and so my heart beats wildly

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/17426555).

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and so my heart beats wildly
by lily_winterwood

Summary

“You know, you’re the one to beat this year,” Jiang Cheng offers helpfully, having seen the glare from right next to him. “Hanguang-jun’s been through juniors with the rest of us, he knows all of our tics. You’re an unknown variable, since he’s never competed against you before.”

“Thanks,” says Wei Wuxian drily. “That’s very comforting.”

Or: five nighthunting competitions where Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji were rivals, and one where they weren't.

Notes

Buckle up, kids, this is going to be a long one!

Some bits and pieces of the MDZS lore have been changed or tweaked to fit the story/modern setting, which in turn slots into our world as basically separate small countries.
for each major sect, in place of China itself as a whole. This includes locations of the sects as well, as you may see in some arcs.

Also, any uncanny resemblance to any IRL competitive sport fandoms (figure skating) is, of course, only partially intentional.

See the end of the work for more notes.
Wei Wuxian to Represent Yunmeng Alongside Jiang Wanyin in 48th World Nighthunting Championships at Lotus Pier

by RACHEL WONG

Wei Wuxian, upstart newcomer to the competitive cultivation world with an astounding victory in February’s Yunmeng National Nighthunting Competition, has been selected by the Yunmeng Nighthunting Federation to represent the country alongside his adoptive brother Jiang Wanyin at the 48th World Nighthunting Championships, held this year at Lotus Pier.

Yunmeng, as one of the Big Five nations that contributes the most to the sport of competitive cultivation, has traditionally been allowed to send two entrants. Jiang Wanyin’s place has been earmarked since he aged out of the junior international circuit this year, but speculation about the person selected alongside him can finally be put to rest with Wei’s appointment. Despite the two training closely together at the same arenas, the divergent paths between the two brothers has been cause for many a rumour regarding the state of the Jiang family.

“Those rumours are all unfounded,” said Wei, when asked to comment. “I simply didn’t want to attend the junior international circuit. It’s not my style.”

Certainly, we can all remember the incident during the 45th World Nighthunting Championships in Yiling, where the highly-accurate Burial Mounds segment caused extensive emotional damage to many of the competitors… [MORE]

Wei Wuxian has never seen such a crowd before.

Even one step removed on a TV screen, it seems entirely unreal. The Lotus Pier Stadium is packed full of national flags and colours, fans filling the air with screams and noisemakers. As the camera closes in on the vast sea of Yunmeng supporters, Wei Wuxian can even see banners bearing his name, of all things. He’d rarely seen those, even at Nationals.

“Intimidating, huh?” Jiang Cheng asks from next to him. They’re with the other competitors in the green room, moments before they’re scheduled to ride out in the opening ceremony. Wei Wuxian looks away from the screen and laughs.

“Bigger crowd than Nationals,” he says, in an attempt to downplay his wrenching gut.

“Bigger crowd from juniors, too,” replies Jiang Cheng. “I mean, this is where it matters.”

At that, Wei Wuxian can’t help but snort. “If juniors didn’t matter, then why didn’t your mom ever let me go to Junior Worlds?”

A shadow passes over Jiang Cheng’s face. They both know why — even his scores from the last Nationals can speak for themselves. It’s why the YNF is sponsoring his entry to Worlds this year.
Before it gets too awkward, Wei Wuxian claps his shidi’s shoulder and laughs again. “It’s all right. We finally get to compete against one another for real. Isn’t that what we’ve always wanted?”

Jiang Cheng perks a little at that. “Yeah, prepare to get your ass handed to you,” he boasts, smacking him on the forearm. Wei Wuxian elbows him in return. They probably would’ve devolved into a bout of hits and giggles, except at that moment the doors to the green room swing open again, and a sudden hush falls over the rest of the competitors.

Calm footsteps. White robes. Long dark hair, skilfully braided in white ribbon. Wei Wuxian’s breath comes short as the doors close softly behind the newcomer, who looks up and pierces him immediately with a scrutinising topaz gaze.

This is him, the famous Lan Wangji. Wei Wuxian’s seen the guy’s face on television too many times to count, making concentration into an art form with his focused gaze. And now that gaze is directed at him, evidently assessing whatever weaknesses Wei Wuxian might be presenting while loitering in the green room.

“You know, you’re the one to beat this year,” Jiang Cheng offers helpfully, having seen the glare from right next to him. “Hanguang-jun’s been through juniors with the rest of us; he knows all of our tics. You’re an unknown variable, since he’s never competed against you before.”

“Thanks,” says Wei Wuxian drily. “That’s very comforting.”

“You better give him hell, you hear me?” Jiang Cheng elbows him, as a gong rings for them to head to the stalls where their horses are waiting for them. “He sniped like half of my targets the last year he was in juniors. I want revenge.”

“And you’re going to use me for your revenge?” wonders Wei Wuxian. He casually swings himself onto Lil Apple, the grey stallion he was borrowing for the night. The horse tosses his head irritably, so Wei Wuxian offers him an apple slice he’d pilfered earlier from the refreshments. “A bit low, isn’t it? I don’t have anything against the guy yet, don’t drag me into your little vendetta.”

Jiang Cheng laughs at that. “You speak as if you aren’t already planning to mess with him,” he points out.

At that moment, a gun goes off, startling the horses out into the arena. Wei Wuxian focuses on keeping Lil Apple in line with the rest of the horses as they gallop in a circle around the stadium. Out of the corner of his eye, he can see himself on the screens above the crowd, larger than life.

Representing Yunmeng at his first international nighthunt — please welcome Wei Wuxian!

The crowd goes wild with chants and screams of his name. Wei Wuxian waves to them, catching a couple of the flowers and gifts being thrown into the stadium. As Lil Apple passes under the Jiang family box, he catches a glimpse of Jiang Yanli, Jiang Fengmian, and Madam Yu. Only the former two seem to put any enthusiasm into clapping for him.

He’s not bothered by that. Much. After all, it’s his first time on this side of the family box at an international competition, and Madam Yu can be as much of a sourpuss about it as she likes, but he got here without her. And he’ll win, with or without her applause.

Jiang Cheng is announced next, as Wei Wuxian pulls Lil Apple into position with the other horses. He cheers on his shidi, high-fiving him as soon as he pulls up. Jiang Cheng’s cheeks are flushed from the attention; he’d even cracked Zidian, his signature whip, to deafening roars of approval.

“Tacky,” Wei Wuxian ribs, grinning. “Not everyone gets to have a sword and a special weapon, you
“Not everyone meaning just you, clearly,” says Jiang Cheng. “Hanguang-jun’s got a guqin. And besides,” he adds, looking a little sheepish, “it’s not like we’re allowed to use them in the actual hunt, otherwise someone would try to bring in a gun that shoots spiritual energy or something.”

Wei Wuxian snorts. “That’s a mental image.”

Lan Wangji brings up the rear, just before last year’s champion, Su Minshan. Wei Wuxian has to feel sorry for him — despite being the World Champion, Su Minshan’s already well-upstaged by both himself and the current favourite. As the announcer says Lan Wangji’s name, the stadium breaks out into deafening screams.

“He’s a hit with the ladies, too,” Jiang Cheng remarks, a little waspishly.

“I’m not surprised,” replies Wei Wuxian. “For some reason, women really dig emotionally constipated guys.”

At that, Jiang Cheng rolls his eyes. “Jin Zixuan’s not that bad,” he hedges.

“Jin Zixuan is the definition of ‘bourgeois,’” retorts Wei Wuxian. “If you look it up in the dictionary, all you’re going to get is a picture of his ugly mug. I don’t see what shijie sees in him.”

Jiang Cheng snorts, and then leans over to smack him again. “Shut up, he’s two horses down.”

Wei Wuxian mimes zipping his lips, just as Lan Wangji comes trotting by on his pure white stallion. As he passes them, Wei Wuxian can’t help but notice that Lan Wangji’s eyes narrow as soon as he catches sight of him. He immediately affects an expression of mock solemnity, much to Jiang Cheng’s amusement.

Lan Wangji tosses his nose in his air, almost in perfect tandem with his horse as he trots away. Wei Wuxian nearly falls off his own with laughter.

**fyeahnighthunting**

**So You Want to Watch Competitive Cultivation? A Guide to Nighthunting Competitions**

Competitive Cultivation is worlds away from the practices of old, where cultivators of various sects would travel the world to hunt the supernatural and defend the common folk. Here, in top secret, top-of-the-line special arenas designed to test skill and endurance alike, cultivators face off only against spirits and monsters created and sanctioned by the International Nighthunting Union.

Each type of beast unleashed carries a certain number of points, but the real jackpot is defeating the biggest obstacle in the arena — invariably some immensely deadly monster or some extremely twisted mind game, requiring the cooperation of multiple cultivators to properly conquer it. Each person to successfully aid in dispatching the biggest monster of the hunt is awarded enough points to skyrocket them to victory, or at least within the top five scores of the competition.

Of course, the most-watched nighthunt is the one at the Olympics, but for those who really follow the sport, the World Championships is the one to keep your eye on. Held annually in different countries of the International Nighthunting Union, the World Championships is not only a brilliant display of athletic and cultivational prowess, but also of technological game design and deployment.
The location, layout, and contents of each arena are kept extremely secret, and for good reason — the gamemasters want to make sure everyone is surprised!

**So, Can I Get Tickets to Watch the Competition Live?**

No, because of the secretive nature of the actual competitive arena and the dangerous nature of the competition itself, the only tickets for spectators are for live viewings. However, VIP ticket purchasers at a certain tier have the ability to control one of the drone cameras in the arena to follow their fave during the competition. It’s basically like being there with them!

**Who Should I Be Watching This Year?**

Well, you could always root for the entrants from your country. Each member country of the INU are allowed to send 1 person to Worlds, but the ‘Big 5’ (Gusu, Qishan, Lanling, Qinghe, and Yunmeng) can send 2. If you don’t like the person or people from your country, here are some notables to watch for this upcoming Worlds:

LAN WANGJI — To the Cult, not knowing who Lan Wangji is is like being a human and not knowing who Beyoncé is. He’s the youngest cultivator ever to have won Olympic Gold, at the precious age of 15. He’s won 4 consecutive Junior Worlds and made his senior debut at 15 in his brother Lan Xichen’s last competition. Everyone knows he got robbed at that competition because the gamemasters in Moling are cheating cheaters who cheat and inflated Su Minshan’s score to beat him.

WEI WUXIAN — Dark horse on a grey horse. Never competed in juniors, kept his head down in regionals until last year when he **BASICALLY DANCED OVER THE CORPSES OF HIS COMPETITORS** at Yunmeng Nationals. Complete wildcard, so keep an eye on him.

JIANG WANYIN — Wei Wuxian’s adoptive brother and fellow competitor representing Yunmeng. He’s a solid competitor, having always made it to top 5 during Juniors. This year is also his senior debut, so expect him to be at his most determined. Wields a totally sexy purple whip passed down from his mother, **THE Purple Spider** (she won three consecutive Worlds titles and two Olympic golds before retiring to coach, and is basically a Head Bitch in Charge).

NIE HUAISANG — It’s not necessarily that you have to watch for his **performance**, because it’s kinda boring at best, but it’s a thing in the Cult to try and **find** him every competition because he’s a fucking cryptid sniper. It’s like Where’s Waldo, but 300x harder. Even in the desert. Yeah we don’t know how his camo uniform managed to blend into sand, but we guess he’s just that good.

#48wnc #compcult #lan wangji #wei wuxian #jiang wanyin #nie huaisang #mod post

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There are a couple days of warm ups and practice before the competition itself, which Wei Wuxian spends the majority of at the training grounds working with his weapons. The Cultivators’ Pavilion boasts numerous fencing pistes and archery ranges, all with the ability to change the room layout to account for rougher terrain.

“You know half of the competition is survival, right?” asks Jiang Cheng, as Wei Wuxian takes a break from his sword, letting Suibian return to its scabbard as he fetches his water bottle. “Fat lot of help your sword will be if you get stranded without water and time out due to dehydration.”

“This is Yunmeng, not the desert,” Wei Wuxian points out, rolling his eyes. “Chances are, there’ll be plenty of water sources. And pheasants!”
“I wouldn’t be surprised if your kill total ends up being entirely pheasants,” mutters Jiang Cheng, as Wei Wuxian chugs the rest of his bottle. “I can see the headlines now: Wei Wuxian Wins Worlds With Only Pheasant Kills. The look on Lan Wangji’s face alone would make that worth it.”

“The look on his face?” echoes Wei Wuxian, snickering. “You mean like this?” He immediately adopts a poker face, causing Jiang Cheng to burst into laughter.

“Yes, exactly that one. The neutral face of displeasure.” His laughter peters off quickly, though, as his eyes widen at something over Wei Wuxian’s shoulder. Wei Wuxian turns, just to come face-to-face with Lan Wangji himself. The other cultivator’s hair has been carefully wrapped and pinned in braids, and his white training outfit somehow doesn’t seem to bear a single stain despite the exertion-induced sweat glistening at his brow.

Had he been a lesser man, Wei Wuxian would probably have even called the entire look ‘hot’. As it is, he just smiles and waves, while Jiang Cheng disguises his sudden laughter as a terrible coughing fit.

“Hey, Lan Wangji,” says Wei Wuxian, ever unrepentant. “Want to fence with us?”


“Tedious?” echoes Wei Wuxian, loping up to him and trying to get back into his line of sight. But no matter how he moves, Lan Wangji keeps on turning his head. “What’s so tedious about a little sparring? The competition’s tomorrow; it makes sense to practice a little.”

Lan Wangji seems to consider it for a moment. The sword gleaming bright at his side twitches a little, almost as if its master was indeed tempted to take Wei Wuxian up on the offer. But at that moment, an announcement comes over the speakers, asking the competitors to gather for the presentation of the arena map. Chuckling, Wei Wuxian claps Lan Wangji on the shoulder and strides towards the presentation room.

“Bad timing, huh? Another time! I’ll make sure not to go easy on you.”

He doesn’t see the faintest hint of a blush at the bottom of Lan Wangji’s earlobe as he walks away.

“Why is Lan Wangji late?” wonders Jin Zixuan as the white form of Lan Wangji shows up in the projection room five minutes into the presentation. All heads turn to watch him walk down to an empty seat at the front, his expression unreadable despite the cloud of embarrassment that seems to cling around his frame.

“Probably reining in his urge to murder Xianxian here,” replies Jiang Cheng, rolling his eyes.

Everyone’s heads now turn towards Wei Wuxian, who promptly shakes his head. “Wasn’t me, I swear,” he insists.

“You really shouldn’t paint a target on your back like that,” remarks Nie Huaisang. Wei Wuxian opens his mouth to retort, but is interrupted by the gamemaster clearing his throat.

“Can we please return to the map, competitors? Unless you would like to go in completely blind?”

That gets everyone’s attention. Satisfied, the gamemaster plucks something from above the projection table, and suddenly a 3D projection of the arena appears on the table, showing numerous hills and mountainsides, as well as a large lake in the centre. A golden star hovers above the centre, marking the location of the largest monster to defeat.
As always, the competition will conclude upon the defeat of this final creature, or the time-out of every competitor, whichever comes first,” says the gamemaster. “Special weapons are forbidden. Every competitor will have a sanctioned qiankun bag with basic survival tools and a medikit, a bow and quiver with twelve arrows, basic banishment and light talismans, and their sword. All other items must be approved by the gamemasters prior to being brought into the arena. Softswords are against regulation and will be confiscated.”

Wei Wuxian raises his hand. “What types of cultivation are allowed in the competition?”

The gamemaster raises an eyebrow. “Standard cultivation moves, with weapons or with spiritual energy, are permissible. As special weapons are banned, their accompanying cultivation moves are also banned.”

“What if, say, Hanguang-jun snuck in his guqin strings? Could he get those approved, even if he doesn’t bring the guqin itself?”

That earns him a dirty glance from Lan Wangji in the front, as if he’s offended by the mere concept of Wei Wuxian doubting his commitment to playing fair. Wei Wuxian sticks his tongue out in reply.

The gamemaster scowls. “Competitor Lan understands the rules very clearly. His guqin strings are not permitted in this competition, and he would be disqualified if he tried to bring them in.”

Wei Wuxian nods. “Okay, sure, maybe that was a bad example. How about if a competitor has been able to harness the energy used to create these creatures, and could, I dunno, improvise a method of controlling them through items in the arena?”

“I’m not quite sure if I follow, Competitor Wei,” replies the gamemaster, his frown deepening. “Are you implying someone could be able to control the command center outside the command center?”

“Energy is energy, right?” asks Wei Wuxian, shrugging. “If electricity and code is all it takes to create these creatures in the arena, then someone with the proper cultivation know-how could hypothetically be able to harness it. What would you do then?”

Next to him, Jiang Cheng is mouthing something that sounds like a prayer. Indeed, the gamemaster’s brows have knit so heavily together that he almost looks like he’s sporting a unibrow. The entire room is silent for a long while, before the game master sighs, rubs his temples, and shakes his head.

“Competitor Wei, there are safeguards in place to prevent unscrupulous competitors from manipulating the competition for this reason,” he says drily. “If anyone is caught attempting such a feat, they, too, would be disqualified. Now, any questions from anyone who is not Competitor Wei?”

The room, unsurprisingly, is silent.

After the rest of the presentation, Wei Wuxian catches Lan Wangji just before the other cultivator is about to head into one of the empty fencing pistes. “Hey, I think we got off on the wrong foot, Wangji,” he says, grabbing the other cultivator by the shoulder.

Lan Wangji flinches out of his grip. “Do not call me that,” he says.


“Especially not Lan Zhan,” replies Lan Wangji coldly. “We are not close. Do not presume otherwise.”
“No one’s ever close to someone by default,” Wei Wuxian points out, slinging an arm around the other cultivator’s shoulder. Lan Wangji flinches out of his grip again, as if scalded. “Closeness is built from bonding activities, and I can think of no better bonding activity than drinking! Come on, let’s sneak out together. Lotus Pier’s nightclubs are lit!”

“No,” states Lan Wangji.

“Come on, you know you want to. The girls here are the prettiest in the world!”

“Absolutely not.”

“Okay, fine, have it your way.” Wei Wuxian shrugs. “I just can’t imagine what it’s like to live your life with no fun whatsoever, just pursuing gold medals like some nighthunting gold medal robot. Beep boop.” He makes a couple robot moves, despite the obvious dagger-laced glares that Lan Wangji was shooting towards him. “I am Lan Wangji. I am Cultivator Bot.”

For one brief, brilliant moment, Lan Wangji looks as if he’d like to punch him. But almost immediately, he clenches his fist and calmness passes over his features like a wave erasing footprints in the sand. “Pathetic,” he declares simply, taking a step away from Wei Wuxian.

“Oh come on, you have to admit it’s a pretty good likeness,” teases Wei Wuxian.

“This is evidently a tactic to unnerve your opposition with ceaseless inanity,” replies Lan Wangji flatly. “I have chosen not to rise to your bait.”

“See, that sounds exactly like something Cultivator Bot would say!” Wei Wuxian claps him on the shoulder again. Lan Wangji flinches again. He moves towards the door of the practice room, but Wei Wuxian quickly beats him to it, blocking the handle from his grip. “Spar with me, Lan Wangji.”

Lan Wangji looks at him for a long moment, topaz gaze scrutinising and unyielding. After a moment, he hums, before promptly turning on his tail and striding away. Wei Wuxian watches him go, a strange mix of satisfaction and sadness mingling inside him.

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Natira Tucker (andalorablecreature) wrote in nighthunt_fc:

**48TH WORLD NIGHTHUNTING CHAMPIONSHIPS WATCH PARTY**

It’s the most wonderful time of the year! This year’s competition is at Lotus Pier in Yunmeng. liz_wangji has splurged for access to one of the VIP drones, and will be streaming the feed on Rabbit:

Link to the stream: rabb.it/everythingandanything
Password to access the stream will be dropped when it opens at 6PM Yunmeng Standard Time.

Rules:

1. We’re here to support everyone. No name-calling or insults.
2. Wank will get you banned from the rest of the nights, no exceptions.
3. Have fun!

**tagged with:** watch party, livestream, competitive cultivation, compcult, 48wnc
The morning of the competition dawns cold and grey, with the hallways of the Competitors’ Pavilion eerily quiet. Even Wei Wuxian, who had never really considered himself spiritual, finds himself wondering where he could potentially direct a prayer or thought to for some good luck in the coming hunt.

Jiang Yanli comes to visit them in the early afternoon to help them suit up. Other competitors’ families are there too; when Wei Wuxian makes his way to the Pavilion’s dining hall to fetch some cutlery and napkins, he sees Lan Wangji meeting with a tall man with cropped dark hair who could only be his older brother, retired nighthunting champion Lan Xichen. The older Lan is resplendent in gamemaster robes, while Lan Wangji has already gotten dressed in his blue-and-white arena uniform. Trust the Gusu competitors to remain on aesthetic, even in situations where white could be a dead giveaway in an inhospitable environment.

His shijie is already pouring out two bowls of lotus and rib soup when he gets back, the delicious smell permeating even the hall outside their room. “Eat,” she instructs as soon as he sits at the table in their room, across from Jiang Cheng, who’s already halfway into his uniform.

“I should probably change,” Wei Wuxian says, nodding towards the red-and-black uniform laid out on his bed.

“Eat first,” insists Jiang Yanli, her tone clearly leaving no room for argument. Wei Wuxian complies, then, spooning mouthfuls of soup into his mouth.

“You’re a lifesaver, sis,” he says. “The cafeteria food was okay, but it held no candle to your cooking.”

“It was fine,” agrees Jiang Cheng, tucking into his own bowl.

“Thank you.” Jiang Yanli’s voice sounds wavery, and Wei Wuxian frowns as he looks up to see her wiping at her eyes. “Oh, it’s nothing,” she says, catching sight of his look. “I’m just happy to see you two finally able to compete together.”

“No thanks to mom,” mutters Jiang Cheng.

“She was always worried about A-Ying showing you up,” agrees Jiang Yanli. “But you two have trained for so long, and either of you winning would do Yunmeng credit. I’m proud of both of you.”
“What’s the odds this year?” asks Wei Wuxian. Jiang Cheng rolls his eyes.

“I’m just asking,” Wei Wuxian points out innocently. Jiang Yanli chuckles.

“Well, the favourite is still Lan Wangji,” she says. “But a lot of people are betting for you both, as well. A little more for A-Ying, though, since he’s completely new to the international circuit.”

“It hasn’t seemed that different from Nationals, though,” Wei Wuxian points out. “Maybe a bigger arena and audience, but still.”

“The monsters are harder,” Jiang Cheng replies immediately. “And it’s not the case this year for us, but competitions held in other countries tend to disfavour foreign competitors in more ways than just different terrains and climate. I mean, just look at what happened to Lan Wangji his first year in seniors.”

“Oh, god, the inflation argument again.” Jiang Yanli rolls her eyes. “You do know the point system is fixed by the INU, right?”

“Sure, but Su She’s a mediocre cultivator at best,” Jiang Cheng retorts. “There’s no way he could’ve ever beat Lan Wangji without some help behind the scenes.”

“Su She won in Meishan, too,” Jiang Yanli shakes her head. “And since mom was a gamemaster for the Meishan competition, would you say she helped him win there?”

That shuts Jiang Cheng up. Wei Wuxian puts down his now-empty bowl with a satisfied sigh.

“Well, I wouldn’t want anyone trying to inflate my points just because the competition’s on home turf,” he declares, walking to the bed to grab his uniform. “I’m going to change in the bathroom.”

“We’ll be waiting,” says Jiang Yanli, smiling. “I’ll walk you two to the green room.”

At precisely four-thirty, a trailer pulls up to the green room, and the competitors silently file inside. There are no windows, to prevent people from trying to deduce their location, and everyone sits facing one another in two silent rows, fiddling with their weapons and qiankun bags.

The ride is extremely long and extremely bumpy. Wei Wuxian can’t help but look over at Lan Wangji whenever the trailer hits a bumpy stretch, as if hoping to catch the other cultivator in a moment of disarray. However, that never seems to be the case — Lan Wangji’s expression is more tranquil than a moonlit lake and his long plait never falls out of place, while with every other bump Wei Wuxian can feel his own much-shorter hair getting messier and messier.

“I feel like I’m going to be carsick,” mutters Nie Huaisang from next to Wei Wuxian. Wordlessly, another competitor hands him a paper bag from under their seat.

After what feels like an eternity, the trailer finally stops and pulls up somewhere, backing into something that locks into place with a loud whirr of machinery. Moments later, the doors swing open, and everyone stumbles out in one confused group into what looks like a loading dock.

The gamemaster from yesterday shows up again. “Are we ready?” he asks. Wei Wuxian can see in the back the other gamemasters — Lan Xichen notable among them. There are nods and murmurs of assent, so the gamemaster claps his hands, and the sound of klaxons begin to blare.
One minute until deployment, a voice announces. Screens light up all around them, showing cheering crowds all over the world as they gather for live viewings of the competition. Wei Wuxian’s heart begins to stutter with nerves at last, as the reality of the situation finally sinks in.

He’s about to compete in front of the entire world, for the very first time. The world is so much bigger than just Yunmeng, though for the past fifteen of his sixteen years of life he’d been content with thinking otherwise.

Thirty seconds until deployment. Wei Wuxian feels a hand on shoulder. He looks, and Jiang Cheng is smiling bracingly at him. He nods, patting his shidi’s hand.

Ten seconds.

Nine.

Eight.

Seven.

Six.

Five.

Four.

Three.

Two.

At one, the ground below their feet begins to move. People stumble; even Lan Wangji has to grab onto the nearest railing to steady himself as the platform rises upwards, and the roof above them slowly rolls back to let in the golden twilight. The sound of screaming spectators gets louder, even as they move farther from the screens.

Then, with a final crunch, the platform sets them at the top of a stony ridge, looking below into a valley with an ominously dark, smooth lake.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter title is taken from "Imperative" by Bii and Andrew Tan.

Competitive Cultivation: I like to think of this as a modern version of the hunt on Phoenix Mountain/Discussion Conference Archery Competition. The arenas are visually similar to the arenas in the Hunger Games: large, immersive, filled with creatures and dangers crafted by people working tech behind the scenes. The competitors are wearing their clan colours, but slimmed down into modern athletics wear.

LWJ's plait + notes on hair: Since this is modern there's going to be more variation in hair length. The reason why LWJ's hair has been kept long will be discussed later, and he braids it in competition so that it's not an impediment. WWX on the other hand has chin-length hair, usually tied back. It's a bit difficult for me to find a place in this first
chapter to mention his appearance, though, so this will be mentioned again later!

As for the rest of the crew they generally have short-to-mid length hair. LXC has short hair too, which ties in to LWJ's thing, so... you'll find out later.
It’s barely been an hour into the competition and Wei Wuxian has been covered in mud, cut from brambles, and rained on during a freak rain shower clearly arranged by the gamemasters. He’d almost fallen off the cliff where they’d first appeared, too, except he’d managed to maneuver Suibian underneath himself just in time.

The terrain is definitely harder than Nationals’. The gamemasters have truly outdone themselves, recreating the Yunmeng wilderness down to every last possible travel inconvenience. Some of the them were even *amplified* — Wei Wuxian’s certain he’s never had to deal with so many bugs in the *real* Yunmeng wilderness, and yet here he is, fighting off mosquitoes and flies by the dozen.

What’s more infuriating, though, is that somehow Lan Wangji has managed to remain as pristine as if he’d flounced off of the catwalk in Caiyi or something. Wei Wuxian has half a mind to push him into the nearest mud puddle, just to even the playing field a little.

“If you keep on making so much noise, every creature in a 50-kilometer radius will come for us,” mutters Lan Wangji.

“How the hell is that possible?” asks Wei Wuxian, more than a little sullen. “And besides, why am I stuck with you?”

“You could walk in another direction,” replies Lan Wangji.

“I was going in this direction. You switch.”

There’s a pause. They’re still on the mountain path. Other cultivators have flown off on their swords in search of whatever quarry is waiting for them. Lan Wangji’s sword flies from its scabbard,
hovering a couple inches above the ground as if expecting him to climb on. But he doesn’t, for a while.

“Are you going straight for the lake?” he asks. Wei Wuxian scoffs.

“Why would I tell you?” he asks.

“It is inadvisable to seek the largest creature right now. It will not show itself until the majority of competitors still in the running pass a certain score threshold. This is a precaution to ensure that everyone who faces the final monster has the requisite skills to banish it.”

“You don’t need to Lan-splain it to me,” retorts Wei Wuxian. “I won Yunmeng Nationals. I know how nighthunting works.”

Lan Wangji’s eyebrow arches, and he steps onto his sword. “I merely assumed you would appreciate a little assistance, as a newcomer to the international competition. Forgive me if I have overstepped.”

Wei Wuxian bites off the retort he’d have liked to give, instead settling for a sullen “It’s fine” before hopping onto his own sword. “I merely assumed you would appreciate a little assistance, as a newcomer to the international competition. Forgive me if I have overstepped.”

Wei Wuxian bites off the retort he’d have liked to give, instead settling for a sullen “It’s fine” before hopping onto his own sword. Suibian brings him down the cliffside, into the valley. Already sounds of conflict are happening in the trees, bolts of bright spiritual energy flying through the cracks and dissipating into the early evening air.

The first creature he encounters is a low-level corpse, which is easily dispatched. The next couple are also corpses of increasing fierceness, but before he could banish the third one, another arrow whizzes out of nowhere, catching the corpse between the eyes. It slumps to his feet before him, and in the dark Wei Wuxian can barely make out the outline of Nie Huaisang disappearing into the shadows of the nearby trees.

With a hastily bitten-down curse, Wei Wuxian draws Suibian again and heads in the same direction. He barely has to walk a couple paces before he hears the low groans of corpses again.

“You’d think there’d been an ancient battlefield here with this number of corpses lying around,” he mutters, as he hears Nie Huaisang’s bowstring sing through the darkness. Just before Nie Huaisang can aim for the last one, though, Wei Wuxian shoots it down for him.

“I probably deserved that,” the other cultivator’s voice warbles through the darkness. Chuckling to himself, Wei Wuxian tiptoes away into the brush, ears perking at the sound of pheasants rustling through in the grass.

Despite having eaten his shijie’s cooking just a couple hours ago, Wei Wuxian sets up a makeshift spit for the brace of pheasants he catches for the night anyway. The little fire he’s managed to spark with a talisman and a pile of gathered twigs and branches burns bright enough to roast the birds, though as he turns them on the spit, he can’t help but feel like someone’s watching him from the shadows.

Drawing Suibian again, he calls, “Whoever you are, show yourself!”

There’s a pause, and then Jiang Cheng steps out from the shadows with his hands up, his cheek smeared with blood and his hair mussed with a couple twigs and leaves. “You’re really cooking pheasants without me?” he demands.

“Well, they didn’t vanish like everything else I’ve killed tonight, so I’m guessing they really are pheasants,” replies Wei Wuxian drily. “How many have you killed?”
“Pheasants? None.”

“No, I mean creatures. Corpses, ghosts, whatever.”

“Couple low-level corpses,” replies Jiang Cheng, shrugging. “Not a lot of points in those guys. You?”

“Same.” Wei Wuxian turns the bird slowly on the spit. “I’ll split a little with you?”

“Sure.” Jiang Cheng moves to sit on a particularly large tree root, watching Wei Wuxian cook. “You know, when we get the scores needed to fight the monster in the lake, we’ll probably still need help to defeat it properly.”

“I thought the minimum for the largest monster was two people,” Wei Wuxian remarks.

“That’s what I mean. If we’re both still around to face the monster together, can we?”

Wei Wuxian pretends to consider the issue for a moment, before nodding. Jiang Cheng almost slumps in relief, though he disguises it by complaining about the pheasant taking forever to cook.

It’s a relatively quiet night so far, as the two of them prepare to settle by the fire for the rest of the night. Even the hunting activity elsewhere in the arena has quieted; they’re not the only competitors getting ready to sleep.

The calmness doesn’t last long.

liz_wangji: oh fuck
postingpebbles: i NEED TO KNOW IF MY FAVES ARE OK
ReaYu36: aaaaaAAAAAAAAAAA
picklddd: HOLY SHIT WHAT HAPPENED
costellations: THERE’S WOLVES!!!
iceglossandsun: 😈😈😈
liz_wangji: anyone on the ground just got attacked by them
MalLeaf100: omg that’s like basically everyone
weiyingloveclub: shit shit shit look at wwx he’s so terrified 😓
jiang_wayne: jiang cheng is Too Pure for This World, we stan a loving brother

The howling of the wolves rends the night into pandemonium. Flares erupt into the sky, signalling that some people, defeated by the wolves, had timed out of the competition.

Wei Wuxian himself has not, though he admittedly came very close to it when he scrambled up into the trees with wolves snapping at his ankles. Down on the ground, Jiang Cheng is holding his own fighting off the wolves, though Wei Wuxian knows he can’t keep that up for long.

Whistling for Suibian, Wei Wuxian quickly sends the sword down to try and help his shidi, but that too attracts the attention of some of the wolves, who start to pounce at the tree, causing it to sway and creak under their weight. His concentration broken, Wei Wuxian can only watch as his sword drops uselessly to the ground as he clings to the tree for dear life.

“Wei Ying!” screams Jiang Cheng from below. “I can’t fend them off forever!”

“Get to a tree!” Wei Wuxian hollers. The sound of growling is too loud. The sound of his own
heartbeat is too loud.

“There’s too many of them!”

Wei Wuxian curses. His own tree is scarred with claw marks, and starting to buckle under the attack. With an ominous groan, the tree starts to sway. Wei Wuxian screams.

“Wei Ying!” Jiang Cheng’s voice is alarmed, even though he should be more fearful for his own life. Spying the nearby branches of another tree, Wei Wuxian steels himself, and when the next attack causes the trunk to finally snap and topple, he jumps. In his panicked rush he barely makes it, heart pounding as he watches the wolves overwhelm the toppled tree.

Jiang Cheng makes to rush to the tree as well, but before he can get there, out of the darkness comes the twang of a bowstring, and several wolves are shot down from a figure in the trees. Moments later, they jump down lightly onto the ground, drawing their sword with a fiery golden slash. It’s Jin Zixuan, and Wei Wuxian has never felt so relieved to see his face before.

(He hopes he never will again.)

“Jiang Wanyin!” shouts Jin Zixuan, charging towards the wolves while releasing another slash of spiritual energy. Several wolves go flying back, but the pack leader turns and starts to charge. Without even flinching, Jin Zixuan crouches as the leader pounces and slices open its belly with one clean stroke as it flies over him.

The rest of the pack immediately take that as a sign to disperse. The pack leader, too, vanishes into the ether of the game, and Jin Zixuan stands up, brushing dust off his uniform.

Shakily, Wei Wuxian descends from the tree. Jin Zixuan turns towards him almost incredulously.

“And where in the underworld were you?” he demands.

“He has a fear of dogs,” Jiang Cheng says, shaking his head. Wei Wuxian makes a protesting noise, especially since Jin Zixuan looks like he’s filing that info away for the future. “He did help a little before they started attacking his tree.” He sways suddenly, and Wei Wuxian darts over to steady him, lowering him to the ground.

“You’re bleeding,” he says. Jin Zixuan kneels next to him, taking out his medikit from his bag.

“What are you doing here, anyway?”

“Oh, thank you Jin Zixuan, for saving our sorry asses,” retorts Jin Zixuan. “You think I’m doing this for you? Your sister would kill me if I let you two get timed out this early.”

“She’s still too good for you,” mutters Wei Wuxian, but he takes the medikit anyway, using the antiseptic pad in it to clean the bite marks on Jiang Cheng’s legs.

“He means thanks,” adds Jiang Cheng. Wei Wuxian presses the antiseptic down harder, causing him to hiss.

