

## Old Gods 141

Chapter 141: Enjoy the Smoothness

The next day, at twilight.

Inside the small bedroom, after sleeping for a whole day, Lu Ran finally awoke.

"Umm..." Lu Ran, still drowsy, let out a groggy nasal murmur.

He swept a cheeky cat tail away from his face with one hand and scratched his cheek in the process.

"Meow~" The tabby cat, seeing its owner awake, made as if to flee.

However, it was pressed down onto the bed by a large hand.

Lu Ran lay on his side, holding the restless tabby in his arms, fumbling around the pillow.

He picked up his phone and began to check it, only to notice a special message.

Instantly, Lu Ran became much more alert.

Early in the morning, Lu Ran had already reported his safety to his family and teammates, but it seemed he had forgotten someone?

Jiang: "Are you okay?"

The brief four characters conjured up a vision of a fair and beautiful face in Lu Ran's mind.

"Meow?"

The tabby in his arms peeked out, curious about the glowing screen.

After a moment's thought, Lu Ran replied:

"I'm fine, how about you?"

Lu Ran didn't hold out much hope for a reply; after all, Jiang Ruyi was very dedicated and focused on her cultivation, and she sent the message in the morning.

At that time, he was fast asleep.

However, Jiang, the beauty, quickly responded, "Mm."

Lu Ran, looking at the lonely word on his screen, couldn't help but grin.

Only a period for company with this aloof word.

"What to do?" Lu Ran lowered his head and kissed the fluffy little head of the tabby, "How should I reply to this?"

The beauty Jiang in the phone was somewhat talented.

She could kill a conversation with just a couple of phrases.

"Meow~" The tabby stretched out a paw, seemingly wanting to imitate Lu Ran and touch the phone screen.

Lu Ran pulled the tabby into his arms, his fingers tapping on the screen.

Ran: "Do you miss me?"

Lu Ran stared at the phone screen, waiting silently.

This time, he got no reply for a long time.

"Just take it as a yes." Lu Ran muttered softly, tossing his phone beside the pillow.

He passed a hand over the tabby, pinching its tail.

"Buzz~"

Suddenly, the phone vibrated.

Lu Ran unlocked his phone instantly, and again saw four words.

Jiang: "A little bit."

Lu Ran's face just showed a smile when it turned into a peculiar look because the message disappeared.

What, she took it back?

Come on, are you fishing for me?

Hmm... if it was another girl, maybe.

But with Ruyi's temperament, that shouldn't be it?

Jiang: "I saw that you joined another patrol team again."

Ran: "What did you take back?"

Jiang: "That was the Barbaric Woman—you should have gone home; a lot of people were worried about you."

Lu Ran looked at the words on the screen, silent for a while, and replied:

"Saw?"

Jiang: "Yes, there's a photo of you in the group chat, fighting against a Barbaric Woman."

Lu Ran's face stiffened and he immediately scrolled through the class group chat.

It was like an explosion in the group—so many messages.

In this "Night of Ghosts," the students were crying out, and even the teachers seemed to lose control of the situation.

Finally, Lu Ran's scrolling thumb stopped, first seeing a flow of comments:

"Lu Ran is badass! He won damn it! The fight is over damn it! I just saw him harvesting energy damn it!"

"Don't die please, I beg you, wuu wuu wuu..."

"He's crazy, acting like he's got no regard for his own life!"

"Can he... can he survive this? How's Lu Ran doing now?"

"@Ran, are you there? Is this person really you?"

"Holy mama, a Barbaric Woman!! And he dared to confront her?"

The comments Lu Ran saw were naturally from the end to the beginning.

He realized he was a bit stupid and should have clicked on "mentions," to save time scrolling.

Lu Ran scrolled up until, after a long while, he finally saw a blurry photo.

The photographer must have been in a residential building, probably on the second or third floor.

The neighborhood was a mess, covered in yellow sand.

On the sand dune above stood an extraordinarily tall figure.

The Barbaric Woman with her back to the photographer, tilted her head back slightly as if howling at the sky, her red hair wildly swirling in the wind and rain.

She held two battle axes, arms spread, revealing her dominant physique and proud stature.

Arrogant, unruly.

Just this back view alone was enough to make one feel an endless sense of oppression!

Beneath her raised arms, one could see, further away, a figure in a yellow raincoat.

The youth held knives in both hands, in a forward charging posture, ascending the dune...

Though the features were a bit blurry, one could faintly make out that it was Lu Ran.

Their classmate from Grade 12 (4), Lu Ran!

After some thought, Lu Ran remembered which battle this was.

The Barbaric Woman really was pretty strong.

The sand dune under her feet had also given Lu Ran a hard time, almost ensnaring his ankles.

Thanks to his comrades' help, and thanks to Evil Technique·Caged Fire (Illusion)!

Otherwise, Lu Ran might really have been dragged into the sand dune and buried alive.

"Heh."

Remembering the thrilling scene from the night before, Lu Ran chuckled and shook his head.

He opened the private chat again and sent a message to the beauty Jiang:

"These brutes are simple-minded and easy to kill."

Jiang: "Have you seen what you're saying?"

Ran: "..."

Indeed, he should have posted that message in the class group, with its hundreds of members. With a big enough trash bag, he could fill it to the brim.

Lu Ran quickly shifted the subject, tapping on the screen:

"Is your cultivation going smoothly?"

Jiang: "It's mundane but smooth.

Daily meditation and cultivation with senior brothers and sisters, occasionally entering the Demon Cave to temper ourselves and enhance Divine Technique."

Ran: "The Demon Cave guarded by the Jade Talisman is no small feat; be careful!"

Jiang: "You're the one who should be careful."

Lu Ran looked at the text on the phone with a strange expression, imagining multiple tones of voice.

Ran: "Throwing a tantrum?"

Jiang: "I'm going to cultivate now."

Ran: "When will you come back?"

Once again, there was no response on the phone screen for a long time.

Ran: "Maybe it's better if you don't come back. For the past few months, the rain alleys haven't been very stable.

Focus on your cultivation. After you become really strong, let's go hunt Evil Demons together."

Lu Ran figured his message would end up as a note to her.

Unexpectedly, she was still there.

Jiang: "It's getting cold, wear more."

Lu Ran raised his head, looking at the coat rack by the door, at the dark red, wide-knit scarf.

Jiang: "Do you hear me?"

Lu Ran's face broke into a smile, this time certain he had imagined the tone correctly.

Just wonder, would she blush behind the screen?

Ran: "I miss you a little too."

"Ran" has taken back a message

Lu Ran not only retracted the message but also tossed his phone aside.

The classic Lu maneuver, silky smooth~

Holding the tabby, he buried his face in its fluffy belly, taking two deep breaths.

Little Ruyi, trying to compete with me?

Sooner or later, I'll reel you in...

"Meow~ Meow~"

The tabby kept mewing softly but ultimately escaped from the clutches of "Lu the Demon."

Lu Ran got out of bed, went to the shrine, and bowed with hands together.

That morning, when Lu Ran was home, he had asked Lord Immortal Goat some questions and got some answers.

To summon and control Evil Demons, at the very least, he'd need to cultivate the sculptures in the God Demon Sculpture Garden to River Realm level.

The Evil Demons created would be one level lower than the actual Evil Demon Sculptures.

And it would cost "Qi" to do so.

Lord Immortal Goat also said that in critical moments, Lu Ran could even pull the sculptures straight out!

Both Divine Sculptures and Evil Sculptures could aid Lu Ran in battle!

It was just that once a sculpture was summoned out of its zone, it was considered a "severe injury," and the energy expenditure would be enormous!

Moreover, this was the highest understanding and utilization of the God Demon Sculpture Garden.

With Lu Ran's current strength, it was far from enough.

Setting a lofty goal in his heart would do for now.

Currently, as a minion of the Stream Realm, he better not dream of being able to summon the true form of the sculptures.

That being said, since Lu Ran could summon Evil Demons with Evil Sculpture, he naturally could also create "Divine Minions" with Divine Sculpture.

But Lord Immortal Goat strongly advised against it.

The "Qi" Lu Ran could harvest from Divine Sculpture was pitifully little. Creating a Divine Minion would deplete the painstakingly accumulated Qi.

This move would be unwise and not worth the loss.

Lord Immortal Goat's exact words were: Why summon Divine Beings to fight when one can use Evil Demons, which require more energy and have a more stable source?

It's also worth mentioning that the Evil Demon minions made from Evil Sculpture were flesh and blood, just as the Evil Demons Lu Ran had continually encountered.

But "Divine Minions," according to Lord Immortal Goat, seemed to be nothing but residues?

Who knew if Lu Ran could use such "Divine Residues" to bluff people in the future?

Hmm... better be cautious.

Once exposed, the sword hangs overhead.

"Lord Immortal Goat, you said this morning that the foundation of my team was correct?" Lu Ran whispered.

White Sheep Jade Carving: "It is acceptable to seek Earthly Apostles for our garden's Divine Sculptures who will follow your every command and wait on you hand and foot.

But you must be extremely cautious in this undertaking.

The Human Clan believers who worship the Divine Sculptures in our garden must remain utterly loyal to you."

Lu Ran nodded earnestly, ultimately still concerned about a leak.

But his mind was active; he asked further: "Lord Immortal Goat, if people from the Human Clan came to worship the Divine Sculptures in our garden...

Could our Divine Sculptures draw the Power of Faith?"

If so, Lu Ran would have more than one method for cultivating Divine Sculptures.

On one hand, Lu Ran could plunder the "Qi" of True Gods in the world.

On the other hand, continuous offerings from Human Clan believers would come in—why not?

White Sheep Jade Carving: "Difficult!"

Lu Ran: "Difficult?"

White Sheep Jade Carving: "As long as the true gods do not perish, our sculpted figures can hardly rise to prominence."

Lu Ran pursed his lips: "Like the Divine Weapon Domain?"

It's like one carrot per hole.

As long as the True Gods don't die, Fake Gods can't snatch faith?

And compared to the Divine Weapons with Artifact Spirits, the living conditions for Fake Gods were even more vicious.

Lu Ran could only secretly wreak havoc, plundering energy to support this group of Divine Sculptures.

"Ah..." Lu Ran sighed deeply.

How hard it is to replace the gods of this world!

The voice transmission fell again:

"Unless..."

Chapter 142: Burn... God?

Lu Ran pressed his palms together and said solemnly, "Please enlighten me, Lord Immortal Sheep!"

The White Sheep Jade Carving replied, "Unless you let that member of the Human Clan worship sincerely in front of our Divine Sculpture.

Leveraging the advantage of the terrain, we might be able to contend with the laws of this world."

Lu Ran asked, "The laws of this world?"

The White Sheep Jade Carving explained, "Gods are the laws.

No matter where you are, whether you are a Believer or not.

When you pray sincerely, the Power of Faith you generate will, like rivers returning to the sea, eventually return to the embrace of the gods."

Lu Ran fell silent for a while, then whispered, "Even if I am not a Believer?"

The White Sheep Jade Carving replied, "I know what you are thinking, and yes."

"Heh," Lu Ran suddenly laughed.

Even though I'm not a Jade Talisman Believer, all the sincere worship I've done since childhood, the Jade Talisman has not missed a bit of it.

The Immortal Sheep fell silent, giving Lu Ran time to digest the information.

Until Lu Ran spoke again, "Lord Immortal Sheep, did you just say that we can rely on the advantage of the terrain?"

The White Sheep Jade Carving explained, "The Power of Faith born from the Human Clan in front of our Divine Sculpture, my side might be able to intercept a bit."

Lu Ran's brow furrowed slightly, somewhat confused.

The God Demon Sculpture Garden is located in my own spiritual world.

These Pupils of the Dead World can only draw Dead Souls into the Sculpture Garden.

Could it be possible to "absorb" a living person?

Lu Ran immediately asked, and, of course, the answer he received was negative.

Lu Ran then inquired, "Since we cannot let living people enter the Sculpture Garden, how do we make them worship... in front of a Fake God?"

His voice grew softer and eventually stopped.

After a moment, Lu Ran ventured, "Do you mean to say, to have people worship sincerely in front of me?"

The White Sheep Jade Carving confirmed, "Exactly."

Lu Ran pursed his lips and said no more.

He had pondered over one thing before and jokingly concluded, "I am All Gods."

Now, it seemed, his spoken words were prophetic.

Indeed, each Divine Sculpture resides within Lu Ran's spiritual world.

This means that anyone wishing to worship any god within the Sculpture Garden need only worship Lu Ran.

In other words, Lu Ran is that small Divine Sculpture standing within the little shrine.

And he is "One with Many Faces"!

When Chang Ying worships Lu Ran, he is Divine-Spiritual Sign.

When Si Xianxian worships Lu Ran, he is Ran Shen.

Likewise, Lu Ran can be Sword Lotus, he can be Red Scarf, and he can even be Prisoner Demon, North Wind, Sword One from West Desolation!

"Pitter-patter..."

The room was silent except for the continuous soft rain outside the window throughout the night.

After a while, Lu Ran softly asked, "Can't we find an object in the mortal world to house the sculptures of our gods for Believers to worship?

Like a little Divine Sculpture within a shrine?"

The White Sheep Jade Carving responded, "Aren't you that object?"

Lu Ran: "..."

The White Sheep Jade Carving continued, "Under the Divine Law, other objects struggle to intercept faith.

Only in front of the true form of our Divine Sculpture can devout prayers possibly work."

Lu Ran still wasn't convinced, "Can't I, through a Divine Sculpture, create a minion of some god and have it collect faith?"

The White Sheep Jade Carving asked, "Why ask further?"

Lu Ran inwardly sighed heavily, resignedly saying, "Disciple understands."

The White Sheep Jade Carving sought clarification, "What do you understand?"

