging from within Lu Ran's hands and the warmth of the Black Fire was palpable.

Evil Technique·Caged Fire (Bath)!

"Don't be afraid," Lu Ran said as he kept the flame burning in his palm and patted the tabby cat's head.

"Meow?"

The tabby cat cocked its head, uncertain if its head was on fire.

As Lu Ran discarded the bath towel and cradled the tabby cat with both hands...

A tabby cat burning with black flames appeared, eerie and extremely cool!

The flame wasn't hot, just warm enough for any creature bathed in it to feel a trace of warmth.

"Meow~"

The already sleep-deprived tabby instantly felt a bit tipsy.

Its body felt no wounds, but that didn't stop it from indulging greedily.

The little tabby felt a comforting warmth throughout its body, extremely comfortable.

Lu Ran watched the lazily luxuriating little fellow, preparing to stoke its fire further.

"You are indeed blessed, other little cats will never get to experience this in their lifetime..."

In the silent depth of the night, Lu Ran's voice also grew tender.

Black flames began to flicker gradually in his eyes.

Just as eerie, just as exceedingly cool!

Regarding how to conceal the black flames in his Immortal Eyes, Lu Ran hadn't yet grasped the trick.

But casting the Evil Technique·Caged Fire (Illusion) with his eyes, he had learned.

As for what beautiful dream to weave for the little tabby, Lu Ran already had an idea.

As the man and cat locked gazes, the tabby's eyes gradually became blank.

The figure of his master kept shifting before its eyes, the scenes flipping faster and faster...

Ultimately, the master transformed into a gentle and elegant young girl—Jiang Ruyi.

Her smiling eyes were warm, cradling it, her jade hands gently caressing it.

Jiang Ruyi slowly bowed her head, her lips pressing upon the tabby's head, she cooed softly:

"Sleep now, be good, sleep now..."

"Meow~" The little tabby nestled in the girl's embrace, even making a "purring" sound from its nose.

That left Lu Ran utterly stunned!

He looked down at the little tabby drowning in the sea of tenderness,

This...?

Where did this tractor come from?

Chapter 120: Snow Alley Cottage

Lu Ran was awakened by hunger.

When he woke up from his sleep, he realized it was already two in the afternoon.

"Ugh." Lu Ran rubbed his head, still feeling somewhat sleepy.

Lu Ran had gone to bed very late, as he had been experimenting with the Black Lamp Evil Technique since waking up at midnight.

Especially since he had woven a beautiful dream for the little civet cat.

While Cat Sister was comfortable and enjoying herself, Lu Ran was mentally exhausted and quite tired.

"Meow~" In his arms, the little civet cat lay lazily, its fluffy tail sweeping back and forth.

Looking at the little one's adorable appearance, Lu Ran couldn't help but kiss its little head again.

He held the little civet cat, lying on his side, and casually picked up the cellphone by his pillow.

Unexpectedly, there were many messages in the four-person group chat, Lu Ran had thought that after yesterday's events, everyone would be very quiet.

Lu Ran opened the group chat and saw the last message sent by Chang Ying just over ten minutes ago:

"Staying at home is so boring, let's go out and play?"

Sadly, no one responded, and the group chat cooled down.

Lu Ran thought for a moment, tapping the screen with his finger.

Ran: "Go out and relax?"

Seeing someone supportive, Chang Ying immediately sent another message: "Good good! Where shall we go?"

Seeing this, Lu Ran was in a quandary.

Rain Alley City is so small, what fun places could there be?

The city only meets people's basic living needs, as for the rest...

There isn't even a single amusement park here, only a cinema that's half-open at best.

Chang Ying: "How about we go for some cold drinks?"

Ran: "Cold drinks in deep autumn, you really have nowhere else to go."

Chang Ying: "Why are you picking on me again, I'm about to cry!"

Ran: "My treat."

Chang Ying: "Wow, Ranbao is the best!"

Lu Ran looked at the text on the screen, his expression quite colorful.

Three words could describe his expression right now: metro, elderly, cellphone.

Ranbao?

It's been a long time since he had seen this nickname.

A stir arose in Lu Ran's heart, had he inadvertently brought back this nickname during yesterday's battlefield scenes of "bah"?

Indeed, people's feelings and reactions were quite similar.

Tian Tian: "Going for cold drinks?"

Ran: "3 o'clock, West River, Snow Alley Cottage."

Tian Tian: "Good

Lu Ran smiled as he put down his phone, got up, and headed straight to the bathroom to wash and shower.

Twenty minutes later, Lu Ran left home wearing a duckbill hat, a round-neck sweater, and jeans.

Since becoming a Believer, Lu Ran rarely had the opportunity to wear casual clothes.