After Wei Wuxian finishes bandaging his shidi’s legs, he takes out his own medikit and hands it to Jin Zixuan. “Fair trade,” he explains. The Lanling competitor nods, putting the kit into his bag and standing up.

“I’ll see you two around,” he says. “Get off the ground for the rest of the night. Looks like the wolves will attack anyone who tries to camp on the ground.”
We walk towards the ashen remnants of their campfire. “Do you know who’s been timed out?” he asks.

“We can check the score in the morning,” says Jiang Cheng with a scowl. “Come on, call your sword and give me a ride. Those wolves could come back any time.”

stardustandsoulmates asked:

hi, cult newcomer, excited to start. just a quick question: how long do these competitions usually last? the stream i was watching didn’t have a lot going on until the end with the wolves. rip everyone who timed out though

fyeahnighthunting

Hi, and welcome!! We’re excited to have you onboard. This year has been quiet so far, which we hope means there’s going to be a big dramatic finale battle!

To answer your question, though, on average a nighthunting competition lasts 2-3 nights. The longest was the 39th World Championships in Baling, which lasted 7 nights and ended with the successful capture of the Tiger of Cruelty by Lan Xichen and Nie Mingjue. The shortest was the 45th World Championships in Yiling, where all of the competitors timed out within five hours of entering the Burial Mounds. The Junior World Championships that year was only completed because Lan Wangji has an iron core or something.

#asks #stardustandsoulmates #lan xichen #nie mingjue #lan wangji #39wnc #45wnc #compcult

“When are they going to update the score?” demands Jiang Cheng.

Wei Wuxian, who had been blearily watching the first rays of the sun creep over the mountaintops that border the arena, looks back to see his shidi pressing irritably at the monitoring device on his wrist. To Jiang Cheng’s annoyance, every time he presses the button, the holographic projection that pops up keeps buffering.

“Don’t they do it after the sun’s up?” Wei Wuxian asks.

“The sun is going up, isn’t it?” grumbles Jiang Cheng. “I need to know who survived the night, come on…”

“Shh!” Wei Wuxian draws his bow. Jiang Cheng immediately quiets as Wei Wuxian takes aim, his breath silent and steady as he looks down the shaft at a deer that had wandered below their tree. He releases, and the arrow flies true. The deer collapses, shot straight through the eye.

“Nice,” breathes Jiang Cheng. “We can roast that when it’s safe to get down.”

“Won’t be too long,” says Wei Wuxian. “Those wolves are clearly part of the game. Someone probably thought the night was too boring for a first night and wanted to stir stuff up.”

“Well, they got their wish. I think I saw like ten time-out flares last night,” says Jiang Cheng. He hits his monitoring device again. This time, there’s a soft chime, and the scoreboard pops up. “Yes! I’m in third. Wangji and Zixuan are the only ones with more points than me.”

Wei Wuxian perks at that. “Where am I?” he asks.

Jiang Cheng chuckles darkly. “That’s why you had to fight the wolves last night,” he says. “You’re in seventh. Missed your chance at points.”
“Ugh.” Wei Wuxian swings backwards from the tree branch and lands lightly onto the grass. “I’ll make up for it. Dogs are the worst.”

“You take that back, puppers are the best.”

“Did I hear someone deciding he doesn’t want to have breakfast?”


“Sure thing, princess,” replies Wei Wuxian, extending his arms to catch his shidi as he jumps.

goldencheng: you know, i’m actually kinda disappointed at wwx’s performance so far? he hasn’t killed that many creatures yet, and he straight up fled from the wolves instead of fighting them like everyone else. doesn’t he know the gamemasters wouldn’t actually let him die?

jiang_wayne: yeah it is a bit underwhelming for all the hype

painterblue: you guys are fucking assholes. wwx’s cynophobia is like a serious issue for him. there was one interview after nationals (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BJHGMt6yzUE) when one of the other competitors brought their pomeranian on set and he had a panic attack and they had to stop the interview and everything.

bvttes: he could’ve at least used his sword or bow from a distance though?

painterblue: were we watching the same game? THAT’S WHAT HE DID before they started attacking his tree. do you want to know how much pressure you have to apply to fell a tree like that? those wolves aren’t like big dogs. they were created specifically to be vicious monsters.

sink_or_swim: yeah no kidding, i love dogs, i own a shibe, and even i’d be terrified out of my mind of those wolves if they were coming at me irl. you guys are just mean.

“What do you want to do with the prize money, if you win?”

The daylight hours are a generally quiet time in the game, as none of the corpses and spirits liked to come out then. The two of them are now seated in the roots of the tree, working through the last of the venison they’d cooked. It’s a bit flavourless given the lack of seasoning, and Wei Wuxian is already looking forward to his first meal once the competition is over.

Jiang Cheng wipes his mouth with a scrap of cloth, looking down at his bandages with a sigh. “I don’t know, what would you do?” he asks.

“Travel,” says Wei Wuxian immediately. “Transportation talismans are stupid and expensive and don’t even get you exactly where you need to go. Why did the UN put so many restrictions on sword travel anyway?”

“Privacy and airspace laws,” says Jiang Cheng.

Wei Wuxian rolls his eyes. “Who invented the concept of airspace anyway? I’ll kill them.”

“I think they’re already dead,” reasons Jiang Cheng.

“I’ll bring them back and kill them again,” grumbles Wei Wuxian. “Anyway, I want to go around the world and try the spiciest dish in every country. I could even blog about it!”

“Pretty sure someone’s already done that,” Jiang Cheng says.

“Yeah, but they haven’t done it the way I would do it,” replies Wei Wuxian. “I just want to try five-
alarm chili at least once before I die, okay? Let me live my dream.”

Jiang Cheng considers it, before saying, in a strained voice, “I would say you could make it yourself, but I’m pretty sure the attempt would melt our kitchen.”

“Exactly. I wouldn’t do that to shijie’s pots.” Wei Wuxian grins, elbowing him. “Okay, you know what I’d want to do. What about you?”

The shadows are already starting to lengthen. Probably some time compression from the gamemasters, Wei Wuxian figures as he watches the clouds and sun roll by towards the west. A cool breeze blows towards them from the direction of the lake, sending shivers down his spine.

“Maybe study with Lan Qiren at the University of Caiyi,” says Jiang Cheng after a moment. “Cultivation theory, spiritual engineering — you know, your comment about the game during the presentation the other day is actually a contentious concept in cultivation theory?”

“Really? Why has no one bothered to try it, instead of just arguing about it?” Wei Wuxian throws away the remnants of his last bone, before leaping up. “It’s not like it’s necromancy, which actually violates international treaties and stuff.”

“People don’t want to be the first onto the path less trodden,” replies Jiang Cheng, as Wei Wuxian helps him up. He winces, but stays standing. “It’s already sunset? Ugh. How many people are left?”

There’s a rustle in the trees. Wei Wuxian draws his sword. “We won’t be left if we don’t run,” he says, spotting a pair of sightless white eyes in the dark.

“What?” asks Jiang Cheng, just as the fierce corpse bears down on them. Suibian sings as it soars through the air, lodging itself firmly in the corpse’s chest.

“Run!” repeats Wei Wuxian. Jiang Cheng doesn’t need to be told a third time. They race through the woods, their pace matched by the eerie white figures of the fierce corpses following them. Wei Wuxian whistles for Suibian again, striking down two of their pursuers before diving low beside them. He hops on, grabbing Jiang Cheng with him as they rise above the corpses and through the trees.

“Are they running towards the lake?” Jiang Cheng gasps as soon as they break through the forest canopy. Below, through gaps between the leaves, the corpses are indeed rushing towards the large glittering mirror that is the lake. Flares spark on all sides, as people succumb to the corpses.

“There’s boats on the lake!” Wei Wuxian shouts, as they near the end of the trees. Sure enough, down on the lake there are two boats, large enough for only three people each, moored to a small dock. The two of them tumble onto one, and Wei Wuxian straightens up just in time to be barreled back onto the deck by someone else.

“Sorry!” Nie Huaisang blusters, taking out his bow and aiming it warily towards the bank. Wei Wuxian leaps onto the bank, ignoring Jiang Cheng and Nie Huaisang’s shouts of protest, Suibian flashing through the darkness as he joins the fray. He cuts through more and more of the corpses, sets banishment talismans on a couple others. But still, whenever one corpse falls another seems to take its place, bearing down on the remaining cultivators until their boots are wet with...
Then there’s a flash of white, a whirl of energy. Lan Wangji descends onto the dock, his plaited hair in disarray and white uniform smeared with dust, yet still somehow star-like in the early nightfall. He slashes back at the corpses, driving them back with his spiritual energy, before sending talismans flying through the air to subdue the fiercest.

“Onto the boat,” he instructs. Jin Zixuan immediately leaps for the other boat. Su She, the last cultivator onshore, glares at Lan Wangji before diving back into the corpses.

The flare shoots out moments later. Wei Wuxian looks at Lan Wangji, before sprinting onto the boat with Jiang Cheng and Nie Huaisang, untying the vessel as they go. With a firm push from a bamboo punt, they steer their boat out into the vast, unknown lake.

They’re nearing the endgame now. Wei Wuxian can feel the adrenaline coursing through him as he rows. And though the boy stands tall and stern in the boat next to them, Wei Wuxian suspects Lan Wangji is just as excited as he is.

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xuan | lan wangji kinnie @hanyuzuwus
when a mediocre cultivator who cheated to win worlds gets timed out before the endgame:

![It's what she deserves.](image)

#48wnc #compcult

xuan | lan wangji kinnie @hanyuzuwus
listen su she didn’t deserve his victory last year, and in this essay i will

starrynight @jiangstan
pictured above: actual proof the #含光军队 are incapable of refraining from beating dead horses
#48wnc #compcult

xuan | lan wangji kinnie @hanyuzuwus
@jiangstan i will literally fight you. meet me in the pit

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“What are you doing?”

Wei Wuxian looks up from where he’d been amassing a pile of lotus pods. Over in the other boat, Lan Wangji’s expression is impassive bordering on displeased. “Getting food?” he asks innocently, as his hand reaches under another lotus pad to swipe its seedpod. “These things are delicious, I swear. And it’s not like we can go back ashore for food right now.”

Sure enough, fierce corpses seem to line the banks all around them, silently daring anyone to head back to shore. Jin Zixuan shoots down a couple of them, but almost as soon as one vanishes another lurches out to take its place.
“The gamemasters want us on the lake,” says Lan Wangji, watching the corpses vanish before even hitting the water. “We are approaching the endgame now.”


Lan Wangji stares almost incredulously at him, but says nothing. Wei Wuxian returns to examining the seedpod in his hand. Moments later, there’s a thud as the pod hits the deck of the other boat, causing Jin Zixuan to yelp.

“What the fuck!” he shrieks at Wei Wuxian, who sticks his tongue out at him.

“Thank you, Wei Wuxian, for the food,” he retorts. Jin Zixuan grits his teeth, but takes the pod nonetheless, peeling out the seeds from their shells with a grimace. A couple more pods fly over to the other boat, one even landing squarely in Lan Wangji’s hand.

“Thank you,” he says stiffly.

“Benefits of having your competition in Yunmeng,” replies Wei Wuxian cheerily, as he notices some shapes moving in the lake below. “Maybe we could even catch us a carp or two.”

“How would we even cook it on a wooden boat like this?” wonders Nie Huaisang, already halfway through his own pod. Wei Wuxian shrugs.

“I don’t know, it’s just an idea,” he says, idly peeling seeds out of the pod. “Knowing the gamemasters, though, I don’t think we’re going to catch anything in this lake besides —”

He breaks off, because the waters around them have suddenly grown choppy. In the other boat, Lan Wangji is immediately on alert, his sword halfway out of its scabbard.

“Guys… who’s rocking the boat?” asks Nie Huaisang, clutching onto the side of the boat.

“No one’s rocking the boat,” Jiang Cheng snaps, his own sword already out despite his aching leg.

A grotesque green arm suddenly shoots out of the water, and before anyone else can act, it has gripped Nie Huaisang by the wrist, dragging him with alarming strength. The cultivator screams as Wei Wuxian and Jiang Cheng rush to his rescue. The boat teeters dangerously to one side.

Then, before either of them can do anything else, Nie Huaisang presses the timeout button on his monitor, and a flare erupts above his location. The arm tugs him out of their grasp, and they can only watch as their fellow competitor is dragged down into the watery depths below.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter title taken from "We are Young" by Dino Lee.

Lan-splaining: I'm sorry, I had to...

含光军队: Lan Wangji's stans in-universe. It's a pun on his title Hanguang-jun. The 'jun' character (君) in his title means 'of noble character', whereas this one has to do with the army. Therefore, 含光军队 roughly translates to 'light-bringer army', or (as this fic will call them in English) the Light Brigade. (Disclaimer: since I'm not involved in the Chinese interwebs I really do hope this hasn't already been taken to mean something
Necromancy vs. Demonic Cultivation: Because this is a modern AU where there is some foreign influence to the terms, I've made the conscious decision to use Necromancy as an umbrella term that also covers Demonic Cultivation. Pretty sure those international treaties would also specify the same. And before we go into that... no WWX is not going to become an international criminal in this AU, oh god.

The link to the YouTube video should hypothetically work, except the video is... temporarily down RIP. It'll be up again at some point ahaha

Also, if you're interested in having your username show up in future social media instalments, please like/reply to this post on Twitter or drop me a comment here! Note that I get to reserve all judgement on where to put your username and what they say; you can provide me a couple notes on who you'd stan in-universe and whether you'd get into discourse or not, but beyond that I have final say on what your in-universe counterpart says on the internet :D
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The mood onboard the boats is decidedly solemn after that.

“He’s going to be fine,” says Jiang Cheng. “He always does that — get to the final five and then bail out at the last minute. It’s how he keeps expectations low. His brother hates it.”

“Nie Mingjue also has criticised his preference for sniping other people’s targets,” Jin Zixuan points out. “He says it’s cowardly.”

Silence. Wei Wuxian looks up from where he’d been peeling his lotus seeds. “That’s his problem,” he says after a moment. “Competitor Nie could’ve stayed in the game longer.”

“That was his decision,” replies Lan Wangji coldly. Wei Wuxian groans.

“I thought you of all people would disapprove of someone going this far just to bail last minute,” he says. “And what the fuck even was that hand, anyway?”

“A water ghoul, probably,” says Lan Wangji. “I spotted a couple circling us a couple meters back.”

Wei Wuxian arches an eyebrow. “Did you banish them already?”

“They are not attacking us at the moment,” replies Lan Wangji. “I imagine they are either waiting for something, or they have been deterred by something.”

“The endgame,” says Jiang Cheng grimly, unsheathing his sword. “Wherever it is, I’m ready for it.”

“You’re still injured,” Wei Wuxian points out.

“Won’t stop me from throwing you overboard,” retorts Jiang Cheng. Wei Wuxian laughs, but stops when he notices how still Lan Wangji has gotten on their boat. He seems to be staring straight ahead, transfixed.

Wei Wuxian follows his gaze, just as the waters begin to grow choppy again, whitecaps in the shape of hands moving towards the boats at top speed.

“Circle!” hisses Lan Wangji. Jin Zixuan looks startled, but draws his sword nonetheless.

Wei Wuxian recognises the move. Lan Wangji and his brother Lan Xichen had done it together once, in Lan Xichen’s last competition and Lan Wangji’s senior debut. That one had been instantaneous, as if the brothers knew exactly what the other was thinking, and moved to anticipate it. Jin Zixuan, of course, could boast no such knowledge. As it is, the circle of spiritual energy forms, but does not push back the oncoming waves very far.

Within minutes the water is back, and this time Lan Wangji slashes down the whitecapped hands, spraying water everywhere. Wei Wuxian follows his lead, attacking another set of waves as they approach from the other end, Suibian slashing deftly through the water.

“Impressive,” remarks Lan Wangji. He stabs his own into the water, bringing back a couple strands of a dark, cloth-like substance. “What do you think this is?”
“A water ghoul’s clothes,” says Wei Wuxian. Lan Wangji’s eyes narrow. “No, I mean, I have no idea, really. There was something shadowy in the water when I was getting the lotus pods, but I supposed it could’ve been fish or something. But it kept changing its shape, so maybe not?”

Lan Wangji’s hand clenches around the substance. “I’ve seen this before,” he says, “but only in books.” The water around them begins to churn, harder and faster until a whirlpool appears. “It does not make sense.”

“What doesn’t make sense?” asks Wei Wuxian, just as a waterspout bursts out of the lake, heading straight for them.

Lan Wangji jumps onto his sword. “That,” he states baldly, pointing at the oncoming column of water, “is a Waterborne Abyss.”

sash @ praying 4 final 4 @utopiansashimi
me: pls let them fight nessie
gamemasters, smoking weed: what if we had them fight a water tornado #48wnc #compcult

aeryi asked:
WHAT THE FUCK IS GOING ON

fyeahnighthunting
WE DON’T KNOW AND WE’RE JUST AS TERRIFIED AS YOU ARE

#asks #aeryi #48wnc #compcult

The boats are immediately wrecked in the first onslaught, causing all four of them to jump onto their swords. But even in the air there is no respite — the Waterborne Abyss continues to strike at them like the unwieldy tentacles of a giant squid.

“What the hell do we do?” demands Jin Zixuan.

“Duck!” screams Wei Wuxian, and the four of them scatter just as a water tentacle swings their way.

“Waterborne Abysses can be banished,” says Lan Wangji, taking out a talisman from the folds of his uniform. “We can summon it out of the water and banish it.”

“Isn’t that only a temporary fix, though?” demands Wei Wuxian. “I heard banishing Waterborne Abysses only moves it to another location.”

“This is in the context of a game,” Lan Wangji points out. “We can safely assume banishing it here will not bring misfortune to some other lake in Yunmeng. Even as you pointed out,” he adds, a little waspishly, “the monsters in competitive cultivation are mostly electronic energy and code.”

“Just banishing it would’ve been unethical back in the day, and I’m not about to follow that example,” retorts Wei Wuxian. “Even if it’s not real, our actions in handling it are still real. There has to be another fix.”

“The proper way to defeat an Abyss would then be to drain the lake of all water, fish out the boats and corpses within, and let the entire lake bed dry for years,” retorts Lan Wangji. “There is no other way.”
“Then the game is wrong,” says Wei Wuxian. “Either the proper fix takes years to achieve, and we all time out trying to do it, or we take the quick and easy way out and demonstrate to the world that we as cultivators are fine with throwing other communities under the bus? I can’t accept that.”

“You’re overthinking it,” snaps Jiang Cheng. “Let’s just get this sucker banished and go home, alright?”

Even as he says that, another tentacle of water comes lashing out at them. The four of them scatter, but the tentacles divide themselves to chase them down. Even as he dips and soars, winds and loops, Wei Wuxian can see an amorphous black shape chasing him at every turn, unrelenting in its pursuit.

“Talismans!” shouts Lan Wangji, hovering into position far above, bright and cold like a star. Clearly he cares more about the score than the actions he’s taking to get there. Wei Wuxian would have shouted that at him, especially as the golden and purple forms of Jin Zixuan and Jiang Cheng join him in the air, but all of a sudden the black strands take ahold of his ankles, dragging him off of his sword and into the lake below.

The water hits him like an icy punch, burning through his lungs. He struggles, but the tendrils continue to drag him under, into the heart where the ghouls and corpses float like eerie marionettes in the dark.

Wei Wuxian reaches for them, and feels the energy thrumming below, a live wire of information about the game just slightly obscured from his access. But before he can dig any deeper, the monitor on his wristband shoots a flare out of the water, and he knows no more.

**compcult-confessions**

Unpopular opinion but: WWX was completely right when he pointed out that the gamemasters should not have had them fight a Waterborne Abyss. First off, it doesn’t even make sense in the context of Yunmeng, where everyone is so water-savvy they wouldn’t even have enough shipwrecks to create one.

And also, if the point of competitive cultivation is to mimic the practice and traditions of old, then suggesting that the competitors can only temporarily banish this creature to torment someone else is uh not a great look tbh? It’s kinda like the Yiling competition all over again… complete irresponsibility on the part of the gamemakers because all they care about is selling tickets for people to watch kids put themselves in danger like this…

Anyway that’s my $0.02 about this. I’m not bitter about LWJ winning; I just think none of them should have even faced a Waterborne Abyss in the first place.

#compcult #competitive cultivation #48wnc #submission #anonymous

Wei Wuxian wakes to bright lights and starched cotton sheets. With a groan, he pulls himself up, only to be pushed back down by a gentle hand.

“Hey, calm down.” Jiang Yanli’s voice says quietly. “Take it easy; you almost drowned before you got fished out.”

“How did I do?” Wei Wuxian asks, sinking back into the pillows. Jiang Yanli chuckles.

“Fifth,” she says. “Nie Huaisang got more kills than you, but you lasted longer than him, so the scores are close.”
“How did A-Cheng do?”

“Second. He’s a little bummed out by it, but it’s really good for a senior debut, wouldn’t you agree?”

“Yeah.” Wei Wuxian rubs his eyes open, smiling blearily at her. “Thanks, shijie. You got any soup?”

“Of course, what kind of shijie would I be if I didn’t bring something to your sickbed?” She pats his shoulder. “I can’t stay long, though. Dr Wen is coming back and I have to get back to the banquet.”

“What?” demands Wei Wuxian, bolting up in bed. “The banquet’s happening now?”

“Competitor Wei, back in bed,” snaps another voice before Jiang Yanli could say anything else. A tall woman with dark hair pulled into a bun and a fierce scowl comes striding into the room, the gleam of a needle evident in her hand. “I don’t want to have to sedate you, but I can and I will.”

“I’m fine,” protests Wei Wuxian. “Really, I am.” The room spins a little, but he clutches the frame of his bed and smiles brightly at her nonetheless. “See? Just fine.”

Her glare is unyielding, almost like Lan Wangji’s. “Back. To. Bed,” she grinds out. Wei Wuxian quickly complies, especially as the needle flashes threateningly at his forehead.

“When can I get to the banquet?” he asks instead, looking up at her. Dr Wen’s lips thin into a line as she consults his charts.

“I have to do a physical checkup on you first,” she says. “But once I’ve cleared you — and not a moment before — you’ll be free to go.”

Wei Wuxian’s heart feels jittery the entire time. It’s a miracle he passes at all.

Transcript of the press conference held for the winners of the 48th World Nighthunting Championships in Lotus Pier, Yunmeng:

Q: Competitor Lan, how did you recognise the Waterborne Abyss for what it was so quickly?

LWJ: I have read about them extensively in the past. They were well-recorded as a scourge in the waterways around Qishan, requiring the efforts of sixteen cultivators just to banish it elsewhere. These actions were said to have contributed to political tensions between Qishan and Gusu back then.

Q: Then what thoughts do you have about Competitor Wei’s words on the ethics of banishing the Abyss?

LWJ: Within the confines of the arena, banishing the Abyss was the most logical route. However, within the larger context of cultivation as a practice, banishing the Abyss would have indeed been an unethical action to pursue.

Q: Competitor Lan, you have competed against all of the people in this year’s hunt, save one: Competitor Wei. What are your thoughts on him and his style?

LWJ: Competitor Wei has his own distinct way of action that is very different from my own.

Q: Yes, indeed. But what else? Would you want to compete against him again?

LWJ: I believe, given his performance in the rankings this year, we may expect him to be at the World Championships again next year.
After what feels like an eternity, Wei Wuxian is finally released from the infirmary. He collects his gear, heads back to his and Jiang Cheng’s room at the Pavilion, and rushes into his suit for the banquet. After a couple half-hearted attempts at tying his tie, he tosses it back into his overflowing suitcase, throws on his shoes, and rushes through the quiet hallways for the banquet room.

The room is crowded with music and chatter when he arrives, sneaking in behind the crowd to make his way to the refreshments. They’ve got flutes of champagne as well as cups of Emperor’s Smile from Gusu, so Wei Wuxian swipes some of the latter to nurse as he makes his way through the throng.

“Oh, there he is, the prodigal brother,” Jiang Cheng’s voice cuts in to his left. Wei Wuxian turns, raising his cup in a mock toast. Jiang Cheng returns the gesture. “How are you feeling?”

“Better and better,” replies Wei Wuxian, running a finger along the ribbon of his shidi’s silver medal. “I gotta say, silver’s a great look on you.”

Jiang Cheng looks as if he’d like to use Zidian on him, but then tugs him forward by the forearm. “Mom and dad are here,” he says. “And sponsors, so many of them. I’m getting tired; you should cover for me.”

“Oh, but I couldn’t possibly,” says Wei Wuxian cheerily. “I’m not the silver medalist this year, remember?”

“I’ll get you ice cream,” wheedles Jiang Cheng.

“Sold,” replies Wei Wuxian, saluting him.

Jiang Cheng claps him on the back, before tugging at his fringe. “Good. Please comb your hair, you look like a lunatic.”

Wei Wuxian scowls, running a guilty hand through his hair. Jiang Cheng rolls his eyes, producing a hairtie from his pocket.

“I don’t know why I’m the one who still carries these around when I don’t need them,” he grumbles.

Wei Wuxian gratefully takes the hairtie. “Well, it’s obviously because you’re the best shidi in the world,” he replies sweetly.

Jiang Cheng’s cheeks turn pink at that, which he promptly covers by ducking behind his own fringe. “Ugh, stop,” he mutters. “If mom and dad try to find me, I’m indisposed.”

And with that, he vanishes into the crowd. Wei Wuxian spins on his heel, just as Jiang Fengmian spots him and heads over, his eyes twinkling.

“Where’s A-Cheng?” he asks.

“Had to use the little cultivator’s room,” replies Wei Wuxian.

“You did well, too, for your first world championship,” says Jiang Fengmian kindly. “You should be proud.”

“Yeah, top 5 isn’t that bad,” agrees Wei Wuxian. “Doesn’t really get as much sponsor interest, though.”

“You’ve definitely stirred the waters a little with what you said about the Abyss,” continues Jiang
“People are upset that the gamemasters put in a basically unbeatable monster into the competition. The fact that you almost drowned helps, but…” he trails off, shaking his head. “How are you feeling?”

“Pretty well, considering I was in the infirmary an hour ago,” says Wei Wuxian, shrugging.

Jiang Fengmian raises an eyebrow. “What are you doing here, then? You should be resting.”

“I’ll rest later,” says Wei Wuxian. “I just wanted to take advantage of the refreshments table.”

Jiang Fengmian hums in amusement at that. “Well, you should try the crab cakes,” he replies. “They’re truly delicious.”

“Yeah, definitely.” But Wei Wuxian’s attention has already diverted at the glimpse of white in the center of the room. “Excuse me,” he says hastily, bowing to his adoptive father before squeezing his way into the crowd once more. Just before he reaches the center, he downs his Emperor’s Smile and places the cup on a passing tray, before taking a deep breath.

Then, he sees him.

Lan Wangji is seated at his guqin in the center of the room, long robes flowing around his now-unplaited hair. It cascades over his shoulders like a waterfall, gleaming like polished obsidian under the bright spotlights. The sweet melody of the guqin fills the room, weaving its magic even into the spaces of Wei Wuxian’s heart. He watches, entranced, as Lan Wangji’s skillful fingers dance across the strings, almost as if they had a mind of their own.

In this moment, it’s easy to see how easily Lan Wangji could have used this guqin to devastating effect in the arena. Wei Wuxian feels as though he’s being seized by his golden core, drawn ever forward into Lan Wangji’s orbit like a wayward planet to a bright star. Only in the brief pauses between notes does he even remember how to breathe, his heart pounding heavily in his ears as Lan Wangji continues to play.

Surely he could’ve even made the dead dance with such beautiful skill. The world falls away, and Wei Wuxian’s heart goes along with it.

With a graceful flourish, Lan Wangji strums out the last haunting notes of his song before inclining his head to thunderous applause. Wei Wuxian watches as he rises from the guqin, wrapping and storing it carefully before handing it to some wide-eyed, white-clad assistants. They leave the room with it, and Lan Wangji moves as if to follow.

An idea suddenly strikes him, and before he can talk himself down from it, Wei Wuxian yells, “Hey, Lan Zhan!”

Lan Wangji turns at the sound of his voice, his eyes narrowed. He says nothing. Wei Wuxian plasters on the biggest smile he doesn’t feel, before adding:

“Dance with me?”

A hush falls over the room. Everyone turns towards Lan Wangji, who tucks his hands into his sleeves and folds them behind his back.

Wei Wuxian smiles, extending a hand as he walks closer. “Come on, Lan Zhan,” he wheedles. “Just one?”

“No.” It seems a little rushed, almost as if Lan Wangji’s testing the word to make sure of his
commitment to it.

Wei Wuxian pouts. “Why not?” he asks. “We’ve faced down a lot together these past couple days. Let’s be friends.”

“No,” repeats Lan Wangji, more bluntly, and before Wei Wuxian can say anything else, he turns his head and stalks from the room. The doors thudding closed behind him feel like an odd finality.

And when the banquet music starts again, Wei Wuxian is certain he’s not the only one feeling the comparative mediocrity of the sugary pop blaring from the speakers.

100% wwx trash (weiyingfanclub) wrote in nighthunt_fc:

**HELLO, NEW RIVALRY!**

Did anyone else see that banquet livestream from Nie Huaisang? Especially at 1:16:30 when Lan Wangji fucking rejected Wei Wuxian?

What are your thoughts on the WangXian rivalry?

tagged with: wangxian, lan wangji, wei wuxian, competitive cultivation, compcult, 48wnc

2410 Comments

**aeryi**

Is it really even a rivalry yet? They’ve only competed against each other once.

**spiderela**

Okay but considering all the other times they’ve interacted during the competition they were basically arguing, it’s safe to assume LWJ hates his guts.

**kashikaze**

LWJ looks like he hates everyone’s guts most of the time. He’s so intimidating 😊

**argent_argenti**
I’m fucking ready for this. The next few international competitions are going to be interesting, for sure!

Chapter End Notes

Chapter title taken from "Be Your Light" by Bii.

Banquet: ...The most obvious reference to the structure of figure skating competitions whoops. Comp Cult banquets are similar, where the winners are lauded and perform encores of their cultivation prowess for the crowd, there’s a lot of food and sponsors vying for their attention, etc.
江SQUAD

3dumaster
have you seen?
lwj’s at the dafan invitational
https://v.youku.com/v_show/id_XMzc2Mjk2ODMwNA==.html

~ yanli
wow!!

3dumaster
that is entirely the wrong reaction sis wtf

~ yanli
he’s not competing though, dafan is only for non big 5 countries

3dumaster
he’s master of ceremonies
who let lan ‘stick up my ass’ wangji be MASTER OF CEREMONIES

i don’t hate him?

3dumaster
okay sure but you’ve been training more than usual

i’m training to be better prepared
wanting to win =/= hating lwj

3dumaster
yeah and i’m the emperor of heaven

The new competitive cultivation season always starts after Lunar New Year with Nationals and culminates in the autumn with Worlds. Wei Wuxian goes through Yunmeng Nationals as easily as breathing, keeping his attention firmly fixed on the international competitions just for a chance to see Lan Wangji again.

He’s not sure why he looks forward to those competitions. Lan Wangji is a bit of a wildcard when it comes to international competitions that aren’t Worlds. After all, he’d skipped out on the Five Countries Cup, the one competition held strictly between the Big Five, but then had guested as master of ceremonies at the tiny Dafan Invitational. Still, Wei Wuxian can’t help but keep an eye out
for that familiar swish of black hair — that familiar gleam of white clothes — and tries to convince himself he’s doing anything but.

“You’re so dedicated to beating him,” Jiang Yanli says cheerily one evening in late spring, watching from behind as he stares down the shaft of his arrow at the rapidly fluttering target. “I’m sure it’ll pay off this year.”

“I’m not practicing for him,” Wei Wuxian mutters, before firing. It hits the bullseye dead center. “I can try to win gold without having it be in relation to him.”

“Well, he’s the new World Champion,” Jiang Yanli points out. “Whether you like it or not, your victory definitely has to do with him.”

*Remember the Moling competition?* hangs unsaid between them. Wei Wuxian’s eyes narrow.

“Well, he’s the new World Champion,” Jiang Yanli points out. “Whether you like it or not, your victory definitely has to do with him.”

“Why should the opinions of the Light Brigade matter?” he grumbles, firing off a successive three arrows. “They’re all convinced he farts perfume and shits rainbows. No one else as champion would satisfy them, least of all me.”

*Rival* — how quickly the label stuck. Despite having only one major competition between the two of them, the fans had taken what had transpired at that competition to split themselves into warring camps almost overnight. For the past year, Wei Wuxian hasn’t been able to search for his name without stumbling upon reams of speculation in dozens of languages about the extent of Lan Wangji’s hatred for him, and the odds of his own ability to beat him in this upcoming World Championships.

It’s enough to drive anyone mad. Briefly, Wei Wuxian wonders how Lan Wangji manages it. Then he clenches his hands, dispelling those thoughts as soon as they appear.

“I mean, I don’t care about the opinions of his fans, either,” agrees Jiang Yanli. “I just worry about you, though. You’re always smiling, even when other people would be reasonably upset. So to see you like this concerns me.”

“I don’t know how many times I have to say it, sis,” sighs Wei Wuxian as he takes aim one last time, “he can hate me however much he likes. I, on the other hand, don’t hate him.”

The problem is, sometimes that feels like a lie.

The 49th World Nighthunting Championships are at Xinglu, a small mountainous tourist town in Qinghe. Its biggest draws are the fresh air, the hot springs, and the ruins of castles and barrows against picturesque mountains. Almost as soon as their car arrives at the large wooden lodge hotel serving as the Cultivators’ Pavilion for this competition, Wei Wuxian is rolling out of the back with his phone at the ready, snapping pictures of the scenery with wide eyes.

“I heard the stadium is on a lake in the valley below,” says Jiang Yanli, who had left the car as well, and is scrolling through her own phone with glee. “It was designed to be constructed and deconstructed with as minimal environmental impact as possible, and the opening ceremonies are going to have water acrobatics and other effects.”

“I thought the ancient Qinghe were supposed to be nomadic raiders,” Wei Wuxian remarks.

Jiang Cheng snorts as he gets out of the car at last, tossing his keys at the valet. “Have you seen Nie Huaisang? He’s from Qinghe and he’s the last person I’d expect to be descended from nomadic raiders.”
“Nomadic raiders can have snipers,” Wei Wuxian retorts. “The Mongols were supposed to be really good at horseback archery.”

“Nie Huaisang also literally let himself get dragged overboard by a water ghoul instead of face the Abyss with the rest of us, but who’s counting?” Jiang Cheng shrugs, as he hands a tip to the porters unloading their suitcases and gear to be brought into the Pavilion. “Come on. Let’s get checked in.”

The lobby of the lodge is decorated with an eclectic collection of hunting trophies, from stuffed animal heads to animal pelts to animal antlers. Even Wei Wuxian, who has never flinched at the possibility of a good non-cultivating hunt, has to admit it’s a bit too much.

“Hey!” a cheerful voice pipes up from one of the high-backed chairs near the fireplace. Nie Huaisang comes running over, all beams and smiles at seeing them. He bows to Jiang Yanli, before clapping both Jiang Cheng and Wei Wuxian on the shoulder. “Welcome to the Grand Xinglu Lodge! This used to be my family’s old hunting lodge, hence all the, uh, souvenirs.”

“The Nie family really does like using antlers in all of their decorating,” mutters Wei Wuxian.

“Yeah, my ancestors went a bit overboard with the butchering,” agrees Nie Huaisang, rolling his eyes. “But we’ve moved past that now.”

“But not that far,” Jiang Cheng points out. “Isn’t Dao Enterprises a defense contractor?”

“That’s not the only thing we do!” protests Nie Huaisang. “We also develop the technology for these games, I’ll have you know. So the next time you think about how realistic our monsters are, well, you’re welcome.”