Lu Ran shrugged, "As you said before, I am a little Divine Sculpture, a messenger of a host of Fake Gods."

The deep, transmitted voice suddenly grew stern:

"I can belittle myself in front of you, but you must not undervalue yourself."

Lu Ran lifted his eyelids to look at the little Divine Sculpture in the shrine.

Oh boy~

Its face is all pissed off, isn't it?

The transmitted voice lowered, "You own this God Demon Sculpture Garden and the sculptures within it.

You cultivate them, control them, use them..."

Lu Ran, uncharacteristically, interrupted the Immortal Sheep, speaking softly, "I am not the messenger of a host of Fake Gods.

I am their master."

The White Sheep Jade Carving commended, "The child is indeed teachable."

It was rare for Lord Immortal Sheep to give Lu Ran such high praise.

Lu Ran probably understood why, just now, the Immortal Sheep was so stern.

All the signs indicated that the Immortal Sheep was cultivating Lu Ran as a "successor."

At this level, Lu Ran was not allowed to undervalue himself.

"Before I make it big, I'll just have to discreetly take on disciples on a small scale," Lu Ran mused, sitting down, crossing his legs.

Lord Immortal Sheep was right. When he decided to extend an olive branch to someone, he had to ensure their absolute loyalty to Lu Ran.

The White Sheep Jade Carving said, "Quality matters in Angel Envoys, not quantity.

Do not fret; you will gradually understand in the future."

Lu Ran pondered and understood the Immortal Sheep's point.

On the night of September 15, Lu Ran witnessed two Sea Realm Great Powers battle.

The confrontation was indeed earth-shattering.

In the face of absolute power, numbers are meaningless.

It seems that if one truly reaches the level of the gods, the principle is even more so.

The White Sheep Jade Carving suddenly said, "Trickery under the Divine Law is, after all, not the right path.

Only proper means can replace it!"

Lu Ran: "..."

You make it sound so easy.

Lu Ran mockingly thought to himself, then changed the subject, "Similarly, this applies to Evil Demon Sculptures, right?

The Evil Demon Clan feeds on emotions like fear and despair, so only if I personally terrify the enemy will the Evil Sculptures in the garden be nourished?"

The White Sheep Jade Carving explained, "The principles of Evil Magic aren't as harsh as the Divine Law.

You can summon minions of Evil Demons to torment your enemies and provide the needed emotional nourishment for the Evil Sculptures in the garden."

"I see," Lu Ran nodded.

The clans of the gods are really stingy, not willing to let even a sliver of faith slip through.

It seems the Evil Demon Clan is much more generous, aren't they?

Thinking about it, while gods collect faith under some conditions—

The Divine-Spiritual Sign, naturally, won't receive the power of faith from Sword Lotus believers.

And the Evil Demon Clan collecting emotions is much more carefree.

What's this believer, that believer—for them, you could be a dog, and it wouldn't matter; who we torment makes no difference, right?

Regardless of what you are, it doesn't interfere with their feasting.

This means the Power of Faith of the Human Clan is higher level, more refined energy that nourishes the gods far more than fear and despair nourish the Evil Demon Clan.

Otherwise, the Evil Demons would have ascended long ago.

Suddenly, Lu Ran had a thought: "The night when Sea Realm's Lady of Yin and Yang appeared and performed her ghostly play in the city skies, the whole of Rain Alley City plunged into panic."

The White Sheep Jade Carving confirmed, "The Lady of Yin and Yang herself feasted heartily, and you contributed your part as well."

Lu Ran was a tad embarrassed; indeed, he had been thoroughly scared that night.

He asked softly, "Since the whole city was panic-stricken, couldn't we have intercepted a bit of that emotion?"

The White Sheep Jade Carving's voice seemed distant, "People were afraid of the Lady of Yin and Yang, not you who hid at home."

Lu Ran: "..."

You've got a way with words, don't you?

Am I invisible to you?

The transmission suddenly turned dark, "Once the Evil Sculptures in your garden grow strong enough, you too can summon Evil Demons to join the chaos of the Night of Ghosts.

From that, you can take your share."

Lu Ran's mouth dropped open slightly.

Isn't this just another form of "farming the Human Clan"?

The Night of Ghosts is already chaotic enough; how could I possibly add to it?

Yes, I can't really send my own Evil Demons to wield the knife; I won't let them attack the Human Clan.

But the mere appearance of a powerful Evil Demon would inevitably trigger serious chain reactions.

This isn't a joke!

If you let me tie Kou Yingquan and have a Lady of Yin and Yang perform and frighten him with her handkerchief every day, maybe then I'd consider it.

But others are innocent...

Too bad, there's no Divine Technique or Evil Technique in this world that can open a separate dimension.

If only I had a secret place to confine a bunch of enemy Evil Dogs, then use my own Evil Demons to scare the pets every day...

Wouldn't that be a steady source of energy?

Wait!

Neither Divine Technique nor Evil Technique can indeed open separate dimensions.

But within the realm of Divine Weapons and Evil Weapons, there seem to be such "Domains"?

"You must find your own path," spoke the god with a voice gradually returning to calm, becoming softer and softer.

Lu Ran quickly stood up, pressed his palms together, and bowed towards the shrine, "Thank you for your guidance, Lord Immortal Sheep."

It seemed that Lord Immortal Sheep had indeed departed.

That night, there was no further dialogue between them.

In the following days, Lu Ran remained quietly meditating in front of the shrine and did not disturb the god anymore.

The days quickly passed until the nineteenth day of the tenth lunar month.

In the early morning, Lu Ran dressed in a trench coat and a dark red knitted scarf, stepped out of his home.

He stepped into early winter.

Last month, the only morning class at school had been canceled, but not this month.

On the road to school, Lu Ran could clearly sense that there were fewer and fewer people in Rain Alley City.

Along the way, only the familiar bun shop was still bustling with noises.

After all, everybody's got to eat.

As for other places...

This dilapidated little town, like the trees entering winter, was withering away continually.

Returning to school gave Lu Ran a sense of being worlds apart.

As expected, he became the center of attention— the kind that drew everyone's eyes.

Wherever Lu Ran went, glances followed.

A fervor, excitement, curiosity...

It's proven that people might envy those slightly better than themselves.

But towards those far beyond their league, the feeling was more admiration.

Lu Ran lowered his head and briskly walked into the teaching building, scurrying upstairs.

Before reaching the classroom, he heard a clamor from inside.

Looks like someone was conning people out of their money?

"Ran Shen!"

"Holy shit, isn't that my Ran Shen!"

"He's alive, alive! Hurry, come in and sit down!"

Lu Ran: "..."

Before, people used to call him "Bro Ran."

After this Night of Ghosts event, did he level up again?

He actually saw this nickname in the grade group chat.

The first to use it was none other than his own classmate, the chubby kid Qian Hao.

"Yay, Ran-bao!"

Chang Ying's eyes were brimming with surprise.

One address, and any airs Lu Ran might have had were shattered.

The fortuneteller stopped her practice.

Chang Ying left her clients aside and hurried over to Lu Ran, "That was so impressive!"

"Oh~" Lu Ran instinctively raised his hands.

Chang Ying then gave Lu Ran a big bear hug!

"Yahoo~!" This gambler seemed too excited as she lifted Lu Ran and suddenly flung him upwards.

Lu Ran flustered, "Eh? Eh?"

What's with flinging me around?

Lu Ran reached up to support himself on the classroom's ceiling to avoid hitting his head.

But as he landed, Chang Ying embraced him again.

"Slap!"

Lu Ran placed his hand on her face, pushing her away at a distance, "Calm down, will you?!"

Chang Ying's muffled voice came from under Lu Ran's palm, "Hmm..."

Chapter 143: Common people setting fire

"Divine Technique!" Deng Yutang strode forward, laughing heartily.

"What's all the fuss about," Lu Ran said as he pressed against Chang Ying's face, pushing her backward.

Chang Ying leaned her head back and retreated, her tall figure also blocking Deng Yutang's path forward.

"Cough." Suddenly, a light cough came from behind.

The noisy and clamorous classroom quickly became quiet.

Li Yanzhu, the class teacher, stood at the doorway. Her gaze lingered on Lu Ran for a moment before she spoke to the students:

"I know how you all feel, and I also admire and respect Lu Ran as a strong individual.

But as Believers, you should still be cautious with certain vocabulary and not attribute them to others casually."

"Hm?" Lu Ran couldn't help but raise his eyebrows slightly.

Originally, he wasn't very fond of the nickname "Ran Shen."

But after what Teacher Li had said...

Lu Ran suddenly took a liking to this title.

A bunch of stones can be called divine, what's lacking in my flesh and blood?

"Return to your seats," Li Yanzhu stepped into the classroom and patted Lu Ran's shoulder.

It was rare for the usually serious class teacher to look at him with such admiration.

"Oh." Lu Ran walked towards the interior of the classroom and noticed that there were fewer students in the class.

Class 3-4 used to have around thirty people. Now at a glance, there were only just over twenty?

Were those people injured or on leave?

Or had they transferred or moved away?

Lu Ran leaned more towards the latter, especially after having witnessed the scene in front of the train station himself.

There had been people who thought Rain Alley City was a cursed city.

And after the Barbaric Clan's Night of Ghosts event, this reputation became even more entrenched.

Escaping Rain Alley City seemed to have become a trend.

"People are panicking."

Lu Ran sighed inwardly and randomly found a seat to sit down.

It was evident that the impact of the fifteenth night event was significant; just in Lu Ran's class alone, there were two entire teams missing.

Hmm... perhaps it was a quantitative change leading to a qualitative one.

After three consecutive special events, anyone would feel uneasy.

"Thump," Chang Ying sat down on the chair next to Lu Ran, her large eyes staring intently at him.

"I really can't give this to you," Lu Ran said softly, his hand on the scarf.

Chang Ying: "..."

Do you really see me as a bandit?

Lu Ran turned his head, looking at Chang Ying's still passionate gaze, and asked, "What's wrong?"

"Just happy to see you alive," Chang Ying leaned on the desk with her elbow propped up, supporting her cheek with her palm, making no attempt to hide her gaze.

Lu Ran: "Didn't I already report my safety in the group chat, and we even chatted for quite a while?"

"That's not the same, silly!" Chang Ying revealed a smile, "Now you're alive, sitting right beside me."

Lu Ran had never expected to see such a sweet smile on Chang Ying's wild face.

Indeed, for everyone, each fifteenth night was a massive disaster.

Everyone was on tenterhooks, first for themselves and second for their friends and family.

After all, no one knew whether they would still be able to meet the person they remembered after that night.

Especially for someone like Lu Ran, who was different from others and didn't just stay at home or inside a shelter.

He ventured alone into the fifteenth night, keeping company with death.

"I'm also glad to see you again," Lu Ran said with a sincere look in his eyes, speaking softly.

"Mm..." Chang Ying's gaze lost its wildness, her eyelids drooping slightly.

It seemed she remembered something, and the joy on her face vanished without a trace, leaving only a hint of loss.

Lu Ran asked softly, "What happened?"

Chang Ying lay down on the desk and whispered, "Seeing you face dangers alone, I always want to help you, but I..."

Listening to Chang Ying's murmur, Lu Ran felt a warmth in his heart.

Her posture with her chin propped on her arms and big eyes staring at the desk reminded Lu Ran of the little calico cat at home.

He thought he was crazy to make such a connection.

But Chang Ying's slouching figure, coupled with her murmured voice, sounded much like a muffled mew.

Hmm... indeed, like a giant cat.

"You've advanced in rank, right?" Lu Ran tried to cheer up his teammate.

"I've been at Stream Realm Third Rank for a while," Chang Ying muttered softly.

"Learned Divine Technique·Seven Treasures?"

"I've learned it, but I'm afraid to use it," Chang Ying shook her hand, "with my luck, let's not even go there!"

All along, Chang Ying had mostly used the initial Divine Technique·Five Treasure Signs.

In the past, during the pitch-dark Demon Cave, when everyone's lives were at stake, she had mustered the courage to use the advanced Divine Technique·Six Treasure Sign.

And she hit the jackpot!

The sole lousy sign among the six was drawn by her.

At Stream Realm Third Rank, the Spiritual Sign Sect would adapt the "Seven Treasures."

The signs representing five categories became more potent, but the number of lousy signs in the sign cylinder increased by one, becoming two.

That's the trajectory of the development of the Spiritual Sign Sect.

At River Realm, Chang Ying would learn "Eight Treasures," "Nine Treasures."

The five signs representing offense, defense, support, summoning, and control would crazily update and evolve, getting outrageously strong!

At the same time, the number of lousy signs would also incrementally increase.

As we all know, Divine Techniques could be improved in grade.

This means Chang Ying's "Five Treasure Signs" could reach the same River Grade as "Nine Treasures."

But even at the same grade, the effects would be like chalk and cheese!

Take the support sign as an example:

The support sign in Five Treasure Signs could only replenish the caster's Divine Power.

An upgrade in Divine Method Grade would simply enhance the casting effect of this sign.

But the support sign in Divine Technique·Nine Treasures...

One could continuously recover the caster's Divine Power.

Two could clear the caster's mind, dispelling negative mental states.

Three could heal the caster's injuries.

Four could perform area Healing according to the master's guidance.

Five could comprehensively enhance all the body's attributes for a specific group, as arranged by the master!

What concept is this?

What kind of disparity is this?

Why does Nine Treasures dare to have four lousy signs in it?

Because the profit from winning the bet is immensely rich!

That's why countless Believers flock to it, desperately drawing a hand at the critical moment!

If you draw the right one, you're godly!

If you miss... damn it.

Next time for sure!

Keep in mind, this is just the difference in support signs.

Say nothing of the output signs, summoning signs, etc., the discrepancies are just as staggering!

"From now on, call me Ran Shen?" Lu Ran suddenly spoke up.