He also rarely had the chance to wear the dark red knitted scarf someone had given him.

It was quite warm.

Lu Ran exhaled a little white breath, feeling the chill of Rain Alley City's deep autumn.

In the residential area, some of the plane trees still had a few orange-red or dried-yellow leaves hanging.

A gust of autumn wind blew, and a few more leaves fell.

Like dried leaf butterflies fluttering in front of his eyes, finally quivering to the ground.

"Crunch~"

Lu Ran stepped on a leaf, making a distinctive crisp sound.

At this moment, he was supposed to be in the pitch-dark Demon Cave, fighting bitterly.

An accident had brought him back home, where he saw this somewhat familiar scene.

In Lu Ran's mind, the image of someone leaving during that beautiful deep autumn lingered.

He imitated that person, pulling up the large knitted scarf to cover his lips.

Mmm... Lu Ran felt pretty good.

In this crappy world, harboring one more concern also brought more hope.

As for the motivation to survive, Lu Ran didn't need anyone to provide that.

Regarding exterminating all Evil Demons in the world, the desire in Lu Ran's heart would only burn hotter as his strength gradually grew stronger.

...

2:50, Snow Alley Cottage.

This cold drink shop was unique, resembling a wooden cottage.

What was even more unique was that standing in front of the cottage was a tall, bald woman.

Bald woman?

Lu Ran was surprised, and the closer he got to the cottage, the more astonished he became.

"Team Lu!" The bald woman grinned, continuously waving at Lu Ran.

Lu Ran's expression was peculiar: "Calling me Ranbao in the phone, but changing to Team Lu in person?"

"Hehe~" Chang Ying placed a hand on her smooth head.

"Don't you care about your image at all?" Lu Ran approached Chang Ying, looking up at her bald head.

You wouldn't believe it, but it's quite round?

Chang Ying in the past was both wild and beautiful, but now...

Only wilder.

When Tian Tian sees you later, won't she be scared to tears?

Chang Ying pouted, "My hair was burnt and charred, looking at it was annoying, so I just shaved it all off."

Lu Ran laughed: "Then you should have worn a hat!"

"Thanks." Chang Ying casually took off Lu Ran's white duckbill cap, putting it on her own head.

Lu Ran: ???

Chang Ying warmly wrapped an arm around Lu Ran's shoulder: "Thanks, Ranbao... er, thanks Team Lu for inviting me for cold drinks and for the hat."

Lu Ran: "..."

True-Eat and take!

Chang Ying looked curiously at Lu Ran: "This scarf is really pretty, is it hand-knitted?"

"Not this one!" Lu Ran quickly shook his head.

Everything else was material, but this scarf absolutely could not be stolen by this bald bandit.

"Stingy." Chang Ying muttered under her breath, pushing Lu Ran towards the shop door, "Let's go."

"Ding Ding Ding~"

The wooden door opened, and the bronze bell on the door jingled, its sound crisp.

"What would you two like?" The female store employee stood up from behind the counter, curiously sizing up Lu Ran.

The employee had noticed the bald woman standing outside earlier and was very curious about what kind of boy she was waiting for.

Now it made sense.

Hmm... this guy seems a bit thin.

Is this small frame up to it?

"3 to 4 people." Lu Ran looked around and directly headed to a booth.

Chang Ying happily said: "Then shall I order?"

"Get some food; I haven't eaten all day." Lu Ran casually replied, settling into a wooden chair.

From outside the booth Chang Ying's voice could be heard: "I want this, this, this, this..."

Lu Ran: "..."

Why don't you just throw the menu in the employee's face and ask for a book instead?

A few minutes later, while Lu Ran was eating a hash brown, Tian Tian arrived.

Unexpectedly, Deng Yutang, who hadn't been active in the chat, also arrived.

"That aunt went to my house." Deng Yutang sat down on a wooden chair.

"She hasn't left?" Lu Ran was somewhat surprised.

Yesterday, that aunt had sent everyone home one by one, and after expressing her thanks, she had driven off.

Deng Yutang nodded: "Yes, she came bearing gifts, apologizing and expressing gratitude."

Tian Tian quietly said: "This morning, the aunt also came to my house."

Lu Ran thoughtfully nodded.

After all, the small team had saved her and her daughter's lives; no amount of gratitude would be excessive.

"Next are our houses, right?" Chang Ying looked at Lu Ran.

"Should be." Lu Ran shrugged his shoulders.

Chang Ying immediately perked up, looking at Deng Yutang: "What gifts did the aunt bring?"

Lu Ran suddenly spoke: "I've always wanted to apologize to you guys."

"Hmm?"