Wei Wuxian snorts. “No wonder you were so happy to let the ghoul pull you under.”

Nie Huaisang pouts visibly at that, but before he could defend himself, Jiang Cheng elbows Wei Wuxian and nods towards the elevators. Sure enough, a familiar white figure has just exited, trailing a couple steps behind his older brother who is deep in conversation with a young woman in a charcoal grey suit.

It’s been basically a year since their last meeting, and yet somehow that elapsed time has suddenly transformed into an instant. As if Wei Wuxian had simply blinked after the banquet doors in Lotus Pier closed behind that retreating white form, and been transported to this moment. Lan Wangji’s street clothes are white; his long hair is tied in a messy bun with his usual white ribbons. He looks up from his mobile as he enters the lobby, and, for a brief, heart-stopping moment, locks gazes with Wei Wuxian.

“He’s gotten taller,” breathes Wei Wuxian.

“So have you,” Jiang Yanli says, her tone clearly hiding her amusement.

He’s gotten hotter, Wei Wuxian’s brain helpfully adds. Surely there must be something in the water in Gusu, because both of the Lan brothers have clearly been blessed by the puberty fairy in every way. Either that, or Lan Wangji has a morning routine that takes roughly four hours. Maybe that’s why he tells all the magazines that he wakes up at 5 AM.

(Not that Wei Wuxian has been reading any magazine articles about Lan Wangji, of course. They just always happened to be on the kitchen table whenever he’s eating.)

Lan Wangji’s eyes narrow, and he stalks past them without a second glance. Jiang Yanli chuckles, taking Wei Wuxian by the arm and tugging him towards the elevators instead.
“Why don’t we go find our room?” she asks cheerily. “And then we can go into town, find a bite to eat. Xiao-Huaisang, do you have any recommendations for restaurants?”

“Oh!” Nie Huaisang taps his chin thoughtfully. “I’ll text you a list?”

“Absolutely!” Jiang Yanli waves at him over her shoulder. “Come on, A-Ying, let’s see what the view is like from our suite!”

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**Showing results for: fast food restaurants in Xinglu**

1. **Auntie Ma’s Kitchen (rating: 4.75/5)**  
   Best of Qinghe comfort food! Come here for the best mutton soup and flatbread in town.  
   Good for: families, first-time visitors  
   menu | website | reviews (2548)

2. **Roujiamo King (rating 4.5/5)**  
   Traditional roujiamo with all the pulled meat goodness. Voted #1 roujiamo stand by the Qinghe Daily Standard for the past 8 years.  
   Good for: families, first-time visitors, local experiences  
   menu | website | reviews (1052)

3. **Sheepkabobs (rating 4.38/5)**  
   Sheepkabobs’s world-famous beef and lamb kabobs are always a crowd-pleaser. Make sure to pair it with some beer for the real local eats experience.  
   Good for: local experiences, young adults, families  
   menu | website | reviews (928)

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“This year, the competition is going to deviate slightly from the traditional format.” The gamemaster making this announcement looks as if every single word pains him a little, a purple vein throbbing visibly in his forehead as he speaks. “Especially in light of concerns raised last year, we have decided to forego legendary monsters this year.”

Heads turn towards Wei Wuxian, some glances accusatory. He slumps his shoulders slightly, grinning nonetheless. The gamemaster then pulls up the map, and a ripple of confused murmurs move through the room.

There are multiple gold stars on the map. Jiang Cheng and Wei Wuxian exchange concerned glances.

“The stars,” says the gamemaster, “each mark the location of a body part that belongs to a man who must be reconstructed in order to end the game. However, each of the parts are dangerous in their own right, and will make you time out if you are not careful.”

He glares, causing Nie Huaisang in particular to quiver in his seat. Wei Wuxian personally suspects that if left in a room with a glass of milk, this gamemaster could curdle it in no time.

“You will have special biohazard qiankun bags this competition,” he finishes. “Each body part must be in its own bag until the very end, when they are all combined. Any questions?”

“How many bags are we getting?” someone asks.

“One per competitor,” says the gamemaster. “This means you must cooperate with others in order to get the body assembled. All involved will receive points at the end.”
“Will there be other clues to lead us to the body?” asks another competitor.

“Once you find the first one, they will try to lead you to the others,” replies the gamemaster. “This year’s competition will be focused on finding direction and teamwork. Any other questions?”

Wei Wuxian raises his hand. The gamemaster sighs.

“Any questions not asked by Competitor Wei?” Silence. “Your question, then.”

“There’s got to be a catch,” Wei Wuxian says. “These competitions are not for the faint of heart. Why are we just reassembling a body this year?”

“Because someone decided that banishing a Waterborne Abyss last year was a breach of ethics,” replies the gamemaster drily.

“So is graverobbing, technically. I’m pretty sure there’s got to be a reason this hypothetical person was buried in pieces.”

“There is not,” snaps the gamemaster. “There are six pieces of this body: two arms, two legs, a head, and a torso. You must assemble all six to end the game. Simple as that. Dismissed!”

“Is it just me, or are there more cameras in the Pavilion than usual?” asks Wei Wuxian as they file out of the lodge’s assembly room to return to the training fields. A camera crew is setting up in front of the archery range, rigs and microphone kits scattered throughout the grass.

“It’s not just you,” says Nie Huaisang, sidling up to them with a fan firmly covering his face from the cameras. “They want to record some behind the scenes footage this year, interview some of the competitors, stuff like that.”

“We already did press interviews,” protests Jiang Cheng.

“No, these are informal things,” says Nie Huaisang, looking sidelong at Wei Wuxian from over the top of his fan. “People want to see more of the competitors in a relaxed environment.”

“That gamemaster looked furious about the scavenger hunt-style competition this year; I can imagine he’s blowing a gasket over this,” says Wei Wuxian, gesturing towards the cameras. Unfortunately, one of the people working them notices him, swinging the rig around to capture him.

“Competitor Wei! Competitor Wei!” a reporter calls, as the camera bears down upon him. Wei Wuxian can’t help but notice that both Jiang Cheng and Nie Huaisang have inexplicably disappeared, the traitors. He smiles flatly at the reporter, who draws up closer and pushes the microphone into his face.

It’s the woman in the charcoal suit he’d seen with Lan Xichen yesterday. Would the betrayals never cease?

“Hi,” he says, nodding to the camera. “You caught me on my way to practice!”

“Competitor Wei, what do you have to say about the changes to the structure of the game this year?” asks the reporter sweetly.

“It’s interesting,” replies Wei Wuxian. “Different from last year, definitely, and more opportunities for everyone to get some points in the endgame.”

“But it places preference on cooperation over competition,” says the reporter. “Do you know if that
will mean anything for your rivalry with Competitor Lan?"

Of course.

“Competitor Lan and I are only rivals in that we are both interested in winning gold,” he says. “If the game requires that we work together, I am more than willing to do so.” Teasing notwithstanding, of course. But then Lan Wangji shouldn’t be such an easy target.

“Do you have any words for your supporters, then?”

Wei Wuxian opens his mouth to respond, but then he sees a familiar white figure whirling through the air. “Thank you for your support,” he says hastily, before rushing towards the field where Lan Wangji is currently practicing his swordwork.

“Lan Zhan! Hey, Lan Zhan — spar with me!”

Lan Wangji looks up from his practice, a wooden stick still firmly gripped in his hands as Wei Wuxian rushes onto the field with his own. Swinging the stick in flashy circles, Wei Wuxian approaches him with a challenging grin.

“You still owe me a sparring session from last year,” he teases.


“No, this will do quite nicely,” says Wei Wuxian, spinning the stick in a circle around him. Lan Wangji nods, before assuming his stance. “Oh, by the book?”

“Form is important to the mastering the will of your sword,” replies Lan Wangji.

Wei Wuxian considers it. “I’ve never had Suibian be that picky with me before.”

“Suibian?” echoes Lan Wangji. “Impertinent name for a cultivator’s sword.”

“Well, no other name felt right, and I’m commitment-phobic to the core,” replies Wei Wuxian with a shrug. “It’s a perfect name. Messes with stodgy old men like you.”

“We are the same age,” Lan Wangji points out, and lunges. Wei Wuxian blocks each of his attacks, ducking under a swipe and tripping him onto the grass.

“If your opponent is unpredictable, standard moves aren’t that effective,” he says.

Lan Wangji glares up at him. “I know how swordfighting works,” he says drily.

“Then prove it,” retorts Wei Wuxian, letting him go and stepping back, bouncing on the balls of his feet as he readies his position. Lan Wangji’s jaw tightens, briefly, before he does just that.

Wei Wuxian had known Lan Wangji’s sword skills were much better than his own, but when it comes down to physical sparring they are almost equal; Lan Wangji may be stronger, but he is also a lot more predictable. Even when on the defensive, he seems determined to stick to the rules he’d been taught. Pretty soon, their match has drawn a small crowd, as well as the cameras.

“Ooh, we’re putting on a show now,” Wei Wuxian teases as he rolls from another one of Lan Wangji’s attacks, kicking the other’s feet out from under him before placing the stick at his throat. “I win.”

“Your methods are crude and you frequently resort to dirty tactics,” replies Lan Wangji.
“Yeah, that’s what you get when you spend some time on the streets,” says Wei Wuxian, dodging a swipe from Lan Wangji before being blocked in his own attacks. “People who don’t give a shit about you don’t stop to critique your form.”

Lan Wangji looks as if he’s filing away that information. Then he thrusts forward again, dancing out of reach when Wei Wuxian tries to retaliate. He jumps the next time Wei Wuxian tries to trip him, ducks the next overhead swipe, and finally loops his arms around Wei Wuxian’s thigh and throws him to the ground, the edge of his stick pressing into the back of Wei Wuxian’s knee.

Wei Wuxian looks up, briefly blinded by the light haloing Lan Wangji’s impassively beautiful face, and loses all sense of what he’s supposed to be doing.

“I win,” says Lan Wangji, the harsh growl in his voice the only sign that he’d exerted himself in their bout at all. He drops Wei Wuxian’s legs onto the grass, before standing up and offering a hand.

“Good match.”

“Yeah,” breathes Wei Wuxian, his brain still stuck on the moment a couple minutes back when Lan Wangji had almost pinned him. “We should do this more often.”

Lan Wangji’s mouth twitches just once, before he turns and strides away from the field.

In these mountains the night is chilly even with the last of the summer heat, which meant that finding a hot springs isn’t as bad an idea as it would be anywhere else. Thus, the Jiang siblings and Wei Wuxian find themselves donning swimsuits and towels and following the signs to the hotel’s springs.
The faint smell of sulphur hits them as soon as they step in, making Wei Wuxian’s nose wrinkle. The springs are steamy against the crisp night air, and based on the chatter and splashing in some of the pools, they’re not the only ones with this idea.

“Jiang Wanyin!” someone shouts. It’s Jin Zixuan, though when both Jiang siblings head over to his pool he promptly flushes several shades of red right down to his chest and sinks into the pool until most of his cheeks are obscured by the mineral water. Wei Wuxian has a sudden urge to ask his shijie to cover up, but he tamps it down with gritted teeth. His shijie can wear whatever she damn well pleases, even if it means Jin Zixuan also gets to look at her in a swimsuit.

“What’s wrong, Jin-gege?” teases Jiang Yanli as she perches herself on the edge of the pool. “Cat got your tongue?”


“A-Ying, you’re not getting in?”

Wei Wuxian, who had spotted a white ribbon in another mineral pool, shakes his head. “I’m going to go over there,” he says, before sauntering over to the pool in question. Sure enough, as soon as the steam clears, he can see the back of Lan Wangji’s head between the rocks at the side of the pool.

“Man, it’s cold out tonight, huh?” Wei Wuxian exclaims, flinging down his towel with a thud on the rock next to Lan Wangji’s head. The other boy flinches, moving away from the rock immediately upon seeing Wei Wuxian. “What? You can’t have the entire pool to yourself. The springs are pretty crowded right now.”

“I thought you would be with your family,” Lan Wangji bites out.

“Oh no, I don’t want to watch my shijie and Jin Zixuan flirting with each other,” says Wei Wuxian, sinking into the water across from him. “I’d much rather poke out my eyes than do that.”

Lan Wangji raises an eyebrow. “I imagine a lot of people would say the same about you,” he remarks. Wei Wuxian splutters, feeling his cheeks heat.

“Wow, give a guy some warning before you drag him like that,” he says, shaking his head. Lan Wangji’s eyes are twinkling, ever so slightly. As far as Wei Wuxian’s Lan Wangji translator is concerned, that’s basically a shit-eating grin.

His heart skips a beat in spite of itself. “Well, I guess that really makes us rivals, then,” he says, splashing playfully at Lan Wangji, whose brows only furrow deeper at the comment. “Fighting on camera, roasting one another… the gamemasters are going to have so much content to hype.”

Lan Wangji’s cough is almost scathing. “Tedious,” he replies. “People enjoy imposing their own narratives over content released without context. You can look no further than those who read deeper meaning into the interactions of other celebrities.”

“Ouch,” says Wei Wuxian, grinning. “I’m guessing you don’t spend too much time on the internet, then? We have our own hashtag now.”

“I am aware,” says Lan Wangji, his voice strained.

“You don’t think that’s at least a little bit cool? We’re like the next Brangelina.”

Lan Wangji makes a choking noise at that. “We are not Brangelina.”
“No, course not. They got married and adopted a small army of children. We just hate each other.”

Lan Wangji hums. “Hate is a strong word,” he says after a moment. “You exaggerate.”

“Well, then, I’m not exactly sure what to call this, then,” replies Wei Wuxian. “You don’t want to be my friend, but you also don’t hate me. I don’t know where that puts us exactly. Frienemies? Enemies with benefits?”

Lan Wangji looks skyward, saying nothing, so Wei Wuxian presses on.

“Come on, Lan-er-gege, throw me a bone. I’m a simple human who likes imposing simplistic, human narratives over content taken out of context.” Wei Wuxian elbows him. “Come drink with me. Nie Huaisang recommended this kebab stand that also serves great beer!”

“No,” says Lan Wangji, long-suffering.

“Well not? Is the drinking age in Gusu twenty-one or something? We’re in Qinghe, the age limit is sixteen, and they don’t card.” Wei Wuxian nudges him again. “Come on, it’ll be my treat.”

“No,” repeats Lan Wangji. Wei Wuxian blows a raspberry, before clambering out of the pool and grabbing his towel. Spying Lan Wangji’s towel on the nearby rocks, he reaches down and swipes it as well.

“Well then, if you’re going to be a grinch about it, I’ll just go eat all the kebabs myself,” he teases, turning from the pool. Lan Wangji clears his throat.

“You took my towel,” he points out.

“Oh, is this your towel?” asks Wei Wuxian innocently, hiding it behind him. “They all look the same; you know how hotel linens are.”

“Give it back.”

“Have a drink with me.”

There’s a strange sound coming from Lan Wangji, something like the splutter of a dying car engine. “Give. It. Back,” he insists, rising from the pool. The water drips down his body, trickling in rivulets across well-sculpted pectorals and down muscular abdominals. Wei Wuxian suddenly finds it remarkably hard to remember where he should be looking.

“Damn,” he whistles. “Please say you’re on Weibo.”

“I am not,” replies Lan Wangji seriously, holding out his hand. “Give me back my towel.”

“Come and get it, then,” replies Wei Wuxian, and bolts. He sprints past the other pools, ignoring the lifeguards’ calls for him to slow down, and has just cleared the doors leading back into the hotel when Lan Wangji finally catches him, pinning him against the nearest wall. In that moment, as he stares up at Lan Wangji’s slightly heaving, dripping chest, Wei Wuxian feels an unfamiliar heat tug at his navel.

“Hi,” he manages, with a weak smile. “You caught me.”

Lan Wangji harrumphs, before snatching his towel out of Wei Wuxian’s nerveless grasp and draping it around his shoulders. Wei Wuxian has to clench his hands to stop the jealousy rising inside him directed at a fucking towel, of all things.
“See you in the morning,” Lan Wangji tosses over his shoulder.

Wei Wuxian has to take a cold shower the instant he gets back to the suite.

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@yanli_jiang #compcult# #49wnc# hahaha a-ying is so cheeky!

[VIDEO: Grainy phone video of Lan Wangji chasing Wei Wuxian out of the hot springs.]

Wei Wuxian has a problem, and that problem is tall, clad in white, and standing directly across from him in the holding chamber before the arena. All around them, the countdown echoes. Lan Wangji looks towards the doors of the holding chamber with his usual impassive serenity.

Every time Wei Wuxian looks at him, he can’t help but remember the shape of that body beneath those clothes, the warmth of his skin, the intensity of his topaz eyes as he pinned Wei Wuxian to the ground and the wall.

“You okay?” asks Jiang Cheng from next to him. “Everyone else has left; let’s go.”

Wei Wuxian blinks, and then realises that the doors to the holding chamber have opened. Outside, the late afternoon sun casts the forest ahead in long stripes of shadow across the concrete floor.

“Right,” he says, and jogs out after Jiang Cheng into the arena.

They manage to catch up with the group a couple paces into the trees. Teams are already branching off in different directions, searching for the first of the body parts. Lan Wangji is the only one left, examining the ground thoughtfully.

“What are you looking at?” asks Wei Wuxian. Lan Wangji ignores him, running the dirt through his fingers before standing up. “Okay, or don’t tell us. Whatever, Jiang Cheng and I could totally find the body parts on our own.”

Lan Wangji shushes them both, pulling out his sword as he does. Hesitantly, Jiang Cheng and Wei Wuxian follow suit, just as the first hulking shadows of walking corpses lumber through the trees at them.

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Chapter End Notes

Chapter title taken from "Haven’t Been a Bad Guy for a Long Time" by Chen Wei Quan. (warning: MV is... a lot of him being a dick to objects and people)

江SQUAD: I was trying to mimic the setup of a WeChat group chat, so the words on the right are from WWX, if that confused you!

3dumaster: JC's title butchered into a username
Geography: Maps in the donghua place Qinghe in the northeast and Qishan in the northwest, which I've swapped for reasons that will become obvious in the Nightless City arc. This is because the seat of power has definitely moved between the setting of MDZS and modern times. Other sects/countries have also been nudged around in relation but it's... hopefully not much of a dealbreaker for you guys?

Qinghe food: I actually based the food on Shaanxi cuisine, because of the whole ~big famous mausoleums~ vibe the town was giving (Xi'an, home of the terracotta warriors, is in that province). As for the history of the Qinghe itself... what is remembered in modern days is obviously very different from who they were in MDZS.

Roujiamo King: 300% a pun on Burger King.

Brangelina: WWX forgot they also got divorced, whoops.

Weibo: The social media post right after the hot springs scene is, indeed, modelled off of Weibo, which is... kinda like Chinese Instagram + Twitter? But why am I saying this to people who have to regularly get MDZS news from there lmao you all knew that
Fortunately for them, though, these corpses are such low-level ones that it almost isn’t worth the effort to kill them. In fact, all they have to do is take one look at Lan Wangji, before immediately lurching off in the other direction as fast as they can go.

Both Jiang Cheng and Wei Wuxian can’t help but double over in laughter at that. “Oh heavens, what a mood,” wheezes Wei Wuxian, earning himself a glare from Lan Wangji. “What? It’s true. Anyone who looks at you would have assumed you’d been cursed to step on Legos all your life.”

Lan Wangji’s left eye twitches just slightly, which only makes the other boys laugh harder.

“Wei Ying, I think we should give him a break,” Jiang Cheng finally manages through his chortling. “He can’t help it that he has resting bitch face.”

“You’re so right,” says Wei Wuxian, leaning onto his shidi for support as he tries to gasp for air. “He’s probably doing us a favour. Every time he tries to smile, the Emperor of Heaven will kill another kitten, and we can’t have that, can we?”

“Are you two quite finished?” demands Lan Wangji, only the faintest hint of impatience in his voice. “We still have body parts to look for.”

“Of course, of course,” says Wei Wuxian, waving an airy hand before sauntering towards the trees. “Mr Spock,” he adds, which makes Jiang Cheng burst into fresh cackles.

“Immature,” sniffs Lan Wangji, brushing past them both.

—

@adorablecreature

okay but if lwj is mr spock, does that make wwx kirk

—

@sinkingorswimming

yes, because then jwy is bones

—

@adorablecreature

i am 1701% fine with this

#star_trek #spirk #49wnc #compcult #wangxian #the_fics_write_themselves_you_guys

—

“I think we are lost.”

Jiang Cheng groans. “We are not lost,” he insists.
“We have passed the same rock three times already,” retorts Lan Wangji.

“We’ve been following this compass,” says Wei Wuxian, waving the standard compass from his equipment qiankun bag. The biohazard one is clipped to it with a carabiner. “I remember the first of the golden stars being northwest of where the holding chamber was, so…”

“That compass is useless,” Lan Wangji points out. “It changes direction every two steps.”

“Okay, then, how do you propose we get out of this?” demands Wei Wuxian. “If we’ve passed the same rock three times, then we’re going around in circles.”

“Or we are trapped in a maze array,” says Lan Wangji. “Such things are not uncommon near old barrows, which are also quite numerous in the Xinglu Ridge.”

“I thought all the barrows were excavated,” says Wei Wuxian, turning the compass upside down with a frown. “I mean, not that it matters, since the arena wouldn’t actually cover an actual burial site, but, still —”

“Think about what the gamemasters want,” replies Lan Wangji. “They want us to reconstruct a body that has been scattered throughout the arena. How is this not related to the Qinghe barrows?”

“I never said it wasn’t?” Wei Wuxian steps back, raising his hands in an appeasing gesture. “But so what? We might be in a maze array. How do you get out of it?”

There’s the sudden sound of a scream. Lan Wangji purses his lips, and begins to walk towards it. Wei Wuxian and Jiang Cheng follow, until they finally break into a clearing where another cultivator is being attacked by a severed arm.

For a moment, the three of them only stare, dumbfounded, as the other cultivator tries to wrest themselves free from the arm. Then, as one, they lunge into action. Jiang Cheng and Wei Wuxian pull the arm free from the other cultivator, while Lan Wangji unclips his biohazard bag.

However, as soon as the arm is freed from its first target, it latches immediately onto another — namely, Wei Wuxian, whose vision bursts into stars of pain as the arm tries to forcibly meld itself with his own. Fortunately, Lan Wangji opens the biohazard bag at that moment, so Wei Wuxian plunges his arm into it and lets the bag’s energy separate the evil arm from his own.

“Fuck, that hurt,” he wheezes. “Thanks, Lan Zhan.”

“Mm.” Lan Wangji closes the bag tightly, and they turn to the other cultivator. It’s Su She, looking rather shaken. “Do you require assistance?”

“I’m fine,” both Su She and Wei Wuxian say at the same time. Su She crosses his arms, refusing to meet Lan Wangji’s gaze. The bitterness about losing his title must run deep.

“So that’s body part one,” says Jiang Cheng. “What do we have left?”

“Two legs, another arm, the torso, the head,” lists Lan Wangji thoughtfully. “I imagine it must be a function of the game itself, but the hand is not nearly as vengeful as I had anticipated.”

“You can tell when a hand is vengeful?” demands Su She. “How do you even figure that out? Does it flip you the bird?”

Wei Wuxian’s not sure why his hackles are rising at the sheer disrespect in the other competitor’s voice. “Anyone can tell,” he snaps. “It’s to do with the amount of resentful energy it carries. But
maybe you can’t sense resentful energy because you’re marinating in it yourself.”

Lan Wangji’s eyes widen briefly, but he quickly recovers. “Competitor Wei is correct,” he says. “The amount of resentful energy carried by a corpse determines its ferocity and malice. This one is angry, slightly vengeful, but it could be a lot more dangerous. I imagine it has something to do with Competitor Wei’s comments from last year.”

“I didn’t say anything about making the spirits less vengeful,” splutters Wei Wuxian. “In fact, I welcome vengeful corpses! I’ve always wanted to experience the zombie apocalypse.”

“I mean that the gamemasters this year are trying to create a challenge with a solution that is not ethically dubious,” states Lan Wangji flatly. He hooks the bag with the hand to his own. “We may not have cleared the maze array just yet, though —”

He’s cut off at the sound of several flares shooting into the sky. Through the trees, the shadow of an ancient castle can barely be seen.

“There,” says Wei Wuxian, and leads the way.

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**saddling up to fight my anxiety** @jiang_wayne

“maybe you can’t sense resentful energy because you’re marinating in it yourself” SNATCHED. BALD.

__

**wangxian is life** @ponweiweiyiing

@jiang_wayne I KNOW RIGHT HE WAS LITERALLY LIKE ONLY I GET TO BACKTALK LWJ #wangxian #49wnc #compcult

**moll @ dying** @wwxno1fan

@jiang_wayne @ponweiweiyiing wwx really be out there snatching wigs for his rival/bf like that!! #wangxian #49wnc #compcult

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The first thing Wei Wuxian notices about the castle is that it is completely empty.

The second thing he notices is that, despite the emptiness, the torches are lit and some of the rooms look like they’d been recently disturbed. The bags of several other competitors are strewn across the floor, not to mention several corpses in varying states of decay. Wei Wuxian grimaces a little as he steps over the corpses, examining a black sarcophagus in their midst.

“Fascinating,” says Lan Wangji from next to him.

“Yes, Mr Spock?” Wei Wuxian asks.
Lan Wangji glares at him, but continues, “this appears to be a Qinghe chieftain saber hall.”

“Looks like your average fancy tomb to me,” replies Wei Wuxian. There’s a sudden hiss, which causes him to stumble and knock over the sarcophagus. “Fuck, sorry —”

He pauses, staring at the saber that had fallen out of the wooden box. It appears, for all intents and purposes, to be the only thing in it.

“Well, if you’re a bunch of nomadic raiders, you probably killed a lot of things,” Jiang Cheng points out. “Which means the weapons you use could potentially be soaked in resentful blood and become vengeful spirits.”

“Like I said,” says Lan Wangji smugly, “a saber hall. Every other sarcophagus you see here will also contain only swords.”

“And I thought people making social media profiles for their pets was weird,” mutters Wei Wuxian. “Okay, so the Qinghe chieftains made mausoleums for their swords. Why?”

“But if the swords are vengeful, then why isn’t the one that just got knocked over attacking us?” demands Su She.

There’s a rattling hiss, and Wei Wuxian turns to see something break out of the wall. “Because usually there’s something else keeping it at bay,” he realises, as a corpse lumbers out of the cracks in the wall towards them. He draws Suibian immediately, getting in front of the rest of the group.

“Wei Ying, no —” begins Lan Wangji, but it’s already too late. Before he’d even started talking, Wei Wuxian had driven the sword into the chest of the corpse, all the way up to the hilt. And then immediately after, his world goes black. The smell of earth permeates his nostrils as he struggles for air, the pressure of the space he’d been drawn into closing in on all sides. On his wrist, the monitor gauging his vitals and location starts to beep, warning him of his imminent timeout.

But just before the timeout happens, a flash of blue light shines through the darkness, and moments later the wall of black soil crumbles into a heap at his feet. Coughing up lungfuls of dirt, Wei Wuxian staggers back into the hall only to be caught by Jiang Cheng.

“What the fuck was that!” his shidi demands. “You shouldn’t have killed that corpse!”

“I didn’t realise,” mutters Wei Wuxian. He looks over at Lan Wangji, who suddenly seems extremely preoccupied with cleaning his sword. “Hey, Lan Zhan, did I hear you calling me by my actual name back there?”

“I have no idea what you are referring to,” replies Lan Wangji coldly, sheathing his sword. “Do not do that again.”

“Roger that,” says Wei Wuxian, saluting him as he straightens himself out. Turning to the wall, he notices a couple skulls and bones had fallen out beside him. “So. There’s bodies in the wall.”

“Also a staple of Qinghe chieftain saber halls,” says Lan Wangji simply. “It balances the energy between the swords and the corpses — the sabers are kept docile by the corpses, and the corpses do not transform because of the sabers.”

Jiang Cheng sighs. “But if this balance is so critical, then what the fuck are we doing here disrupting any of it?”
The bag at Lan Wangji’s side rustles at that. The boys all stare at it, especially as it starts to move towards a certain direction. Lan Wangji raises an eyebrow at them, as if asking if they’d like to join him in following the bag.

Wei Wuxian nods, and they head in the direction the bag points out to them, just to enter another sword room sporting exactly one low-level corpse on a leash next to Nie Huaisang, who is bent over a pile of ransacked bags, digging for something.

“Gotcha,” he says, before catching sight of them and freezing. “I… I can explain.”

You are watching: The 49th World Nighthunting Championships: Night 1

cryptidhunter: NHS!
iratehear: o7
ilulwj: found him :O
mistresswhatever: does it even count if he was standing out in the open?
iratehear: \_(ツ)_/¯

“So,” says Wei Wuxian, crossing his arms. “Explaining?”

They’ve moved out of the castle now and are setting up camp within walking distance of it. The trees are dark and silent now that they’re well past midnight, and next to Wei Wuxian, Lan Wangji is hiding yawn after yawn behind his hand.

It’s almost endearing, seeing something human crop up in such a deified figure. Wei Wuxian tries not to think too hard about it.

“Well, the castle is modelled off of a Nie family sword hall,” says Nie Huaisang, fiddling with the clips of the bags he has next to him. Somehow, he’d managed to ransack the other hand and a leg from the competitors who’d timed out. “Since, you know, many of them were chieftains of the Qinghe back in the day. Even now there’s kind of a family curse surrounding fighting and violence — we excel in it to an unusual degree, but even then too much of it results in health problems.” He pauses. “The past six family members on the board of directors of Dao Enterprises have all died of heart failure.”

“But what does that have to do with constructing graves for your swords?” asks Wei Wuxian. “Is it really to counteract the angry spirits trapped in these swords?”

Nie Huaisang nods. “The corpses in the castle are sensitive to yang energy. Usually the sabers provide that, but whenever these halls are entered by outsiders, they have to make sure their yang energy is sufficiently dampened. Hence, my corpse buddy.” He tugs at the rope holding the low-level corpse, which slumps pathetically against a tree a couple feet away.

“You’re not worried that thing’s going to try and kill you?” asks Su She.

“It’s really bad at doing anything,” says Nie Huaisang. “Which, honestly, I can relate. I think I might give him a name.”

“Am I correct in assuming then that archaeologists and grave excavators must take precautions, then, when they are studying these barrows?” Lan Wangji cuts in suddenly.

Nie Huaisang nods. “Yup, they put on face masks and take spirit-dampening pills,” he replies. “Also,
the government recently started banning barrow excavations, because they didn’t want to disrupt the balance. So there’s still a lot of real barrows out there whose contents we know nothing about because we’re not allowed to go inside anymore.”

“Sad day for archaeology,” mutters Wei Wuxian, but no sooner does he say that does Lan Wangji’s bag twitch in his direction. All eyes fall towards it, especially as it starts yanking the other bag — and Lan Wangji — with it.

“Heavens, I wish Hanguang-jun had his guqin here,” says Nie Huaisang. “Maybe then we could figure out what that hand is — hey!” The other bags are also moving, too, inching towards Wei Wuxian. Lan Wangji unclips his bag, and it goes flying straight at Wei Wuxian, punching him in the solar plexus.

“Rude!” exclaims Jiang Cheng, rushing to steady Wei Wuxian. The other bags follow suit; Jiang Cheng has to draw his sword to try and ward them off. “Are you all right?”

“As well as someone that just got punched by a qiankun bag could be,” mutters Wei Wuxian, ducking away from the attacking bags and glaring at Lan Wangji. “Can’t you do something about this?”

Lan Wangji hums something under his breath. The bags tremble, before going quite still.

“Well, that was close,” says Jiang Cheng, patting Wei Wuxian’s shoulder. He then suddenly notices something, and frowns, pushing Wei Wuxian out to arm’s distance. “A-Ying, can… can you lift your shirt?”

“What?” demands Wei Wuxian. “Finally realising I’m the hotter brother?”

“Shut up.” Jiang Cheng shoves him. “Just lift it.”

With a grimace, Wei Wuxian unzips his jacket and lifts the shirt underneath, and gasps go around the camp as they see the dark bruise-like mark blossoming across his chest.

“Wei Ying,” says Lan Wangji, his voice grave, “you have a curse mark.”

Chapter End Notes

Chapter title taken from "Tenderness" by Mayday.

Posting this earlier than expected again because 1) 新年快乐 恭喜发财! 2) I have an interview with JET tomorrow and I need all the ego-boosting I can get  v a l i d a t e m e
Wei Wuxian looks down at the bruise-like mark on his chest, and swallows. “Yeah,” he says after a moment. “I know. I didn’t have it earlier, though.”

“You could have gotten it when you were in the wall,” says Jiang Cheng, gingerly skimming his fingers across it. “Do... do you think the medikit has something for it?”

“Doubtful,” says Lan Wangji. “All of the body parts were attracted to it, which implies he was cursed by whoever that body used to belong to.”

“Which could also mean another one of those body parts was in the wall I got sucked into,” agrees Wei Wuxian. “Let’s go find out in the morning.”

The morning comes soon after that. Wei Wuxian wakes to the sound of birdsong and the rustling of others in the camp. Lan Wangji, for example, looks as if he’d been awake for hours already, calmly sorting through berries on a scrap of cloth.

“Morning,” says Wei Wuxian. Lan Wangji ignores him, but moments later a small handful of berries appears by Wei Wuxian’s bedroll.

They’re back in the castle before noon, returning to the wall that had already been partly destroyed the day before. With a couple slashes, the boys open up the rest of the wall to reveal several more corpses in varying states of decay.

“They all look fine,” says Jiang Cheng, frowning.

“Of course they would,” sniffs Nie Huaisang. “My family wouldn’t cut up bodies that are put into saber halls.”

“Where would your family even get these bodies?” wonders Jiang Cheng.

Nie Huaisang pales at that. “I’m pretty sure they bought a bunch of them,” he says. “I mean, it’s not like we do this now, anyway.”

“Either way, one of these bodies isn’t like the others,” says Wei Wuxian, kneeling down to examine some of the bodies. “Lan Zhan, what would you say those body parts we obtained look like?”

Lan Wangji reaches for his bag thoughtfully. The daytime is subduing the ferocity of the body parts, but one could never be too careful with these things. “It appeared warrior-like,” he says after a moment of examining his bag. “The arm is very muscular.”

“Muscular torso, got it,” says Wei Wuxian, as his mind helpfully supplies him with memories of other muscular torsos. With the tip of his sword, he peels back the rags on several of the less-decaying corpses, and looks back at the others. “Would you say this one? Or this one?”

“It’s probably been transplanted,” says Jiang Cheng. “Check for stitches.”

“Aha.” Wei Wuxian kneels down next to the corpse of what appears to be an old man, who obviously has no business looking so swole in death. “Here it is. Can I get one of the other parts for a
“Yeah, sure,” says Nie Huaisang, reaching for his own bags. However, his hands pause when he reaches them, and a look of abject panic crosses his face as he turns around and around, as if looking for something. “Oh, gods. I only have one of the two parts I got last night.”

“Do you remember where you last saw it?” asks Lan Wangji patiently.

“Yeah, I had it right here,” says Nie Huaisang, before clapping a hand to his mouth. “Hold on, where’s Competitor Su?”

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After obtaining the torso, they leave the castle again in search of Su She and the rest of the body parts. However, looking through the surrounding woods proves fruitless, so they head instead towards the sound of running water.

“It’s so beautiful,” says Wei Wuxian, as they approach the small clear stream running between the shady cedars. Little silver fish are darting through the current, heading down towards the lake at the heart of the valley. Jiang Cheng and Nie Huaisang immediately settle themselves by the riverbank, Jiang Cheng drawing his sword to cut a strand of bamboo from a nearby thicket.

“What are you doing, Jiang Wanyin?” asks Nie Huaisang.

“I want to catch myself some of those,” says Jiang Cheng, already whittling the bamboo down into a spear.