"Hm?" Chang Ying turned her head slightly to look at Lu Ran, "What's wrong, don't you like it when I call you Ran Bao?"

Lu Ran shrugged nonchalantly: "You can call me Ran Bao with your lips, but think of me as Ran Shen in your heart."

Chang Ying's expression became strange, and after staring at Lu Ran for a long time, she said in a low voice, "Shameless."

Lu Ran: "..."

Indeed, others might genuinely admire and call out "Ran Shen" from their hearts.

But for Lu Ran to actively ask others to address him that way seemed a bit shameless?

"Slap!"

Chang Ying's large hand landed on Lu Ran's back, and her face once again displayed a smile: "Fine!

Since you're so powerful, I guess I'll reluctantly agree to it."

During this conversation, Chang Ying's smiling face became somewhat serious, and her eyes were earnest: "Just don't let me down with the nickname I have for you.

You have to survive!"

At that moment, Lu Ran also smiled.

He could feel Chang Ying's sincerity, her earnest wishes.

Did Lu Ran care about the empty title of "Ran Shen"?

It was merely because he took an interest in a "Disciple."

In private, the two could be close comrades-in-arms, noisy friends.

But someday in the future, Chang Ying, the troubled disciple of the Spiritual Sign Sect, might very well accept the olive branch he extended.

The timing would also be good.

With the character of the Spiritual Signs, Chang Ying was bound to suffer terrible losses.

Everything was ready; he only needed to thoroughly examine Chang Ying as a person.

And today's conversation with Chang Ying, her troubles and sorrows, her sincere blessings...

Had won her lots of points!

"Why are you looking at me like that?" Chang Ying moved back a bit under Lu Ran's intense gaze, "Don't tell me you've taken a fancy to me?"

Lu Ran: ?

Chang Ying whispered, "I... I still want to find someone tall and mighty, I've always liked that type since I was a child.

I don't have many wishes, I'm only living this one lifetime, and who knows when I might just croak.

You're... cough, anyway, we're not quite suitable."

"Get lost!" Lu Ran was actually amused.

What kind of nonsensical talk was this?

Chang Ying sat up straight, her mouth firing off like a machine gun: "Ran Bao, I know you're amazing, and I really admire you.

But in my heart, you are a dependable teammate, a strong individual I look up to.

You're about to turn 18, remember, it's essential not to act against a girl's will, using violence, coercion, or other means..."

"Shut up!" Lu Ran hurriedly reached out and covered Chang Ying's mouth.

You gambling addict, are you teaching me the law now?

If this were overheard by the students in front or behind us, what would they think of me?

Besides, with Jiang Ruyi being so fair and gentle, a goddess, why would I turn around and chase after you, a wild woman like you?

Forget that it's not my type,

But if I really liked it, couldn't I just summon a Barbaric Woman myself?

Wouldn't that be even more powerful and wild...

Chang Ying's face was earnest, and her muffled voice came from Lu Ran's palm again:

"Ran Bao, I can entrust you with my life."

Lu Ran lowered his voice, grinding his teeth, "Just stop talking."

Chang Ying kept going, her eyes innocently wide, her voice soft and muffled:

"But not my body."

Lu Ran was utterly flabbergasted!

Today, he truly had met his match.

Chang Ying's mouth, with its incessant chatter, had left Lu Ran utterly defeated.

Lu Ran suddenly remembered when Chang Ying first joined the small four-person group; she also left Deng Yutang dazed and confused...

"You two, sit properly!" The class teacher Li Yanzhu's scolding voice came from the podium.

Lu Ran pulled his hand away and also lowered his head.

Chang Ying sat correctly as well.

Only her eyes betrayed an impish smile.

To survive in this world plagued by suffering and misfortune, fun had to be sought out by oneself.

Even if overexerted, just a moment of joy was enough to last for a long time.

Li Yanzhu: "The school is aware of what you all have gone through.

I represent the school in commending you and feel deep sorrow for the misfortune you have encountered."

Li Yanzhu's gaze swept over the students as she continued: "For this month's training, the school has specially selected a Demon Cave with an excellent environment for you.

While practicing, you'll also be able to relax and adjust your state of mind.

This Demon Cave, located in Qiantang River province, is called Bamboo Sea. You've probably heard of it..."

#### Chapter 144: A Precious Lotus Flower

Whenever people think of the Demon Cave, they tend to conjure bleak and dreary images of a hostile environment shrouded in darkness.

Actually, it's not true!

There are many Demon Caves in the world, each with its own environment.

The so-called "Bamboo Sea" is one such Demon Cave that boasts an elegant environment and a pleasant climate.

Frankly speaking, the Bamboo Sea Demon Cave might even be more comfortable than the continuously overcast Rain Alley City...

Nested within the Bamboo Sea Demon Cave thrives a species of "Bamboo Wood Demon," part of the Evil Demon family.

They are relatively low on the danger scale and not the brightest, on par with the Straw Demon clan.

It's clear that the school chose this particular Demon Cave precisely to enable students to get away from the rain alleys and relax.

This trip to Qiantang River province involves a lengthy journey.

According to the school's plan, students are expected to travel by train and spend the night on the train.

The class teacher gave the students two hours to consider and requested that they submit their names by ten in the morning.

Following Li Yanzhu's departure, Deng Yutang came over with Tian Tian in tow.

"Are we going?" Tian Tian stood next to Chang Ying's seat, her gaze skating over the girl and fixing on Lu Ran.

Feeling bypassed, Chang Ying struggled to assert her presence. She reached out, scooped up Tian Tian, and held her in her arms.

It was as if she was hugging an oversized doll, and she had Tian Tian sit on her lap.

"Umm." Tian Tian blushed, struggling for a moment, but she truly couldn't outmuscle the female wildling.

"I'll go with whatever you guys decide," Lu Ran responded.

He had already changed the squad's itinerary several times, consecutively visiting Evil Dog Village, Black Grave Mound, and the Black Soul Wood Forest.

This time, Lu Ran had no intention of making his teammates accommodate him once more.

"Let's go have a look," Chang Ying suggested enthusiastically, "I heard the environment there is especially nice, perfect for a getaway."

And since the Bamboo Wood Demons are all a bit dim-witted, we can have some fun with them, right?"

While talking, Chang Ying tilted her head slightly, looking at the large doll in her embrace.

"Mhm mhm," Tian Tian murmured in agreement, head low.

Seeing their leader nod, Chang Ying immediately cheered, "Yay~!"

Deng Yutang suddenly spoke up, "Should I book plane tickets for our team?"

Chang Ying replied, "Riding the train is so much better, traveling from north to south. Isn't the school's intent to let us enjoy the scenery along the way?"

"Huh?" Deng Yutang took a moment to process.

That did make sense.

Lu Ran looked at Chang Ying and abruptly asked, "Do you snore when you sleep?"

Chang Ying's eyes widened: ???

Deng Yutang chuckled, "Brother Lu's ears are too sensitive, and we're going to be sleeping on the train at night.

If you snore, he might not be able to sleep at all."

"You're the one who snores!" Chang Ying almost used Tian Tian in her arms like an axe to chop down Deng Yutang, "Don't slander people!"

"Hey! Hey!" Lu Ran hurriedly intervened.

Poor Tian Tian, swung back and forth by someone, felt dizzy...

After registering with the class teacher, everyone went home to prepare.

On his way home, Lu Ran also made a phone call.

"Hello?" A pleasant female voice came through the phone.

"Good morning," Lu Ran said casually.

Si Xianxian snorted back, "Good."

It was evident that the background noise on her end was loud, as if she was outside.

Lu Ran continued, "We're planning to train in the Qiantang River area, do you want to come?"

Si Xianxian's refusal was straightforward, "It's too far, I'm not going."

"Ah?" Lu Ran was quite surprised, "I thought you didn't want to train with Auntie."

Si Xianxian grew increasingly irritated, "Train my ass! I'm not training this month. I'm taking a break."

"You, a belligerent, staying calm?" Lu Ran was even more puzzled, "What are you doing over there? Why's it so noisy?"

Si Xianxian said annoyed, "I'm volunteering here, cleaning the streets!"

A weird smile appeared on Lu Ran's face, "Earning believer points?"

"It's called contributing to the city's appearance!" On the other end, Si Xianxian stooped to pick up a shard of porcelain from the street.

With one hand clutching the shard tight, she ground it fiercely.

The porcelain shard was thus reduced to powder and cast into the air by her.

A gust of wind blew by, dispersing the powder without a trace.

Good, another piece of rubbish cleared!

Si Xianxian nodded in satisfaction.

Meanwhile, the volunteers around her, watching this irritable Fierce Heavenly believer, dared not say a word.

Over the phone came that irritating voice again, "You must be running low on believer points, and they won't let you into the Demon Cave, right?"

Someone's life advisor had once said: Lies don't hurt people, the truth does like a sharp knife!

Si Xianxian stopped in her tracks, eyes closed, as if enduring something great, "Lu Ran, I think..."

"What do you think?"

"I think about slapping you."

Lu Ran: "..."

Si Xianxian took a deep breath, still managing to control her anger; she couldn't throw too much of a fit with Lu Ran.

But the rage had to be vented somewhere, so she cursed, "Is there something wrong with your school?

After just having gone through the Night of Ghosts, wanting to die, and they still send you on training?"

Lu Ran: "The Bamboo Sea, the intensity isn't that high."

"The Bamboo Sea, sounds fun... Uh." Si Xianxian clearly paused, "Not exciting. The Bamboo Wood Demons are too weak.

One hammer from me could smash a whole bunch, not interesting beating up weaklings."

"Alright, then keep contributing to Jinchuan City," Lu Ran laughed, "Do more!

Accumulate more points, we'll save them for later deduction."

"Lu! Ran!" Si Xianxian ground her teeth furiously, her pretty face a bit distorted as she squeezed out the words.

"Beep... beep... beep..."

No more replies from him, just a series of busy tones in her ear.

"Dammit!" Si Xianxian picked up the big broom and swept the street fiercely.

People around shrank their heads, discreetly cleaning up rubbish.

Those who volunteer usually have noble intentions, but there are also troublemakers doing it for points.

Yet even the worst troublemaker didn't dare breathe too loud in Si Xianxian's presence.

The volunteers were indeed curious, what kind of entity could infuriate a Fierce Heavenly believer thus?

Were they not afraid of death?

Lu Ran... Well, Xu Zhen wasn't afraid of dying.

But he was quite averse to people snoring.

In the afternoon, before boarding the train, Lu Ran even bought a pair of earplugs.

It should be mentioned that Mr. Deng's spending ability had indeed come into play.

Since they weren't allowed to buy plane tickets, he upgraded all their hard sleeper reservations to soft sleeper...

"You, not spending money must be uncomfortable," Chang Ying commented, shoving the big axe under the lower bunk and then looking around the compartment.

Four of them in one compartment did ensure a lot more quiet.

"Why keep money around? Who knows when it might vanish," Deng Yutang said nonchalantly.

Leaning against the doorframe, Lu Ran couldn't help shaking his head with a smile.

"What's up, Brother Lu?" Deng Yutang smiled, "Got a better idea?"

"No," Lu Ran shook his head, "I smile because you and your sister's perspectives are quite aligned."

Deng Yutang: "..."

He had warned Lu Ran long ago to keep a distance from Deng Yuxiang.

But instead, Lu Ran had managed to join her team.

Thinking it over, Deng Yutang was actually quite grateful to Lu Ran.

He had learned of some things and knew that Lu Ran had helped his sister a lot, standing by her during numerous fifteenth nights.

"Are you sleeping on the top or bottom bunk?" Deng Yutang asked.

"I'm fine with either." Though he said this, Lu Ran plopped himself down on the lower bunk.

Deng Yutang: "..."

Tian Tian couldn't help covering her mouth and giggling, "Pfft... hehe~"

"Rustle rustle~"

Chang Ying clasped another divination container in her hand, and the spiritual signs within began to emerge.

This time, cradling the container with both hands, she rocked it back and forth, "All will go smoothly, all will go smoothly..."

The same-named Divine Technique·Spiritual Sign!

"Swish~"

A phantom sign streaked out, floating and slowly rotating above the compartment.

It bore a single character - Up!

"Ho?"

"Wow?" Their faces brightened with delight; it was rare to see an auspicious sign.

"Ha! Looks like our journey's fortune is good!" Chang Ying exclaimed in joy.

"Bamboo Wood Demons aren't that tough," Deng Yutang climbed up to the top bunk, "They're just right for practising new Divine Skills."

Lu Ran inquired, "Have you mastered the Red Edge?"

"Of course!" Deng Yutang lay on the top bunk, one hand resting on the edge of the bed.

In his palm, a faint red energy quietly emerged.

The energy flowed like a stream, with a streaming effect, emitting vibrant red light!

Red Cloth Divine Skill-Red Edge!

This skill, when properly used, wraps around the edge of a weapon, amplifying its output damage.

It had a sense of "Armor-Piercing."

Lu Ran had once seen Chen Jing, a Moon Gazer, using this skill.

"It's so pretty," whispered Tian Tian.

Chang Ying nodded in agreement, "True, it's like a handy nightlight, no need to switch on the light when getting up at night."

Deng Yutang: ???

Mr. Deng wasn't pleased, gripping the railings of the bunk bed, he looked down, "Why do you talk about our Red Cloth Divine Skill like that?"

I want a one-on-one duel with you!"

"Mine, mine works too," Tian Tian quickly interjected, averting a crisis.

She lifted her small hands, and energy flowed within them.

A beautiful green lotus flower burst into bloom, its brilliance shimmering in her palm.

The petals fluttered on their own, swaying gently, wafting out a light fragrance.

Sword Lotus Divine Skill-Treasure Lotus!

This skill can spread pollen with a light fragrance, helping to soothe the mind and spirit.