"Ah?" The others turned to look at Lu Ran.

Lu Ran embarrassedly said, "The Demon Cave was my choice; you all accompanied me, and then..."

"That's nonsense!" Chang Ying interrupted Lu Ran directly, "Every Demon Cave is dangerous, accidents can happen anywhere!"

You can't predict the future! If anyone should apologize, it should be me."

As she spoke, Chang Ying's face was full of remorse: "At the critical moment, I drew a bad lot, useless in helping out."

Tian Tian looked at Chang Ying, retorting: "You gave the most; you were always at the front.

I am the team's commander, I should bear the greatest responsibility."

Tian Tian's voice grew softer and she lowered her head more and more: "I made a unilateral decision, leading the small team into danger.

If not for Lu Ran taking command and leading us out, we all might have..."

The small booth fell silent, the relaxed atmosphere once again becoming tense.

They had agreed to come out and relax, but it turned into a self-criticism meeting.

Deng Yutang suddenly spoke up, breaking the silence: "I was wrong too."

Chang Ying curiously looked at Deng Yutang: "What did you do wrong?"

On the battlefield, this Red Scarf Believer had performed exceptionally well, obeyed orders, and never fell short in his duties.

"I... I..." Deng Yutang struggled for a while but couldn't articulate anything.

Maybe the mistake was just wanting to fit in too much.

While the three teammates were reflecting, Deng Yutang being there felt... well, slightly awkward.

Eventually, Deng Yutang picked up some juice: "Surviving is our greatest success, the most worth celebrating!"

We must quickly regroup, as there are still many dangers ahead!"

Self-reflection is necessary, but surviving in this dangerous world, you can't dwell too long.

Growth inevitably involves experiencing some storms and learning some lessons.

And focusing on survival is people's top priority.

"Okay." Lu Ran picked up his juice, and the four clinked glasses.

The crisp sound was like a boundary marker.

Deng Yutang took a big gulp of orange juice, directly asking, "It's still early in the day, shall we go to the Demon Cave for training?"

At this moment, the traits of a Red Scarf Believer were fully manifested in Deng Yutang.

Just yesterday, they had all experienced life and death, seeing the horrifying Evil Nest.

For others, not only would it take several days and nights to recover, but they might be shadowed for life.

Yet, the Red Scarf Believer was ready to take up arms again!

"I'm about to advance to Stream Realm Third Rank." Tian Tian quietly said, "I want to train before Divine Sculpture."

It was rare for Tian Tian to be so brave and express her wishes.

Training in the Demon Cave did speed up cultivation, but it was still inferior to training in front of a divine shrine.

Tian Tian's choice was understandable; after all, she was just a 17-year-old student wanting to ease her mind, which was perfectly reasonable.

"I feel like I'm about to advance too." Chang Ying chimed in.

"Alright, then I'll also focus on cultivating at home." Deng Yutang did not insist.

After all, he was close to advancing too, and the Stream Realm Third Rank Divine Technique was also very tempting for him.

"What about Lu Ran?" Chang Ying looked at Lu Ran.

Lu Ran shook his head: "I just advanced to the third rank about ten days ago, I still need some time."

Chang Ying: "Strength to you, you're the most likely to catch up to the Great Competition."

Deng Yutang confidently asserted: "Brother Lu must catch up, the term isn't over yet!"

There are still four months until the next term starts, advancing to River Realm should be a breeze for Lu Ran, right?"

Chang Ying suddenly thought of something, laughing: "That's true, maybe by next term's start, our school will only have one River Realm.

A contest with just one person, victory without a fight!

Grabbing awards and points till your arms tire, blissful~"

Lu Ran, however, laughed: "That's a nice thought, but with four months to go, how could I be the only River Realm?"

The need for River Realm was because within this realm, Believers could assemble flowing water armor.

In the context of this special era, Da Xia needed to encourage students to strive forward while also avoiding casualties to the greatest extent.

Thus, between people, there's an unspoken rule for a good-natured contest: if the flowing water armor breaks, you lose.

"Cut~" Chang Ying countered, "After Stream Realm Third Rank, there really is a barrier every step.

Especially breaking through from Stream Realm Fifth Rank to River Realm, it's really tough...

I remember, in the last semester of the senior year, there were only 2 or 3 River Realm Believers at the start of the second half?

The top three were decided in just a few minutes."

Lu Ran: "Ma Tianchuan should be able to do it. Haven't heard from him in a while, wonder how his cultivation is going."

Deng Yutang: "If you really encounter Ma Tianchuan, Brother Lu, you must teach him a lesson, haha!

Our two teams' contest has been postponed until now, you can represent our team.

Oh, and there's Wu Shanshan..."