“They look so small; I don’t think you’ll get much of a mouthful if you spear them,” says Nie Huaisang thoughtfully. “We could try to weave a net instead.”

“Do I look like I know how to weave a net?” demands Jiang Cheng.

Wei Wuxian turns to another bamboo thicket nearby and cuts himself a pole of bamboo as well. “Where do you think Su She could be?” he asks.

Lan Wangji hums. “It is useless to conjecture,” he replies.
“No one’s timed out since last night in the castle,” says Wei Wuxian, trying to direct Suibian into carving holes along the side of the bamboo. It’s a lot more complicated than he’d anticipated. “I’m not sure if I like it. What’s the current scoreboard?”

Lan Wangji presses his wrist, and the projection pops up in front of them. “You are in the lead,” he replies. “There is only us, Jin Zixuan, and Su She left.”

“Oh damn, Zixuan’s still around?” Wei Wuxian snaps his fingers. “Here I was hoping he’d get eaten by the castle.”

Lan Wangji raises an eyebrow. “You seem to dislike Competitor Jin a lot,” he remarks.

“He likes my shijie,” replies Wei Wuxian as he polishes off the holes on the bamboo flute. “She’s too good for him.”

“I would assume that decision rests with her, as the recipient of his affections,” remarks Lan Wangji. “He made her cry once, when Jiang Cheng was in juniors and she and I had gone to cheer him on.” Wei Wuxian blows a couple test notes on the flute, the sound cacophonous and strange. A couple of birds nearby take to the sky in alarm. “He called her plain and stupid.”

“Children are cruel,” replies Lan Wangji simply, folding his hands in his lap as he kneels down on the grass. “I, too, was the subject of childhood cruelty, in other ways. No one would dare call me names to my face, but….” he breaks off, looking down at his folded hands, “I never quite fit in with my peers at school.”

“No wonder, you talk like an old man,” teases Wei Wuxian. “And I bet you set the curve in class, too, people hate that.”

Lan Wangji inclines his head slightly. “I am aware, but I do not believe in delivering substandard work simply to be accepted socially.”

“Good, because that’s paid off for you now, hasn’t it?” Wei Wuxian flops down onto the grass next to him, admiring how Lan Wangji’s posture could remain perfect even in casual moments like this. “Look at you. Olympic gold at fifteen, world champion at seventeen. You’re absolutely a hit with the ladies; they won’t stop screaming whenever you show up.”

Lan Wangji’s expression hardens at that, however imperceptibly. But Wei Wuxian is proud of himself for being able to spot it now.

“You don’t like getting attention from girls?” he wonders. Lan Wangji doesn’t respond, so Wei Wuxian flops over onto his stomach, inching closer to Lan Wangji’s lap. “It’s all right, I won’t judge. I accept all types!”

Lan Wangji’s hands clench. “That is personal,” he mutters. “You should rest.”

He nods towards where Jiang Cheng and Nie Huaisang have obviously given up in their attempts at fishing in order to take a nap in the afternoon sunshine. Wei Wuxian laughs, before raising his new flute to his lips and blowing into it, hard.

Jiang Cheng nearly jumps a foot into the air, cursing all the way. “Fuck, Wei Ying!” he screams, when he finally recovers to see Wei Wuxian laughing at him. “Blow a little louder, I don’t think the dead have heard you yet!”

“Why would I want to wake the dead?” wonders Wei Wuxian innocently, looking back at Lan
Wangji, who has hidden his mouth behind his hand in obvious amusement. “Necromancy violates the Geneva Conventions, after all.”

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**wanishitposts**

you don’t like getting attention from girls???

YOU DON’T LIKE? GETTING ATTENTION?? FROM GIRLS???

yOu dOn’T LiKe gEtTiNg aTtEnTiOn fRoM gIrLS???

#wangxian #oh my god wwx you are more transparent than glass #does lan wangji is gay? #compcult #49wnc

As the shadows lengthen, the body parts they’ve collected start to get agitated again. In the distance, the sound of howling raises shivers down Wei Wuxian’s spine.

“Let’s get back to the castle, in case there’s wolves,” he says.

“You would rather face corpses instead of wolves,” states Jiang Cheng.

“You forgot how they bit your leg last time?” wonders Wei Wuxian. “Come on, let’s go!”

“The bags appear to want to move in that direction,” Lan Wangji adds, already grabbing his own. Nie Huaisang takes another, and Wei Wuxian the bag with the torso. All of them are angrily tugging them back up to the castle, as the wolf howls grow louder and louder.

They arrive at the castle just in time to see Su She and Jin Zixuan appear, holding three bags between them as well. “Quickly!” Wei Wuxian shouts, waving his own. “Let’s get this guy assembled.”

Jin Zixuan tosses one of the bags to Jiang Cheng. “We should make sure there’s an array set up to trap these,” he says. “It’s not going to be that effective if the corpse reanimates, but it’ll buy us some time.”

Wei Wuxian nods, before summoning up his spiritual energy to lay a trap array on the ground. Jiang Cheng reaches into his bag, grimacing as he pulls out the head of a man and gently lays it at the north point of the array. Wei Wuxian places the torso below his neck, Su She and Lan Wangji place the arms, and Jin Zixuan and Nie Huaisang place the legs. With the plasters and medical tape from their medikits, they reconnect the body parts before imbuing it with spiritual energy.

Slowly, the body rises to its feet, the whites of its eyes fierce within the darkening sky. It takes a look at all of them, standing around the trap array covered in mud and dust, and roars. Almost immediately, the trap array collapses.

“Oh gods,” says Nie Huaisang. “It’s a Qinghe chieftain.”

“I’m not sure what you were expecting,” Wei Wuxian mutters, but Jiang Cheng elbows him.

The chieftain raises its hands, and an eerie glow begins to emanate from the castle itself. Nie Huaisang screams, backing up with his bow at the ready. Even Lan Wangji has moved, but in front of Wei Wuxian.

Then, an ungodly metallic screech rends the night air as the saber spirits awake to the sound of their chieftain’s command.
The fight is not going well.

Each of the competitors have to take on several saber spirits as well as the angry chieftain in the middle. But even though there’s six of them, they’re still quite outnumbered.

Wei Wuxian staggers, barely avoiding a swipe from one of the saber spirits. Some of the other competitors have been wounded; Su She had been stabbed in the leg and is now staggering about, clearly trying to find a place to hide. In a nearby tree, Nie Huaisang is rapidly running out of arrows, and the only thing preventing the saber spirits from attacking his tree is his low-level corpse buddy warding them off.

“Wei Ying, duck!” shouts Lan Wangji. Wei Wuxian does, just as Lan Wangji’s sword clashes with a saber spirit about to try and attack him from behind.

“Thanks!” he shouts. Lan Wangji says nothing, only disappears back into the fray. Almost as soon as he goes, his spot is taken by Jiang Cheng, who is fighting the chieftain with Jin Zixuan.

“I wish I had Zidian,” Jiang Cheng complains as he swings by, avoiding a lunge from the chieftain’s arm. “This would be a lot more evenly matched if I had Zidian.”

“We probably should’ve expected something like this,” says Jin Zixuan. “I mean, if the body parts were separately dangerous, of course putting them together would’ve been even more dangerous.”

“Ugh.” Jiang Cheng slashes spiritual energy at a set of saber spirits trying to catch Jin Zixuan off-guard. “Of course. We were fools to think we’d get out just by assembling this guy.”

“I told you there’d be a catch,” mutters Wei Wuxian.

“Would you like to fight this guy by yourself?” retorts Jiang Cheng, ducking just in time to avoid being decapitated.

The clearing rings with the sounds of battle. Nie Huaisang’s bowstring sings with his last arrow; after that’s used up he promptly jumps higher into the tree, leaving his corpse buddy to fight off the rest of the saber spirits by itself. Wei Wuxian looks around, seeing how winded Jiang Cheng and Jin Zixuan are, seeing the injury on Su She’s leg, seeing the cuts on Lan Wangji’s arms and cheek, and decides, well —

_Fuck it._

“Time and place, A-Ying!” snaps Jiang Cheng, as Wei Wuxian raises the bamboo flute to his lips. “We’re all about to time out, but you’re playing your stupid bamboo whistle?”

Wei Wuxian blows out a couple notes. “It’s not a bamboo whistle,” he says, pouting. “It’s a flute.” Around the chieftain, the saber spirits glow bright blue. Wei Wuxian continues to play, picking out
the notes from a half-remembered melody. The chieftain pauses, slumping slightly against the notes. Lan Wangji, too, looks a little amazed if the sudden quirk of his eyebrows is of any indication.

Then Wei Wuxian hits the wrong note. The chieftain roars, and charges forward. The competitors scatter. “Thanks a fucking lot!” screams Jiang Cheng as he pulls Wei Wuxian into the trees.

“It was working for a while there!” hisses Wei Wuxian.

“What the hell were you even doing?” demands Jiang Cheng. “It sounded so bad!”

“I looked up Lan Zhan on Wikipedia last year and found out his family’s cultivation style focuses on music,” replies Wei Wuxian. “I mean, it makes sense, right, his guqin basically made everyone cry last year at the banquet. So I… was trying to play it again.”

“It sounds horrible,” says Jiang Cheng flatly. “I don’t ever want to hear it again.”

Wei Wuxian laughs. “It was worth a shot,” he says, before the saber spirits lunge at them.

They can’t hold off these saber spirits forever, though. Already the low-level corpse buddy has been killed by the chieftain in one ground-shattering smash. Lan Wangji’s white outfit is stained with blood. Nie Huaisang has timed out, while Jin Zixuan barely avoids doing the same the next time the chieftain swipes at him.

They need something else to fight off these creatures. But what?

“Balance,” says Su She suddenly. “Too much of one type of energy and not enough of another.”

“Yes, we figured that bit out a while back,” Wei Wuxian intones drily.

“We have to restore it,” says Su She. “The corpses were there to keep the saber spirits from getting restless, and the sabers were there to keep the corpses from reanimating. So if the sabers are out here —”

“We need more corpses for them to fight,” says Wei Wuxian. “I gotchu fam.”

It doesn’t take long to attract the undead with flute playing this bad. Wei Wuxian’s almost surprised they hadn’t shown up sooner. The new low-level corpses lurch out at him, venturing closer and closer to the edges of the clearing. Lan Wangji’s eyes narrow.

When he amasses a significant crowd of corpses, Wei Wuxian puts down his flute and hollers, “Hey Frankenstein!”

The chieftain growls at him.

“How about you pick on someone at your own station in life?” Having finally inched back towards the doors of the castle, Wei Wuxian raises the flute to his lips and starts playing again, leaping out of the way just as the chieftain, the saber spirits, and the other corpses rush into the castle.

“Seal the doorway,” says Lan Wangji immediately, and Jiang Cheng and Jin Zixuan dart out, swing the door shut, and place trap arrays just outside the door. Lan Wangji then walks over to Wei Wuxian, taking the flute from his hands.

“Hey,” protests Wei Wuxian, as Lan Wangji examines the instrument closely.

“You came very close to the demonic path with this,” he remarks.
“Is it a demonic path if I was just annoying all of the corpses?” wonders Wei Wuxian.

“Very close,” repeats Lan Wangji. “It would be better for you to study the music of my family’s sect instead, if you wish to make yourself more effective.”

Wei Wuxian raises an eyebrow. “Condescending, but thanks.” Above them, a gong rings, signalling the end of the competition. The scoreboards appear, with Wei Wuxian’s name firmly at the top.

“Congratulations,” says Lan Wangji, inclining his head. The flute drops back into Wei Wuxian’s nerveless hold. “A well-earned victory.”

Wei Wuxian’s throat rises with a lump of something he can’t describe.

Natira Tucker (andorablecreature) wrote in nighthunt_fc:

**Final Scores for 49th World Nighthunting Championships**

THE SCORES ARE HERE!

Congratulations to Wei Wuxian for his first Worlds title!

Second: Lan Wangji

Third: Su Minshan

Fourth: Jiang Wanyin

Fifth: Jin Zixuan

Good job to everyone! I was terrified for a moment there when the dude reanimated, but I’m glad they managed to beat him! And WWX was on point with his banter this year, fucking superb you funky little flautist. Hope to see some more of that soon!

tagged with: scores, results, wei wuxian, lan wangji, su minshan, jiang wanyin, jin zixuan, competitive cultivation, compcult, 49wnc

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**3419 Comments**

**starry_night**
#sushewasrobbed, anyone? He collected more body parts than LWJ?? How did he get a lower score?

**coronaborialis**

Su She fucking stole that hand from his group, try again.

**starry_night**
If I recall correctly, he found that hand first and they basically took it from him. Cry harder.

**coronaborialis**

No, he stole the one NHS scavenged from the other bodies.
starry_night
Still, he found the first hand, then used the other hand to find the other leg. LWJ just found the torso and even then technically that counted as WWX’s. They just keep inflating LWJ’s score with technical bonuses because he’s LXC’s brother, Gusu is a Big 5 country, and his rivalry with WWX fills seats.

The entire world thinks he shits jade and farts Chanel no 5, and I’m sick of it.

yasumitodaka
So happy for Wei Ying’s first Worlds gold! My terrible recorder boy deserves it!!

---

Wei Wuxian remembers the protocol at Nationals when he won. The top 5 scorers all were required to perform at the subsequent banquet displays of their cultivational prowess. Jiang Cheng usually has an entire routine he does with Zidian, but as for him…

He’s stuck.

“Should I play something on this?” he asks, wriggling the bamboo flute at Jiang Cheng as they get dressed for the banquet in their suits. Jiang Cheng pauses in his tying of his purple tie, and grimaces.

“No,” he says. “You’ll break everyone’s eardrums.”

“Ye of little faith,” laments Wei Wuxian, putting the bamboo flute away. He examines his chest as he buttons up his shirt, satisfied at seeing that the curse mark has vanished entirely. Not to say that it wouldn’t look great as a scar, but the implications behind curse marks are a little too morbid for the long run.

There’s a sudden knock at the door. Wei Wuxian opens it to see Lan Xichen standing there, a cloth-wrapped package in his arms. With a smile, Lan Xichen extends the package to him.

“For you,” he says. “The gamemasters believe that if you plan to exhibit your, ah, musical talents from here on out, they would prefer you do it with a much better instrument.” He pauses. “And this would be classified as a special weapon much like Lan Zhan’s guqin, so you would no longer be allowed to play during future competitions unless provisions for special weapons have been made beforehand.”

Wei Wuxian unwraps the bundle to reveal a dizi of polished purple bamboo so dark it appears almost black. He smiles.

“Thank you, Xichen-gege,” he says, bowing. Lan Xichen laughs.

“You can thank my brother,” he replies. “He’s the one who picked it out.” And with that, he nods his head and leaves. Wei Wuxian turns from the door, experimentally blowing a few notes with his new flute.

“Slightly less obnoxious,” says Jiang Cheng. “Not sure if you want to perform with it, though.”

“I’ll figure something out,” mutters Wei Wuxian, wandering off to the adjoining room to bother his shijie with his new present.

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At the banquet, Wei Wuxian manages to get away with a couple stupid little ditties on his new flute, earning himself some polite applause from people who were probably still reeling from his more
chaotic performance in the arena itself. He talks to a couple sponsors from various brands that he forgets almost as soon as the conversation ends, and poses for selfies with a couple other competitors.

Then the first sounds of a guqin start to reverberate through the room, and the rest of the world falls away.

This song is every bit as enchanting as last year’s, and Wei Wuxian can’t help but be drawn to it as the melody wends its way through his heart. It’s a love ballad, he knows instinctively, the words still nebulous and uncertain but the melody strong and true. His feet seem to move of their own volition, pushing him through the crowd until he’s in front of the brilliant figure of Lan Wanji seated at his guqin under the silvery spotlight.

Lan Wangji truly is a vision tonight, with his dazzling white suit sparkling just faintly with every move, and his flowing black hair tied back with white ribbons. As his fingers dance across the strings, Wei Wuxian is struck by the sudden memory of their bodies pressed close in the sunlit grass, of those intense eyes boring into his own that afternoon in the arena while he was whittling the flute. The room suddenly gets uncomfortably hot; he loosens the collar of his suit almost without thinking.

Lan Wangji looks up at him, his face the beautiful blank it always seems to be, but this time something else is dancing in his eyes. Wei Wuxian recognises fire when he sees it. Lan Wangji wrote this piece for someone.

His heart plummets; that lump of something inexplicable returns to his throat. When Lan Wangji finishes, the last notes echo through the hollows of Wei Wuxian’s heart, making the pain in his throat that much harder to bear.

Without a word, he turns and flees from the room, knowing deep in his heart that Lan Wangji wrote a love song for someone, and that person most definitely is not him.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter title taken from "Wangxian" from the MDZS audio drama.

Su : Again, stupid pun. Not as perfect as the light brigade, but it’s kinda how I remember Su She is a bad guy in the novel aksajgdalksdf

Farts Chanel no. 5: [insert obligatory Crazy Rich Asians reference here]

That ending line: ...silly Wei Ying, silly silly silly Wei Ying...
FIRE AT CLOUD RECESSES DAMAGES PROPERTY, NO DEATHS, SUSPECTED ARSON

by LUO SHUYIN

CAIYI — A fire broke out last night at the affluent Cloud Recesses neighbourhood in Caiyi, Gusu. As of print this morning the fire has been put out by the Caiyi Municipal Fire Department, where it has caused significant property damage to both buildings and vehicles alike. No deaths have been recorded, but several residents are said to have been badly injured in the fire.

The fire is reported to have originated at the Cloud Recesses Free Library, a privately-owned community library and gathering place for the neighbourhood’s residents. While a large portion of the library was damaged in the fire, its collection of rare books had been saved by several volunteers prior to evacuating the building.

“We are looking into this matter as expediently as we can,” said the Caiyi Police Department in a press statement this morning. “We are exploring all options possible, including arson.”

As of print, no suspects have emerged, and the Caiyi Police Department has declined to comment further on the matter.

weibowifi

i’ve been reliably informed my dear rival lan wangji is in the hospital recovering from a broken leg while saving the books at the cloud recesses free library! what a nerd hahaha please get better soon lan zhan so i can kick your ass in nightless city! #wangxian# #lanwangji# #cloudrecessesfire#

[PHOTO: Wei Wuxian holding a paper saying ‘get better soon’, next to a drawing of a wolf looking at a chicken.]

Like 3.2k | Comment 829 | Repost 210

lanxichenofficial

- LWJ

wangxian_fans

did lwj steal xichen-gege’s weibo? that’s so cute omg

plumblossoms_

expectations: lwj speaks perfectly all the time even on the internet, reality: lwj uses emojis

perfectblue

GET BETTER LAN ZHAN!! We are cheering for you!
Wei Wuxian’s biggest problem, in his opinion, is that he gets bored easily. Ever since he was a child he’d been cited by teachers as being too restless, too argumentative, constantly in pursuit of some new mischief to disrupt his classmates with. His mind races ahead of the rest of him by miles; almost as soon as he attains one thing he is looking forward to the next.

Right now, though, all he wants is something new, so that his mind doesn’t focus so hard on the way Lan Wangji’s eyes had burned that night, as he played the love ballad definitely not meant for Wei Wuxian. As far as his obsessive searching can take him, though, Lan Wangji doesn’t have a significant other, or any press connecting him romantically to anyone else.

That’s worse. That means Lan Wangji likes someone in secret, and Wei Wuxian would just corrupt the purity of his affection by placing any designs upon it.

But why would he even want to? His own mind confuses him more often than not these days, love and hate etched on opposite sides of the same coin of thought spinning through his head. Lan Wangji is a stickler by the rules, the jade of the International Nighthunting Union, the most perfect competitor and person the world has ever seen. He’s easily provoked, he’s rigid, he’s everything personality-wise that Wei Wuxian is allergic to.

Then again, Wei Wuxian had once eaten an entire carton of ice-cream despite knowing the havoc the dairy would wreak on his digestive system. He had not regretted a single bite, even after practically confining himself to the bathroom for the rest of the day. Seeking out things that are bad for him just for the thrill of it is written into his bones, and wanting Lan Wangji while knowing he has feelings for someone else slots perfectly into that.

Wanting.

That’s another thing he’s terrified of. As far as he’d known, most of Wei Wuxian’s childhood fancies had been for pretty girls at school in Yunmeng. He’d flirted with them constantly, but nothing ever came of any of it, and after a while the game lost its appeal, too. He’s distantly aware of the trouble he’d stirred among them, and sometimes even relishes in the chaos.

This is different. This is chaos created inside him not entirely of his own volition. It’s not that he’s not open to the possibility; he’s always been aware and appreciative of the male form, but —

— but Lan Wangji likes someone else, they are still billed as rivals in their sport, and as far as he’s concerned, Lan Wangji considers him a waste of breath.

Still, he can’t help but remember the peaceful afternoon in the grass at Xinglu, the softness in Lan Wangji’s expression as the first cracks in the ice fortress of his personality began to show. He can’t help but remember the sweet guqin melody that made the rest of the world fade away, that wordless love that burned so bright in Lan Wangji’s eyes as he played.

Whichever beautiful maiden — or man, Lan Wangji never answered his question — had inspired such a ballad, Wei Wuxian hopes they know they’re probably one of the luckiest people in the world.
“A-Ying?” There’s a soft knock at the door as his shijie calls for him. “Come on, it’s time to go.” Wei Wuxian looks at the time on his phone just as a reminder for his train comes up. Right. Fuck.

“A-Ying, please tell me you’re not just lying in bed feeling sorry for yourself,” Jiang Yanli says through the door.

“What gives you the idea that I’m doing that?” demands Wei Wuxian, scrambling off the bed to throw a couple things into his suitcase. In his haste he almost forgets the flute Lan Wangji had gotten him, but makes sure to grab it as he swings the door open. “Here I am, not lying in bed feeling sorry for myself. At all.”

“Your sword is still under your bed,” says Jiang Yanli. Wei Wuxian sighs, and trudges back to pick it up.

“Okay, I’m ready,” he says. Jiang Yanli rolls her eyes, taking out her oxhorn comb and rising onto her tiptoes to run it a couple times through his fringe.

“You should consider trimming your hair when you get back,” she says.

“You sound like mom,” grumbles Wei Wuxian. Madam Yu may be convinced he’ll always be a slob, but he’s pretty sure he cleans up well when he puts his mind to it.

Jiang Yanli rolls her eyes again, and grabs his suitcase. “Let’s go, before the Didi drives off without us.” And with that, she turns and takes the suitcase down the stairs, leaving Wei Wuxian to scramble after her with his sword and flute.

The new high-speed rail from Lotus Pier to Nightless City has been a long time in the making, hindered over the years by political tensions and budget cuts. Now it is finally completed and operational, carrying people between the two capitals in less than five hours’ travel time. Still not as fast as a near-instantaneous transportation talisman, but the prices of those have recently gone up, and the government of Qishan has absurdly tight security for talisman travel hubs.

“I can’t believe we finally get to ride this thing,” Jiang Yanli exclaims, clapping her hands as she sprawls into her business class seat. Wei Wuxian helps her put away her bags, before taking the seat across from her. Jiang Cheng sits down beside her with a roll of his eyes.

“It’s just a fast train,” he says. “Lotus Pier’s subway is fast, too.”

“Lotus Pier’s subway is constantly behind schedule,” says Jiang Yanli. “And it’s not as fast as you think. It once took me an hour to get from Lotus Pier to Yunping when I could’ve gotten there in half an hour by car.”

“Half an hour during the middle of the night, maybe,” argues Jiang Cheng. “Lotus Bridge is a fucking parking lot during rush hour.”

Wei Wuxian spends most of the train ride staring out the window. The countryside passes by so fast in this train that everything is a big green blur, but that doesn’t make the experience any less thrilling. As it goes, he catches glimpses of sparkling rivers and lakes, fields of wildflowers, farm animals grazing in pastures. Occasionally the train will stop in a city, where Wei Wuxian amuses himself by making up stories in his head about all the people on adjoining platforms.

He wonders if any of the other people could see him in this car, looking out at them on his way to Qishan. Would they care that he’s the World Champion in competitive cultivation? If he were them,
he wouldn’t. Most people don’t want the pressure of being the best at something out of seven billion other people in the world.

Finally, as the shadows start to lengthen and the sky begins to grow golden with the oncoming sunset, their train crosses the border into Qishan, and white-and-red liveried guards show up at the first checkpoint after the border to check their passports. If the guard recognises them when he checks their visas, he doesn’t give any indication and stamps them with as much suspicion as if they’d declared themselves to be professional shoplifters.

“Anything to declare?” he asks.

“Two cultivation swords, two special weapons. We have permits from the INU,” says Jiang Cheng.

The guard’s eyes narrow. Wei Wuxian eyes the suspiciously-crackling cattle prod at their side.

“What kind of special weapons?” he asks.

“A flute and a ring,” says Jiang Cheng.

The guard harrumphs. “Okay,” he says, and moves on. Jiang Yanli slumps with relief in her seat.

“I hate going to Qishan,” mutters Jiang Cheng. “I always feel like I’m one breath away from being arrested as a terrorist spy.”

The train eventually makes its way from the border and outskirts to Nightless City itself, the buildings growing from utilitarian brutalist slabs to elegant modern skyscrapers almost exponentially the closer they get to the capital. Through gaps in several large business towers, Wei Wuxian can glimpse a wide plaza leading up to a magnificent golden palace.

“The Grand Plaza,” says Jiang Yanli. “That palace is supposed to be the resting place of the Sun itself.” She grimaces. “Or, at least, the head of state.”

“No wonder they call it Nightless City,” remarks Wei Wuxian. “They really don’t think the sun sets on themselves.”

The train finally pulls into the terminal station at Nightless City Grand Central Station. As they disembark, they are immediately herded to another checkpoint staffed by red-and-white military officers, and forced to run their bags through scanners. Their swords and special weapons are taken and examined, and they have to walk through what feels like a forest of metal detectors before they can be reunited with their belongings on the other side.

“You’d think they’d recently gotten bombed or something with this amount of paranoia,” grumbles Jiang Cheng. Jiang Yanli smacks his arm at that.

“You really want to get us arrested as terrorist spies or something?” she demands. “You do know who the President of Qishan is, right?”

“I do, and I still don’t know why the INU thought it’d be a good idea to let Qishan host any World Championship, let alone the fiftieth one,” replies Jiang Cheng irritably. However, at the sound of someone clearing their throat to the side, he freezes, and looks over to see a young man with gelled-back brown hair in a smart black suit, holding a whiteboard that says ‘Jiang Wanyin and Wei Wuxian’ on it in neat handwriting.

“Welcome to Nightless City, Competitors Jiang and Wei,” says the young man sweetly. “I’m Wen Qionglin, and I’m here to take you to the Cultivators’ Pavilion.”
Nighthunting in the Nightless City: Why Qishan Should Not Host the 50th World Nighthunting Championships

LIN XUEHUA and GWEN HEARTH

The world of competitive cultivation has captured the attention of the world beyond the Asian countries that practice it, but the International Nighthunting Union’s decision to award the Nightless City the honour of hosting its 50th Championships should be concerning.

At first glance, Nightless City is a breathtakingly modern wonder. Well-lit and bustling at all times of the day, it truly is a city that knows no nighttime or rest.

But upon closer inspection, the cracks in its opulence reveal below the authoritarian boot poised on the heartbeat of this city, always one dissident breath away from crushing the city back to days of martial law and dictator control. The Qishan National People’s Party may have loosened the leash in recent years, gaining enough political goodwill to finally finish the high-speed ‘Capital to Capital’ railway between Qishan and its neighbour Yunmeng, but the leash itself is not gone. Military guards still staff many checkpoints in Qishan’s transit hubs, subjecting foreign travellers to borderline humiliating security checks at a moment’s whim.

Into all of this comes the 50th World Nighthunting Championships, the crown jewel of sporting events in this part of Eastern Asia. Nighthunting stems from a centuries-old tradition of wielding spiritual energy to banish supernatural evils, similar to dragon-slaying paladins of old in the West. But don’t think that means a nighthunting competition is anything like the jousts and broomstick races we know — contemporary nighthunting is sleek, modern, melding spiritual energy and technology so seamlessly it’s hard to tell what in the arena is real and what was constructed by its gamemasters.

Given that nighthunting is such a prominent cultural tradition, valuing the spirit of cooperation and honesty among its competitors, allowing a country that flouts every one of those values to host the 50th World Nighthunting Championships is misguided at best.

Supporters of the Nightless City bid have promised that hosting the World Championships would bring forth an era of change and political freedom in Qishan. “With the eyes of the world upon Qishan,” said Jin Guangyao, current Head Gamemaster of the International Nighthunting Union, “they would have no choice but to work to better the state of human rights in their country, as well as invest in infrastructure and education to improve the quality of life for people in Nightless City.”

However, groups such as Human Rights Watch and more local humanitarian groups in Qishan have indicated that the opposite is happening. Recently, the Qishan government passed a controversial bill banning the expression of ‘deviant practices of sexuality and family structures’, and arrested groups of political activists and dissidents in the name of national security. Nevertheless, the International Nighthunting Union has expressed reluctance in rescinding its acceptance of the Nightless City bid, as Qishan is one of ‘Big 5’ countries that contributes great amounts of financial support to the sport.

“We have done what we can to protect our athletes as they travel to Qishan for the competition,” said Lan Xichen, another gamemaster and spokesperson for the INU, over email. “While the Qishan government’s policies are not ideal, it is not the place of an athletics organisation to criticise the practices of their host country.”

This is not promising for the future of the INU as an organisation, as the sport gains more and more international recognition. Despite promises to “demand transparency” and “ensure proper ethics” over the years, previous nighthunting championships have garnered controversy due to encouraging
unethical cultivation practices and endangering the well-being of competitors. To some INU critics, the decision to stick with Nightless City as the host of its 50th World Championships is simply to be expected.

“The money says it all,” said Xiao Xingchen, a political activist and known critic of the INU. “They do not want to rock the boat, because it would mean loss of financial support. President Wen may be unpopular outside his own country, but these other countries believe they lack the financial clout to criticise Qishan’s human rights abuses.”

As the competition draws nearer, the eyes of the world will descend ever closer upon Qishan. At this point, however, one can only imagine what is left to be uncovered. President Wen Ruohan may have charmed the people into granting him 98% of the vote every election, but there are things not even authoritarian charisma and strong-armed threats can keep hidden. The question then becomes: what will be first?

“So, Wen Qionglin, you seem awfully young for a government minder,” says Wei Wuxian as their car wends its way through the golden-lit streets of the city. The young man who’d picked them up at the station flushes at that, hunching over his whiteboard.

“I’m not really — I was just told to accompany you guys and make sure to answer any questions you had,” he flusters. “They do it for all the competitors coming in from outside.”

“We probably could’ve found the way by ourselves,” says Jiang Cheng. “No offense, though,” he adds hastily. Wen Qionglin shrugs.

“None taken,” he says. “I was just excited to volunteer, because I’d always wanted to meet such high-level competitive cultivators. I… do a little myself, in local competitions, but I’m not that great.”

“Really?” wonders Wei Wuxian, scrolling through his phone. “Baidu tells me you’re one of the top competitive cultivators in Nightless City.”

“Oh it says that?” Wen Qionglin’s face flushes harder. “That’s weird. I guess it must still have the old articles up or something.”

“The last competition you won was last month.”

“I was just shooting stuff; I don’t really do fancy swordwork.”

Wei Wuxian shrugs. “So? All Nie Huaisang does is shoot things, and he keeps getting into the top ten scores at these competition. You could totally compete! I mean, just look at me. Didn’t even do international competitions until about two years ago, and now I’m the World Champion everyone’s trying to defeat.”

“Everyone wants to defeat you anyway because you’re annoying,” says Jiang Cheng, but there’s no heat in his words. Wei Wuxian sticks his tongue out at him.

As their car joins the traffic crawling by the Great Plaza, Wen Qionglin gestures to where a crowd of tourists are gathered with their cameras and selfie sticks. “Want to take a picture by the Palace of Sun and Flames?” he asks. “This street is the most congested one in the city, for obvious reasons, but we have to take it to get to the Cultivators’ Pavilion because President Wen wants you to have the scenic tour.” The eyeroll is evident in his voice as they inch past the roadblocks, lined with military guards watching tourists taking pictures by the golden palace gates.

“I think we’re good,” says Jiang Cheng. Jiang Yanli rolls down the window to snap some pictures.
“Weibo’s gotta know we’re here,” she explains. The car continues on, out of the city center but along the riverbank. Here a string of international hotels have sprung up, similar to Lotus Pier’s waterfront. It would look a lot like home, if it weren’t for the big propaganda billboards sitting everywhere proclaiming how Wen Ruohan really cared about supporting the people.

The hotel serving as the Cultivators’ Pavilion is almost absurdly large, spanning almost half of a block with uninterrupted views of the river and the city lights. A set of magnificent dancing fountains play as their car pulls up to the porte-cochère, while national flags flutter in the breeze next to the fountain basin. The sun-motif flag of Qishan flies the highest, of course.

A porter takes their bags as soon as they unload. Jiang Yanli and Jiang Cheng immediately go inside to check in, while Wei Wuxian looks over at Wen Qionglin thoughtfully. The kid seems nice, just the sort of distraction he needs from his thoughts about Lan Wangji. They still have several hours until the opening ceremony, so why not get to know his minder — er, guide — a little more?

“Do you know any cool places nearby for shopping?” he asks, and Wen Qionglin’s eyes light up.

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costellations
Tianshi Alley, Nightless City, Qishan

[PHOTO: Blurry candid of Wei Wuxian eating a tanghulu]

Liked by mila_b, ppxvuxch, gblair420 and 129 others

costellations is that who i think it is #compcult #weiwuxian #50wnc

View all 42 comments

mila_b wow you just keep running into famous people! 😊

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Wen Qionglin takes him to a small alleyway full of shops and restaurants, bustling with tourists and locals alike. There’s a Miniso here, as well as other major chain stores, but Wei Wuxian is more interested in the smaller boutiques and the tacky souvenir shops.

He buys some gifts for his shidi and shijie, as well as his dad. Madam Yu, on the other hand, is much harder to shop for, especially since she’d criticise whatever he brings home to her anyway. He briefly considers a jade hairpin marked for a price so low he suspects it might actually be made out of frosted green glass, but then his attention is diverted to a bin full of stuffed rabbits in a variety of colours.

“Oh my stars,” he breathes, rushing over to the bin and pulling out a bright white rabbit with intricate blue cloud patterns across its fur. “They made a Gusu rabbit. This is so cute!”

“They have rabbits of the other four countries, too,” Wen Qionglin points out. “Maybe you’d also like one for Yunmeng?” He holds up a black rabbit with a purple lotus motif. Wei Wuxian shakes his head, holding the Gusu rabbit tighter.

“I’ll just take this one,” he says, and brings it with the rest of his purchases to the cashier.

After he’d amassed an entire collection of shopping bags as well as a tanghulu, Wei Wuxian spots a Starbucks and drags his guide inside. One of the seasonal drinks is something called the ‘Cultivator’s Delight’, which appears to be a latté made with an added shot of spiritual energy in it.
“That implies there’s some cultivator playing barista here,” says Wei Wuxian as he considers the menu. “I suppose it is a job option if your level isn’t too high? I mean, I couldn’t imagine Hanguang-jun working at a Starbucks.”

(A mental image of Lan Wangji wearing a green apron and concocting latté foam artwork sneaks into his mind. He banishes it.)

Wen Qionglin makes a choking noise. “It would be interesting,” he says neutrally. Wei Wuxian raises an eyebrow at him.

“Do you want to get something?” he asks. Wen Qionglin shakes his head. “You sure? It’d be my treat.”

“Caffeine isn’t good for me,” demurs Wen Qionglin. “I’ve been informed it turns me into a monster.”

Wei Wuxian laughs at that. “They do have decaf things, though,” he points out. “And again, it’d be my treat for you putting up with me!”