Its force lay in the fact that it could cleanse away all mental anomalies within the pollen range!

Note that it's "anomaly," not positive or negative.

Meaning, whether it's Deng Yutang's Battle Roar or Lu Ran's bleating, in front of this Treasure Lotus, they would be ineffective.

Even Lu Ran's Illusion Technique of Evil Technique·Caged Fire would be classified as a mental anomaly.

As long as Tian Tian held this Treasure Lotus, Lu Ran could not pull her into his illusions.

"Wow!" Chang Ying's eyes gleamed, and she leaned in closer.

Sniff~

Lu Ran shrugged his nostrils, catching the scent of the lotus flower.

In fact, that morning in the classroom, when Tian Tian approached his desk, he had already faintly smelt a hint of the fragrance.

It was clear that Tian Tian must have liked this newly learned Divine Skill very much; she must practice it often at home for her body to retain the scent of lotus.

"Isn't it pretty?"

Tian Tian carefully placed the Treasure Lotus on the table, revealing a sweet smile on her face.

Lu Ran watched smilingly.

A flower pure and flawless, a girl charming and lovable.

Slowly, Lu Ran turned to gaze out the train window, observing the murky overcast skies.

The world had been thrown into disarray, no longer wonderful.

Fortunately,

In this world, there were still many beautiful people.

Chapter 145: The tall person turns out to be myself

Qiantang River, Anji City.

This is a lush small town that does not even require entry into the Bamboo Sea. When Lu Ran set foot on this land, he already felt exhilarated.

Distant mountains, sea of clouds, and strands of morning sunlight.

Compared to this small county town, the perpetually dark and hazy Rain Alley City seemed like a "Demon Cave".

Hmm... it produced the great demon, Lu Ran.

"Does the school also want us to escape from Rain Alley?"

On the bus, Lu Ran, sitting by the window, heard Chang Ying muttering from the seat behind.

At this moment, everyone was on their way to the Demon Cave-Bamboo Sea, organized by the school teachers.

It turned out that this female savage indeed did not snore.

But she was restless in her sleep. Last night, she even fell to the floor...

Although Lu Ran had deactivated Evil Technique·Evil Recognition and was wearing earplugs, his senses were still superior to ordinary people due to the stimulation and cultivation from Evil Recognition.

That "thud" last night had startled Lu Ran out of his seat.

On the other hand, the fallen Chang Ying continued to sleep soundly.

That scene had Lu Ran looking stupefied.

After hesitating for a long time, he still did not wake her, nor did he carry her back to bed.

After all, Chang Ying had just cast a spell on him. Lu Ran believed that sleeping on the floor was her personal will, and it was not good to contravene that...

Lu Ran never expected that while Chang Ying was sleeping, she suddenly raised a leg and kicked him!

It made Lu Ran burst into laughter.

Was she picturing herself as Cao Cao, killing people in her dreams...

"I met Lord Lantern!" Chang Ying said excitedly, looking out the window.

After a full night's sleep, she was energetic and radiant.

By contrast, Lu Ran was not as spirited.

After all, he had been "killed" by her all night; surviving that was already a testament to his tough life.

"Mind your words and behavior outside, don't embarrass the school!"

At the front of the bus, the teacher continued: "When you meet the Divine later, show your respect solemnly, don't create a ruckus!"

"In our school, we don't seem to have disciples of Lord Lantern, do we?" Chang Ying looked towards Tian Tian next to her.

"Lu Ran's sister is a Lantern Believer." Tian Tian whispered, adding, "His sister is really pretty."

"Eh?" Chang Ying leaned forward, "You have a sister?"

"Yes," Lu Ran said grumpily, "If I sleep with you for two more days, only my sister will be left at home."

"Uh." Chang Ying felt a bit embarrassed.

This morning when she woke up, she was bewildered to find herself, at some unknown time, under Lu Ran's bed.

Chang Ying knew herself well.

She could imagine that last night, she must have tormented him quite a bit...

"Next time sleep on the top bunk?" Chang Ying whispered.

Deng Yutang suddenly spoke: "You are embarrassed to bother your Ran Bao, but you're okay with bothering me?"

Chang Ying declared boldly: "My Ran Bao is so sensitive, his whole body is like a switch, a slight touch and he's awake."

You on the other hand sleep like a log~"

Lu Ran: ?

Deng Yutang: ?

He looked back at the gap in the chair: "No way, I must challenge you to a duel!"

Tian Tian timidly spoke up: "Don't fight, guys..."

"Everyone, get off the bus in order." The teacher loudly instructed, "Worship God first, then go to the side luggage compartment to receive your weapons!"

As they spoke, the bus drove into a bamboo forest.

Indeed, this camp was located in a large bamboo forest, the environment overly splendid.

As Chang Ying had mentioned before, the school really seemed to encourage students to flee Rain Alley City.

At least every moment Lu Ran spent outside, seeing various scenes, was much better than the gloomy, hazy Rain Alley City.

And this event organized by the school, whether or not it was inspired by multiple parties, at least had to be reported to many.

If so, was there a deeper meaning behind this motion?

With the Evil Demons' increasingly brutal invasions, would Da Xia evacuate some small cities, directing people to larger urban centers?

"Get off!" As the vehicle stopped, the teacher commanded.

The students filed out and stood within the elegantly-set military camp, looking up at the high Divine·Lantern.

She resembled a graceful lady walking slowly from ancient times.

The so-called willow-leaf eyebrows, cherry lips, that was probably it.

Her clothes were splendid, her hair ornaments delicate, and her demeanor elegant.

Though she was a Stone Sculpture, the eight-side lantern she held still showed exquisite carvings at its edges.

Third-class God·Lantern!

Lu Ran raised his head, admiring Lord Lantern's grace.

This was just an avatar of Divine Sculpture, while the real Divine Sculpture of Divine·Lantern stood in the provincial capital of Qiantang River, Hang City.

The current distribution pattern of gods in Da Xia had evolved over time.

Over the past forty years, a significant number of strong gods, by overt and covert means, had usurped the territories of weaker gods.

The gods seemed like colleagues, united against common enemies, but clearly there was also competitive tension.

The more people in a certain area, the more comprehensive its development, the easier it attracted strong gods to station themselves.

Rumor has it that when Divine-Lantern first appeared in the 1980s, she was located on an island on the eastern side of Qiantang River province.

Back then, the divine being residing in Hang City was not her...

And now, Divine-Lantern avatars were spread all across Qiantang River.

The only issue was, having such a strong god like Lantern guarding the Demon Cave-Bamboo Sea was somewhat an overqualified deployment.

"Okay, line up for weapons." The male teacher stood beside the bus, summoning the students who had finished worshiping.

He handed out weapons and continued: "The bamboo spirit clan doesn't produce Demon Crystals.

Your task in this training is to chop down a thousand Evil Bamboos."

Lu Ran took his twin blades and turned to look at Chang Ying.

Chang Ying blinked, "What's up?"

Lu Ran then looked at the large axe in Chang Ying's hands.

Chang Ying: "..."

Perfect for the job, it seemed.

The male teacher continued: "Before chopping the Evil Bamboo, make sure to measure it! Only those with a diameter over 10 centimeters and a height over 10 meters qualify.

If the bamboos you bring back don't meet the criteria, you will be punished."

"Annoying." Chang Ying unhappily rolled her eyes at Lu Ran.

Ever since she joined the squad, her large axe had rarely seen close combat.

Now, he was even asking her to chop bamboo?

The male teacher loudly said: "If you've got your weapons, you can line up now. Soldiers will lead you in."

"Let's go!" Deng Yutang took the lead, already itching to clash with a bamboo spirit.

The group of four set off first, led by a male soldier down the central building's stone staircase.

Lu Ran tilted his head, looking downwards and discovered that the "entrance" of this Demon Cave was different from others.

Below wasn't a Starry Sky Curtain but a clear water curtain.

It looked like a sparkling clear lake, with light mist swirling above it.

Overflowing with Immortal Energy.

The male soldier led the way: "For students above Stream Realm Third Rank, our side does not provide soldiers for escort for free.

If you feel uncertain, you can choose to pay to keep me."

Tian Tian stretched out her small hand, tugging Lu Ran's sleeve: "Shall we?"

"No need," Lu Ran turned back and smiled at Tian Tian, "I think I'm quite strong."

"Right!" Tian Tian also smiled, full-face in agreement.

Chang Ying suddenly said: "Soldier big brother, if we hire you, can you help us chop and drag the bamboos?"

Male soldier: "..."

Lu Ran: "Others come as instructors, not to labor for you."

"Just asking," Chang Ying pouted, "What if big brother is willing to help?"

The soldier ignored Chang Ying, continuing: "After collecting the Evil Bamboo, just deliver it to the nearest Bamboo Village, and it will be recorded for you."

Also, we have received notice that you do not need to participate in the next defense on the fifteenth;

On the night of the next fifteenth, if you wish to reside within the Bamboo Sea, you may register at the Bamboo Village."

Deng Yutang asked: "You don't drive people out on the new moon here? And we can stay inside?"

"Yes, the Bamboo Sea has a resort area, you can stay after reporting to the school."

The soldier continued down the stairs and stepped into the "lake," adding: "At your own expense."

The group entered the clear water curtain one by one, without feeling suffocated, and reappeared high in the air.

"Wow!"

Chang Ying's eyes sparkled as she gazed down at the Demon Cave.

This... this is called a Demon Cave?

This is clearly an Immortal Realm!

Although there was no sun here, the daylight was bright, and the visibility was excellent.

Below, the Bamboo Village was sizable. Rather than being defensive fortifications, it was more like a quaint village.

Looking into the distance, the scattered bamboo forests stretched further into the misty Bamboo Sea, without end.

"So beautiful." Tian Tian rubbed her eyes and looked intently again to confirm it wasn't her illusion.

The environment was not just pleasant; because it was a Demon Cave, the energy was relatively abundant.

Indeed, a great place for a vacation, very nurturing.

"You can go down now," the soldier advised, "Remember, whichever direction you head, do not go beyond the tenth Bamboo Village."

Lu Ran's heart stirred: "Beyond the tenth village, is it a selection area?"

The soldier moved upward: "Not exactly, we just don't want you going too far."

Our control over this Demon Cave is tight; the selection area is deep inside, you can be assured."

"Oh," Lu Ran replied softly.

Everything he encountered here was a revelation for him.

"Moreover!" the soldier cautioned lastly, "There might be bamboo wood cottages deep within the bamboo forest.

Those are not supply points but private places for spiritual practice and rejuvenation.

Without permission, do not intrude!

There are several prominent figures from the Human Clan residing quietly here; don't look for trouble."

"Human Clan's powerful figures?" Chang Ying's eyes shifted, "Now that feels interesting."

Deng Yutang: "What do you feel?"

Chang Ying confidently patted her chest: "It is said, where there's a cliff, there must be a cave; in the cave, there must be manuscripts!"

Deep within this Bamboo Sea, there must naturally be reclusive experts!

Possibly those nearing their life's limit, ready to pass on decades of Divine Power to me..."

"Um," Tian Tian mimicked Sister Ruyi whom she remembered, holding her forehead.

This Chang Ying, truly whimsical.

Probably the enchanting atmosphere of this Bamboo Sea dredged up television drama scenes from the depths of her memory.

Lu Ran looked up at Chang Ying, teasing: "I never noticed, are you the protagonist?"

Chang Ying waved dismissively: "Ah~ I was born a protagonist; I just never found the right place.

Let's go, it's time to seize the opportunity that belongs to me!"

Lu Ran just laughed.

Is it possible that you have already found the right place because you were born in the right place?

Is it possible that I, standing before you, am that grand opportunity meant for you?

Thinking this, Lu Ran's expression turned odd.

Well, well~

Turns out the expert was myself?

Chapter 146: Master Ran Starts Classes

Outside Bamboo Village, at the edge of the bamboo forest.

The four-person squad observed for a moment, then plunged into the dense bamboo forest.

Although the Demon Cave was quiet and peaceful, the presence of the Evil Demon Clan in the forest meant they still had to be cautious.

"Rustle, rustle~"

A breeze blew through, gently swaying the bamboo and causing the leaves to rustle.

"Sigh..."

Lu Ran walked alongside the team, took a deep breath, and slowly exhaled.

While the others were carefully searching for Evil Bamboo Demons, Lu Ran was secretly enjoying himself.

The refreshing fragrance of the bamboo was truly soothing to the soul.

"Isn't it too quiet? Could there be something wrong?" Chang Ying whispered quietly.

In this serene environment, she no longer shouted loudly.

"No." Deng Yutang answered honestly.

"Bamboo Demons look so similar to the actual bamboo," Tian Tian said, "But they're not too powerful, so no need to worry too much."

"That's true," Chang Ying nodded, "If anything, we'll just get hit by a stick~"

Deng Yutang snorted coldly, leading the way, "Anyway, I'm walking in front, right?"

Chang Ying chuckled, holding the Mountain Opening Axe, "I'd actually like to clear the way, but Ran won't let me!"

Suddenly, Lu Ran spoke up, "There's one over there."

"What?" Chang Ying quickly asked, "Where is it?"

She swiftly moved next to Lu Ran, followed the direction he was pointing, and after a moment, her eyes lit up.

Evil Bamboo Demon!

This type of demon was humanoid, tall and thin, made up of clumps of bright green bamboo.

It was dressed in a coat of bamboo leaves and wore a hat woven from bamboo leaves.

Under the hat was a bright green face, and the lower half of its face was masked with woven bamboo strips.

Its eyes were peculiar, emitting a bright green glow that was quite startling.

"Those eyes are quite scary, look tough but so dumb," Chang Ying muttered.

"Shh~" Deng Yutang whistled softly, tapping the nearby bamboo with the Heavenly Star Spear, "Hey!"

Chang Ying raised her hand, waving energetically, "This way, this way!"

"Hmm?" The Bamboo Demon turned its head from a distance in the forest.

Upon seeing humans, its green eyes sparkled even brighter.

"Whew~"

Suddenly, a thin bamboo stick appeared in its bamboo-jointed palm.

Evil Technique·Bamboo Stick!

It then hurled the stick like a javelin, throwing it fiercely.

"Crackle, snap, pop..."

It might have been because the bamboo forest was too dense, or perhaps the Bamboo Demon couldn't aim well.

In any case, the thrown stick was solidly blocked by the bamboo, bouncing off wildly before finally falling to the ground.

"Pfft~" The stick shattered into wisps of green smoke as it hit the ground.

The team: "..."

Do they really need to be this realistic?

Hey, you're supposed to be a demon, why are you being so cute with us?

"Hmm!" The Bamboo Demon grunted loudly and strode forward, summoning another bamboo stick in its hand.

"Clap! Clap! Clap!"

As it advanced, it struck the standing bamboo along the way, producing a crisp sound.

Tian Tian hurriedly said, "This Bamboo Demon must be calling for its companions, the books say this is how the Bamboo Demons communicate!"

Chang Ying nonchalantly said, "Then let it call!

More Bamboo Demons would be good, one isn't enough for us to share."

Tian Tian: "..."

Faced with other demons, the team might have immediately intervened or turned to flee.

At the very least, they would be on high alert.

But faced with the somewhat cute Bamboo Demon...

"Swoosh~ Swoosh~"

The Bamboo Demon got closer, and suddenly smashed its stick downward.

Instantly, two bamboo leaves shot out from the top of the stick, like daggers, flying towards Lu Ran.

Evil Technique·Bamboo Leaf Fly!

While they were likened to flying daggers, the speed and force...

Were truly pitiful to behold.

"Swoosh~ Swoosh~"

Lu Ran picked up the Dawn Blade and swung it in front of him, creating a flourish.

The Black Ice Blade's edge flashed, and the two bamboo leaves were sliced in half, drifting lightly to the ground.

"Tsk tsk~" Chang Ying's eyes sparkled as she sighed lightly.

That little show was too stylish.

She had thought that Lu Ran would easily dodge.

But instead, he stood in place and precisely sliced the slender bamboo leaves.

Especially as Lu Ran, dressed in black, stood amidst the misty bamboo forest.

If he were wearing a bamboo hat, he'd totally look like an ancient swordsman.

"Hmm!" The Bamboo Demon finally burst out of the dense forest, swinging its wooden stick fiercely downward.

Lu Ran immediately raised his blade to block.

But he didn't use the edge, he used the flat of the blade to block.

With a soft "thud," the two, one man and one demon, were locked in a stalemate, weapons pressed against each other.

Such a scene left the team somewhat surprised.

His teammates knew Lu Ran's fighting style well, which was usually to overcome strength with cleverness.

Plus, considering that Lu Ran was rather slim, one would naturally think he was less strong.

But that was not the case!

Regardless of the tall Chang Ying or the burly Deng Yutang, before Lu Ran, they were all "little brothers"...

Only Deng Yutang, invoking the Red Cloth Ancestor, could match Lu Ran's strength when his physical attributes surged.

Lu Ran's Evil Technique·Soul Splitting Power was not for show.

"Hmm!" The Bamboo Demon exerted a lot of force, groaning loudly, determined to push the blade down.

Lu Ran then suddenly took a step forward.

"Thud!"

Lu Ran fiercely kicked the Bamboo Demon, sending it flying back into the bamboo forest.

"Aren't we supposed to exterminate demons?" Tian Tian asked curiously, "It might be weak, but it's still a demon, it can kill."

Lu Ran glanced at the Bamboo Demon, "You misunderstood, I want it to bring more companions here."

He spoke quickly, "We're close to Bamboo Village here, and we can retreat at any moment, no worries at all.

With this kind of advantage, why not use this place as a training ground and treat the Bamboo Demons as sparring partners.

What do you think?"

Deng Yutang raised an eyebrow, "Not kill, but use them as sparring partners?"

Lu Ran nodded, "There's no Demon Crystal in killing Bamboo Demons, might as well refine skills."

While speaking, Lu Ran watched the approaching Bamboo Demon and chose to repeat his tactic.

It only took a move or two before the Bamboo Demon was kicked in the chest, flying back again.

"Hmm!!"

The Bamboo Demon was clearly not happy, its tall, thin body smashed into a clump of bamboo, causing the leaves to rustle.

Lu Ran was truly at a loss.

The Bamboo Demon had just gotten up from the ground and was charging again!

Really stubborn.

Come on, call for help, will you? It's been kicked back twice already and still keeps rushing forward?

"That'll do," Tian Tian decisively nodded, "We've just entered the Demon Cave, we have plenty of energy, perfect for training."

The school chose this Demon Cave as a place for students to relax.

But for Lu Ran, improving strength was a moment not to be wasted!

It'd be great if ten or eight Bamboo Demons surrounded him, forming a "Shaolin Stick Monk Formation" to help with his special training!

"Can't we chop them?" Chang Ying, holding the Mountain Opening Axe, felt it was a bit of a shame.

Lu Ran: "Our task is to chop bamboo, a thousand Evil Bamboos, all for you to chop."

"I don't want that!" Chang Ying quickly stepped forward two steps, standing behind Lu Ran, her axe reaching diagonally upwards.

"Thud!"

The Bamboo Demon's stick didn't hit the blade but was blocked by the axe.

Lu Ran: "..."

He turned his head and looked up at the wild woman close by, "What are you doing?"

Chang Ying giggled, "This silly thing, let me play for a while."

Lu Ran: "You... be careful!"

Lu Ran suddenly embraced Chang Ying's waist and pulled her to the side.

"Zing! Zing!"

Right where they had just been standing, several sharp bamboo spikes suddenly shot up.

Evil Technique-Bamboo Ground Stab!

To be honest, even if they hadn't dodged, it wouldn't have been a big issue.

That so-called "ground stab" lacked force, and the bamboo tips weren't sharp, more like bamboo sticks.

This technique would only turn the bamboo tips into sharp spikes after advancing to the River Grade.

Lu Ran's "excessive" reaction was due to his habit of killing ingrained by the age of fifteen.

Any slight disturbance would put Lu Ran on high alert; otherwise, death could easily ensue.

"Ha ha, finally here!" Deng Yutang immediately faced the challenge.

"Lu Ran." Tian Tian whispered, sounding a bit hesitant.

"Hmm?" Lu Ran, with his fine hearing, heard her clearly.

He let Chang Ying go ahead to face the enemy, embedding his twin blades into the ground, pulling a red cloth from his pocket, "What is it?"

Tian Tian gathered her courage, "Could you... give me some pointers?"

"Pointers?"

"Yes, movement techniques and footwork." Tian Tian held her three-foot long sword, looking up at Lu Ran.

"That's right!" Chang Ying enthusiastically agreed, "You move like an eel, teach us, will you?"

As she spoke, she held the Mountain Opening Axe, the head of the axe pressing against the Bamboo Demon's face, pinning it firmly to a clump of bamboo.

"Hmm! Hmm!" The Bamboo Demon was almost bursting with frustration.

But its bamboo body wasn't strong enough to push away the axe, and Chang Ying instead slammed it deeper into the bamboo clump.

Lu Ran tied the red cloth, making a butterfly knot at the back of his head, "Of course, if I can help you!"

Deng Yutang and Chang Ying's style was more forceful, using long poles and heavy weapons, not quite compatible with Lu Ran's combat methods.

But Tian Tian could still learn something.

Although she always held the central position within the team, protected by defensive techniques.

But on the battlefield, anything could happen, and even if it was just a slight increase in survival probability, any effort was worthwhile.

Lu Ran walked over to Tian Tian, patted her head, "Then I guess I'm taking a disciple?"

Tian Tian paused briefly, whispered softly, "Can I?"

In many people's hearts, including Tian Tian's, Lu Ran had already been "deified."

Lu Ran was indeed very approachable, and they were teammates, seemingly equal.

But Tian Tian had always looked up to Lu Ran in an extremely humble manner.

Especially after these past events on the fifteenth night, Lu Ran's extraordinarily powerful performances heightened his image in Tian Tian's heart even more.

This made Tian Tian feel that Lu Ran was getting farther and farther away from her.

"That's settled then." Lu Ran suddenly raised his blade, pointing to the right front, "Go, Tian Tian!

It's decided, it's you!"

Master Ran's class starts today.

First, recruiting martial arts apprentices, and later, taking personal believers!

I must find an opportunity to snatch Xiao Tiantian from the deity, Sword Lotus...

Chapter 147: You smell good

Seven days later, by the bamboo forest.

Hearing Wind rising, leaves flitting.

Lu Ran cradled his twin swords, seated in the midst of the bamboo path.

Around him, some tens of meters away, three battle groups were in action.

Deng Yutang's cries of war were fierce and aggressive, befitting the name of a Red Scarf Believer.

Chang Ying, shouting continuously with her giant axe, did not fall behind; though merely a habitual gambler, she lived the aspect of West Desolation.

Tian Tian was considerably quieter, wielding her three-foot long sword and striving to dodge and weave through the siege of three bamboo demons.

Her battle group was the one Lu Ran paid most attention to and offered the most guidance.

"Too deep!"

Though his eyes were covered by a red scarf, Lu Ran precisely pinpointed Tian Tian's mistake.

While mentoring his trainees, he was, of course, also striving to improve himself.

Lu Ran even attempted to gather all the information from the three battle groups at once!

"Don't plant your steps too firmly in offense, always think of how to retreat safely."

"Keep back a third of your force in each strike—your retreat is what you make it."

Lu Ran continued to speak, then slightly bowed his head again, his ear tilted to listen.

These concepts had been instilled in him since childhood.

Since Lu Ran had mastered Evil Sense and Evil Sensitivity, his fighting capabilities had been maximized.

Ironically, the person who taught him these concepts...

was dead.

Dead by the banks of Wu Lie River, atop that dilapidated rooftop.

"I'm not talking about you two," Lu Ran spoke again, "you two should be rash when it's called for."

"Of course not! Brother Ran is absolutely right!" Far away, Chang Ying's laughter could be heard.

It was hard to imagine she was engaged in close combat with three bamboo demons.

Truly a scene of jovial slaughter...

Her battle axe had been replaced by a bamboo stick, as if she feared accidentally shattering her sparring partners.

Lu Ran shook his head: "My style doesn't suit you...hm?"

Smelling...

Suddenly, Lu Ran twitched his nose; amidst the scent of bamboo, he caught the spicy aroma of meat.

Someone was behind him.

This was not unusual, as the place was close to Bamboo Village, and it was common for trainees to pass by here.

Lu Ran sidestepped, yielding the path through the bamboo.

Unexpectedly, the spiced meat aroma stopped right beside him, followed by a young man's voice:

"Brother, you smell so good."

"Huh?" Lu Ran was a bit dazed.

"Ah, no!" The young man quickly shook his head, "What I mean is, you are very strong!"

Lu Ran: "..."

The young man's voice was resonant and unique, "I heard you mentoring them?"

Lu Ran didn't respond but turned to face the young man, "You do smell quite nice."

"Duck, spicy and salty," the young man lifted a bamboo basket he carried, "Wanna try?"

"Gulp." Lu Ran's throat bobbed.

It had been a whole seven days living in this Bamboo Village, surviving on bland meals, which truly left one craving more taste.

He wondered what the military of this Demon Cave was thinking.

Most trainees were young; not feeding them well—how could they get enough nutrition?

Lu Ran was almost sick of eating bamboo shoots...

The young man opened the lid of the bamboo basket, taking out a duck wing and passing it over, "Don't mind."

Lu Ran hesitated for a moment before asking, "How much?"

The young man laughed, "Misunderstanding, brother, I'm not selling these."

Lu Ran: "..."

"What's up?" Chang Ying easily defeated three Initial Stage Mist Realm bamboo demons.

It was truly, a punch per child.

She turned and saw a young man in his early twenties standing beside Lu Ran.

His posture was upright, his eyes bright, exuding a courageous aura.

However, such a majestic appearance didn't hold Chang Ying's gaze for long.

Because she saw the duck wing!

"Yay, tasty!" Chang Ying's eyes lit up, and she walked briskly over.

"Sorry, I brought this for my sister," the young man apologized with a smile.

"Ah..." as if struck by lightning, Chang Ying hadn't yet left the bamboo forest, already frozen in place.

Her skin was naturally dark, and now, it looked as if turned to stone.

"Did you just say this was for me?" Lu Ran opened his palm.

"For you to taste," the young man handed over the duck wing.

"Ran darling!" Chang Ying suddenly revived, sounding pitiful, "Keep the leftover bones for me, let me enjoy the flavor, okay?"

"One half each, keep the wing tip for me," Lu Ran shook his hand.

"Hah, Ran darling is the best!" Chang Ying was overjoyed, striding forward, startling the young man into stepping back.

My God!

What in the world was rolling over to him, a big black bear?

The young man stared at Chang Ying for several seconds, then turned back to Lu Ran and remembered his purpose.

Glancing at the red scarf covering Lu Ran's eyes, he asked,

"Brother, are you a North Wind Believer? Can you hear the wind?"

Lu Ran shook his head: "No, I am not a North Wind Believer.

I am a swordsman."

"Damn!" the young man gasped slightly, "Awesome! That's the best answer I've ever heard!"

Lu Ran slightly lifted his head, gesturing to the battle group directly in front of the east.

The young man turned his eyes and naturally saw the valiant Red Scarf Believer: "What happened to him?"

Lu Ran shrugged, "His sister told me."

The young man nodded, full of admiration: "His sister is awesome!"