“I’m really quite all right,” says Wen Qionglin, as Wei Wuxian finally makes it to the register.

“Really?” he asks.

“...Maybe a small vanilla steamer?” Wen Qionglin fiddles with his mobile, checking the time as Wei Wuxian places his orders. “Anyway, we should get back to the hotel soon. They’ll have my head if you missed the opening ceremony.”

Wei Wuxian nods. Their orders are brought up soon, and he hands Wen Qionglin his before taking a sip of his own latté. It burns a little at his tongue, but the spiritual energy bolsters his nerves nonetheless. “Yeah,” he says, heading for the door. “Let’s keep your head attached.”

weibowifi

haha, doesn’t this look exactly like #lanwangji#? #tianshialley# #nightlesscity#

[PHOTO: A white stuffed rabbit with blue cloud-like patterns on it.]

Like 5.1k | Comment 917 | Repost 325

wangxian_fans

it’s so cute! 😊 is it for him?

weibowifi

😊

lanzhanismygege

it looks just like him! where can i get my own??

weibowifi

i found it in a store at tianshi alley!

The first thing Wei Wuxian notices when he steps into the hotel is that the opulence of the lobby does precious little to hide the cracks in its crown moulding and giltwork. Even the chandelier dangling in the middle of the foyer has a couple unlit bulbs.
He texts Jiang Cheng to come down and fetch him, since he has both of the room’s keycards. “Knowing him, he’s going to come downstairs and complain about me making him do that,” he tells Wen Qionglin as they loiter in the lobby watching the other competitors and officials move through the space. Wen Qionglin laughs at that, and then claps an embarrassed hand to his mouth. “It’s all right,” says Wei Wuxian in response, grinning as he finishes up his latté. “I meant for you to laugh.”

“I really should get going,” Wen Qionglin mutters after a moment. “I have other things I should tend to.”

“That’s all right,” says Wei Wuxian. “I don’t mind if you need to go. You’ve already gone above and beyond for me today, anyway.”

“I’m — it was just an honour to meet you,” replies Wen Qionglin, fiddling with his fingers on his Starbucks cup. “I’ll be cheering for you again this year!”

“I’d like to see you in these competitions, too,” replies Wei Wuxian. “I bet you’d do so much better than most of the people competing this year.”

“Well, I’d agree for one of them,” says Wen Qionglin, before putting a hand to his mouth. “I mean, of course I have every confidence he’ll perform admirably, but still…” he quickly stops his talking with several gulps of his drink, but Wei Wuxian already has a strong suspicion he knows who Wen Qionglin is referring to.

Wen Chao, the second son of President Wen Ruohan, is supposed to be back from his hiatus this year. He’d gone on it to recover from a torn ACL, but as far as his performance tapes go even with his ACL intact he hadn’t stood a chance at making even top five. That, plus all the gleeful foreign tabloids reporting on his latest scandals and misdeeds, only makes him look more and more like an ordeal Wei Wuxian wouldn’t want to touch with a ten-foot pole. And that’s coming from someone like him.

“I should just go,” says Wen Qionglin, hanging his head. “If you never hear from me again, it’s because I’ve been locked up for insulting the President’s son.”

“I’ll win the competition to bail you out,” teases Wei Wuxian. That earns him a flustered flush, before Wen Qionglin spins on his heels and promptly exits the lobby. Wei Wuxian watches him leave, before turning back to see himself almost toe-to-toe with a fiercely-glowering Lan Wangji.

“Oh! Hi!” he exclaims. Lan Wangji glares after the rotating doors that Wen Qionglin had vanished through, before directing it towards Wei Wuxian as well. Wei Wuxian grins, kneeling down to rummage through his bags.

“I went to Tianshi Alley before I came here!” he says, presenting the rabbit with a flourish. “I saw this in a store and noticed it was in Gusu colours, so I thought you’d like it.”

Lan Wangji stares at the rabbit. The rabbit stares back through its beady little amber eyes. Lan Wangji swipes the rabbit out of Wei Wuxian’s arms, before squeezing it tight to his chest.

“Thank you,” he manages roughly. “The volunteer guides are government spies. Do not talk to them.”

Wei Wuxian laughs at that. “I knew that going in, I mean, he was so obviously our minder while we were being driven here? Still…” he tilts his head. “Are you saying that because you actually care about my not being arrested, or because you’re jealous of me?”

Lan Wangji’s eyebrow twitches. Of you? his expression screams.
“Or him, I wouldn’t know.” Wei Wuxian shrugs. “Listen, if you want me to get you his number, I could try —”

“That is unnecessary,” says Lan Wangji harshly, spinning on his heel. “See you at the opening ceremony.”

Wei Wuxian can’t help but notice he’s still squeezing the rabbit tight as the elevator doors close on him.

The opening ceremony is… very fiery. That’s all Wei Wuxian can say about it, as he watches the pyrotechnic cannons spark and flash to the sound of ridiculously tense instrumental music that he’s pretty sure he’s heard in a bad action movie before. Wen Chao, a young man whose face would be handsome if it weren’t perpetually leering, takes the last place in the presentation lineup despite that slot usually being for last year’s champion.

Wei Wuxian would fight him about it, except he’s never really been one to defend tradition if it seemed unnecessary, so he just rides out as second to last anyway to deafening cheers and screams. The horse he’s riding tonight is black, like his outfit, but it’s also ten times more haughty than Lil’ Apple. He almost misses that grey stallion.

Now announcing the second son of the Great President Wen Ruohan — Wen Chao!

“Does he think he’s a prince?” hisses Jin Zixuan as Wei Wuxian pulls into place near him.

“I mean, his dad’s basically a king, isn’t he?” whispers Wei Wuxian. Ahead, Wen Chao rides the circuit to tremendous cheers from only the Qishan supporters, though that doesn’t seem to dissuade him as he cues another series of pyrotechnic effects.

“That amount of deference should be reserved for only the previous World Champion,” mutters Jin Zixuan, mutinous. Wei Wuxian laughs.

“I couldn’t possibly,” he says. “It’s all for show. See, he’s trying to catch a girl right now.” Sure enough, a young woman in lurid pink is swinging from a trapeze, while Wen Chao rides to a stop below her and extends his hands.

“The only way he could, with an attitude like that,” says Jin Zixuan. Wei Wuxian vaguely wonders if it would be in line to remind him about pots and kettles.

The woman leaps, and Wen Chao catches her neatly to tremendous cheering.

“He definitely used his cultivation to stay on his horse. There’s no way that could’ve been physically possible otherwise,” Wei Wuxian says.

“Maybe I should go,” adds Jin Zixuan. “I could have sworn this was a sporting event, not a circus.”

Wei Wuxian stifles another laugh at that. The enemy of his enemy may be his friend, but too much appreciation of Jin Zixuan’s commentary might bloat his ego.

When Wen Chao and the trapeze artist join their ranks at last, everyone else has to pretend that they hadn’t spent the last ten minutes gaping in utter disbelief. No one else in all of competitive cultivation history had the audacity to stage a ten-minute one-man show during an opening ceremony. Lan Wangji in particular looks quite pained, as if the very fabric of reality is crumbling at his feet.

Wei Wuxian has to admit, this is going to make the next few days very interesting indeed.
He doesn’t realise just how interesting, though, until twelve hours later.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter title taken from "My New Swag" by VaVa.

Cloud Recesses: This is going to be brought up later too but the Cloud Recesses are basically the bougiest neighbourhood in Caiyi. Think Gramercy Park in New York. It even has some of the most extensive HOA regulations in the city haha

Weibowifi: WWX's Weibo acct! It's "Weibo" + "WiFi", since in Chinese fandom that's actually WWX's nickname ("Wuxian" = wifi, and also his lil hair thingie that sticks up like an antenna haha)

LWJ's emojis: This is a modern au headcanon of mine adkgajsdf

Didi: taxi service similar to Uber!

Nightless City: … any and all resemblance to certain modern national capitals in certain parts of Asia is, uh, absolutely and purely coincidental, of course ;)

Lin Xuehua: translates to "wood snowflake" so yes, I am indeed self-inserting as the token Asian friend of a quinoa-eating yt feminist thinkpiece writer ahah

"jousts and broomstick races": since this is a modern with magic setting and it's stated compcult is a popular East Asian sport, arguably there'd be comparisons to other magical practices in the West. i'm not going to touch much on the global effects though because the implication that there's some white gusuboo dude out there in this universe getting Really Into compcult and emulating LWJ on, idk, a guitar is,,, amusing and terrifying in equal measure. also someone in universe would definitely consider ew's supernatural a paltry western appropriation of cultivational practices. im just saying

Qishan the dystopia: again, references to existing authoritarian East Asian countries and their wannabe Western counterparts is ofc very much coincidental ;) and also i might have referenced like 3 different articles on Beijing hosting 2020 Winter Olympics for this lmao

costellations / mila_b / pxpxvxch / gblair420: if you recognise these users congrats you've unlocked the not-so-secret Lily Winterwood Cinematic Universe, also feat. my Star Trek writer au (via Natira Tucker/andorablecreature) lol

Tianshi Alley: inspired by Kuanzhai alley in Chengdu as well as other tourist shopping alleys in Beijing and Shanghai!

(This is up early bc I'm hella busy travelling this week RIP)
50th World Nighthunting Championships Will Allow Special Weapons

INU officials have confirmed the 50th World Nighthunting Championships will have a provision allowing the usage of special weapons in the arena.

For the uninitiated: competitive cultivators usually use swords, talismans, and arrays (like summoning circles but cooler) to channel their spiritual energy during competitions. Special weapons are the tools that don’t fall into those categories and are usually unique or rare items, like the Purple Spider (and now her son Jiang Wanyin)’s Zidian, a special ring that transforms into a whip of purple lightning, capable of banishing evil spirits out of the things it hits, among other things. There’s also Lan Xichen’s xiao, which he used to great effect to tame the Tiger of Cruelty in the 39th WNC. They banned special weapons the next year, so it’s been ten years of no special weapons at these games… until now.

ONTD, what do you think? About time, or completely unfair?

tagged with: sports / athletes, sports / athletes - compcult, asian celebrities

582 Comments

starry_night
Terrible decision. Will just lead to LWJ getting even more of an advantage than usual.

lightbrigodemarie
Someone sounds bitter?

starry_night
Yes, it is I, the bitter crone of the cultdom. Bitter because literally no one else except LWJ’s precious rival gets any decent shot at gold. No big deal.

regentertiary
You forget LWJ’s not the only person who has a special weapon, right? Loads of cultivators have special weapons. They all get an advantage depending on what’s waiting for them, and considering they’re allowing special weapons I’m guessing the final boss this year is gonna be intense.

goldencheng
I just want Jiang Cheng to win a gold medal. How hard is it for the gamemasters to give me that?

starry_night
Apparently harder than it is to hop off LWJ’s dick
“I swear to heaven, if I run into one more rock I am going to blow this entire mountain to pieces!”

Wei Wuxian, crawling on all fours behind his shidi, chuckles. “You sound like you’re having a rough time up there,” he teases.

“Fuck you,” is Jiang Cheng’s witty retort. Wei Wuxian laughs harder.

“I’m sure there’s gotta be a way out of here,” he says cheerily. “I mean, this is obviously not the entire arena; we saw the map, right? There’s an entire valley we have to hit before we even get to the endgame.”

“You’re really not helping,” Jiang Cheng grumbles, as they crawl on. All around them resound the distant echoes of clanging swords and singing bowstrings. “Maybe we’re on the wrong path, though. Everyone else sounds like they’re running into corpses, and here we are, just —” he smacks at one of the rocks nearby them as if to prove a point, “running into rocks.”

Almost as if on cue, Wei Wuxian hears a rustling from above. “You sure about that?” he asks.

“Yeah, I’d love to see a corpse right about — ow!” Jiang Cheng rubs his forehead, glaring at the stalactite he’d just bumped into. “I’m going to be covered in bumps by the end of this.”

“You’ll still be beautiful, though,” says Wei Wuxian, grinning.

“Fuck you,” repeats Jiang Cheng.

The rustling gets louder as they emerge onto a more walkable portion of the path. “I think something’s following us,” Wei Wuxian adds, trying to look for the source of the noise in the half-light. The sky above is already dark, stars twinkling along the narrow mountain cleft like a heavenly river. It would be beautiful, if it weren’t for the rustling, amorphous shapes fluttering between the cliffs.

“What the fuck was that?” demands Jiang Cheng, Zidian already crackling with energy as the rustles
happen again.

“The thing following us,” explains Wei Wuxian, shrugging. Suibian flashes brightly against the dark. “Think we could potentially ride our swords from here?”

“Let’s get out of here,” agrees Jiang Cheng, already halfway on his sword once Wei Wuxian mentioned it. They fly along the mountainous path, aware of the steadily-dimming sounds of battle behind them as well as the flares being shot into the sky. The thing rustling along with them slinks into the shadow when they try to get closer, but when Wei Wuxian lights up a talisman to help reveal them, all he gets are two pinpricks of bright red where their eyes should be.

“Spirit,” he says, before sending forward a banishment talisman. It dissipates into the night, just as a corpse comes lumbering into view as well. “You get that one, A-Cheng.”

“On it,” says Jiang Cheng, whipping out Zidian. However, just before the whip makes contact with the corpse, an arrow whizzes out of nowhere and lodges itself in the corpse’s chest, disintegrating it.

“Oops!” Wen Chao exclaims, stepping over where the corpse had been, a big smirk on his face. “Was that your target? My bad.”

A vein pulses at Jiang Cheng’s brow. “You —” he hisses, but Wei Wuxian suddenly draws his bow and fires off another arrow just past Wen Chao’s ear. Wen Chao spins around in time to see another corpse collapse into dust.

“You’re welcome,” says Wei Wuxian. Wen Chao grits his teeth, and guides his sword onwards. Wei Wuxian and Jiang Cheng follow, guiding their swords higher so to lessen the chance of having to talk to Wen Chao.

They’d just reached the end of the trail into the valley when another series of corpses and spirits appear out of nowhere. Wen Chao manages to get a couple, but Wei Wuxian and Jiang Cheng take care of most of them, leaving one low-level corpse for Wen Chao to tackle. He glowers up at them, before nocking his arrow and taking aim —

— and having his target shot down before he even releases. A brilliant white glow halos Lan Wangji’s serene face as he gently descends on his own sword, lowering his bow to survey his handiwork. Wei Wuxian can’t help but laugh, considering the level of the target. Lan Wangji’s lips thin briefly before he steps away towards the silvery river ahead.

The sound of Wen Chao’s gritting teeth could be heard from almost a mile off. “Why, you…” he growls, drawing his sword, but Suibian blocks him easily.

“Why are you so angry about someone sniping you?” Wei Wuxian asks innocently. “Was that your target? I’m sure Hanguang-jun didn’t mean to steal it.”

“Insolence!” snaps Wen Chao. “When my father hears about this, he’ll —”

“Point out that the same rules that allows you to take other targets means you can also have your targets taken,” replies Wei Wuxian. “After all, isn’t that what a fair application of the rules means?”

Wen Chao glowers at him, breaking free in an attempt to lunge for Lan Wangji. Wei Wuxian simply blocks him again.

“Does the son of Wen Ruohan really want to demonstrate in front of the rest of the world that rules are only for other people?” he asks. “What on earth will that say about public support for your family’s regime, I wonder?”
Wen Chao’s glare hardens, but he takes a step back. “You’ll regret this,” he snaps. “You don’t steal from me without exacting a price.”

“I mean, these corpses don’t really belong to anyone besides the gamemasters, so can they be stolen?” wonders Wei Wuxian with a shrug.

“If we were in Nightless City right now, I would cut your tongue in the Grand Plaza.”

“That would definitely not be good for diplomatic relations,” says Wei Wuxian, taking a step back as well. He looks over at Lan Wangji, who, upon catching Wei Wuxian looking over, immediately spins around before leaping across the river and vanishing into the trees. Wei Wuxian smiles, turning back to Wen Chao and clapping him on the shoulder. “Better luck next time, yeah?”

“Fuck you,” says Wen Chao.

“I’m sorry, philanderers aren’t really my type.” Wei Wuxian hops onto his sword, looking over at Jiang Cheng, who had been following the entire conversation with something akin to awe on his face. “Nighty-night, Wen Chao!”

“If you get assassinated, A-Li is going to murder me,” Jiang Cheng says as they fly away.

“I’ll try to stay alive for shijie’s sake,” replies Wei Wuxian cheerily. “Let’s find some trees for the night. I wouldn’t put it past them to run some wolves tonight just to try and knock me off.”

You are watching: *liz_wangji’s 50wnc stream*

*ilulwj*: HE PROTEC
*ilulwj*: HE ATTAC
*ilulwj* and most important
*ilulwj*: HE GOT LWJ’S BACC
*xuaniemingjue*: have you guys ever seen a softer buncha rivals because wtf
*picklddd*: they’re less like rivals and more like lowkey flirting at every competition instead ■□■
*thewokepelican*: does lwj is gay?
*xuaniemingjue*: … he doesn’t like attention from girls remember?
*thewokepelican*: yea but he didn’t actually answer that question so he could have,… 😏
*lan_wuxian*: MORE IMPORTANT: DOES WWX IS GAY?
*ducksonsostrucks*: how are you guys even reading flirting into this? it’s just good sportsmanship
*picklddd*: … oh my god
*ducksonsostrucks*: barely two years ago everyone was convinced lwj hated him, so i’m just confused
*xuaniemingjue*: hAROLD…,
*ducksonsostrucks*: i guess i’m just not seeing it ／_(∪)_/"/
*lan_wuxian*: @liz_wangji i thought this chat was no str8s allowed
*ducksonsostrucks*: fuck you, i’m not straight? i just happen to think hating someone isn’t exactly the strongest foundation for flirting? 😊
*thewokepelican*: @ducksonsostrucks got a point tbh, we really shouldn’t be assigning sexualities to people without proof, especially celebs like wwx and lwj
*ilulwj*: anyway who wants to read my wangxian fanfic

Surprisingly, there are no wolves in the night, but the rustling and floating spirits do mean that Wei Wuxian and Jiang Cheng have to sleep in shifts. Neither of them are particularly cheerful about it in
the morning, as they chew on emergency ration packs from their medikits before clambering down from the trees.

“How did Wen Chao get into first place?” mutters Jiang Cheng as they walk through the forest, Wei Wuxian keeping an eye out for stray corpses and monsters while Jiang Cheng checks the stats from last night. “We sniped so many of his targets, how —”

“Maybe he hunted through the night,” says Wei Wuxian, as they pass into a clearing.

“Morning, boys!” Wen Chao’s voice suddenly rings out, irritatingly perky as he rises from a nest of moss and other competitors’ jackets and cloaks. “I slept like a baby last night; how was it for you?”

Jiang Cheng’s forehead vein returns with a vengeance. “…And whose clothes are those?” he demands, gesturing to the nest.

“People of no consequence,” says Wen Chao, waving an airy hand. “They all timed out during the night, anyway.”

“Yeah, probably from exposure,” Wei Wuxian bites out, feeling his hackles rise at the sight. Those were all people who could have survived this first night, had Wen Chao not taken their jackets and cloaks for his own stupid gratification!

Jiang Cheng is clearly thinking the same thing, because his face is turning roughly the same shade as his uniform. In a testament to his restraint, he only clenches his fist before turning to walk away. Wei Wuxian runs after him, but not before pointing at his eyes and then pointing back at Wen Chao.

“I’ve got my eyes on you,” he says.

“You can try,” retorts Wen Chao, crossing his arms.

“The longer I stay here the more I want to punch him,” Jiang Cheng growls, “except that would be a waste of a good punch. Come on, A-Ying, let’s go —”

There’s another rustling in the bushes. Jiang Cheng immediately goes for Zidian, while Wei Wuxian draws his sword. Wen Chao, too, has his sword out and is glaring at the bushes as if they were personally offending him.

Out of the shadows hops a incredibly hairy, one-legged, monkey-like figure. For a moment the cultivators stare at the creature, and the creature stares back, cocking its head to the side for a moment as if surveying their threat levels.

Wen Chao laughs. “Did we really get all worked up over a tiny little monkey?” he demands.

“What kind of one-legged monkeys do you have in Qishan?” bites out Jiang Cheng.

“Maybe we’re in the exclusion zone of a nuclear reactor,” Wei Wuxian suggests, taking a step away from the creature nonetheless. “But then if we were, the gamemasters would probably have given us something for radioactive poisoning, right?”

“Wouldn’t put it past them to have forgotten,” Jiang Cheng grumbles.

“It’s harmless,” sneers Wen Chao, stepping closer to the creature, knocking it back with his sword. “Look at it, it’s probably easy points, you could just knock it over with a good whack.”

“I wouldn’t do that —” begins Wei Wuxian, but at that moment the creature gives an ear-piercing
screech and launches itself at Wen Chao, claws extended as if trying to tear him into pieces. “— if I were you,” he finishes, crossing his arms.

“Get it off get it off get it off!” screeches Wen Chao, stumbling back as he tries to pry the hissing, snarling creature off of his clothes. It leaps off his chest and goes right for his face, causing Wen Chao to scream and struggle harder. “Kill it! Kill — mmph!”

“Whoops,” says Wei Wuxian. “Didn’t your dad ever tell you not to piss off a shanxiao?”

“I don’t care! I need this stupid creature’s head on a plate!” screams Wen Chao.

“Why can’t you get it yourself? You’re in first place right now, aren’t you? Pretty impressive, killing all those monsters in your sleep,” teases Wei Wuxian, dancing a little closer. The shanxiao hisses at him, causing him to step back. “And this one’s just an itty bitty thing, probably a juvenile. Maybe the big bad this game is a really big shanxiao that’ll gobble anyone whole.”

“Shut the fuck up and get it off me!” snarls Wen Chao, as he tries to stop the shanxiao from digging its claws into his eyes. Wei Wuxian looks back at Jiang Cheng, who shrugs, and readies Zidian to whip the shanxiao off of him.

But before he could do that, an arrow lodges itself in the back of the shanxiao, and it immediately goes limp in Wen Chao’s hands. A young woman in a rose gold outfit comes flying out of a tree, plucking the arrow out of the shanxiao’s back as it disappears.

“Thanks,” she says, as her friends drop down from neighbouring trees as well.

“That was awesome, Mianmian!” one of them yells. “Come on, let’s —”

“Hold on, hold on, that was my target,” Wen Chao interrupts, stepping right into Mianmian’s personal bubble. “Don’t you know who you just stole from?”

“Stealing targets isn’t against competition rules,” Mianmian replies coolly.

“Exactly what I said last night!” Wei Wuxian cuts in. Mianmian arches her eyebrow at him, before turning back to Wen Chao.

“I broke no rules,” she says. “It was your fault you couldn’t handle even a tiny shanxiao.”

Wen Chao’s cheeks flush bright red. “Do you know who you’re disrespecting right now, girl?”

Mianmian looks him up and down, clearly unimpressed. “A six-foot tall toddler,” she says. Jiang Cheng hides his snort in a bout of coughing, but Mianmian’s friends don’t even bother hiding their laughter.

“Better get your medikit out, Xiaochao, that looks like it’s a first degree,” teases the first friend, holding her hand out. Mianmian returns the high-five before the three of them vanish back into the trees again, laughing the entire way.

Wen Chao’s complexion is now a fetching shade of puce. “They’re going to pay,” he snarls.

“She did you a favour,” Wei Wuxian points out.

Wen Chao swipes spiritual energy at them, knocking them back a couple feet. “Get lost.”

“Gladly,” says Wei Wuxian, before tugging Jiang Cheng along with him in the same direction as the girls.
“Do either of you remember where the cave opening was?”

Wei Wuxian and Jiang Cheng have caught up with Mianmian and her friends as they reach the banks of a babbling river. The water rushes fast over slippery cobblestones, and the three young women have set a series of bamboo poles and traps in the water to catch fish while they puzzle over a series of scribbles in the dirt.

“I remember the gold star being near a river in the forest,” says one of the friends. “When we flew over the arena we determined it’d probably be within a couple kilometres’ radius of this spot.”

“What do you suggest we do, then?” asks Mianmian, as something tugs at one of the poles. She winds the pole back, revealing a small, flopping fish. Her friends scream as she gingerly brings the catch back to land. “Oh heavens, Qiuhong, you scream like you’ve never seen a fish before.”

“It’s gross,” insists Qiuhong. The fish flops at her feet, causing her to inch back in alarm. “I’ve never had to touch a fish before.”

“Okay, sure, princess,” says Mianmian, rolling her eyes as she takes out a dagger and hacks the fish’s head off. It flies towards the other friend, who screams as well and scrambles to get out of the way.

“Let’s just go get some berries, okay?” suggests Qiuhong. “Mianmian can take care of the fish.”

“And we can help!” chips in Wei Wuxian, pulling Jiang Cheng out of the trees with him. The three women stare at him, making him wave sheepishly. “Sorry, I know, abrupt.”

“Weren’t you two with Xiaochao?” asks Qiuhong, eyes narrowing.

“We ditched him,” says Wei Wuxian. “Though he was muttering a bunch of stuff about making Mianmian here pay, so you should probably watch your back.”

“Don’t call me that,” snaps Mianmian. “I don’t even know you.”

Wei Wuxian shrugs. “My bad, forgot to introduce myself. My name’s Yuandao.”

“Yuandao?” echoes Mianmian sceptically. “Isn’t it Wuxian?”

“Yeah, but for you it’s Yuandao,” teases Wei Wuxian. Mianmian ponders it for a moment, before flushing six different shades of pink and shaking her head vehemently.

“As if,” she scoffs. “Aren’t you only allowed to flirt with your rival?”

“My rival —” begins Wei Wuxian, but he cuts off when he notices a flash of white on the opposite bank. “Lan Zhan!” he hollers, waving madly. “Hey, come here, Lan Zhan! Let’s catch some fish and have a feast!”

“Hey!” splutters the third friend. “You can’t just invite other people to meals you’re not even invited to!”

“Really?” wonders Wei Wuxian. “Seemed like your friend could’ve used some help with the fish, and you two were a little too grossed out to lend a hand.”

“It’s all right,” says Mianmian, still pink. “We can take care of it on our own.”

“You sure?” asks Wei Wuxian. “Don’t want two handsome boys helping you cook?”
“Who are you calling handsome?” demands Mianmian. “Go catch your own fish.”

“You were definitely asking for that,” Jiang Cheng says, as they make their way downstream on their swords, “harassing those poor girls. A-Li’s going to lecture you when you get back, and I’ll be sure to record it this time.”

“Oh come on, it’s only harassment when it comes from someone like Wen Chao,” scoffs Wei Wuxian. “I left them eventually, didn’t I?”

“I’m going to post a short version to TikTok,” muses Jiang Cheng. “You’re going to become a star.”

“Bold of you to assume I wasn’t already one,” says Wei Wuxian, just as they catch sight of a flash of white at the edge of a cave mouth in the side of a mountain. Upon closer inspection, though, the white object turns out to be a bone, picked clean by birds and blanching out under the sun.

Wei Wuxian hops off his sword and kneels down next to it, raising an eyebrow at Jiang Cheng. “What do you think?” he asks.

Jiang Cheng frowns. “Maybe this is the cave,” he says, gesturing to the maw-like opening in front of them. The two of them sheath their swords, before venturing inside.

They can hear the echoes of other footsteps below, followed by the voices of Nie Huaisang and Jin Zixuan. “Where do you think it is?” Nie Huaisang is asking.

“Maybe it’s not even here,” adds Jin Zixuan.

“No, I’m pretty sure this was the entrance,” insists Su She. Wei Wuxian and Jiang Cheng look at one another, before tiptoeing farther in.

They eventually come out into a vast underground cavern with an eerie green pool. In the center of the pool sits a black islet, hulking in the gloomy light. On the banks, several other competitors are gathered, searching the area carefully with their swords out. Lan Wangji is among them, ignoring the bickering from the others as he examines some of the bones tossed into cavern crevices.

“Hey, Lan Zhan!” Wei Wuxian exclaims, his voice echoing around the cavern. The others look up and shush him immediately. “Oh, come on, you guys could be heard from the cave opening. You’re not really being stealthy at all.”

“We weren’t screaming,” hisses Jin Zixuan. “Do you want to attract the monster or what?”

“Do you even know what it is?” wonders Wei Wuxian as he flies down into the cavern. “I mean, they’re letting us use special weapons on it, so it’s probably pretty hard to kill just by swords.”

“We’re thinking it might be in the pool,” says Nie Huaisang. “But none of us want to check.”

“I could try Inquiry,” suggests Lan Wangji, the eerie light of the pool flashing across his guqin.

“It might not be a spirit,” Su She points out. Lan Wangji hums at that, as if conceding the point.

Wei Wuxian rolls his eyes. “But we’d only know definitively if we try it,” he says, as Lan Wangji takes out his guqin and sits down at the edge of the pool. However, he’d barely lifted his fingers to the strings when a woman’s scream pierces through the dark, and everyone turns just in time to see Wen Chao arrive on the scene, Mianmian clutched in a chokehold in his arms.

“Why not lure out the beast?” demands Wen Chao, pointing the tip of a red-hot brand just inches
from Mianmian’s face. “I bet it’ll come out if we just shed a little blood. How about it, huh?”

Mianmian grits her teeth. “Fuck you, Xiaochao.”

“Oh, still got that attitude?” wonders Wen Chao, the brand now just ghosting across her cheek. “Maybe you won’t be so high and mighty once I put you back in your place. Thought you’d learnt your lesson after I made your friends time out, but —”

He’s cut off by his own scream of pain, as an arrow suddenly pierces into his hand. The brand clatters to the ground, and Mianmian scrambles to safety. The cavern falls quiet, so quiet that the sound of a bow dropping seems as loud as a bomb.

Everyone turns, shocked, as a resigned Jin Zixuan presses the timeout button on his wrist before leaving on his sword towards the cave mouth.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter title taken from "Madman" by 831 (lyric translation)

Lanflation: oh god. i’m just fs-adjacent via YOI and i’ve heard about “canflation” and "rusflation" and "ameriflation" too many times to count over the past 3 years. it's been a real ride, guys. for people not in fs, it's the idea that judges inflate the scores of athletes from certain nationalities. in compcult these accusations usually arise because of the "technical bonus" which is awarded for artistry + unique cultivation methods. guess who gets a lotta points for being graceful cultivators? the lans. more on this next arc too.

"...who wants to read my wangxian fanfic": yes... that's a thing in-universe lol

Mianmian's friend's name is actually my aunt's name ahaahha

What JZX does in the end: if you deliberately hurt another player you're deducted points for sabotage, and it's sorta coded into the sportsmanship to time out if you hurt someone. so he's doing the noble thing here... while WC... was not.

Flying out to China tonight, hence the early update again! I didn't wanna test my new VPN on this lolol. Thank you to everyone who's been regularly commenting; I super appreciate it!
Several things happen at once:

Wei Wuxian tackles Wen Chao to the ground before he tries to do something else to Mianmian.

Lan Wangji immediately moves to Mianmian’s side, his medikit already out.

Jiang Cheng vehemently kicks the brand out of Wen Chao’s grasp. “Are you all right, Competitor Luo?” he shouts.

“I’m fine,” she calls back, as Lan Wangji offers her a spark of spiritual energy. “Thank you.”

Satisfied, Wei Wuxian pins Wen Chao against the cavern floor by the throat, raising his fist threateningly. “Time yourself out,” he hisses.

“Why?” spits Wen Chao.

“Are you really in any position to fight anything?” demands Wei Wuxian, nodding towards Wen Chao’s hand, which still has an arrow sticking out of it at an odd angle. With a vicious wave of anger, Wei Wuxian moves his hand to the arrow shaft. “Time yourself out, or the blood from your hand will be used to lure the beast.”

“I broke no rules. I didn’t actually hurt her,” says Wen Chao.

“What about her friends?”

“They fell into the river,” says Wen Chao, feigning innocence. “Those rocks are so slippery, after all.”

“He pushed them!” Mianmian screams.


“Make me,” he says. Wei Wuxian wipes the spittle from his face, before yanking out the arrow as fast as he can.

The blood, which previously had only been trickling from the wound, now gushes out rapidly towards the pool. The eerie green churns into vibrant scarlet. Wei Wuxian quickly clambers off of Wen Chao, leaving him by the side of the pool, just as the cave begins to vibrate.

And then, with an almighty explosion, a massive black figure head bursts from the islet in the middle of the pool. Its golden eyes glow menacingly as it latches onto Wen Chao’s leg, causing him to howl in even more pain. And despite Wen Chao slamming his timeout button as fast as possible, the monster still manages to drag him, kicking and screaming, into the waters below.

Then the cavern falls silent once again, before Nie Huaisang squeaks, “What in Nüwa’s stones was that?”

“It looked like a turtle, but with a really long neck,” adds Jiang Cheng.
“It must be a demon-form Xuanwu,” says Lan Wangji. “There are legends about Qishan suffering from the attacks of such a creature. No wonder we were allowed to use special weapons — it was said to have consumed over a million souls.”

“A — no. Fuck this shit, I’m out,” says Nie Huaisang. “Competitor Luo, you coming?”

Mianmian swallows. “I can fight,” she says, just as the pool vibrates again. Clearly unsatisfied with its last meal, the Xuanwu bursts out again, causing the remaining cultivators to scatter. Its long snake-like neck chases them through the cavern, snapping up stray competitors left and right. Mianmian barely avoids its snapping beak as Nie Huaisang tugs her towards the mouth of the cave.

“I’m staying here!” she insists.

“The sun’s setting; there’ll be plenty of corpses outside,” Nie Huaisang retorts. “You really want to go the same way as Wen Chao?”

“Bold of you to assume I’ll get eaten,” she snaps. A couple other competitors zoom past them on their swords, just as the Xuanwu starts to knock down the entrance to the cave. Mianmian drops Nie Huaisang’s hand. “Go!” she yells.

Nie Huaisang doesn’t need to be told twice. He immediately vanishes, just before the cave entrance collapses entirely, blocking everyone else in.

Now the only light in the place is coming from the eerie green lake. It extends out almost indefinitely into the vast darkness of the cavern. Wei Wuxian lights up a talisman as Mianmian checks her knives and sword with grim determination.

“Well, I guess we’re going to have to find another way out,” says Jiang Cheng. Lan Wangji hums, pointing at a maple leaf bobbing against the bank.

“There was no maple tree at the other entrance,” he explains. “There must be another way, though it may be underwater.”

“Through the Xuanwu,” adds Wei Wuxian. “Jiang Cheng, you and I can dive in and scout for it. Everyone else, stay out of trouble.”

“Rich, coming from you,” says Su She dryly. Wei Wuxian sticks out his tongue at him before looking at Jiang Cheng, who nods. Together, the two of them strip down to their briefs. Mianmian squeaks and promptly turns her back.

Wei Wuxian can feel Lan Wangji’s gaze against his shoulder blades. “Wei Ying,” the other boy manages, his voice slightly hoarse.

“Yeah?” Wei Wuxian asks, staring resolutely ahead at the pool even as his stomach dives and his heart races.

“Come back quickly,” says Lan Wangji. Wei Wuxian hopes his hair covers the flush in his ears as he dives into the water.
Lan Wangji’s eyes briefly widen as Wei Wuxian strips in front of him]

i rest my case.

_______________________

lanvvangjis

That shocked reaction proves nothing! Lan Wangji could have been just as shocked at seeing sudden nudity! We all know his neighbourhood in Caiyi is notorious for its thousands of rules!

[PHOTO SERIES: Screenshots of some of the Cloud Recesses’ HOA Regulations]

As you can see, the community of the Cloud Recesses has some of the strictest rules in all of Gusu, including things such as:

- No animals allowed in the gardens.
- No open containers of alcohol in public.
- No establishments within the community are allowed to serve alcohol.
- No profanity in the gardens.
- No running in the gardens.
- No walking, sitting, or lying down on the grass in the gardens.
- No public nudity.
That last one implies strongly that Lan Wangji is not accustomed to seeing people strip in front of them, as he has grown up in this neighbourhood all of his life.