That's the best answer I've ever heard!"

Lu Ran: "..."

The young man sighed, "My sister has also gone blind."

Sigh...

She does not have your sort of lofty thoughts or good mentality."

Lu Ran opened his mouth, but amidst the young man's sighs, he didn't explain, instead asking, "Divine Technique can't cure it?"

The young man shook his head, "Tried everything, sigh...anyway, shall we spar a bit?"

"Spar?" Lu Ran realized why the young man had approached to start a conversation.

The young man nodded affirmatively, "You must be very strong! By the way, what Believer are you?"

Lu Ran answered, "I am just Stream Realm Fourth Rank."

Whenever strangers suggest "sparring," they are generally above River Realm.

Da Xia had an unwritten rule:

To avoid unnecessary casualties, a benign sparring fight required that both sides possess "Water Flow Armor."

The fight would be deemed over once someone's armor shattered.

"You a Stream Realm? Are you a high school student?" the young man stared, dumbfounded.

"Yes." Lu Ran nodded lightly.

"This..." the young man looked at Chang Ying again, as she ate the duck wing.

Considering Chang Ying's demeanor and size, one might think she was 21 or 22.

"Keep me some." Lu Ran suddenly spoke.

"Oh." Chang Ying took out the wing tip, reluctantly, but still touched it to Lu Ran's lips.

"What Believer are you?" Lu Ran nibbled on the tip, murmurously speaking and taking a breath of cool air, "Sister can eat quite spicy."

"Loves spicy," the young man responded, "I am an East Thunder Believer."

"East Thunder?!" Lu Ran felt a stir in his heart.

Second-class God·East Ting!

Commonly known amongst the folk as East Thunder Spear, one of the Four Directions Martial Heroes.

The statue of Divine-East Thunder could be described in two words—Lv Bu!

Yes, when Lu Ran first saw East Thunder Spear's stone sculpture in a book, those were the two words that popped into his head.

Equally majestic, also wielding a square sky halberd.

What is called a hair crown, which is called a Tang Ni armor...

Aside from not having the Red Hare Horse, Divine-East Thunder lost nothing!

Compared to the Lord of Wen, Divine-East Thunder also had a body wrapped in purple electricity, his tiger-eyes flashing with purple lightning; it was extremely intimidating!

Lu Ran resided in the small Rain Alley City, where the quality of students was also low.

On God Worshipping Day, Lu Ran had not been fortunate enough to witness this awe-inspiring God of War.

"That's too bad," the young man said, visibly disappointed, shaking his head.

The young man was obviously itching for a challenge, seeing a strong individual like Lu Ran and very keen to learn something.

"Still, we could fight," Lu Ran suddenly said.

"Oh?" The young man perked up instantly.

Lu Ran shrugged, "Let's use bamboo sticks as weapons, and stop when a hit is scored?"

"Master." Tian Tian approached, first calling out, then looking curiously at the strange young man.

Seven days ago, Tian Tian had timidly called out "Master" for the first time; by now, she did so smoothly and naturally.

"There's progress." Lu Ran extended his hand, patting Tian Tian's head.

"Mhmm." Tian Tian smiled sweetly, her beautiful eyes curving into crescent moons.

The intense seven days of training had naturally borne some fruits.

Tian Tian's call of "Master" wasn't in vain; Lu Ran had truly imparted all he knew.

He had practiced martial arts since childhood and naturally had some tricks up his sleeve.

Don't think that Lu Ran's fighting capabilities depended solely on Evil Techniques.

It's undeniable that Evil Sense and Evil Sensitivity were what drastically boosted Lu Ran's capabilities.

But the solid foundation laid by his father was the root of Lu Ran's growth and rise as a martial artist.

It was just a pity Tian Tian didn't use a sword.

Otherwise, Lu Ran could have taught her much more.

That said, as a Sword Lotus believer, Tian Tian's position within the team was central, generally engaging in long-range casting, so the expectations for her needed some adjustment.

"That settles it, brother!" the young man spoke up, "You still use a sword, just shatter my Water Flow Armor.

I'll switch to a bamboo stick, and we'll stop at a touch!"

Lu Ran: "Let's both use bamboo sticks, swords and swords are blind, and my habits are hard to change."

The young man: "What habits?"

"Of course, the habit of killing enemies!" Deng Yutang also approached, "Brother Lu's blade never strays far from the vitals!"

East Thunder Believer, I advise you to be careful."

"Good!" The young man grew increasingly excited, his battle spirit soaring, "Then let's begin!"

Lu Ran: "How do we determine the victor?"

The young man paused, looking at Lu Ran, "You still think you can win? I am River Realm Second Rank!"

Lu Ran, however, smiled: "River Realm? They say kill, I just kill."

Young man: ?????

Lu Ran quickly clarified: "I mean the Evil Demon."

The young man stared blankly at Lu Ran.

Was this blind youth...

Really so fierce?

Had it been some other Stream Realm nobody talking so big, the young man might have scoffed, perhaps even scoffed a few more.

But facing Lu Ran, the young man could clearly feel that inward radiance of confidence.

The so-called aura of a strong person, just like this!

"Alright, alright, alright!" The young man nodded repeatedly, "If you lose, just grant me one request."

Upon hearing this, Lu Ran slightly furrowed his brows.

The young man quickly said, "It's a small request, you don't even have to agree, it doesn't matter."

Lu Ran then nodded, "If you lose, then give us four more duck wings."

Upon hearing this, Chang Ying, who was still sucking on bones, immediately lit up!

"Four?" The young man looked at the bamboo basket in his hand.

If he were eating them himself, why not give them all away?

But his sister was still waiting in the little bamboo house...

"Yeah, look at this big glutton here," Lu Ran gestured towards Chang Ying beside him, "She's almost chewed the bones to bits."

"I'll go chop the bamboo sticks!" Chang Ying, delighted, hurried to prepare weapons for both sides.

Soon, two one-meter-long thin bamboo sticks, and one two-meter-thick bamboo stick, were delivered to their hands.

"Tian Tian, guard the basket," Lu Ran instructed.

"Okay," Tian Tian came beside the bamboo basket and squatted down.

The young man's eyes sharpened, gradually entering combat mode: "Brother Lu is very confident, already guarding the spoils?"

Lu Ran shook his head lightly, "I'm afraid while we fight, this big glutton might steal the duck wings."

Chang Ying: "..."

The young man was not bothered by Lu Ran's reply. He seemed transformed, edges sharp, and his presence impressive!

Before combat, as was his habit, he stated his name with his weapon: "Justice, Hao Tian!"

"What?" Lu Ran wasn't quite sure he had heard right.

The young man pondered for a moment, tightened his grip on his long stick, and declared,

"Qiantang River, Hao Tian!"

Lu Ran suddenly understood, his legs slightly bent, using the stick as if it were his sword, held it across his front:

"Wu Lie River, Lu Ran."

Chapter 148: The Trace of Falling Bamboo Leaves

"Hah!"

Hao Tian surged forward, thrusting his staff toward Lu Ran's face.

Lu Ran tilted his head slightly, and the tip of the staff brushed past his ear.

"Good!" Hao Tian's eyes blazed as he shouted.

He was naturally prepared for Lu Ran's signature abilities, but he hadn't expected Lu Ran's control over distance to be so precise!

The bamboo staff had been just one centimeter from Lu Ran's face.

The key was, this blindfolded youth wasn't even a North Wind Believer!

Truly divine!

Right, what kind of believer was he again?

Hmm...never mind, it's not important!

"Again!" Though Hao Tian's mind was racing, his actions didn't slow down in the least.

He immediately swept his staff sideways, aiming for Lu Ran's head.

"Thud!"

Lu Ran blocked the sweeping attack with his left hand holding a thin bamboo stick, his right hand's stick already thrusting toward the enemy's face.

As the saying goes, an eye for an eye!

"Huh?" Hao Tian promptly retreated a step, using the shaft of his staff to deflect Lu Ran's thinner stick.

The two exchanged a flurry of blows, immediately disengaging.

"I didn't see that coming, Brother Lu is quite strong in the arm, huh?" Hao Tian was quite surprised.

As a strong contender from the River Realm, he should naturally overpower Lu Ran in strength.

Hao Tian was also afraid that with one swing of his staff, he might accidentally send Lu Ran flying into the bamboo forest.

So, he subconsciously held back a bit, but he hadn't anticipated that Lu Ran would block so cleanly, even causing his palms to tingle!

"It's mutual," Lu Ran said offhandedly.

"Hmph." Seeing Lu Ran's calm demeanor, Hao Tian felt his temper flare.

After all, weren't they both Heaven's Chosen?

Hao Tian said, "Since that's the case, then I'll just add a bit more force! If Brother Lu can't hold up, make sure to let me know, okay?"

Divine Power surged within Lu Ran's palms, wrapping around the pair of thin bamboo sticks, "You too."

"Take this!" Hao Tian stepped forward swiftly, his long staff poking and jabbing continuously.

Face, chest, left shoulder, right leg.

Lu Ran was forced to keep retreating.

Tilt head, block, side-step, counter-strike.

And it was this counter-strike that caused Hao Tian's face to change.

Lu Ran's speed was simply outrageous!

His thin stick pointed directly at Hao Tian's chest.

"Thud! Thud! Thud!"

Hao Tian stepped back several paces, his face registering shock as he stared at the young man whose eyes were bound with a red cloth.

What...what is this?

Why is this possible?

For a moment, their sparring came to a standstill.

Hao Tian was utterly surprised, "Brother Lu, your speed is also incredible, huh?"

Lu Ran twirled his thin stick, repeating his earlier words indifferently,

"The River Realm, killable with just a word."

"Fine, I won't hold back then!" Hao Tian shouted sharply, raising his staff to advance once more.

A formidable Second-class God-East Ting Believer was certainly not to be trifled with!

Such believers were not only fiercely competitive but also prideful and arrogant!

Even if Hao Tian had a decent disposition, he couldn't avoid being influenced by the divine and act restrained in everyday life; but on the battlefield?

Under the banner of his weapon, all generals bow their heads!

"Take this!" As expected, Hao Tian's assault became three times more fierce, his thick bamboo staff even creaking with the force.

During sparring, both parties wrapped their bamboo sticks with Divine Power.

It's fortunate that they were using "Evil Bamboo" grown in the Demon Cave; had it been ordinary bamboo, their sticks would have shattered long ago.

"Crack!"

The sticks clashed, the sound crisp.

They went on the offense and defense with surges of Divine Power.

The wind and waves caused the bamboo forest to shake, and the leaves to dance—it was stunning to behold.

In a blink of an eye, more than a dozen rounds had passed, and the two fighters were locked in stalemate.

Such a sight enraptured Deng Yutang, who couldn't help but cry out, "Thrilling!"

"Lu Ran! Lu Ran! Lu Ran!" Chang Ying cried out.

As his teammate, it was only right for her to cheer on Lu Ran.

But Lu Ran had every reason to believe that Chang Ying was probably more excited about that basket of duck wings...

"Eh? I just don't buy it!" Hao Tian, unable to gain the upper hand for so long, felt a blow to his pride.

He suddenly backed away, lifting one hand high.

Accompanied by a surge of energy, dark clouds rapidly gathered overhead.

"You guys!" Chang Ying was immediately displeased, "Why are you using Divine Technique now?"

Tian Tian whispered, "That's bullying."

Deng Yutang crossed his arms over his chest, "Looks like you've already lost."

Hao Tian's face stiffened!

Truth be told, he had indeed gotten carried away, fixated on breaching Lu Ran's defenses.

By the time he realized what was happening, dark clouds had already gathered over his head.

For a moment, Hao Tian froze, uncertain of what to do next.

Awkward!

Lu Ran spoke calmly, "It was you who felt my strength and wanted to spar.

Yet now, we've been exchanging blows evenly, and you're the one who's not happy."

Hao Tian stammered, "I...I..."

Lu Ran pursed his lips and smiled, giving Hao Tian a classic expression:

"Duck Wing Bro, you're a bit hard to serve."

Hao Tian's recent surge of arrogance and ferocity instantly deflated.

He looked somewhat embarrassed, "It's not like that, dude!

You can be strong, but you tm can't be this strong!"

An East Thunder believer, of course, could seek out the unique skills of a Stream Realm's underling.

But it had to be from a position of superiority, not one of equals!

These short dozen or so rounds completely overturned Hao Tian's perceptions, creating a huge mental disparity!

After all, he was one of the top ten students on his college campus, the one everyone looked up to.

And now, in this most inferior Demon Cave-Bamboo Sea, some random passerby could fight him to a standstill?

This has got to be some kind of joke!

Could it be that I attended a fake college?

That's not right! I went to Qiantang River University, which requires incredibly high scores...

Lu Ran remained indifferent, unafraid and steadfast, "Since you've summoned the dark clouds already, go ahead."

Hao Tian hesitated for a moment but still called down a bolt of lightning.

"Crack!"

It did not strike his opponent but himself.

"Zizz~Zizz~"

Suddenly, purple electricity crawled over Hao Tian like tiny snakes.

Divine Technique·Thunderstruck Phase!

As the name suggests, when an East Ting believer activates this technique, they can slightly assume some of the grandeur of Divine·Dongting.

This technique, with its unique effects similar to Red Cloth Divine Skill·Red Cloth Soul, significantly boosts Hao Tian's attributes under the aid of the purple current!

"Hmm..."

Lu Ran slightly looked up, listening to everything.

The sound of the wind, churning clouds, descending leaves dancing in the wind.

Each sound entered his ears.

Over the past seven days, Lu Ran had been working hard to enhance his skills.

He kept a secret in his heart, not sharing it with anyone.

He often listened to the sound of falling bamboo leaves.

Trying to trace those confounding descent paths.

Leaf by leaf...

Fluttering to and fro, pausing suddenly in mid-flight.

Swirling with the wind, dancing in ascent and descent.

Lu Ran wanted to understand something from them.

One, for being unpredictable and two, for going with the flow and leveraging the situation.

The presence of a strong enemy in this battle might just be the catalyst he needed.

"This ends here, Brother Lu!" Hao Tian's voice became increasingly firm.

"Don't shout." Lu Ran suddenly interrupted.

"Eh?"

"If you've used Divine Technique·Thunderstruck Phase, then you can't use Divine Technique·Thunderclap next," Lu Ran crouched down, gripping his twin bamboo sticks.

Divine Technique·Thunderclap, a type of battle cry technique.

For an East Thunder believer, a shout can be as startling as a thunderclap, potentially stunning and immobilizing the listener.

It was a technique that countered Lu Ran significantly!

Hao Tian had been quite honorable and had not used this technique until now.

Against "blind" Lu Ran, who had exceptionally keen hearing, if Hao Tian as much as hollered, Lu Ran would be completely overwhelmed!

"Brother Lu, you really underestimate me! It's just a friendly match; would I really use Divine Technique to bully you?" Hao Tian immediately responded.

Upon hearing this, Lu Ran looked up at the dense, lingering dark clouds above Hao Tian's head.

Hao Tian: "..."

Awkward Times 2!

"Pff...haha~" Tian Tian couldn't help but laugh.

However, her smile soon faded, becoming a bit anxious.

Because Hao Tian was charging forward again!

"Take this!" Hao Tian's speed was so fast it was maddening, his hands wielding Evil Bamboo crackling with electricity.

Thankfully, Evil Bamboo material wasn't of high grade and was usually used for household items.

Even as a weapon, it was only suitable for beginners.

Meaning, Hao Tian couldn't infuse more Divine Power into the Evil Bamboo or it would explode.

"Thud!"

The long staff, like a halberd, hit the ground heavily.

Lu Ran shifted aside with ease, landing to the side.

Evil Technique-Evil Agility increased Lu Ran's control over his body, making him ever more nimble.

Evil Technique-Evil Sense allowed Lu Ran to perceive and hear the world in a way unlike any ordinary person.

He could execute many precise and subtle maneuvers.

This was a huge advantage!

Lu Ran genuinely believed he could be as elusive as a fluttering leaf, his movements unpredictable, entangling his opponent!

Entwining until the end...um, to death!

On the battlefield, there's no need to hit and run, rapidly creating distance from the enemy.

The concept of "dancing with the wind" and taking advantage of the flow should be higher-level techniques.

For now, Lu Ran wasn't overreaching.

After all, he didn't even have a suit of flowing water armor.

If Lu Ran got too close to an enemy, he could be injured by the blast of energy they emitted.

If too far, he wouldn't be able to react and ride the waves.

Finding the balance between these two extremes without protective gear was truly difficult.

Therefore, what Lu Ran wanted to mimic and understand was the unpredictable dance of the bamboo leaves.

"Thud!"

Lu Ran landed solidly on his feet.

As soon as Hao Tian's bamboo descended, Lu Ran had already tilted his body and lightly touched the ground first.

"Swoosh~"

Lu Ran sharply raised his thin stick with his left hand, swinging it sideways.

"Hmph!" Hao Tian grunted, raising his thick stick vertically to block the blow.

He then applied force, lifting the bottom of his staff to slash upwards.

As Lu Ran ducked in evasion, his own stick swept at the enemy's thigh.

Hao Tian, still lifting the staff, couldn't block in time and leaped backward.

Lu Ran followed like a shadow, with a stomp of his foot, one hand's stick missing, but the other coming back for another strike!

The posture was clear—he aimed to take down the enemy's thigh.

"Dream on!" Hao Tian, retreating, had already retracted his thick staff, smashing it down toward Lu Ran again.

Lu Ran's tactic suddenly changed!

Tapping the ground with his toes, he was supposed to strike at Hao Tian's right leg, but abruptly darted to Hao Tian's left side instead.

The sudden change of direction startled Hao Tian immensely!

Whether by a flash of insight or premeditated, the poise Lu Ran displayed at that instant...

Was as unpredictable as a leaf twirling down from the sky.

"Zizz~Zizz~"

Hao Tian's body crackled with electricity; Divine Technique abruptly activated.

This was purely muscle memory of the martial artist, seeing Hao Tian burst backward with astonishing speed.

East Thunder Divine Technique·Rapid Light Flash!

When an East Thunder believer uses this technique, they can move at high speeds for a brief moment, dashing into and out of battle.

"Huff!"

Almost simultaneously, mist billowed beneath Lu Ran's feet.

Immortal Sheep Divine Technique·Immortal Hoof!

Lu Ran's figure dashed forward!

Well...he didn't catch up.

The Immortal Hoof was indeed fast, but the rendition Lu Ran used was merely of Stream quality.

That being said, Lu Ran had no reason to be disappointed.

Even if the quality of their Divine Techniques were the same, East Thunder Divine Technique-Rapid Light Flash would be a notch faster than Immortal Hoof!

This was the disparity of Divine Techniques, something believers couldn't compensate for.

"Damn!"

Hao Tian, leaning against a cluster of bamboo, looked astoundingly surprised.

He had been ready to apologize, having made a mistake by subconsciously using Rapid Light Flash.

If Hao Tian had used that technique, there would've been no point in sparring at all.

But he never expected his deployment of Rapid Light Flash would also trigger Lu Ran's Divine Technique!

Those legs shrouded in mist, that drifting Immortal Fog along the way...

What was this?

"Immortal...Immortal Sheep Believer?"

Hao Tian, coming to his senses, wore an expression that was extremely vivid!

I, a grand Second-class God·East Ting Believer, have been fighting up to this point with a lowly Nine-level God·Immortal Sheep Believer?

After a moment of silence, Lu Ran nodded subtly:

"Baa."

Chapter 149: Divine Name Wang Quan

"Immortal Sheep Believer, Immortal Sheep Believer..."

Hao Tian put down the bamboo stick, murmured under his breath, and just stood there.

"What's with him?" Chang Ying was puzzled, looking at Hao Tian, whose eyes were gradually becoming vacant. "We were in the middle of a fight, why did he start daydreaming?"

Deng Yutang chuckled, "Maybe he's questioning his life choices?"

Tian Tian clenched her tiny hands around the bamboo basket handle and whispered, "Master is the best."

"Mm-hmm, Ran is the best," Chang Ying squatted down, her fingers slyly reaching for the edge of the bamboo basket.

"Snap!"

Tian Tian slapped Chang Ying's hand back, looking displeased at the wild woman.

With a hand that big coming over, who wouldn't see it!

"Ran won, we can eat now," Chang Ying, knowing she was in the wrong, softly scrambled for an excuse.

Lu Ran faced Hao Tian's direction and asked, "Not fighting anymore?"

Hao Tian came back to his senses and planted the bamboo stick into the ground firmly. "Not fighting anymore."

East Thunder believers are usually proud and haughty, naturally, they have their pride.

Hao Tian kept breaking the rules, there really was no need to continue the fight.

"Who won, who lost?" Lu Ran inquired.

Hao Tian looked at Lu Ran with a complex expression.

Chang Ying was anxious, her sinful hand hovering over the edge of the bamboo basket, urging, "Just say something!"

"Ah..."

Hao Tian sighed deeply, cupped his fists, and gestured towards Lu Ran from a distance, "I am thoroughly convinced!"

"Yahoo~!" Chang Ying cheered joyfully.

She reached out with her long arm, scooping up the petite Tian Tian along with the bamboo basket filled with delicious duck wings into her embrace.

From afar, Lu Ran's reminder came, "You can only eat one."

Chang Ying stiffened.

In her arms, Tian Tian timidly said, "Master was talking about the duck wings, not me."

Chang Ying: "..."

Continuing towards Hao Tian's direction, Lu Ran smiled, "Looking at Brother Hao's demeanor, it seems like he's not thoroughly convinced?"

"Look?" Hao Tian's gaze intensified as he scrutinized the red scarf in front of Lu Ran's eyes, "I noticed something was off long ago!"

Brother, tell me frankly, does that red scarf of yours have holes?"

Lu Ran simply sent a pursed-lip smile back.

After a long silence, Hao Tian suddenly asked, "Did you pay respects to two gods?"

Lu Ran: "What, looking down on our Immortal Sheep faction?"

Hao Tian leaned against a cluster of bamboo, "There are very few Immortal Sheep Believers in this world, I've only ever seen three from my childhood until now.

Those three people, it's like they were carved out of the same mold.

They are timid, soft..."

Lu Ran spoke softly, "I'm listening."

Hao Tian stuttered, "Soft... tender, friendly, gentle."

Lu Ran calmly asked, "Am I not friendly, not gentle?"

Hao Tian scoffed in his heart.

You've been so fierce, still talking about being 'gentle'?

"Master," Tian Tian holding a spicy duck wing, ran to Lu Ran's side.

"Thank you," Lu Ran smiled gently, as if proving something, "Go back, don't let Chang Ying sneak any."

"Oh, okay."

Meanwhile, Hao Tian also approached, "Brother, I won't comment on your martial arts.

But your strength, your speed, your control over your body, and your ability to discern sounds...

Is it all natural talent?!"

"My sister can really handle spicy," Lu Ran seemed to not hear the question.

He enjoyed his spoils while hissing from the cool sensation.

It's been plain food day in day out, today was a feast.

Hao Tian, his face dark, stood in front of Lu Ran, "Believer, it can be unconventional."

But it can't be heretical!"

Lu Ran: "..."

In a way, Hao Tian was very close to the answer.

Lu Ran naturally belonged to the Divine Sect, being a high disciple of the Divine-Immortal Goat.

However, at the same time, Lu Ran was also in the Evil Sect.

But he was not a disciple of the Evil Sect, he was the Evil Sect Master!

The Evil Sect Master of many!

Hao Tian sighed again, "My sister is quite heretical."

"Oh?" Lu Ran asked, "Is your sister also a believer?"

"More than just a believer," Hao Tian shook his head with a bitter smile, followed by another wave of sighs.

Lu Ran's interest peaked, wondering what exactly Hao Tian's sister worshipped that would make him so troubled.

It couldn't be an Evil God, could it?

Hmm... probably not, since Demon Cave was under the control of the Da Xia military.

If his sister was a disciple of an Evil God, she wouldn't be able to live so comfortably.

Lu Ran suddenly asked, "Your sister is also an Immortal Sheep Believer?"

Hao Tian shook his head repeatedly, his tone slightly relieved, "Nothing of that sort."

Lu Ran tilted his head, confused.

"Not that, Brother Lu," Hao Tian quickly clarified, "What I mean is..."

"Forget it, forget it," Lu Ran waved his hand, "Just take your bamboo basket away, don't tempt us anymore."

"Hey!" Hao Tian hurried to retrieve his basket.

"Let's part ways here," Lu Ran said without turning back, picking up the double bamboo again.

The recent battle had given him some insights.

It was time to advance further and trace the path of the falling bamboo leaves.

"Brother Lu, would you care to visit my small courtyard?" Hao Tian returned to Lu Ran's side, extending an invitation.

"We still have training," Lu Ran tactfully declined.

"Brother Lu, I misspoke earlier... actually, I've been misspeaking the whole time, I apologize," Hao Tian's expression was earnest.

The usually proud and haughty East Thunder believers unexpectedly admitting a mistake?

Since their encounter, Hao Tian hadn't seemed too arrogant.

Only during the recent fight did he slightly reveal his true colors.

"No need," Lu Ran nodded slightly, "How would I not understand how the world views the Immortal Sheep faction?"

Lu Ran believed he had no right to blame others.

Because when he encountered certain believers, he too harbored stereotypes.

Facts had proven time and again, the so-called "prejudices" were indeed not misconceived!

In most cases, what kind of god, that's exactly the kind of believers they attract...

"Brother Lu, come visit my bamboo courtyard," Hao Tian invited again, "My sister has been bullied since childhood due to her eye issues.

This has made her extremely introverted and silent."

Hao Tian paused, his tone sincere, "Brother Lu, your disposition is excellent, I respect and envy that.

I can't imagine what you've been through from childhood, but you've come out strong!

Could you please help me by talking to her?"

Lu Ran: "..."

Great, this is a complete misunderstanding.

Hao Tian went on, "You're similar people, your words, they would certainly be more effective than mine... huh?"

Hao Tian suddenly gasped, his eyes widening.

Because Lu Ran had pulled down the lower edge of his red scarf up to his nose.

His dark eyes silently observed Hao Tian.

"Thump! Thump! Thump!"

Hao Tian clasped his heart as if struck by an unseen spiritual shockwave, retreating three steps.

Before Hao Tian extended his invitation, Lu Ran naturally did not know the thoughts driving him.

Now that the reason had been voiced, Lu Ran looked apologetic:

"I can see."

"You! You..." Hao Tian pointed at Lu Ran, unable to complete his sentence.

He felt his emotions had been greatly deceived!

"And I even gave you duck wings!" Hao Tian was quite annoyed.

Now that Lu Ran was no longer considered blind and no longer shared his sister's pain, Hao Tian saw Lu Ran without any filter.

"I never said I was blind," Lu Ran patiently explained, "I can see."

But to listen to the world's sound, I choose not to look."

Hao Tian stood agape, unable to speak for a long time.

Even though he was furious, he also remembered that Lu Ran had indeed never claimed he was blind.

Everything was due to Lu Ran's appearance, the rest was Hao Tian's own speculation.

Lu Ran smiled apologetically, "I can try to talk to her.

For about 20 days a month, my eyes are closed, so I have a bit of authority on the matter."

Hao Tian: "Twenty days?"

"Each time I practice," Lu Ran pulled up the cloth strip, covering his eyes again.