That list of rules only applies to public conduct. Lan Wangji and Lan Xichen share an apartment. It is not unreasonable to suggest they may have seen each other in states of undress at times.

Additionally, as with many other compcult athletes in Caiyi, Lan Wangji trains during the off season at the Caiyi Municipal Cultivational Grounds, which has a locker room. What frequently happens in locker rooms? **Public nudity**.

Nothing further.
The water is lukewarm at best, murky with the debris of a million corpses. The pool itself is also deeper than expected, so the boys quickly split to search. Jiang Cheng swims on ahead, while Wei Wuxian keeps an eye on the beast slumbering in its shell.

He has to resurface for air sooner than Jiang Cheng, clambering to shore quickly. Mianmian draws something onto her hands and claps, causing a spark of fire to hover between her palms, and holds it out to help him dry off.

“Thanks,” says Wei Wuxian, but no sooner had the words left his mouth does the islet begin to tremble again. Everyone onshore dives for cover, as the Xuanwu’s head lurches right where Mianmian and Wei Wuxian had been just seconds before.

“It’s attracted to fire, too,” breathes Mianmian, before frowning. “Where’s Competitor Jiang?”

“Still swimming,” says Wei Wuxian, just as Jiang Cheng’s head breaks through the water with a loud gasp. The Xuanwu, sensing an intruder, immediately heads for him.

“No!” Mianmian screams, flinging her fire into the opposite side of the cavern. The Xuanwu goes immediately, distracted by the light, and Jiang Cheng hurriedly scrambles onshore and grabs his clothes.

“There’s a crack at the bottom of the pool,” he says. “It seems to lead out to the river.”

“How wide is it?” asks Wei Wuxian. “How many people can get out through it?”

“About six at a time,” says Jiang Cheng. “But wouldn’t it be better if we defeated the Xuanwu together and then escaped?”

“How do you propose we do that?” demands Su She.

“The Xuanwu retreats into its shell when it’s resting,” explains Wei Wuxian. “We can probably assume some of the parts inside the shell are delicate. If we can get inside the shell, we could kill it that way.”

“Chord Assassination,” adds Lan Wangji suddenly, gesturing to the guqin he still has strapped to his back.

“Wait, no way,” says Jiang Cheng. “I thought that move only existed in spy movies!”

“My great-grandmother used it in her capacity as an Allied spy in the last World War,” replies Lan Wangji seriously. “It really is a technique practiced by my family for centuries.”
“So James Bond learned Chord Assassination from a little old lady from Gusu.” Wei Wuxian whistles. “Good on granny.”

Lan Wangji stares almost incredulously at him before continuing, “If I string the chords to capture the Xuanwu as it tries to escape, I will be able to decapitate the beast. Zidian could potentially speed along the process.”

Su She frowns. “And the rest of us?” he asks.

“You could help attack from inside the shell,” suggests Wei Wuxian, “or you could try to get out.”

At that moment, the Xuanwu spots them again, and lunges with a roar. Mianmian draws another fire talisman, but this time Wei Wuxian helps her enlarge it into a pillar almost six feet tall. They throw it at the beast, causing it to shrink away from the light. Wei Wuxian looks back at Su She, who seems to be seriously debating whether to stay or go.

“This is your last chance!” he shouts. “Stay and fight with us, or get out!”

Su She runs. At the far end of the pool he seems to pause for a moment, before taking out his bow and firing off an arrow. However, in the beast’s thrashing and his own apparent nervousness, the shot flies wide, lodging itself in Mianmian’s shoulder instead. She screams and stumbles, her fire going out almost immediately.

There’s a flash of white-blue spiritual energy, and Su She’s timeout flare bursts into the cavern, distracting the Xuanwu long enough for Wei Wuxian to bring Mianmian back to the group.

“You need to get out of here,” says Jiang Cheng, rifling through the remnants of Lan Wangji’s medikit. “I’m going to break the shaft so it doesn’t get in the way when we swim, but we have to keep the wound plugged or else the blood will attract the monster when we’re getting out, okay?”

“You’re coming with me?” Mianmian asks, her eyes sparkling with tears of pain.

“Yeah,” says Jiang Cheng, clearly trying to calm the flush in his own cheeks as he focuses on snapping off the arrow shaft. “You need medical attention. I think those two idiots have the situation handled.”

“Yeah, don’t worry about us,” says Wei Wuxian, clapping Lan Wangji on the shoulder. Lan Wangji flinches.

“Besides,” continues Jiang Cheng, “I’m a better swimmer.”

Mianmian nods, her cheeks rosy in the green light of the pool. “Okay,” she says, before venturing to the water’s edge with Jiang Cheng beside her. “Take care, you two.” She reaches into her qiankun bag, and tosses them a small satchel. “There’s some extra medicinal herbs in there, and you two need it more than I do.”

“You’re the one who’s shot,” Wei Wuxian points out.

“You’re the one about to kill a monster,” Mianmian retorts. She nods at Jiang Cheng as soon as their feet hit the water, and Wei Wuxian quickly turns to shoot out another fire talisman in order to distract the Xuanwū from their escape. Su She, humbled, dives in after them.

Then the only ones left in the cavern are Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji.
The Xuanwu, after thrashing angrily in the water for a couple minutes in an attempt to get to the fleeing competitors, finally gives up and retreats to its shell to sulk and bide its time. Back on the shore, the sound of dripping water against the pool is the loudest thing in the cavern for a long while.

Then Wei Wuxian opens his mouth. “So,” he begins.

“We do not need to begin the process immediately,” says Lan Wangji. “It must be getting late. We should rest.”

They retreat into the shadows of the cavern, taking shelter behind a series of stalagmites and stalactites. Wei Wuxian gathers some leaves and debris as kindling for another fire talisman, setting out his bedroll and qiankun bag nearby.

“You hungry?” he asks, taking out a ration pack. “Jiang Cheng and I caught some fish earlier, so I’m not really hungry myself. You can have this.”

“I have my own,” says Lan Wangji bluntly, taking out a water bottle from his own bag. Wei Wuxian laughs, tearing open his ration pack.

“Okay, suit yourself.” The flames dance across Lan Wangji’s face, highlighting the smudges of dirt and blood on his clothes, the scrapes and bruises on his skin. “You’re hurt,” Wei Wuxian realises, his gaze falling to Lan Wangji’s leg. “Isn’t your leg still recovering?”

“It could be worse,” mutters Lan Wangji, looking down at his hands. “I do not require medical attention.”
“You’re bleeding through your clothes,” Wei Wuxian points out. “Take off your pants.”

Lan Wangji splutters before he can catch himself. “Excuse me?”

“You pants,” repeats Wei Wuxian. “Look, if it makes you feel better, I’ll do it, too.” He starts to undo the zipper on his own trousers, but Lan Wangji seizes his wrist, shaking his head vehemently.

“I can do it,” he grinds out, and Wei Wuxian makes a big show of not looking down until Lan Wangji tells him his trousers are off. Sure enough, his legs are covered in bruises and lacerations, probably from one of the many times when the Xuanwu had pursued them through the cavern.

“Okay, wow,” says Wei Wuxian, taking out the antiseptic pads. “I don’t know how many of these I can clean, but I’ll get to as many of them as I can.”

Lan Wangji bites down a hiss as the antiseptic touches the first wound. “You may have similar injuries,” he points out.

Wei Wuxian suspects he does, considering the Xuanwu had singled him out a couple times. “I’ll live,” he says dismissively. “I just wish I could’ve done more for Mianmian.” He chuckles, though, as he takes out some of the herbs from the sachet she’d given them. “So helpful. I’ll have to thank her properly when we get out of this!”

“Harass her properly, you mean,” mutters Lan Wangji.

Wei Wuxian raises an eyebrow. “You jealous of me?” he teases.

“Ridiculous,” scoffs Lan Wangji. “You were also quite cruel to Competitor Wen earlier.”

“He deserved it,” replies Wei Wuxian. “You didn’t hear the way he talked to her in the forest. It took all of my willpower not to punch him back there.”

“I do not doubt he deserved it,” says Lan Wangji. “I only fear potential reprisal from his father.”

“You’re not the one who bled him out for the Xuanwu to find.” Wei Wuxian finishes dabbing antiseptic on Lan Wangji’s wounds and starts to poultice the bigger ones with Mianmian’s herbs. “I can take whatever they send my way. I’m a big boy now.” After a moment of consideration, he chuckles and adds, “It’s Jin Zixuan I’d be more worried about. I don’t think that peacock has known a day of hardship in his life. If he ends up in a Qishan prison for shooting Wen Chao in the hand…”

Lan Wangji hums. “This time last year you said you would sooner gouge out your eyes than sit in a hot spring with Jin Zixuan,” he points out.

“This time last year Jin Zixuan didn’t give up his place in the competition to save someone else,” replies Wei Wuxian. “He has more balls than I gave him credit for, I’ll admit.”

“But not enough for a Qishan prison,” Lan Wangji remarks.

Wei Wuxian laughs. “If Wen Ruohan knows what’s good for him, he won’t do something as stupid as lock up the heir to the Jin family. I mean, they’re the biggest landlords in Lanling and probably have more money than the Heavenly Emperor. They would bury this country in lawyers if they needed to.”

“I am aware,” agrees Lan Wangji. “Still, that leaves you vulnerable.”

“I can handle it,” repeats Wei Wuxian, and wonders if he’s imagining the brief flicker of pain
dancing across Lan Wangji’s face at that admission.

They are quiet for a moment, as Lan Wangji primly tucks into his ration pack and Wei Wuxian finishes poulticing and bandaging his legs. The only things audible are the crackle of the fire nearby, and the mad pounding of Wei Wuxian’s heart. If he lets his fingers linger a little longer against Lan Wangji’s skin, well, that’s a secret he’ll take to his grave.

After all, Lan Wangji’s heart belongs elsewhere, and all Wei Wuxian can have are these brief stolen moments in the heat of competition.

“I don’t think we’ve ever been completely alone during competition except for that first night during my first Worlds,” he remarks.

Lan Wangji hums in agreement, but says nothing else as he continues to eat. Wei Wuxian suspects he’s not used to mealtime conversations.

“It’s weird, though; at the time I found you so insufferable. I mean, you’re still kinda stuck-up, but in the fun way, you know?”

Lan Wangji raises an eyebrow.

“I know you have a sense of humour now,” says Wei Wuxian. “It’s just buried deep down inside. That’s why you’re so fun to tease, Lan er-gege. I really don’t mean much by it.”

He doesn’t know why he’s saying all of this. It’s not the best place or time, not by a long shot. But Lan Wangji is here, giving him his undivided attention, and even if the rest of the world is watching on the other end of some hidden camera, at least he’ll have a witness for whatever comes next.

“So, tell me, would you rather go on a date with Mianmian — Competitor Luo, whatever — or that government agent you were so mad about the other day?”


Wei Wuxian shifts closer, nudging him. “I saw you on the bank, though you ran off the minute those girls saw you. Spying on innocent young women, are we? For shame, Hanguang-jun!”

“I was not,” insists Lan Wangji.

“Well, I can’t help but come to these conclusions, since you never told me if you were into girls or not.”

Lan Wangji’s expression grows pained at that. “Shut up,” he mutters.

Wei Wuxian laughs. “Struck a nerve?” he teases.

Lan Wangji reaches for his guqin. “If I play you a song, would you shut up?” he wonders.


It’s the love song from last banquet. The melody echoes through the cavern, amplifying the haunting beauty of the piece. Wei Wuxian’s heart feels full just listening to it, watching the flickers of firelight grace Lan Wangji’s dancing fingers.

“Is this enough of an answer for you?” wonders Lan Wangji quietly. Wei Wuxian smiles.
“They’re very lucky, you know,” he says, leaning against a stalagmite. Lan Wangji raises an eyebrow at him. “Whoever you wrote this for,” he adds.

Lan Wangji hums. “Indeed,” he says, before dancing back into the song. “Rest, Wei Ying.”

And Wei Wuxian does, in spite of himself.

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the smolest pickle @picklddd
thank you god & gamemasters for this #wangxian feast  #50wnc #compcult

When Wei Wuxian wakes again, Lan Wangji is already awake, unstringing his guqin and tying the strings together with single-minded determination.

“What happened?” he asks, yawning. Lan Wangji shakes his head. Groping through his bag for his rations, Wei Wuxian groans when he can’t find anything.

Lan Wangji wordlessly hands him his ration pack. Wei Wuxian takes it a little guiltily.

“What do you mean?” he asks. Lan Wangji nods. “Really?”

“I do not require as much sustenance as others,” he replies.

Wei Wuxian tears the package open and bites in. Somehow, the taste of synthesised proteins and vitamins magically turns into a delicious Michelin-starred meal in his mouth.

“Thank you,” he chokes out in between bites.

“Please swallow before you talk,” replies Lan Wangji.

By the time Wei Wuxian finishes eating, Lan Wangji has tied together his guqin strings into one extremely deadly cord. Together, they venture back to the banks of the pool, glowing green as ever in the dark cavern. The black islet of the Xuanwu’s shell trembles with the sound of its underwater snores, small bubbles rising occasionally to the surface.

“Ready?” asks Wei Wuxian.

Lan Wangji nods curtly, whipping the cord across a stalagmite. The stalagmite cracks immediately, causing a shiver to run down Wei Wuxian’s spine.

“Right.” He shoulders their remaining arrows, sheaths his sword, and dives into the murky water.
The inside of the Xuanwu’s shell smells like decay and despair, worse than every landfill and dumpster Wei Wuxian had ever scavenged through as a young orphan. He valiantly chokes down the urge to vomit as he sloshes through the muck of decomposing bodies to reach the sensitive membranes ringing the Xuanwu’s neck. The gamemasters have truly outdone themselves with this experience; Wei Wuxian has his suspicions that Lan Xichen and Nie Mingjue are responsible for this 50th competition special.

Once at the membranes, Wei Wuxian stabs a small bundle of arrows into the Xuanwu, startling it awake with pain. It screams, golden-red eyes searching wildly for the cause of its agony before landing squarely on Wei Wuxian.

Well, shit.

The Xuanwu opens its foul mouth, fangs bared and dripping with blood, and snaps him up. As Wei Wuxian slides into its throat, his timeout counter begins to beep. With a growl, he unsheathes Suibian, stabbing it into the Xuanwu’s throat both to keep himself from sliding down the Xuanwu’s oesophagus, and as part of the plan.

Come on, Lan Zhan!

The counter beeps faster and faster as the countdown continues. Wei Wuxian lodges his wrist into the Xuanwu’s throat as well, holding on for dear life especially as the monster, unable to swallow and still wracked with pain, shoots its neck out of the shell.

The counter times out, but the flare flies into the throat of the monster, causing a torrent of infernal air to blow past Wei Wuxian as the Xuanwu screams in pain. There’s the sound of a loud thrum. Lan Wangji has struck, and the cord is pulled taut.

Wei Wuxian isn’t sure for how long he managed to hold on to his sword. He’s not even sure when Lan Wangji finally managed to decapitate the creature. All he knows is that one minute he’s in foul-stenched darkness, clinging for dear life onto Suibian’s hilt, and the next he’s fallen into a set of strong arms, and a deep, familiar voice is whispering his name as he drifts into unconsciousness.
with the equally-grimy but unconscious Wei Wuxian in his arms.]

**fyehnighthunting**

Lan Wangji carries Wei Wuxian out of the cave of the Xuanwu of Slaughter, 50th World Nighthunting Championships.

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**bowldeepfannish**

Something tells me this photo’s going to become iconic!

_______________________

**goatskeleton-art**

“la pietà 2: compcult boogaloo” — ghost of michelangelo, probably

#50wnc #compcult #wangxian #wei wuxian #lanwangji #it really does look like one of those pieta paintings don’t @ me

Wei Wuxian wakes to the sound of his mobile notifications going off. With a groan, he reaches towards the nightstand and mutes his phone, before rubbing the sleep out of his eyes.

“Please tell me the banquet hasn’t started yet,” he says to the infirmary in general. There’s the sound of scurrying footsteps, followed by the firm thump of something hitting his chest.

He looks down to see a black stuffed rabbit, red eyes shining under the bright lights. Jiang Cheng pulls up a chair next to him, scowling. As Wei Wuxian raises the hospital bed into a sitting position, he spots Wen Qionglin lurking out past the privacy curtain.

“Well?” he asks Jiang Cheng, as he moves the rabbit to the nightstand. “How’d we do?”

“You got second, despite timing out just before the Xuanwu was killed,” replies Jiang Cheng. “Probably because you were found stabbing it from the inside. Lan Wangji carried you out of the cave; the photo of him doing so went viral.”

Wei Wuxian laughs as he consults his mobile. “It *does* look a bit like a Renaissance painting,” he says, looking at the photo. There’s definitely something reverent in Lan Wangji’s expression as he looks down at his unconscious form.

“You lost by about half a point,” adds Jiang Cheng. “I’m third, and Luo Qingyang — Mianmian — is fourth.”

“Oh, good for her!” Wei Wuxian claps. “What about Wen Chao? He was in the lead earlier.”

(Earlier feels like a lifetime ago, somehow.)

“Well, there was a bit of a fuss about what you did to him in the cave,” says Jiang Cheng, “but dad and the Jin family had some firm words with the Qishan authorities. You’re not getting arrested or any of that, but you’re both getting kicked out of the country tomorrow morning and declared *persona non grata* for 5 years.”

“Like that’s going to be a serious blow to my travel plans,” sniffs Wei Wuxian. “Honestly, I’m pretty
excited to leave — though there’s some things I will miss, of course.”

He waves Wen Qionglin closer. The young government minder flushes as he approaches the bed.

“I’m sorry, I tried to argue for your good character as much as I could,” he says.

“It’s all right,” says Wei Wuxian cheerily. “Since I can’t come back to visit you for five years, you’ll have to try and get out of the country to visit me instead.”

“There’s always something to do at Lotus Pier,” agrees Jiang Cheng.

“And the girls are very pretty!” adds Wei Wuxian.

Wen Qionglin opens his mouth to reply, but at that moment Dr Wen arrives, a clipboard firmly tucked in her arms. “Wen Ning, what are you doing here?” she asks.

“I — I was supervising Competitor Wei before the competition, so I thought I’d come and say hi,” replies Wen Qionglin.

“I see.” Dr Wen clucks her tongue, before starting to run through what’s on her clipboard, occasionally poking and prodding Wei Wuxian to ensure his body is giving the correct responses. “How many fingers am I holding up?” she adds, holding up four fingers.

“Four,” says Wei Wuxian.

“And who’s the current president of Qishan?”

“A dictatorial megalomaniac,” replies Wei Wuxian, with a sigh.

“Sounds about right for someone about to get kicked out of an entire country at the tender age of 18,” mutters Dr Wen, hanging the clipboard at the foot of his bed. “I’ll give you a clean bill of health, under the condition you actually rest for an hour before you try to leave.”

“When’s the banquet?” asks Wei Wuxian.

“Not for a couple more hours,” replies Wen Qionglin.

Wei Wuxian groans, lowering his bed again. “Okay, fine. I’ll sleep now, then. Good night, everyone. See you at the banquet.” Jiang Cheng splutters in indignation at that, but Wei Wuxian ignores him as he closes his eyes and pretends to snore until his bedside grows quiet.

 precisely an hour later, Wei Wuxian opens his eyes, grabs his rabbit and other belongings, and leaves the infirmary in search of the Jiang siblings. They meet him at reception, as he signs off on his release paperwork before following them to the taxi back to the hotel.

“Who gave me this, by the way?” wonders Wei Wuxian, waving the black rabbit. The Jiang siblings
exchange a glance with one another, before Jiang Yanli bursts into flustered giggles.

“Who do you think?” she asks.

Wei Wuxian runs through his options. “I really don’t know,” he says. Jiang Cheng makes a noise that sounds suspiciously like ‘hopeless’, before the taxi pulls away from the curb.

Back at the hotel, the impending banquet settles heavily on his shoulders. After getting into his suit, Wei Wuxian has to hold still as Jiang Yanli combs the tangles out of his hair.

“I’m definitely getting you a trim when you get back to Lotus Pier,” she says, tugging at a particularly obstinate snarl of hair.

Wei Wuxian yelps, as his eyes smart from the pain. “Careful, A-Li!”

“Sorry.” She sighs. “I can’t believe Zixuan-gege shot Wen Chao in the hand like that. What possessed him to do something so stupid?”

“You know, but…” Jiang Yanli trails off, sighing. “He’s such a stupid boy.”

Wei Wuxian chuckles. “We all do stupid things.” For love, he doesn’t add, but Jiang Yanli flushes nonetheless.

He keeps an eye out for Lan Wangji at the banquet. For some reason, despite being the World Champion this year, the other man is nowhere to be seen. Even Lan Xichen doesn’t seem to know where his brother is, though he seems more concerned with the lack of a guqin performance for the night.

Wei Wuxian barely chokes out a piece on his flute before racing out of the room.

The banquet is being held out on the hotel’s terrace, a rooftop promontory sporting a pool and several gardens bursting with flowers and fountains. Wei Wuxian catches a flash of white by one of the fountains and immediately makes a beeline there, seeing Lan Wangji lying by a fountain basin, apparently passed out.

There’s an empty champagne flute next to him.

Wei Wuxian can’t help but laugh at the sight, as concerning as it really is. Did Lan Wangji really blow off the banquet to get drunk? And, even worse, was he really so much of a lightweight that he could pass out from one flute of champagne? He reaches out, but jostling Lan Wangji’s shoulder doesn’t wake him at all, only makes him cling harder to the stone basin.

Wei Wuxian decides to carry him back to his room instead. Lan Wangji’s room key is in his pocket, and Wei Wuxian had remembered seeing him coming out of a room down the hall from his own the morning of the competition. So with that in mind, he tries to heave Lan Wangji up in his arms, just like Lan Wangji had done to him, but only finds his arms giving out from trying to carry someone with so much more muscle mass.

“How the fuck are you so heavy?” grumbles Wei Wuxian as he sets Lan Wangji back down against the basin. “Maybe I should get your brother to come move you.” He turns to leave, but freezes when something tugs at his sleeve. When he looks back down, his heart skips a beat.

Lan Wangji’s eyes are open, and Wei Wuxian hates how soft and sweet they look, like pools of
honey and amber as he continues to tug at Wei Wuxian’s sleeve like a small child.

“You awake?” Wei Wuxian asks, his voice more hoarse than intended.

Lan Wangji nods.

“…You sober?” ventures Wei Wuxian.

Lan Wangji shakes his head. At least he’s a self-aware drunk.

Wei Wuxian gestures towards the light pouring out of the open conference room door nearby, and laughter and music can be heard. “Well, it seems like you missed most of the banquet. Not that anything really important happened, though I imagine sober you would be disappointed to hear you did since, you know, you won and it’s tradition for the winners to show up to the banquet.”

“Dn’wanna,” mumbles Lan Wangji. He grabs Wei Wuxian’s hand, pulls him down to the basin with him. Wei Wuxian’s stomach swoops along, as Lan Wangji entwines their fingers. It truly isn’t fair how perfectly their hands slot together, how warm and soft Lan Wangji’s skin feels. At this close range, Wei Wuxian can smell his sandalwood aftershave.

Okay, so you don’t want to go to the banquet,” he says, more to calm the anxious fluttering of his own traitorous heart. “What do you want to do, then?”

Lan Wangji ponders the question as sugary pop music pours into the garden from the conference room. He hums for a moment, the base of his earlobes flushing in the half-light, before abruptly springing to his feet and dragging Wei Wuxian up with him as well.

“Dance,” says Lan Wangji. Oh, he really is drunk.

“Dance?” echoes Wei Wuxian, smiling nonetheless. “Out here? What if someone sees? You’ll lose so much face, Lan Zhan — no one will forget the great Hanguang-jun making a drunken fool out of himself. Plus, you know Nie Huaisang will be livestreaming it, and the internet is forever…”

“Dance,” insists Lan Wangji, already starting to move in an eerily precise rendition of a waltz. Wei Wuxian has no choice but to follow, especially as Lan Wangji’s hand comes around his waist.

“I can’t believe you really get like this from one glass of champagne,” he says, as Lan Wangji steers them around the fountain in time with the music. He’s not sure how the other cultivator does it — the music isn’t even musically close to a waltz. “You’re lucky I’m the only one who knows, because what if someone else tries to use it against you in the arena next time?”


“Like I —” begins Wei Wuxian, before he remembers their first banquet together. Heat creeps up along his collar. “Right. I did do that. You remembered that?”

Lan Wangji nods gravely. There’s something unspoken hanging in the air between them, but Wei Wuxian doesn’t know what it is, and wouldn’t even know where to begin to try and figure it out.

“Okay,” says Wei Wuxian, more to assuage himself than anything else. The song ends, but Lan Wangji is still holding him, and he is drowning in the best way possible. “One more dance?”

“One more,” agrees Lan Wangji. “Then one more. Then one more.”

You are watching: 50wnc banquet!!

bvtlles: nhs is doing the lord’s work
bebarts_dlad:
neesawahh: disappointed that lwj didnt show up tho 🙃 maybe not feeling well after those injuries in the arena?
jiang_wayne: wwx disappeared real fast too
bebarts_dlad:
yasumitodaka: where’s he going oh my god is that lwj and wwx
bvttles: OH MY GOD
weiyingleoveclub: 😥
bebarts_dlad: 😥😥😥
jiang_wayne: they’re dancing in the garden oh my GOD name a more iconic set of rivals i’ll wait
neesawahh: my crops are watered my skin is clear my family fed
xuaniemingjue: oh fuck! wwx touchED THE RIBBON
bebarts_dlad: 😥😥😥
jiang_wayne: get rekt wwx
yasumitodaka: 😥 he just wanted to fix lwj’s ribbon
neesawahh: wwx got bitten by lwj for our sins 😊
weiyingleoveclub: what’s so special about it anyway? seems a bit overkill.
the_ebbehmoth: those ribbons are like his good luck charms, he’s always wearing one. they’re super personal so i get him not wanting other people to touch it
chloemv: every time it seems like they’re making progress something like this happens, rip wwx

When Wei Wuxian wakes for the third time in less than 24 hours, it’s to the smell of coffee.

Yawning widely, he slowly stretches himself out before sitting up, and then quickly realises he doesn’t recognise the room he’s in. He’s in a larger bed in a larger room, and neither Jiang Cheng nor Jiang Yanli are anywhere to be found.

Then he sees Lan Wangji sitting at the desk near the foot of the bed, idly sipping his own travel mug as he reads a book, and everything from last night comes flooding back to him.

“Oh heavens, I am so sorry,” he groans, putting his face in his hands and rubbing at his eyes. Lan Wangji looks up from his book, raising an eyebrow. Wei Wuxian’s heart skips a beat as he sees the reading glasses perched on Lan Wangji’s nose — another hint of humanity below the godlike exterior.

“I brought you a latté,” Lan Wangji says simply, gesturing to the cup on the desk. “A Cultivator’s Delight from the Starbucks in Tianshi Alley.”

Wei Wuxian blinks, even as the cup is pressed into his hands. He takes a sip, savouring the bolt of spiritual energy that jolts through him. “You visited Tianshi?” he asks.

“I wake at five,” says Lan Wangji. “It is currently nine. I saw fit to obtain breakfast during the period between these two times.”

“How much do you remember from last night?”
Wei Wuxian himself remembers dancing, remembers Lan Wangji’s hand warm in his, remembers the spark of pain in his arm when he tried to adjust Lan Wangji’s ribbon and got bitten for his trouble. The bite mark is still an angry red on his forearm, and Lan Wangji’s gaze slips to it briefly before he looks away, the lobes of his ears flushing crimson.

“Not much,” he admits. “But I do not think much happened, either.”

“No,” agrees Wei Wuxian. Despite the bite, Lan Wangji had not wanted him to leave, so he’d ended up cuddling with him well into the night. He still remembers lying awake long after Lan Wangji had fallen back asleep, staring at the other cultivator in the moonlight filtering through the window with quiet reverence and overwhelming guilt. “I think Nie Huaisang got our little disagreement recorded, though. I did warn you about him.”

“Mm.” Lan Wangji’s hum somehow speaks volumes of the number of threats he’d be willing to place to ensure Nie Huaisang removed that video from the internet posthaste. Wei Wuxian laughs, taking another gulp of his latté before checking his phone.

Of course it’s blowing up with people clamouring to educate him on the sacredness of Lan Wangji’s ribbon. He’d come to that same conclusion on his own after he got bit for his troubles.

“You have a train in two hours,” says Lan Wangji suddenly, his brows furrowing. “Jiang Wanyin informed me as much this morning. And given your new persona non grata status in Qishan…” he trails off, the corners of his mouth twitching slightly in amusement. “I imagine you would not wish to miss this train.”

“No,” agrees Wei Wuxian, as he hops out of the bed with his latté still in hand. Lan Wangji’s heart lies elsewhere. He’s overstayed in so many more ways than one. “I should go, then.”

Lan Wangji hums, solemnity colouring his expression as he nods his head. “Until the next competition,” he agrees.

Wei Wuxian’s hand pauses on the doorknob. “Lan Zhan,” he says.

“Mm?” is the response.

Wei Wuxian turns, but upon seeing Lan Wangji silhouetted against the morning light, any words that could have bubbled out of him just seconds ago freeze and shrivel in his mouth.

“I…” he struggles. Lan Wangji’s eyes are like topaz, his skin like opals, his hair like jet. Every inch of him is too precious, too untouchable for someone as uncouth and unrefined as Wei Wuxian. “I…”

What could he possibly say?

“I’m sorry about the ribbon,” he mumbles. Lan Wangji blinks at him. “I touched it when you were drunk. I didn’t realise it was special.”

Lan Wangji inclines his head, almost as if in forgiveness. Wei Wuxian smiles.

“See you next competition,” he finishes, before stepping out of the room. What he doesn’t see, as the hotel door closes behind him, is the look of undeniable pain on Lan Wangji’s face.
Hi, you guys might notice this chapter is up before social media posts about it RIP I'm posting this from China and my VPN on my laptop is terrible, so the social media posts will be up when I'm back in the States in like,,, a day lol

"What in Nüwa’s stones": ahahah ok so Nüwa is a goddess in Chinese mythology and she has a set of 5-coloured stones that represent the elements. it's basically like "Merlin's beard" from HP haha

The random Phoenix Wright reference: I HAD TO I'M SORRY

Chord Assassination: yeah i modified the origin of the technique a little. don't really wanna touch on the implications of these countries going through ww2 though so. yeaaaaaa

"Take off your pants": kind of a UK vs US English joke here which honestly i'm not sure would translate per se since technically in-universe they'd be speaking Mandarin/Putonghua, but: pants in the US = underwear briefs in the UK. (though for the record Lan "bougieville born and raised" Wangji would've learnt UK English lol, nevermind that the Suzhou/Gusu dialect is basically the British accent of Chinese dialects)

Banquet dancing: okay did you see what fandom I was in before this one,,,, did you think i'd do a rivals fic with heavy allusions to fs fandom,,,, and leave this out? bold assumptions my lads <3
(and the morning after feat. coffee is also a reference to a rivals fic in that fandom bc i love the author so much guys ;w;)

The art in this chapter was drawn by the fantastic minatu! Thank you so much minaaaaaaa <3333

Also, pancakesprince drew WWX and LWJ dancing!! You can see it here. Thank youuu!
It’s a warm autumn evening. The air is thick with humidity and music, and Wei Wuxian’s heart beats like a promise as he dances through a perfumed garden in Lan Wangji’s arms.

“Silly Lan Zhan, needing the excuse of alcohol to let his hair loose,” he teases in spite of himself, fingers digging sweetly into the cloth of Lan Wangji’s white suit. Lan Wangji’s brows knit, but all he does is pull Wei Wuxian even more flush against himself.

Wei Wuxian giggles. “Is that your sword, or are you just happy to see me?”

Lan Wangji merely nods, which doesn’t answer the question at all. Wei Wuxian pouts, fingers pressed flat against Lan Wangji’s shoulder as they move back into their waltz. “What does that even mean?” he wonders, his voice a secretive whisper against Lan Wangji’s ears. “Are you not happy here?”

“Impossible,” replies Lan Wangji, as the song ends. Wei Wuxian moves to drop his hands, but Lan Wangji takes them in even harder, his topaz eyes now closer to amber in warmth as he entwines their fingers.

Wei Wuxian wants this so badly he’s almost insane with longing.

“Lan Zhan, you’re squeezing my fingers too tight,” he jokes, but makes no move to tug his hands away. Lan Wangji hums and reels him in, having moved from the waltz to the swing. Wei Wuxian had no idea he even knew half of these moves.

They dance, and dance, and dance, until Wei Wuxian’s feet are aching and his heart is racing at the exhilarating proximity between them. Lan Wangji leads him with breathtaking grace, his steps fluid, effortless. Wei Wuxian would like to say he’s a decent dancer himself, yet next to Lan Wangji — as with almost everything else — he can only feel eclipsed.

On the final note of the final song, Lan Wangji dips him, and this is the moment that changes everything, every time.

When this moment had first happened in real life, Wei Wuxian had accidentally tugged off Lan Wangji’s forehead ribbon, earning him a bite for his troubles. But this time — as with every other time he revisits this night in his dreams — Wei Wuxian simply tangles his fingers in the waterfall of Lan Wangji’s hair, brings him in close, and kisses him.

And, invariably, that kiss is where he wakes up. The bedroom is strangely empty around him; beside him, his bed feels too big and too cold. Wei Wuxian sighs as he checks his mobile, before closing his eyes and trying to scavenge a little more sleep.
He got second place despite timing out at the last WNC, and he keeps disrespecting the rules and traditions of CompCult.

Also, the WNC at Xinglu shouldn’t have been his victory, considering he almost performed demonic cultivation to solve the endgame.

**popsicletwink**  
*member for 5 years*

*huaisangs said:*
Also, the WNC at Xinglu shouldn’t have been his victory, considering he almost performed demonic cultivation to solve the endgame.

If that was demonic cultivation, the entire Lan family must be advanced demonic cultivators then. WWX was using their techniques to lure the corpses.

As for his second place in Qishan, maybe you should refresh yourself on how CompCult scoring works. Here’s his scorecard from that competition. WWX killed several monsters on night 1. He also dealt significant damage to the endgame monster. He was deducted for timing out, but not by much because he was taken out by the Xuanwu. He was also deducted for taking the arrow out of Wen Chao, but technically since Wen Chao had been hurt, removing an arrow from him is not inherently a sabotage deduction. *Also Wen Chao had it coming.*

Finally he received technical bonuses for his fire talisman usage, his bladework, and his method in hurting the Xuanwu. And inb4 wank about LWJ’s technical bonus, btw, the Chord Assassination technique is a legit skill available to guqin users, so you guys can shut up about that.

Anyway tl;dr: WWX keeps winning or scoring high because he thinks out of the box. Cry harder.

**kissmekate**  
*member for 2 years*

*popsicletwink said:*
Anyway tl;dr: WWX keeps winning or scoring high because he thinks out of the box. Cry harder.

HAHAHA yes! WWX deserves some credit for coming up with the plan to kill the Xuanwu, as well as actually being the one to lure the Xinglu chieftain back into the tomb with the other corpses and spirits. Plus, he’s charismatic, which is more than what can be said for his rival…

**popsicletwink**  
*member for 5 years*

Oh my god don’t even get me started on how much of a bitch ass attitude LWJ has. Would it really kill him to not look like he drinks vinegar every morning?

**kissmekate**  
*member for 2 years*

Yeah really if there’s someone who gets overhyped it’s him. Just because he’s LXC’s little brother… and he’s like, okay-looking when he’s not scowling… god Lanflation is such a scourge. Thank fuck WWX is there to keep him from completely dominating the scoreboard.

**goldencheng**
kissmekate said:
Yeah really if there’s someone who gets overhyped it’s him. Just because he’s LXC’s little brother… and he’s like, okay-looking when he’s not scowling… god Lanflation is such a scourge. Thank fuck WWX is there to keep him from completely dominating the scoreboard.

Still completely unfair to other hard-working cultivators though, like Jiang Wanyin and Jin Zixuan. How the fuck has Jin Zixuan, who always gets top 3 at 5CC and Lanling Nationals, been languishing at the bottom of the WNC top 5 for so long? I call shenanigans.

starrynight
member for 5 years

goldencheng said:
How the fuck has Jin Zixuan, who always gets top 3 at 5CC and Lanling Nationals, been languishing at the bottom of the WNC top 5 for so long? I call shenanigans.

Because Lan Xichen has a soft spot for his little brother and every other gamemaster has a boner for LXC so they let him do what he wants. I know they did away with special weapons after that entire #inflategate scandal with between him and NMJ after 39WNC but IMHO “technical bonuses” is an entire category that needs to die. There’s too much room for favouritism there.

wwwxian
member for 1 month

Hi, I’m a n00b but how do technical bonuses even work?

kissmekate
member for 2 years

wwwxian said:
Hi, I’m a n00b but how do technical bonuses even work?

Technical bonuses are extra points awarded for artistry or unique cultivation techniques. It’s basically how the gamemasters inflate their faves. LXC and now LWJ have been known to get big technical bonuses because their cultivation is considered aesthetically refined or whatever especially compared to, say, NMJ’s cultivation style. NMJ consistently got lower technical bonuses because he came off as ‘too aggressive’. Since he became a gamemaster, though, that’s kinda stopped being a thing.

And yes, sometimes people get higher technical bonuses on their home turf. That’s how #molinggate got so widespread.

When Wei Wuxian goes downstairs for breakfast, the first thing he sees is Lan Wangji’s face staring up at him from yet another magazine cover.

“*Lan Wangji, the ice king of Competitive Cultivation,*” he reads, reading the words surrounding his rival’s face. “World Champion reveals how to melt his heart. Why the hell are people so obsessed with his love life? When I had all those magazine interviews last year no one cared about mine.”

“You’re much more accessible than he is,” says Jiang Cheng without even looking up from his class readings. “People are more interested in the people they can’t have.”
“Wow, are you implying I’m easy?” demands Wei Wuxian, pretending to be offended. Jiang Cheng’s eyebrow quirks up.

“I don’t even want to think about whatever you get up to when I’m not looking,” he says.

Wei Wuxian blows a raspberry at him. “Okay, sure, but which one of the two of us has been blacklisted by every woman in the Yunmeng National University school system?”

“It’s not my fault I have high standards,” retorts Jiang Cheng.

“I’d like you to repeat that sentence again, and think about where you went wrong,” says Wei Wuxian, frowning. Jiang Cheng retaliates by throwing the magazine at him. It hits him in the face and flops into his lap, flipping right to a centerspread of Lan Wangji sitting on a throne-like chair in sparkling white, his expression regal and refined as always.

Wei Wuxian feels a frisson of something run down his arms just seeing the picture, and promptly snaps the magazine closed before his flustered expression becomes too obvious. He takes some mantou from the plate in the centre of the table, nervously biting off a chunk.

After a long moment of companionable silence, Jiang Cheng looks up from his reading again. “So. Olympics this year,” he remarks, causing Wei Wuxian to drop his mantou.

“Don’t remind me,” he mutters. “Really pushed up the schedule on Worlds, too.”

“Might be a good thing,” says Jiang Cheng. “There isn’t that much after all the national competitions and 5CC, anyway.” He pauses, raising an eyebrow. “And the Olys are in Caiyi, so that’ll be interesting.”

Wei Wuxian sighs. He’d also seen the news. “Yeah,” he mutters. “Baifeng and Caiyi. It’s like they’re desperate to play it safe this year.”

“I’m not surprised, considering all the complaints about Qishan last year,” replies Jiang Cheng, rolling his eyes. “But I’m not sure if Baifeng is the best idea. All the towns nearby are going to be fucking crowded. Jiejie says all the hotels in Fenghuang are booked already.”

“Really,” says Wei Wuxian, raising his eyebrows. “Why?”

Jiang Cheng snorts. “You’ve been to Baifeng before, right?” he asks.

Wei Wuxian frowns. “Not that I can remember, why?”

“It really is a traditional competition ground,” replies Jiang Cheng. “Which means the opening ceremony and the live competition are at the same place.”

Wei Wuxian quickly realises what he’s implying. “They’re letting people watch the competition live this year,” he states.

Jiang Cheng nods.

wen ning

i’m going to baifeng with sister this year!!

wow really? that’s exciting
Baifeng Mountain Neutral Zone: A Visitor’s Guide

Welcome to the Baifeng Mountain Neutral Zone! Long considered a sacred ground for traditional nighthunting competitions between the countries of Lanling, Gusu, and Yunneng, Baifeng Mountain has been preserved as a neutral zone between the boundaries of all three countries in order to foster international goodwill and cooperation. The Neutral Zone is governed by a panel of three commissioners, one from each of the countries bordering its territory. However, there isn’t much to govern besides scientists studying the local flora and fauna — especially its populations of extremely rare, magical birds — as the Neutral Zone and much of its surrounding lands in each of the countries have long been considered off-limits to modern development schemes.

“In order to preserve the unique biodiversity of Baifeng Mountain, as well as its place in the histories of all three countries, the Neutral Zone maintains only the most basic of developments necessary to the work of the researchers that live in the area,” says the Board of Commissioners of the Baifeng Mountain Neutral Zone. “This is a place free of worldly attachments, free of the politics and greed and corruption found in other parts of the world. Here at Baifeng, the lucky visitor allowed to set foot amid its ancient trees will be greeted with nothing but the vast, tranquil majesty of nature.”

For more information on Baifeng Mountain’s governance, or to read about the latest scientific developments by the community living within, you may visit: baifengneutralzone.org

“Heavens, this is going to be hell already,” mutters Jiang Cheng as their car slowly inches through the one properly-paved street in Fenghuang, Yunneng. The tiny rural tourist town has probably never seen so many crowds before, not even during peak tourist season in the neighbouring Baifeng Mountain Neutral Zone, and already seems to be over capacity based on the sheer number of cars honking at one another in the streets.

“I told you it was a good idea to let me drive,” says Jiang Yanli as she stops her brother from reaching over to honk the horn. “You’d just get road rage and cause an international incident again.”

Jiang Cheng groans. “You cuss out one person,” he mutters, scrubbing his hands down his face. “How was I supposed to know that dude was supposed to be a big deal in some other country?”

“How about we don’t cuss people out in traffic next time?” suggests Jiang Yanli innocently, as they finally win the right to move forward three meters. “Heavens, this is going to take forever.”

“How about we don’t cuss people out in traffic next time?” wonders Wei Wuxian. “Are they really going to give your room away if you drop us off first?”

“Yes,” says Jiang Yanli, looking determinedly ahead. Someone tries to cut her off, but she zooms ahead with a loud honk to throw them off. “Do you see the mayhem here? People are going to be setting up tents by the end of tonight; I’m certain of it.”

They finally pull into the hotel courtyard an hour later. Jiang Yanli rushes inside with her bags to
check herself in and drop off her luggage, while Wei Wuxian and Jiang Cheng make faces at the other impatient tourists in the driveway waiting to get to the door. “I pity the fool who decides to visit Old Town Fenghuang this week,” says Jiang Cheng, shaking his head as they watch a gaggle of fans walk by across the street, sporting merch in a myriad of colours. “Our fans have completely shut down the town.”

“Your fans?” wonders Wei Wuxian, nodding towards the sheer amount of Gusu Lan’s blue and white. “Most of those are probably from the Light Brigade.”

Jiang Cheng rolls his eyes, but waves at some purple-clad fans standing on the curb with their phones out. “Smile for them anyway,” he says. “The internet is forever, after all.”

Jiang Yanli comes rushing out a couple minutes later, swinging into the car just as the tourists behind them start honking and yelling again. Their car merges back into the crawl of traffic heading out to the Baifeng Mountain Neutral Zone, passing through the roadblock at the end of the town without any problems. After that, the drive goes by fairly quickly.

“Poor tourists,” says Wei Wuxian, looking out the back window. Several cars behind them are getting turned away because they don’t have competition passes. “Can’t even go to Baifeng Mountain amid this insanity.”

“It is pretty messily organised,” agrees Jiang Cheng. “I wouldn’t even be surprised they oversold seating in the observation towers this year.”

“That’s going to be a nightmare and a half,” remarks Jiang Yanli, as she pulls into a dirt parking lot beside what looks like a repurposed scientific research base. “Hell hath no fury worse than angry fans, after all.”

Wei Wuxian and Jiang Cheng grab their equipment and bags as soon as they can, dust flying up as they wheel their suitcases through the parking lot towards the Cultivators’ Pavilion. They’re greeted by the press almost immediately upon entering, walking through flashing cameras and clamouring reporters to get to the reception desk.

“What thoughts do you have on the ecological impact this hunt will have on the population of rare birds endemic to Baifeng?” one of them demands, shoving a microphone in front of Wei Wuxian’s face as Jiang Cheng checks them in. Wei Wuxian looks over at the cameras now trained upon him, feeling his ears start to heat at the attention.

“No comment,” he says, pushing away to join Jiang Cheng as they break free of the crowd to head to their rooms.

“Competitor Wei! Competitor Wei!” the press screams after them.

Wei Wuxian ignores them all as he and Jiang Cheng head for their room.

r/CompCult • posted by u/monochrome MODERATOR 1 day ago

51WNC Etiquette Tips/Advice Post

It’s been a while since we’ve had a WNC that allowed fans to watch the action live! The last one was probably the 25th WNC; after that the events began to be held in closed arenas and only filmed for the audience to watch.

So with that in mind, if you’ve been to a live CompCult nighthunt, what are some etiquette tips and
advice for the newcomers?

310 Comments  Share  Save  Hide  Report

kiki_xoxo 79 points • 1 day ago
I guess the setting of the competition has to be taken into account, too. Baifeng Mountain is a traditional cultivation spot, considered sacred enough to be designated a neutral zone for the 3 countries that border it. I’d treat the place like it’s a historic temple, instead of your average sports stadium.

elisedabeast 50 points • 1 day ago
oh shit i was gonna bring hotdogs and popcorn

niewhysang 1 point • 1 day ago
LOL I mean I have popcorn when I watch the livestreams, but this’ll be better lol

3 more replies

12 more replies

arosiehaze 24 points • 12 hrs ago
I can’t be the only person who thinks people who purchased a ticket to go to this live are being fleeced right? Because the observation towers won’t get you as close to the action as the cameras and drones will. Who’s stupid enough to fall for this?

dankmemez69 9 points • 7 hrs ago
Rich people. It’s just like Fyre Fest but CompCult kek

mrslanzhan 7 points • 7 hrs ago
Me. I just wanna throw flowers at Hanguang-jun 😊

5 more replies

th3sc3pticaln3rd 3 points • 5 hrs ago
They have a good thing going with the livestreams and drones and stuff; why do they gotta sell physical seats? This is just going to attract the richest and most entitled fans tbh since tix to travel to Baifeng are expensive, and these tix are expensive too…

ashleeigh 1 point • 2 hrs ago
Well I have fam in Fenghuang and they love the birdspotting so this is an excuse for me to visit them and check stuff out lol

It seems this year the theme is something along the lines of ‘back to basics’, because for the opening ceremony everyone is grouped into columns based on their country, rather than riding out individually at the call of their name.

But then again, the field for the opening ceremony is also a lot smaller than the average arena, at least from Wei Wuxian can see on Lil Apple’s back. Next to him, Jiang Cheng fiddles with Zidian’s ring, the electricity crackling in anticipation.

“I don’t think it’s a good year to use that,” says Wei Wuxian, gesturing to the other cultivators in formation beside them. At the sound of the gun, the first line of competitors trot their horses down the
field, their names barely audible over the sound of screaming fans.

Then the flowers begin to rain.

In most competitions, people throw more than just flowers during the opening ceremony. This year, however, it seems to be just flowers: buckets and buckets of petals and blooms cascade from the towers and float through the breeze towards the grass. Some of the competitors catch blossoms from specific fans, waving them in acknowledgement as they pass underneath the towers. When the columns containing him and Jiang Cheng start to move, Wei Wuxian manages to catch a falling peony from one of the towers.

Up ahead, Lan Wangji is riding for Gusu, his curtain of ebony hair flowing out with his horse’s steady pace. His white ribbon flies out with it, rippling bright in the breeze along with the flowing sleeves of his white and blue robes.

Wei Wuxian can’t help it. He tosses the peony at Lan Wangji, using a bit of his cultivation to ensure it hits the mark — literally. The flower bounces off Lan Wangji’s head from behind, but he catches it nonetheless, crumpling the petals in his hands.

Wei Wuxian’s heart deflates without really knowing why.

Then Lan Wangji’s arm pauses in his dismissal of the flower. He turns around on his horse, searching through the columns behind until his eyes lock on Wei Wuxian. Wei Wuxian promptly pretends like he hadn’t been staring in Lan Wangji’s direction, tapping mock-thoughtfully at his chin. Lan Wangji returns his gaze forward, then, but he also tucks the peony into his robes.

Wei Wuxian’s heart skips a beat, and that only confuses him more.

“Take a feather, everyone take a feather!” exclaims Lan Xichen. The glowering gamemaster from Xinglu is also passing them out, and Wei Wuxian takes his with some trepidation. “These will lead you to the objective of the game this year: the successful capture of the Zhuque of Carnage.”

The feathers glow bright red as Lan Xichen pulls up a projection of the bird in question. It’s vermillion from tip to toe, with a cruelly-curved beak and shrewd golden eyes.

“Those feathers are your clue to capturing the Zhuque,” says Lan Xichen. “They get brighter the closer you get to the target, so follow them well! But don’t rely on them too hard — sometimes you might show up too late, because the feather itself can glow in the proximity of other items of the bird’s, such as its nest, its last perching spot, and… its excrement.”

“You don’t want to touch that,” adds the other gamemaster. “Nor do you want to touch some of the other birds in the mountain. The zhenniao, for example, is not a bird you want to cross.”

“Every inch of their body is poisonous,” says Lan Xichen. “And you only have one vial of antidote to counteract zhenniao exposure in your medikit. It is good for about five exposures.”
“What happens after we’re out of that?” demands Jin Zixuan.

“Hands,” snaps the other gamemaster, but Lan Xichen laughs.

“It’s fine, Mingjue,” he says. “If you are exposed and you have no more antidote left, you time out.”

Wei Wuxian raises his hand. Nie Mingjue and Lan Xichen look at one another with identical long-suffering gazes, before Lan Xichen crosses his hands behind his back and nods at him to ask. “Isn’t zhenniao antidote traditionally composed of powdered rhino horn?”

Murmurs rise amongst the other competitors. Luo Qingyang in particular looks rather put-off.

“We have already accounted for that,” says Lan Xichen. “The antidote in your medikit is made from water buffalo horn and herbal substitutes.”

“Good,” says Wei Wuxian. “I’m just worried since I got asked several questions about the ecological impact this game will have on the mountain. I’m guessing you have some set response for that, too?”

“Measures have already been taken to minimise ecological impact,” says Nie Mingjue immediately, scowling deeply. “You will not be harming any real birds during the course of this game.”

“The Zhuque of Carnage may set things on fire,” adds Lan Xichen, “but there will be crew on standby to ensure it does not spread out of the confines of the arena.”

“So we’re fair game for timing out in a blaze, but at least the rest of the park will be fine,” mutters a cultivator sitting next to Jin Zixuan. “Amazing.”

“Competitor Jin, no one is forcing you to compete,” replies Lan Xichen sweetly. Wei Wuxian laughs, as the other Competitor Jin immediately scrunches down in his seat, cheeks flaring. When the gamemasters turn their attention to the arena map, however, the other Competitor Jin turns around and glares in Wei Wuxian’s direction.

Oh, thinks Wei Wuxian, grinning widely. A new challenger.

“Hey! Competitor Wei!” shouts the other Competitor Jin over the din of cultivators exiting the briefing room. “I have a bone to pick with you.”

“Already?” asks Wei Wuxian with a chuckle as he turns around to face Competitor Jin. It only makes the other man cross his arms with a deeper scowl.

“Yeah, already. You keep picking on my cousin.”

“Your cousin!” exclaims Wei Wuxian. “...Jin Zixuan is your cousin?”

Jin Zixun glowers harder. “Your comments towards him have been nothing but insulting, while all he has done is treat you with courtesy.”

“He has not treated my shijie with courtesy in the past,” retorts Wei Wuxian.

“For which he’s apologised,” Jin Zixun points out. Wei Wuxian sighs.

“You know, compared to you, Jin Zixuan is actually the kindest, sweetest walk in the park of a man,” he says. “Is this really the beef you have with me? Because something tells me it isn’t.”

Jin Zixun juts out his chin. “Your victory in Xinglu was undeserved,” he replies. “The INU should
not have stooped so low as to give you technical bonuses for *demonic cultivation*.”

“Oh my gods.” They’ve made it out to the field again by now, where many fans are still clustered in the observation towers watching the competitors practice archery and bladework. “You do know the definition of demonic cultivation, right?”

“Isn’t it controlling corpses?” asks Jin Zixun.

“No,” says a new voice. Lan Wangji has arrived, white ribbons plaïted into his hair, his white athletic jacket unzipped to show a thin white t-shirt below. Wei Wuxian has to avert his gaze immediately. “Demonic cultivation is the harnessing of resentful energy generated by fierce corpses and spirits. Competitor Wei had only been practicing evocation in Xinglu. Very roughly, of course, but not demonic in nature.”

“Nice to see you too, Hermione Granger,” says Wei Wuxian, slinging an arm around Lan Wangji. The other cultivator pushes his arm off almost by instinct. “So, Zixun, you got a problem with my evocation?”

Jin Zixun glares at the two of them. “Whatever. What do I know? It’s not like the rest of us can stand a chance against the two of you. Even getting technical bonuses for your little rivalry at this point — no one could fight against that.”

Wei Wuxian bristles at that. He can take this idiot trash-talking his own ability until the cows come home, but the minute Lan Wangji’s is pulled into question, all bets are off. “You wanna go? We could prove you wrong right here, right now. Lan Zhan, let me borrow your ribbon.”

A blink. “No,” says Lan Wangji, clutching onto his plait.

“Suit yourself.” Wei Wuxian strides over to the archery line, picking the farthest target on the field. He takes off his scarf and ties it around his eyes, before nocking an arrow to his bow and taking aim.

The arrow hits the bull’s-eye dead centre. The stands erupt into cheers and screaming. Wei Wuxian removes his scarf with a mock bow to Jin Zixun.

“Thank you for your consideration,” he says. Jin Zixun scoffs.

“Show-off,” he says.

“For who?” wonders Wei Wuxian. “Certainly wasn’t for you.” He winks over at where Luo Qingyang is practicing her own aim. “Mianmian, need any help with your stance?”

“Not from you, Yuandao,” she retorts. Next to Wei Wuxian, Lan Wangji’s expression hardens.

“Shameless,” he mutters, before stalking away. Jin Zixun laughs at that, much to Wei Wuxian’s chagrin.

“Let’s make this competition even more interesting,” he suggests. “I’ll bet you ten jars of Emperor’s Smile that you can’t spend the first night of this game blindfolded.”

Wei Wuxian’s never one to back down from a challenge. Jiang Cheng had recorded and posted too many videos of him eating cinnamon and chili peppers for cowardice to be a possibility now. And so, in his infinite wisdom, Wei Wuxian steps up and shakes Jin Zixun’s hand.

“You’re on,” he says.
#BirdBoxChallenge Hits Sports with Wei Wuxian’s Blindfold Dare at 51st World Nighthunting Championships

Apparently the world of CompCult hasn’t gotten Netflix’s memo not to replicate its thriller movie *Bird Box*, because this year’s World Nighthunting Championships is going to feature Yunmeng Champion Wei Wuxian sporting a blindfold for the first night of the game. Competitor Wei had reportedly agreed to blindfold himself as part of a dare with a fellow competitor… [MORE]

_______________________

**weiwvxians**

petition to get lwj to tie him to a tree for the first night so he doesn’t hurt himself, stupid boy 😊

_______________________

**lanvvangis**

@weiwvxians you had me at ‘petition to get lwj to tie him’ 😊

_______________________

**iluvmywaifu**

The stupidity of humanity never ceases to amaze me. Next thing you know Wei’s going to be eating Tide pods.

_______________________

**killedbythesketchbook**

He’s actually done several other challenges! Here’s him doing the cinnamon one, the chili pepper one, and the car surfing one. He doesn’t do some of the really dangerous stuff, so he at least has some sense.

_______________________

**pure-of-heart**

What part of car surfing is not dangerous? Or eating all that cinnamon and chili peppers? He’s a terrible role model for the kids that look up to him!

#discourse #negativityforts #51wnc #wei wuxian #compcult

There’s a knock at their door later that night, and when Jiang Cheng answers, he audibly groans. “A-Ying, someone for you,” he says, and steps aside to reveal Wen Ning with a jar of Emperor’s Smile. “Amazing!” cheers Wei Wuxian, already fetching plastic cups for the wine. “I’ll make it up to you after I win those ten jars from Jin Zixun.”

Wen Ning flushes, setting the jar down on the desk. “There’s no need,” he says, pulling out the desk chair. Wei Wuxian looks over at Jiang Cheng, who’s packing up his laptop and mobile.
“You don’t want to stay and drink with us?” he asks.

“Hell no,” says Jiang Cheng. “What is he even doing here?”

“Helping my sister,” says Wen Ning, before making a noise of remembrance and pulling out a bag of crisps from his satchel. “Shrimp flavoured. I hope that’s fine with you?”

“You’re the best,” says Wei Wuxian, as Jiang Cheng rolls his eyes and leaves. “Hey, A-Cheng, if you run into Lan Zhan tell him he should totally come drink with us!”

“I doubt he will,” says Jiang Cheng, before closing the door. Wen Ning sighs, opening the jar and pouring them two cups of wine.

“Cheers,” he says, handing one to Wei Wuxian. They clink their cups, before Wei Wuxian downs his in one gulp.

“Nothing beats Emperor’s Smile,” he says, grinning as he sets the cup back onto the desk and opens the crisps. “What’ve you been up to?”

Wen Ning shrugs. “University and competing. Not much besides that, you?”

“About the same,” lies Wei Wuxian. Well, not completely — he and Jiang Cheng had both gotten into Yunneng National University, Lotus Pier, but schoolwork hardly takes up much of his mental energy these days. “How’d you do in Qishan Nationals?”

“First,” says Wen Ning, pink-cheeked. “But since I… was involved in the hearing against you at the last Worlds… I got barred from competing internationally by the Qishan Federation.”

Wei Wuxian raises an eyebrow. “They can do that?” he wonders.

“Things are different in Qishan,” replies Wen Ning, shrugging. “It is what it is.”

“It doesn’t have to be,” protests Wei Wuxian. “I’d love to compete against you someday, and you’re clearly so much more competent than Wen Chao.” He pauses. “How is he, by the way?”

“Recovering,” says Wen Ning as he finishes his own drink. “They sent some other people this year, but I don’t know them very well.”

“Their loss, not sending you,” replies Wei Wuxian as he refills his friend’s cup. “Maybe for the Olympics? They’re happening in like two months after this, right?”

“Worlds is where we solidify the Olympics team,” says Wen Ning with a little sigh. “If I were to represent Qishan at the Olympics, I would be competing at Worlds.”

Wei Wuxian grumbles at that. “Sounds stupid,” he mutters.

“It’s all right,” dismisses Wen Ning. “I’m sure the Qishan competitors this year are good, but it’s not like I have to support them. I’ll be cheering for you again this year, for sure!”

Wei Wuxian clinks his cup against Wen Ning’s. “I’ll drink to not timing out the first night,” he says with a chuckle.

“I’ll drink to that, too,” says Wen Ning, and downs his wine in one gulp.

The rest of the night becomes a bit of a blur after that.
The WADA Executive Committee met today to discuss the Song Investigative Report, commissioned in September of last year after the 50th World Nighthunting Championships in Qishan. Following allegations by now-former Director of the WADA-accredited Laboratory in Nightless City, Baiyang Wen, WADA engaged Professor Zichen Song as an Independent Person to investigate Qishan state manipulation of the doping control process.

In addition to the Song Investigation, however, the Intelligence & Investigations (I&I) Department is now also in possession of an electronic file that the Department is confident is the Laboratory Information Management System (LIMS) of the Nightless City Laboratory. WADA’s Executive Committee hereby lists the following key recommendations, to be taken at the discretion of each of the relevant organisations based on their rules and regulations… [MORE]

Wei Wuxian is quite late to report to the field on the morning of the competition. “Competitor Wei, were you not aware of the calltime?” asks Head Gamemaster Jin Guangyao with a rather condescending twinkle in his eyes. All he receives in return is a groan, because the headache Wei Wuxian had woken up with this morning hasn’t fully dissipated just yet.

“I forgot it’d been moved to the morning,” he admits.

“Well, we have a live audience this year, so we need to make it worth their while,” replies Jin Guangyao drily. “Get into position.”

Wei Wuxian immediately takes out his scarf and ties it around his head. The stands cheer.

At the sound of a gong, they all venture into the forest. Wei Wuxian lets his core guide him for a bit, relying on his cultivation to keep him from tripping over roots. The screams from the stands slowly die off the deeper he ventures into the shadows of the trees, but he only stops once he reaches something that feels like a clearing.

This is a lot harder than he’d thought, but he’s too proud to break the challenge now. He finds a tree that hopefully isn’t infested with zhenniao, leaning against the trunk in what he hopes is a casual pose. There’s drone cameras flying about, but this is the closest he’s been able to hear them.

Then his heightened senses pick up footsteps, and his heart seizes. He puts a hand on Suibian, asking, “who’s there?”

The footsteps only venture closer. “If this is Jin Zixun, please go the fuck away,” Wei Wuxian adds. Closer. “A-Cheng, if this is you, you need to work on your stealth,” Wei Wuxian calls. Closer. “...Mianmian? Maybe it’s you?” After all, if this mystery person is a maiden like Mianmian, she must truly have no fear. Not just because of the cameras lying in wait to capture what happens, but also because of the subsequent fan fallout. He knows the internet will be broken in the next couple of minutes, with this person stepping ever closer.

Either it breaks because he’s the first person to time out, or it breaks because —

His train of thought immediately evaporates at the brush of the mystery cultivator’s lips against his own. They’re smooth and soft, pressing against Wei Wuxian’s with undeniable need. Fire sparks
deep inside him, slowly rising through his gut all the way to his cheeks. He moans into the kiss, and the other boldly seizes it, pressing themself even closer as their tongue plunders the corners of Wei Wuxian’s mouth.

He reaches up, desperate for a hint, and finds just long hair and the smell of sandalwood before the person is reeling back, almost as if scalded. Wei Wuxian tries to stammer out an apology, but all he gets in response is the thud-thud of frantic footfalls against the leaf-strewn path as his anonymous kisser fades into the darkness.

Excerpt from “Melting the Ice King of Competitive Cultivation” from HelloHello! Girl Talk Magazine:

Like an iceberg in the Arctic, the true depths of Lan Wangji lie far below the surface. Romance is, of course, one of these depths. So we sat down with him and learnt some new things about this Ice King’s surprisingly spring-like heart.

HH: Do you believe in love?
LWJ: Absolutely.

HH: Really? You don’t give the impression that you would do something so illogical.
LWJ: My family has rarely ever been logical in love. It is our one weakness.

HH: Tell us more. How did it start?
LWJ: One of my ancestors believed that everyone has another half. Yin and yang, animus and anima — the concept crosses cultural boundaries.

HH: So you believe in soulmates.
LWJ: Affirmative.

HH: Have you found yours yet?
LWJ: I hope so.

HH: Do they know?
LWJ: I hope so.

HH: And if you could tell your soulmate something, what would you say?
LWJ: Listen closer.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter title taken from "Let's Not Be Friends Anymore" by Eric Chou.

Goldencore: a play on the goldenskate forum, that beautiful internet cesspool of figure skating wank...

Baifeng Mountain: IRL neutral zones do exist! But this one in particular is more inspired by my experience in more rural parts of Sichuan. However, Fenghuang itself is a city with an old water town in Hunan province, so if you’re interested in that, go check it out.

Thank you for your consideration: reference to that scene in Hunger Games lol

WADA: is a real anti-doping organisation. this snippet is based off of their press releases about the Russian doping scandals.
The super amazing pancakesprince has drawn the end scene [here!!](#) THANK YOU SO MUCH AHHH
Wei Wuxian is in a great deal of pain, and for once it’s actually physical.

He’d been trying to follow the mysterious kisser after they vanished, but being blindfolded definitely hinders that effort. He’d tried to follow the direction of their footsteps but hadn’t gotten very far before he’d tripped and stumbled into a nest of extremely sharp beaks and piercing cries.

Then his timer had started to beep. He’d frantically searched through his bag, but every movement felt as if his nerves were being set on fire. His heart was racing too — hard and erratic, with each passing second inching him closer to timeout.

At the very last second, he’d felt a cool hand rub something onto his hands, his face. His cuts stung, but the beeping had subsided, and all that was left was the cool balm of the ointment.

“I better stay close to you, huh, whoever you are,” he says now. Like his mysterious kisser, this mysterious doctor also makes no sound. Wei Wuxian chuckles. “You’re not chatty, either. Huh. Second one I’ve met today. The first one just kissed me.”

A soft exhale. The steady hand now moves to his forearm, warm and comforting. Wei Wuxian
“Wait, did you use your antidote on me? What about you, then? What if you get exposed?”

More silence. The hand tugs at him, and Wei Wuxian follows immediately. As they walk, he can smell the scent of smoke, hear distant sounds of conflict. But his guide doesn’t let him get closer to the chaos, only steers him to something solid and rocky.

A shelter. Wei Wuxian leans into the stone, humming. “Thank you for this,” he says, but his saviour continues not to say anything. Wei Wuxian is more tempted than ever to peek under his blindfold, but there’s still ten jugs of Emperor’s Smile on the line.

So instead he leans into the form of his saviour and guesses their identity in his mind until he drifts off to sleep.

Wei Wuxian opens his eyes to the rumble of shaking trees. The morning sun almost blinds him again as he tears off his blindfold, but when his eyes adjust he sees that he’s been tucked into a sheltered overhang, and the trees under attack are not too far away.

He checks the score, cringing at his own low standing. Jin Zixun is currently in first, because of course he’d take advantage of Wei Wuxian being a blindfolded idiot to kill a fuckton of monsters the first night. What’s more surprising, though, is the fact that Lan Wangji is also languishing low on the scoreboard for the first night. What happened there?

He gets his answer after a couple bites of his ration pack and heading out in the direction of the swaying trees, as Lan Wangji is the one slashing at them hard enough to make them sway as if buffeted by a great storm. Wei Wuxian suspects the game itself is the only reason none of the trees have actually toppled by now.

“What are you doing?” he asks, causing the other cultivator to jump nearly a foot into the air. Lan Wangji spins around to glare at him, storm clouds gathering on his brows faster than the wind. “What did the trees do to deserve you attacking them like this?”

Lan Wangji opens his mouth as if to retort, but then thinks better of it, deliberately turning his face from Wei Wuxian’s concerned glance. Wei Wuxian moves, trying to meet Lan Wangji’s eyes, but to no avail.

“Is something wrong?” he wonders, finally stepping into Lan Wangji’s space and peering up at him with curious eyes. Lan Wangji’s ears are bright pink now, and he closes his eyes and purses his lips like a child determined not to look at something. “Is it the scores? They did seem pretty low for someone who usually racks up a lot of kills the first night —”

“Shut up,” says Lan Wangji, sheathing his sword with much more viciousness than necessary. “It is none of your business.”

Wei Wuxian pouts. “Okay, geez. Sorry I cared, then.” He crosses his arms, sticks out his tongue. Lan Wangji opens one eye to glare at him.

“We are behind,” he says after a moment, pulling out the glowing red feather from his jacket pocket. “Unless you do not want to win this year, I suggest we move forward.”

“Yeah, sure.” Wei Wuxian takes out his own feather, holding it up to the light. “Though, why are you behind? I know I’m behind because I was an idiot who decided to blindfold himself for the first night and almost timed out because of it, but you? What were you up to last night?”
Lan Wangji pushes him into the tree. “None of your business,” he repeats.

Wei Wuxian yelps in pain, but drops the subject anyway.

---

**katriarch:** oh my god he’s an bona fide IDIOT

**nicaforov:** to be fair i don’t think he knows at all

**xuaniemingjue:** we stan a boy with one (1) braincell

**thoushaltcount23:** ‘’

**liz_wangji:** i can’t believe we’re witnessing this firsthand this is worse than the hallmark movies my mom makes me watch at christmas

**jinzixuans:** he really doesn’t… he really doesn’t know?

**AngelaValente:** APPARENTLY NOT?

**nicaforov:**

**thoushaltcount23:** i’m so sorry lwj but your rival/boyfriend is a can of oblivious sardines

**xuaniemingjue:** god save us all

---

Following the Zhuque feathers proves to be frustrating at best. The glow is inconsistent; sometimes one would be brighter than the other, or both would glow but then dim three steps later. No matter how bright the red becomes, it’s almost impossible to pinpoint why, or where the bird itself might be.

But then again, that might have been the gamemasters’ plan all along.

By the time lunch rolls around, they’ve only managed to kill a couple stray corpses and monsters beneath the forest’s dark trees, with no sign of the Zhuque anywhere. When they stop for lunch, Lan Wangji guides them down to a smaller waterfall, before poking through all the nearby bushes to come up with a handful of ripe berries and fruit. Wei Wuxian watches him for a moment, admiring how the breeze from the waterfall stirs at his long plait, before the sound of a twig snapping causes his attention to redirect to the opposite bank of the waterfall pool.

A couple rabbits have hopped out of the undergrowth, noses twitching warily as they approach the bank. Wei Wuxian immediately nocks an arrow to his bowstring, but before he can take aim, Lan Wangji grabs his wrist.

“Don’t,” says Lan Wangji, eyes narrowed. Wei Wuxian raises an eyebrow.

“They’re just rabbits,” he points out.

“No,” says Lan Wangji, shaking his head. “Please.”

Wei Wuxian sighs, lowering his arm. The rabbits hop away, but almost immediately after there’s another branch snap, followed by the appearance of a young buck.

“How about that one?” asks Wei Wuxian, raising his arm again. Lan Wangji considers it, before inclining his head.

The deer falls. Wei Wuxian has to wander across the pool to bring it back.

“Thank you for this,” he says, after Lan Wangji manages to put together something edible between the venison and the berries. “It’s delicious.”

“Mm,” says Lan Wangji, inclining his head in acknowledgement.
“How have you been?” adds Wei Wuxian as he takes a bite of the food.


“Just fine?” he asks. “We’re all in uni now; surely you’ve got to have some stories about your school.” He pauses. “You’re at University of Caiyi, right?” Lan Wangji nods. “How is that? Jiang Cheng keeps talking about how he wants to transfer there, so…”


“Ugh, studying,” Wei Wuxian rolls his eyes. “Caiyi’s the biggest city in Gusu, about to host the Olympics this year, and all that matters at that school is studying?”

“Academic success is valued under the rectorship of Lan Qiren, yes,” replies Lan Wangji. They fall into a peaceful silence, punctuated by bites of food. Wei Wuxian watches the golden sunlight dance across Lan Wangji’s fair features, and tries to slow the racing of his own heart.

“You know, I also kinda want to study in Gusu,” he says. Lan Wangji almost drops his venison, but catches himself just in time.