After a long silence, Hao Tian spoke again, now as sincere as before, "I'd appreciate that, Brother Lu."

It was evident, Hao Tian truly cared for his sister.

Whether this was a desperate measure or not remained uncertain.

"I'll do my best to help you," Lu Ran spoke gravely, feeling somewhat regretful.

After all, he had also enjoyed two spicy duck wings of his.

Hao Tian finally saw the traits of an Immortal Sheep Believer in Lu Ran:

Gentle, friendly, soft-hearted.

"Let's go," Hao Tian, carrying the bamboo basket, headed deeper into the bamboo forest path.

"Are you guys coming?" Lu Ran turned to his teammates.

"I'm coming with Master!"

"Sure, why not? We train here every day and haven't toured around yet."

"Okay," Tian Chang and Deng responded in turn.

Chang Ying strode forward, calling to Hao Tian's retreating figure, "Hao Tian, which god does your sister believe in?"

Hao Tian replied, not too kindly: "I call her sister, you should call her senior."

Chang Ying murmured, "Finally makes sense, definitely an East Thunder believer."

Hao Tian: "..."

Lu Ran took a couple of steps forward, walking beside Hao Tian, "What god is she a believer of?"

"Wang Quan."

"What?" Lu Ran was quite puzzled, not quite sure what the other had said.

With numerous gods in Da Xia, nearly a hundred,

Lu Ran didn't claim to know them backwards, but he recognized each deity.

And he was sure that among those he knew, there was no such deity, so...

Lu Ran asked, "Is this a god from outside Da Xia?"

"No," Hao Tian shook his head, "It's a native god, Lord Wang Quan."

"Huh?"

"What lord?" Those following behind were also confused.

Lu Ran felt a stir in his heart, having guessed something.

At the beginning of the divine descent, there were more than the current 98 gods!

During the extremely chaotic "Year of God and Demon," some gods fell like shooting stars, quickly disappearing from public view.

People used two specific terms to describe these disappeared gods—seclusion.

Whether these gods truly secluded themselves or fell during the battle against the Evil Demon...

Everyone had an idea.

However, as believers of the All Gods, it was impossible to publicly proclaim that a certain god had died.

It seemed then, that the god Hao Tian's sister worshiped hadn't been destroyed by an Evil Demon, but had actually gone into seclusion?

Of course, there was also another possibility:

Since its descent, this god had maintained a hermit-like presence.

The god neither participated in battles nor recruited believers.

Thus, it wasn't listed among the Da Xia deities.

The only problem was, the existence of this god was genuine.

Yet, there was no related information online, nor was it presented in Da Xia textbooks as knowledge...

This was quite intriguing.

Lu Ran inquired, "Brother Hao, what are the two characters for this god's name?"

Hao Tian looked at Lu Ran beside him and said, "Wang Quan.

Forget of Forget River, Quan of Yellow Springs Road."

Chapter 150: Youhuang Crossing

"Are we not there yet?"

In the bamboo forest, Chang Ying couldn't help but ask as she walked.

The group had already passed the seventh Bamboo Village, but they hadn't yet seen the sight of Hao Tian's younger sister's courtyard.

"Just around the bend," Hao Tian quickened his pace.

Soon, the group came upon a fork in the road.

There was a sign that read "Private Residence, No Entry."

"Rustle rustle~"

A sound of bamboo leaves rubbing together echoed from the woods, as if a predator was lurking in the shadows.

Lu Ran frowned slightly and pulled down the red scarf covering his eyes.

He saw the sign and noticed a figure dressed in camouflage in the bamboo forest to the right front.

Military soldiers?

Does Hao Tian's sister's residence actually have soldiers guarding it?

This mysterious Forget Spring Believer...

Must indeed be quite significant.

"Let's go, it's in this forest," Hao Tian turned into a small path in the bamboo forest, heading deeper.

"By the way, what is Brother Hao's sister's name?" Lu Ran asked.

"Li Rouyin," Hao Tian's tone softened a lot when he spoke of his sister, "Gentle as water, grass as lush as a meadow."

Chang Ying curiously asked, "Named Li? Aren't you actual siblings?"

Hao Tian replied, "We are blood siblings, twins actually. She takes our mother's surname."

"Dragon-phoenix twins~" Chang Yun felt a bit envious, "Such good fortune, I want that too someday."

Hao Tian: "..."

In this special world, Da Xia needs population, and the divine need believers, so the government particularly encourages early marriage and childbirth.

People were allowed to marry at the age of 18, and that was just the official decree; in practice, the age might be even lower.

It was quite normal for Chang Ying to say such a thing at 17.

It's just that, Hao Tian felt like he was being taken advantage of?

"Whoa?"

"Wow!" Deng Yutang and Tian Tian looked up simultaneously, their faces showing surprise.

Walking on this bamboo forest path, tall bamboo surrounded them, the view was not very open.

Yet, a huge residence broke through the dense bamboo, coming into everyone's line of sight.

"So grand," Chang Ying muttered under her breath.

Everyone had thought that the sister would be living in a small bamboo hut, at most with a small courtyard.

But this...

This estate was as large as those of wealthy ancient families.

The only difference was that, whether it was the massive buildings or the tall courtyard walls, all were made of bamboo.

Above the main gate hung a huge plaque—Youhuang Crossing.

"Hmm?" Lu Ran's expression became stern.

It wasn't because of the size of the estate, but because he smelled an increasingly strong "Ghost Energy"!

Yes, like that musty, moldy scent found in dark, damp basements.

The closer they got, the stronger the ghost energy became in the air.

Until the group stepped out of the bamboo forest and stood in a relatively open area facing the mansion, Lu Ran's spine turned cold!

This...this?

"Brother Lu?" Hao Tian turned to look, only to find that Lu Ran had already stopped, distancing himself by more than ten meters from the group.

"Master?"

"Lu Ran?" The others also came back to their senses and turned to look at Lu Ran.

Lu Ran hesitated for a moment, then confirmed, "Does your sister live here?"

"Yes," Hao Tian did not understand, "What's wrong?"

What's wrong?

Lu Ran pursed his lips, feeling very uneasy.

To others, this was just a grand mansion.

Hidden among the woods, serene and elegant.

But in Lu Ran's eyes, there were only two words to describe this place—Evil Nest!

Apart from the absence of sky-reaching black qi or swirling dark mists like black satin, what was the difference from an Evil Nest?

Gusts of cold wind!

And an atmosphere heavy with death!

Lu Ran calmed his mind and asked, "Does your sister live here alone?"

Hao Tian nodded, "Rouyin lives alone, but she carries a divine being with her, also residing here."

Lu Ran's heart shuddered!

No wonder the ghost smell is so heavy!

Damn, isn't this case solved?

Lord Wang Quan is actually an Evil God?!

Wait, that's not right.

Lu Ran looked around, and with the help of Evil Technique·Evil Recognition, he easily found the soldiers stationed in the woods.

Demon Cave·Bamboo Sea was under the strict control of Da Xia's authorities.

The deity worshipped by Li Rouyin couldn't possibly be an Evil God, right?

She and her Evil God, how could they live peacefully, they should have been destroyed long ago!

"Brother Lu," Hao Tian seemed to realize something, "As expected, you have sharp senses?"

"What exactly is going on?" Deng Yutang furrowed his brows, returning to Lu Ran's side with the two team members.

Hao Tian stated, "Once you enter the mansion, you'll notice it too. I was planning on explaining it then."

But it seems, Brother Lu, you have already noticed something?"

Lu Ran nodded slightly: "I'm particularly sensitive to the presence of Evil Demons."

"Ah?"

"Evil Demons? Inside the house?" Upon hearing this, everyone became startled.

Their view of the mansion changed.

The previous tranquility now turned into a deathly silence.

"Don't worry, Brother Lu, Lord Wang Quan is not an Evil God," Hao Tian explained, "She's just a bit special."

The soldiers present in the forest became Hao Tian's strongest reassurance: "There are military personnel all around here, Brother Lu can be completely at ease."

"Okay..." Lu Ran pondered for a moment then finally nodded, "Alright."

He was really curious about a mysterious god.

He was also quite sure that there was no statue of Divine-Forget Spring in his God Demon Sculpture Garden.

Given the backing of Da Xia's military, it was indeed possible to investigate further.

Under Hao Tian's guidance, everyone entered the main gate.

Inside the courtyard stood several huge clusters of Evil Bamboo, centered in the courtyard.

On both sides were east and west wing rooms, all doors tightly shut.

Passing the central Evil Bamboo, not far in front of everyone, was an even larger main building, and it was two stories high.

From the outside, the estate was not just this small area; there surely was a backyard too.

"I feel it too, so chilling," Chang Ying muttered softly, her arms breaking out in goosebumps.

"Mmm..." Tian Tian quietly reached out and held Chang Ying's arm.

Everyone could smell the Ghost Energy too, just that their noses were not as sensitive as Lu Ran's.

"Rouyin?" Hao Tian stood in front of the tightly shut main building, looking up at the open windows on the second floor.

The courtyard was silent, making Hao Tian's voice seem very abrupt.

"Rouyin?" Hao Tian waited for a moment before calling again, "I finished my training mission from over there, and this time, I've brought you some duck goods."

Finally, a young woman's voice came from the window:

"Leave it at the door."

Her voice was cool and distant, adding a chill to the serene mansion.

Looking at Hao Tian at this moment, where was the arrogance typical of an East Thunder believer?

He ruffled his hair in frustration and spoke again: "I met some outstanding young people on the way and thought you might want to meet them."

A light breeze picked up, with only the rustling of bamboo leaves, and the woman gave no response.

Hao Tian, persistent, said, "You're alone all day, you'll get sick from the boredom.

Every time you leave the house, you have to go through those...hey, talk to your peers."

Finally, from the second-floor window, the woman's faint voice came again: "No meeting, please leave."

People looked at each other.

Gee, colder than the Sword One believers?

Hao Tian was still persistent: "At least let the guests pay their respects to Lord Wang Quan, that's the duty of a believer."

It was clear that this brother was trying hard.

Suddenly, a delicate hand appeared on the windowsill, even the lines on the knuckles were shallow, like a finely crafted art piece.

The only flaw was that this hand seemed overly pale.

Then, a graceful figure stood at the window.

The woman had a strikingly beautiful face, which impressed everyone.

The flaw was the same as her hand, overly pale.

Even sickly pale.

However, it wasn't to the extent of the Evil Demon Yan Paperman's "ghastly white," so it was still considered beautiful.

She frowned slightly, displeased: "Lord Wang Quan dislikes being widely known, you..."

She stopped mid-sentence.

Her gaze was incredibly hollow, yet it fell on Lu Ran and the others.

Strangely enough, her pupils, clearly unfocused, seemed to not see anything.

But everyone felt she was sizing them up.

Lu Ran never expected that one day, he would be unnerved by a pair of lifeless eyes.

"Nice to meet you," Lu Ran broke the eerie atmosphere.

Li Rouyin nodded slightly, her attitude shifting a bit.

Her thin lips slightly parted, and she spoke softly: "Lord Wang Quan dislikes disturbances, have them worship outside the hall."

Hao Tian's face lit up, lifting the bamboo basket: "Sure, I'll take them now!

Come down too, have something to eat, treat yourself."

"Deliver the things upstairs," Li Rouyin stepped back and disappeared from the window.

"No problem!" Hao Tian immediately replied.

From the window, the cool voice came again: "Let the one who was just speaking deliver it."

Suddenly, everyone looked at Lu Ran.

Lu Ran: "..."

Hao Tian, with an awkward expression, quickly walked towards Lu Ran: "Brother, help me out!"

She's been alone too long, her personality might be a bit...um, she rarely wants to eat anything, please help."

Lu Ran whispered, "Is your sister really blind?"

Hao Tian: "What reason would I have to lie to you, I dream of her being trouble-free!"

Lu Ran nodded, took the bamboo basket in his hand.

"Thank you!" Hao Tian patted Lu Ran's shoulder heavily, then quickly walked to the main building's door.

As the door opened, everyone realized this was not just a main building, but a hall, akin to a reception hall.

The room was furnished with various exquisite bamboo furniture.

Further ahead, two more doors opened left and right, leading to a courtyard that was an entirely different world.

The yard was not only lush with bamboo but also had stone-paved paths, even featuring rockeries, ponds, and exotic flowers surrounding it.

"Go up there," Hao Tian pointed to a corner of the hall, "Please, Brother Lu.

If she says anything too much, if she offends in any way, don't hold it against her! After we go out, I'll apologize, any compensation works!

Brother, consider this a favor owed to you! If you need anything in the future, just say the word!"

Tian Tian looked worried, whispering: "There won't be any danger, right?"

Hao Tian was somewhat helpless: "How could there be any danger? The divine being here just has a unique temperament.

This place is under the control of Da Xia, and I'm a legitimate believer student.

Look, this is my student ID from Qiantang River University..."

"Alright," Lu Ran glanced at the pleading brother, took the bamboo basket, and walked towards the bamboo steps.

"Much appreciated, Brother Lu!" Hao Tian spoke very fast, his voice kept low, "You send Buddha to the west, you persuade her to eat more, best if she finishes all the duck wings..."

Lu Ran waved his hand and step by step, ascended to the second floor.

"You have a pair of beautiful eyes." He had not yet reached the second floor when he heard Li Rouyin's faint voice.

Lu Ran: ?

He slowed his steps, hesitating when the woman's cool voice came again:

"I'd really like to pluck them out."

Lu Ran, without a second thought, turned and ran!

Dammit,

Let nm whoever wants to deliver that duck goods, not me.

That was too frightening!

Hearing the "thump thump" sound of footsteps descending the stairs, Hao Tian in the hall was completely baffled!

Seeing Lu Ran's hasty figure, he hurriedly said: "Brother Lu, hey? Where are you going, Brother Lu?"