“Given your attitude towards academics, I doubt it would be a good fit,” he replies.

“Spoilsport,” retorts Wei Wuxian. “Watch as I get in just to annoy you every day.”

There’s a small huff from Lan Wangji at that, something caught between exasperation and amusement. “Tedious,” he says, before popping the rest of the meat into his mouth to stave off further conversation.

Wei Wuxian nudges him. “It’d be anything but tedious. I’ll find all the cool spots in Caiyi and we’ll go clubbing every night. You should loosen up a little. There’s more to the world than compcult and school, you know.”

“I am aware,” replies Lan Wangji, his voice strained as he looks at Wei Wuxian. That’s when Wei Wuxian remembers — *ah yes, he’s in love with someone.*

“Have you tried talking to her? Or him, or them?” he asks.

Lan Wangji blinks at him, almost confused. Wei Wuxian sighs.

“The person you wrote that song for. I won’t pry too hard, but the first step to getting them to like you is to talk to them, you know.”

Lan Wangji’s expression tilts into deeper confusion, though in a blink it smooths back to placid. “I have talked to them,” he says, before dipping his hands into the waterfall. The droplets that fly through the air seem to sparkle like diamonds. “I do not know if they return the sentiment.”

Wei Wuxian considers it. “Then maybe you need to talk to them more,” he suggests. “Be more open about your interest in them! I can’t imagine anyone saying no to you. They’d be stupid to turn you down!”

Lan Wangji hums at that, but says nothing.
As far as Wei Wuxian is concerned, he would’ve gladly traded all of his gold medals to make this afternoon last a little longer. But eventually they have to get back to the search, holding out their Zhuque feathers as they venture deeper into the forests of Baifeng Mountain.

“Maybe if we get on our swords we’ll be able to find the nest better,” says Wei Wuxian after a couple hours of wandering. They’d managed to banish some spirits and kill some lower-level monsters along the way, so it hadn’t been a complete waste, but the target bird still seems to elude them at every turn.

“Perhaps,” agrees Lan Wangji, as the sunlight begins to fade through the eaves of the trees. Their feathers are still depressingly dim, though Wei Wuxian hopes that the nighttime will make it easier to see any changes to its brightness.

And then the afternoon is properly ruined when Jin Zixun crashes through the underbrush, looking about him wildly. “You!” he hisses at Wei Wuxian, jabbing a finger at him. “What did you do with my antidote?”

“Your antidote?” echoes Wei Wuxian, raising his palms in a placating gesture. “I don’t know what you’re talking about, Zixun.”

“The zhenniao antidote, you idiot!” hisses Jin Zixun, his finger now poking against Wei Wuxian’s chest. Wei Wuxian takes a couple steps back, sending a bewildered glance towards Lan Wangji. “Mine’s missing! Clearly someone wants to sabotage me!”

“Well, it’s not me,” replies Wei Wuxian, shaking his head. “I haven’t been anywhere near you ever since the game started. I don’t even remember where I was last night.”

And I would’ve been in no position to steal anything, since someone was making out with me while I was blindfolded, he doesn’t add, though he can’t help but notice Lan Wangji suddenly turning his gaze pointedly towards the forest floor.
“I can’t think of who else it would be,” snarls Jin Zixun, drawing his sword. There’s a flash, as Lan Wangji’s sword flies out to meet it. If Wei Wuxian hadn’t seen it at his side moments ago, he’d have sworn Lan Wangji pulled it out of thin air.

“How would you know?” wonders Jin Zixun, glaring.

“Our paths crossed last night. He was nowhere near you.” Lan Wangji’s scowl deepens. He easily knocks Jin Zixun’s sword out of his hand, before pointing the tip of his at the other competitor’s face. Jin Zixun’s eyes cross as the blade moves closer to his nose. “Do not blindly accuse people of things they did not do, simply because you do not like them.”

Jin Zixun opens his mouth as if to retort, but Wei Wuxian steps forward and puts a hand on Lan Wangji’s chest, gently nudging him back.

“It’s all right, Lan Zhan,” he says, patting Lan Wangji’s shoulder. “It’s noble of you to try and defend my honour, but you don’t need to get into a fight —”


“It was definitely a fight —”

“No,” insists Lan Wangji, his gaze fixed on something over Wei Wuxian’s shoulder. “Fire.”

Wei Wuxian turns, and sure enough, an ominous red glow is seeping through the spaces between the trees in the forest. Golden sparks light up the early evening as the smell of smoke suddenly hits their nostrils.

Jin Zixun curses loudly, immediately hopping onto his sword and taking flight. Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji look at one another before quickly following suit.

Once they clear the trees, Wei Wuxian can’t help but look down at the inferno raging through the forest. Several time-out flares shoot into the night, while other cultivators who’d managed to escape the blaze in time hover, windswept and soot-smudged, above the trees. Wei Wuxian breathes a sigh of relief when he sees Jiang Cheng amongst the survivors, though the relief is tempered somewhat at the sight of Jin Zixuan and Su She hovering next to him.

Then the Zhuque feather scorches his hand, causing him to drop it. Fortunately, Lan Wangji manages to catch it. “Thank you,” Wei Wuxian says, but anything else he would’ve said dies on his tongue as he looks down at the glow emanating from the feather.

It’s glowing almost as brightly as the fire.

“Lan Zhan,” Wei Wuxian breathes, “check your feather, too.”

Lan Wangji gingerly pulls out his own feather. The other competitors follow suit, eyes widening at the glow emanating from their feathers.

“This is the brightest they’ve been all competition,” Wei Wuxian says, just as a fiery blur flies past them.

“The endgame,” agrees Lan Wangji, just as Jiang Cheng and Jin Zixuan zoom past them in pursuit of the blur, followed by several other competitors.
Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji look at one another, before joining the chase as well.

The chase is fast and vicious. Wei Wuxian finds himself dodging arrows from the other competitors as they weave through the sky, though he knows everyone is mostly trying to aim for the Zhuque. The competitors from Qishan, however, seem to be shooting at anywhere except the fiery blur, their arrows flying towards most of the competition instead. Su She, who had been following close behind Lan Wangji, gets knocked down by one of the arrows, falling into the fiery woods below. A small trail of smoke follows the timeout flare, like a muddy grey pillar against the night sky.

“Competitor Wen!” shouts Jin Zixuan, furiously turning around to face the Qishan competitors. “Time yourself out!”

The Qishan competitors look between one another before one of them retaliates by shooting at him. Jin Zixuan knocks back the arrow easily, his spiritual energy slashing them off their swords.

“Whoops,” says Wei Wuxian, as a set of timeout flares shoot out from where the two Qishan competitors had fallen. Jin Zixuan dusts off his hands.

“I hate it when people play dirty,” he replies, before speeding up to catch up with Jiang Cheng.

Wei Wuxian can’t help but shiver a bit. Up ahead, the Zhuque is approaching a narrow pass between two cliffs, intent on taking its pursuers through a dangerous ravine. Looking over at Lan Wangji, Wei Wuxian can’t help but admire his steely focus and the way his hair flows banner-like behind him as they head into the ravine.

Then he has to swerve to avoid a tree branch to the face, and tears his gaze away to focus on the dangers ahead.

The ravine is filled with razor-sharp cliffs and jagged trees. Some of the less-adroit competitors time out colliding into obstacles, but most get through just fine. There’s one stretch where the Zhuque flies into a crevice too small for any of the pursuers, but everyone swerves around the side and waits for it to emerge again.

And when it does, it rears up at the competitors and releases a wave of fire in all directions. Everyone immediately scatters to avoid the flames, as the trees and brush below catch the brunt of the Zhuque’s attack.
Wei Wuxian shoots an arrow at the bird, narrowly missing it. Lan Wangji does the same, but the bird swerves away just in time. Jin Zixuan, however, manages to hit the Zhuque. It sways, as if about to fall like a real bird, but just before it does there’s a glitch-like flash, and the arrow vanishes.

Wei Wuxian’s brows furrow, but before he can react, or ask anyone if they saw the same thing, a flock of zhenniao comes flying out of nowhere to attack them. Competitors drop left and right, having used up their antidotes earlier in the game.

And Jin Zixuan seems to be the zhenniao flock’s primary target.

“No!” screams Jin Zixun, as his cousin disappears into the cloud of birds. His brows are clouded with desperation — he has no antidote, but his cousin is in danger of timing out. Sure enough, when the birds briefly pull back, Wei Wuxian can hear Jin Zixuan’s countdown timer ticking down his final seconds.

The flare shoots out. Jin Zixuan falls from his sword, and Jin Zixun immediately dives after him, trying to catch him before he falls too far. His own timer starts to beep, as the birds follow him with cruel beaks and sharp eyes.

Now the only ones left are Jiang Cheng, Wei Wuxian, and Lan Wangji, and the Zhuque is rapidly soaring upwards, fleeing into the stars. The three of them immediately give chase, spiralling upwards towards its fluttering tail feathers. Up here the wind blows sheets of icy, bitter knives at them, until Wei Wuxian can’t feel his face anymore.

Jiang Cheng is now the closest, his hand reaching out to grasp the Zhuque’s tail. But just as the tip of his finger brushes against the feather, the bird rears up with a scream and dives straight for them, its beak stabbing into Jiang Cheng’s shoulder.

Wei Wuxian immediately dives off his sword to tackle the bird, managing to grasp it by the talons. The Zhuque screams again, wings flapping wildly as it struggles to stay aloft. Lan Wangji fires an arrow into its eye.

The Zhuque immediately starts to fall. Without Suibian under him, Wei Wuxian falls with the bird. They hurtle through icy clouds and bitter winds, with the ground getting closer at each meter. Just above the trees below them flies an ominous black flock; the zhenniao have tired of chasing the Jins and are returning for the rest of them.

Wei Wuxian closes his eyes with dread. But instead of an attack, all he gets is another burst of scalding pain. Cracking open an eye, he realises that the dying Zhuque has burst into flame, scattering the zhenniao as they fall through their ranks. He lets go of the Zhuque’s talon and spreads his arms and legs, and the bird plummets past him like a meteorite.

Now all that’s left is the ground, rapidly rising to meet them. Cold apprehension trickles down Wei Wuxian’s spine, as the earth comes closer, closer —

Until it doesn’t. Wei Wuxian’s jacket tightens as something seizes him from behind. Slowly, gently, they descend towards the ground, landing in a valley full of woven twigs, grass, and the scent of smoke.

It’s the Zhuque’s nest.

yeetchen @mimi_compcult
[PHOTO: Screenshot of a Weibo post from inu_official]
From the official INU weibo acct: “There was a technical error with Competitor Jin’s attempt to kill the Zhuque. The points will be awarded accordingly.” #compcult #51wnc #zixuanwasrobbed #glitchgate

**JIN ZIXUAN WAS GLITCHED** @jinzixuans
@mimi_compcult TECHNICAL ERROR MY ASS SOMEONE SABOTAGED HIM LIKE THEY SABOTAGED HIS COUSIN #zixuanwasrobbed #51wnc #compcult #glitchgate

**jin zixuan protection squad** @sparksamidstsnow
someone got it in for the jins? #zixuanwasrobbed #51wnc #compcult #glitchgate

yeetchen @mimi_compcult
[PHOTO: Screenshot of the Weibo announcement]
From the official INU weibo acct: “There was a technical error with Competitor Jin’s attempt to kill the Zhuque. The points will be awarded accordingly.” #compcult #51wnc #zixuanwasrobbed #glitchgate

**lulu’s compcult account** @lulu_lanlan
@sparksamidstsnow maybe qishan bc of what happened last year? #zixuanwasrobbed #51wnc #compcult #glitchgate

**jiang cheng gold medal WHEN** @goldencheng
or maybe it’s wwx or lwj just so they can get back to the top again #zixuanwasrobbed #51wnc #glitchgate #compcult

**starry_night** @jiangstan
@goldencheng why would they cheat like that when lxc is already cooking their scores? #zixuanwasrobbed #51wnc #compcult

**xuan |含光军队** @hanyuzuwus
[PHOTOS: Screenshots of @goldencheng and @jiangstan’s tweets.]
lantis at it again with their conspiracy theories #51wnc #compcult

Wei Wuxian straightens up and looks around. The nest seems empty, full of scattered red feathers and charred twigs. Beside him, Lan Wangji dusts off the soot from his jacket.

“We really should stop meeting like this,” jokes Wei Wuxian, smiling in spite of the pain in his hands and the numbness in his face. Up here the wind is still blowing, but not as keen and cold as before.

“Competitor Jiang timed out,” says Lan Wangji, inclining his head. “The Zhuque’s injury was not severe, but the cold…”

Wei Wuxian nods. Lan Wangji looks around the nest.

“I do not believe the bird is here,” he continues, but no sooner have those words left his mouth do they hear a screech, followed by a burst of flame that springs right between them.

The Zhuque has set the nest on fire.

“Lan Zhan!” Wei Wuxian yells, casting around wildly for any sign of him. The flames rise higher, cloying smoke stinging at his eyes. All he can see through the smoke and fire are glimpses of white.

“Wei Ying!” shouts Lan Wangji’s voice from somewhere amid the flames.
“Lan Zhan, I can’t see you!” Wei Wuxian protests, turning around and around in wild panic. “Stay where you are, I’ll go to you —”

“No,” says Lan Wangji’s voice. “Keep going.”

“Lan Zhan, you don’t —” begins Wei Wuxian, but then he hears a scream from amidst the flames. There’s a burst of brilliant light, and the flames part to reveal a large egg in the centre of the nest.

The old Zhuque is dead. The new one is all that’s left. Wei Wuxian is exhausted, more exhausted than he’s been in previous competitions. But he steps forward anyway, one foot in front of the other, though the heat grows unbearable and the smoke fills his lungs and waters his eyes. Finally, he makes it to the centre and picks up the egg, coughing as he clutches it in his arms. As the fire rages on around him, he carefully carries the egg through the flickering flames, back to where Lan Wangji is waiting.

“Here,” Wei Wuxian mutters, holding the egg aloft. His knees buckle, but Lan Wangji is there to catch him. “We made it.”

A gong sounds, but Wei Wuxian doesn’t get to see the scores as he faints in Lan Wangji’s arms.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter title taken from "Breaking Point" by Hins Cheung.

the blackout: so this is how i imagine that went down with the gamemasters:
LXC: ...
NMJ: ...
JGY: ...
LXC, rushing to try and obscure the screens: CUT THE FEED. CUT THE FEED. CUT THE FEED!!!
JGY: da-ge, you owe me so much money
NMJ, sending him money on wechat: i hate you
LXC, scandalised: THAT IS MY BROTHER

Score-cooking: another way to imply score inflation.

If you're impatient for more Rivals content, check my Twitter for how to get it ;) See you guys next week!
“Why is it that I keep seeing you here after every competition?” Dr Wen demands, as Wei Wuxian opens his eyes to see the infirmary at the research base-turned-Cultivators’ Pavilion. There’s an alarming number of posters dissuading people from touching zhenniao on the walls. “Why can’t you be more like Competitor Lan, who always seems to end these things in one piece?”

“I wasn’t hurt in Xinglu,” Wei Wuxian points out, as Dr Wen raises an eyebrow at him from behind her clipboard. “And it’s not like I like visiting the infirmary, though your presence does make it better, somewhat.”

Dr Wen scoffs. “I think you have other reasons to keep pestering me,” she says, as Wen Ning peeks his head from around the curtain with a cup of something strong-smelling. “Thank you, Ningning.”

“We’ve got a busy ward this year,” says Wen Ning as he hands the cup to Wei Wuxian. “Mostly the zhenniao, though there’s been a lot of third-degree burns and broken ribs. You’re lucky you and Lan Wangji just have some smoke inhalation and first-degree burns to treat.”

“What’s this, then?” asks Wei Wuxian, sniffing gingerly at the cup.

“More zhenniao antidote,” replies Dr Wen. “Drink it. You were exposed pretty badly the first night, but you’re lucky Competitor Lan was there to care for you.”

“Lan Zhan was there?” demands Wei Wuxian. “How come I — oh, right, blindfolded. Duh.”

“Don’t pull a stunt like that again,” says Dr Wen, frowning.

Wei Wuxian draws an ‘x’ on his chest. “Scout’s honour,” he replies.

“I can’t imagine you as a scout,” chips in Wen Ning. Wei Wuxian laughs, and downs the antidote in one shot. It tastes about as foul as it smells.

“How’s Jiang Cheng doing?” he asks when he’s done, and gets cuffed over the head for his troubles. Sure enough, Jiang Cheng has been sitting nearby, his shoulder swathed in bandages but looking none the worse for wear.

“What the fuck did you think tackling the damn bird would do?” he snaps, though clearly his shoulder is not letting him get more physical with his concerns. “You really think you’re light enough for it to carry you?”

“Stranger things have happened,” replies Wei Wuxian, shrugging. He gets cuffed again.

“Congrats on winning again,” says Jiang Cheng, his expression stormy nonetheless. Wei Wuxian raises an eyebrow, before trying to take his brother’s hand. Jiang Cheng flinches out of his grasp.
“What’s wrong, A-Cheng?” wonders Wei Wuxian. “You congratulate me, but won’t even let me hold your hand. What kind of sportsmanship is that?”

“The kind that’s tired of only ever being allowed to be third because of your stupid rivalry,” snaps Jiang Cheng. On closer inspection, Wei Wuxian notices that his brother’s eyes are a bit bloodshot, as if he’d been crying prior to this. There’s a shuffling noise, as Dr Wen and Wen Ning take this as their cue to check on other patients.

Wei Wuxian sits up in the infirmary bed, frowning at Jiang Cheng. “A-Cheng, does it really matter?” he demands. “Top 3 still gets you sponsor attention, doesn’t it?”

“Not as much as first,” replies Jiang Cheng. “And not enough for mom. Do you know how this looks back home — you, the kid my dad plucked off the street, always being the favourite because your rivalry with Hanguang-jun keeps you either first or second in competitions?”

“A-Cheng, no one works harder than you, I know —”

“What’s the point of hard work when I don’t have a rival to flirt with like you do?”

Wei Wuxian splutters. “Flirt?” he echoes. “You think I — I’m flirting —”

“Well, that’s what it looks like!” Jiang Cheng’s explosive shriek causes Dr Wen to poke her head through the curtain again to shush them. Gritting his teeth, Jiang Cheng leans in closer. “Get your fucking shit together, Wei Wuxian. Either you like him, or you don’t. But if you don’t, stop leading him on like this. It’s only going to get more complicated if you keep doing this to him.”

“You think I’m leading him on,” states Wei Wuxian.

“I think you need to get more professional,” retorts Jiang Cheng. “People have been saying your technical bonuses get inflated because having you and Lan Wangji alternating between first and second keeps the rivalry going. Sells tickets.”

“Isn’t that a good thing?”

“Not when it makes both of you look like you’re cheating,” Jiang Cheng points out.

Wei Wuxian isn’t sure what to say to that. Jiang Cheng shakes his head, folds his hands behind his back.

“Put the man out of his misery already, A-Ying,” he says, before spinning around on his heel and striding away. Wei Wuxian sighs, sinking back against the infirmary pillow with his stomach tied in knots.

How can he face Lan Wangji like this?

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雪林花木 (rose_summerfield) wrote in nighthunt_fc:

**TL;DR: A Literal Forest Fire of Scandals for 51 WNC**

It’s been a rough year for the INU it seems:

WADA’s Song Investigation results have confirmed Qishan has been covering up athletic doping for the past several years. Qishan CompCult athletes such as Wen Quan and Wen Zihua (participants in the 51 WNC and Olympic hopefuls) confirmed among the ‘dirty’ athletes.
Olympics Committee has banned Qishan from competing in the Summer Games this year in Caiyi, Gusu.

#jinzixuanwasrobbed and #glitchgate are causing people to question the security of the games themselves, and whether or not it is possible to tamper with game items from outside the gamemasters’ command center.

51 WNC has seen a record high in injuries and is facing backlash for that, as well as for burning through a grove of old-growth cypresses in Baifeng Mountain Neutral Zone.

People are accusing LXC for inflating LWJ and WWX’s technical bonuses again this year because of the rivalry, but what else is new?

And finally… THE BLACKOUT. What the HECK happened to make every livestream black out like that? Especially the ones that were focused on LWJ and WWX? Discuss.

tagged with: wangxian, lan wangji, wei wuxian, lan xichen, competitive cultivation, compcult, 51wnc, tldr

4892 Comments

lightbrigademarie
Blackout was censorship, pure and simple. WWX and LWJ did something the gamemasters didn’t want everyone to see.

ebbehmoth
You mean they really kissed? I thought that was a rumour?

lightbrigademarie
There’s no way to independently confirm it since no one actually saw what went on and the camera feeds aren’t saying anything either but what else can it be? It is a bit concerning though, considering how much the rivalry gets hyped… do they want to push a narrative? Or is it homophobia?

andorablecreature
I mean it could also be like… a private, spur of the moment thing that probably shouldn’t be broadcast for the world to see? Not every country likes invasive reality TV show stuff in their sports you know.

stardustandsoulmates
Have the gamemasters always been this irresponsible or is this a new thing since JGY became head gamemaster?

kissmekate
JGY never competed in CompCult, so is it that surprising he doesn’t really know how to gamemaster at all?

stardustandsoulmates
Wait really? He never competed? How do you become head gamemaster without competing?
Same way you become head of anything else without relevant experience — nepotism. Daddy Warbucks. Jin Guangshan has clout everywhere because his development firm has fingers in every pie.

**popsicletwink**
He got a doctorate in cultivation theory though? Didn’t know education didn’t count as relevant experience…

**starry night**
Education doesn’t mean you can’t be incompetent at managing a CompCult game. See: Yiling competition.

Ouyang Zicheng’s cultivation knowledge was also theoretical, and it showed really hard in that game since there were literally no fallbacks for the competitors when the shadows came for them. You had to either outlast the other competitors or attempt demonic cultivation to get out. It was a flawed game from the start, and he deserved to be fired forcibly retired.

**starry night**
JGY became head gamemaster around the time of 47WNC, so it’s hard to say whether the suckiness of this generation is because of him or the blatant scorecooking from LXC lol

**jiang_wayne**
You can’t pin everything on *them*, some of it is because there’s more scrutiny now from the rest of the world, so missteps are more likely to be called out.

*(Deleted Comment)*

**costellations**
That’s incredibly unfair to JWY and JZX.

**stuchai**
I wonder what the Qishan ban is gonna do to the athletes who didn’t dope…

**regentertiary**
Countries banned from participating in the Olympics can still have their athletes in the Games, but as independent athletes *from* the country.

**ningningfanclub**
Have you guys heard of Wen Qionglin? He’s mostly stuck to National and regional competitions in Qishan but he’s a fantastic sniper-style CompCult athlete, kinda like NHS. Despite having scores to qualify for Worlds this year he got barred because of some political bullshit from last year. Maybe this will be his chance?

Wen Ning’s the one who signs off on the paperwork to release him from the infirmary. Wei Wuxian stretches, before retrieving his mobile and frowns at the notifications piled up on his screen. “What the hell just happened?” he wonders, and Wen Ning makes a small ‘ah’ of recognition.

“Qishan just got banned from the Olympics,” he says.

“Okay, but why is *my* phone blowing up? I’m not from Qishan,” protests Wei Wuxian.

Wen Ning shrugs. “I wouldn’t know, then,” he says. “But the two competitors this year are
disqualified from going to Caiyi, even as independent athletes.”

“Then this is your chance, isn’t it?” wonders Wei Wuxian. “Qishan barred you from representing them, but now you’re like the only eligible athlete from Qishan left who could participate in Olys this year. You should take advantage of it!”

Wen Ning bites his lip. “You think I could?”

Wei Wuxian nods.

“What about yourself, then? I heard —” he cuts off, shaking his head. “I didn’t mean to hear, so I’m sorry, but I do know about what people are saying.” He pauses, cheeks flushing harder. “You know, about you and Hanguang-jun.”

“I don’t really know what Hanguang-jun and I are anymore,” admits Wei Wuxian, looking down at his hands. Wen Ning takes a seat on the bed beside him, patting his shoulder. Wei Wuxian pulls him into a hug.

“Do you like him?” wonders Wen Ning.

“He’s a good friend,” replies Wei Wuxian, his voice muffled against Wen Ning’s shoulder. “And a good rival to beat.” But the longing still coils tight in his chest, painful with the knowledge of wanting someone he could never have. Wen Ning hums.

“I don’t mean to intrude,” he says, “and this might not be my place to tell you, but — Jiang Wanyin is right. You need to be honest with Lan Wangji.”

“Honest,” echoes Wei Wuxian, the concept familiar and foreign at the same time.

“About whether or not you mean it when you… tease him during competitions.” Wen Ning’s cheeks flare. “Since, you know, he spent this last competition entirely by your side, even using his own zhenniao antidote on you.”

Wei Wuxian’s heart skips a beat, as he remembers the first night again: the pain of the zhenniao poison, followed by the gentle care of his mysterious saviour. “Lan Zhan used his own antidote?” he repeats, pulling back to stare at Wen Ning, who nods.

“You know the first night of a competition is crucial to getting an edge points-wise, and yet he sacrificed that head start to care for you,” he replies. “The least you could do is tell him how that makes you feel.”

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You are watching: 51wnc banquet!

liz_wangji: PAY THE FUCK UP JIN ZIXUN 😈😈
stardustandsoulmates: 10 jugs of emperor’s smile, jeez. is wwx gonna drink it all
cutelittlegreenraccoon: Imfao he put zhenniao antidote in all of them
bebarts_dlad:
VivS17: ohh he’s playing now!!
yanguangjun: he’s improved a lot! it’s such a pretty song
bebarts_dlad:
liz_wangji: …
cutelittlegreenraccoon: oh no omg
stomp_loudly OMG
The moment has come, but the words still haven’t.

Wei Wuxian puts away his flute, feeling Lan Wangji’s gaze on him the entire time. There’s something warm and tense between them, something that he’s desperate to understand but can’t even name.

Lan Wangji plays his piece. The music washes over Wei Wuxian, quiet, introspective, wistful. He feels the longing emanating from every note, the want that haunts the slide of Lan Wangji’s fingers across the strings. An assistant takes the flute from him, but he barely notices them as the world once again narrows to just him and Lan Wangji.

But the words still haven’t come. Instead, Jiang Cheng and Wen Ning’s words echo in his head. *Be honest with him. Get your shit together. Tell him.*

Tell him tell him tell him —

The song ends. Lan Wangji looks up at him after his bows — after the assistants take care of his guqin as well. He nods once before stepping down from the platform and vanishing into the crowd.

The world comes rushing back. Sponsors clamouring for his attention, competitors asking for selfies, a couple press people asking about interviews — Wei Wuxian brushes past all of them, bowing and making excuses for himself the entire way out of the conference room where the banquet is being held.

A flutter of white ribbon greets him in the hallway. Lan Wangji pauses only briefly at hearing his footsteps, but Wei Wuxian isn’t having any of it. “Lan Zhan, why are you running from the party? The night’s still young,” he calls.

Lan Wangji resolutely turns the corner. Wei Wuxian isn’t sure how such a tiny research base could
have so many rooms and corridors.

“Lan Zhan — wait up!” He jogs a bit to catch up to Lan Wangji, who makes no sign of recognition. “Don’t be like this. What happened to using up your zhenniao antidote on me, huh? Or all the other nice things you did for me?”

Lan Wangji turns to face him at that, his expression a beautiful blank as usual, but this time Wei Wuxian can see something simmering beneath the surface. A fire that’s been mostly banked, but the coals are still hot.

“So you were the one who took care of me that first night,” says Wei Wuxian, crossing his arms and staring Lan Wangji down like a challenge. “But that wasn’t the only thing that happened.”

“The blackout,” agrees Lan Wangji, inclining his head.

“Someone kissed me.” Wei Wuxian looks up at him through his lashes. “I’ve been wondering who it was.”

“Mm.” Lan Wangji looks away from him, folding his hands behind his back.

Wei Wuxian tilts his head to the side. “You all right, Lan Zhan?” he asks. “You look like you’ve been drinking vinegar all night instead of… whatever it is you usually drink at banquets. Not champagne, I guess, since last time you did that…”

Lan Wangji promptly starts walking again. Wei Wuxian jogs to keep up.

“Come on,” he teases. “You’re not jealous, are you? Of whoever it is kissed me the first night? I mean, it’s not like you’d care, since you’re interested in someone else — mmph!”

Lan Wangji has pressed him against the wall of the corridor, pinning his hands to the side with his own. The scent of sandalwood tickles Wei Wuxian’s nose, bringing back memories from a night or two ago of strong hands and soft lips.

Soft lips that now press against Wei Wuxian’s own, unlocking a realisation long in the making. The kisser and the doctor were the same. No wonder everyone else has been talking about them.

Be honest with him.

But how could he make Lan Wangji choose like this, between whoever he wrote that song for and Wei Wuxian? Even as Lan Wangji lets go of him and pulls away, Wei Wuxian can feel the imprint of Lan Wangji’s lips against his own, and maddening, traitorous warmth pools in his stomach.

“Wei Ying,” breathes Lan Wangji, his voice hoarse. Wei Wuxian hates how much he wants to hear that voice say his name for the rest of his life.

“You took my first kiss,” he murmurs instead, before tangling his fingers into Lan Wangji’s hair and pulling him back in again. Lan Wangji’s breath hitches in the moment before their lips reconnect, but he recovers quickly by pulling Wei Wuxian’s body flush against his own. Wei Wuxian can feel him against his thigh, and it terrifies and excites him in equal measure.

“We shouldn’t —” he begins, but Lan Wangji doesn’t let him finish. He kisses Wei Wuxian for a third time, before sweeping him into his arms and opening the door to his room.

“If you do not wish to proceed,” he says, depositing Wei Wuxian onto the bed, “then you only have to say the word.”
Wei Wuxian knows he should. He’s at a crossroads between what is proper and what he really wants, and he’s never let society’s idea of proper determine his actions before. Even with his own heart on the line, he doesn’t want to say no.

Not to Lan Wangji.

(Not to that selfish part of himself that will greedily lick up any scrap of affection Lan Wangji tosses his way.)

“Kiss me again,” he says, and Lan Wangji does, teasingly prim and chaste. “Again.” Another kiss. “Again.”

Lan Wangji presses him down against the comforter, into the sheets. His fingers are uncertain against the buttons of his dazzling white suit. Wei Wuxian loosens his own tie and collar, eyes never leaving Lan Wangji’s beautiful form as it’s revealed to him inch by tantalising inch.

“Are you sure about this?” he ventures, as Lan Wangji’s jacket, shirt, and tie flutter to the ground. He reaches out, stopping Lan Wangji’s fingers at his belt buckle. “I shouldn’t be the only one who has any say in the matter.”

(Don’t you like someone else?)

Lan Wangji shakes his head. “I am sure,” he says, his gaze burning as Wei Wuxian shrugs out of his shirt and jacket as well. I have never been more sure of anything before in my life, he seems to add, as his finger traces a line down Wei Wuxian’s chest, teasing into the trail of soft dark hair just below his navel.

Wei Wuxian exhales, and takes his first step. His fingers retreat to the fly of his trousers.

“Come here, Lan Zhan,” he beckons. Lan Wangji doesn’t need to be told twice. His hands make short work of the rest of their clothes, pressing Wei Wuxian into the bed as he mouths possessive marks down the line of Wei Wuxian’s throat. Wei Wuxian arches into him, delirious with the pleasure already flooding his senses as Lan Wangji’s fingers wrap around him, stroking him harder.

For all his talk and flirting, Wei Wuxian had never actually had much practical experience. He hadn’t been lying when he said Lan Wangji had taken his first kiss, and in terms of this, well, he’s only ever known his own touch, his own experiences tucked into the dark corners of the night with some lascivious video playing on his phone. To have someone else touch him like this — to have Lan Wangji of all people touch him like this — is exhilarating like nothing else. Not even the freedom of riding on Suibian or the thrill of winning competitions can compare.

Lan Wangji’s hands are calloused from the guqin, but his touch is soft, reverent. He teases every spot on Wei Wuxian’s body that makes him moan, maps him out through touch as thoroughly as possible. In the half-light of the room, his topaz eyes shine — studious and determined, and Wei Wuxian briefly forgets how to breathe.

Lan Wangji strokes him again, and climax hits Wei Wuxian before he can get ahold of himself. He reaches out to try and return the favour, but Lan Wangji swats his hand away, moving off the bed to rummage in his suitcase. Wei Wuxian sits up, amused.

“You came prepared?” he teases, grinning. The tips of Lan Wangji’s ears turn pink. It’s a fetching look on him, especially combined with his hair half-askew. Wei Wuxian can’t help but feast his eyes on the muscles of Lan Wangji’s back and abdomen, though his gawking is soon rewarded as Lan Wangji crawls back into bed to kiss him.
“Legs,” he murmurs. Wei Wuxian spreads them without hesitation, letting Lan Wangji’s lube-slicked fingers tease against his entrance. He moans as the finger slips into him, strange and foreign.

“So you wrote the piece for a man, huh,” Wei Wuxian breathes. The finger still suddenly, as Lan Wangji raises an eyebrow at him. “What? You seem to be very prepared for this.”

“I did my research,” concedes Lan Wangji. Wei Wuxian can’t help but laugh.

“I admit, I never thought my first time would be with a guy.” He wraps his arms around Lan Wangji’s shoulders, before flipping their positions so that he can straddle Lan Wangji’s legs. Lan Wangji’s fingers crook slightly inside him, brushing against a spot that makes Wei Wuxian briefly lose his breath. “— But since it’s you, I don’t think I mind so much.”

Lan Wangji’s expression clears slightly, though his brows still quirk in confusion. Wei Wuxian laughs.

“Hanguang-jun is perfect at everything else he does, isn’t he?” he teases, leaning in to peck his nose. “I’ve no doubt he’ll take good care of me, even if it’s just practice.”

Something inexplicable flashes across Lan Wangji’s face at that, before the familiar topaz glare is back. Lan Wangji’s fingers grow rougher inside him; he even adds a third. It’s more than Wei Wuxian can bear, and yet it still doesn’t compare to what’s to come. He grits his teeth nonetheless, bucking into Lan Wangji’s fingers until the other hand at his hips stills him, steadying him.

Lan Wangji tears open the condom packet with his teeth and rolls it on with an impatient hand. He grasps himself by the base, lining himself up. Briefly, topaz melts to honey as he looks up at Wei Wuxian expectantly through his lashes.

Wei Wuxian nods, sinks down onto him, and the world bursts brightly with pain and pleasure. His body was clearly made for this, taking Lan Wangji in to the hilt. He only needs a moment to pause and catch his breath, before he’s moving again, his hips pliant to Lan Wangji’s guiding hands as they try to find a common rhythm together.

Wei Wuxian can feel the pleasure mounting inside him again. Can see Lan Wangji’s brows furrowing in concentration, in desperation to make this moment last longer. Lan Wangji’s fingernails dig crescents into his ass; his mouth leaves yet more marks and bites across Wei Wuxian’s skin. He picks up the pace, and Wei Wuxian follows eagerly, wantonly, his mind devoid of everything besides Lan Wangji.

“Lan er-gege, Hanguang-jun, Lan Zhan — oh gods, I’m close, I’m so close!” His fingers tangle into Lan Wangji’s hair; his heartbeat races even faster as Lan Wangji shifts their positions so he can thrust into him with increasing roughness. It’s terrible and wonderful and everything Wei Wuxian had ever dreamed of for a first time. It’s 

Lan Wangji’s breath comes in ragged pants, his fringe falling heavily in his face. Wei Wuxian has never seen him as such a dishevelled mess. It thrills him to know this is all his doing.

(He doesn’t mind. For as long as he could be useful, he’d do anything for Lan Wangji.)

(That, in and of itself, terrifies him like nothing else.)
Lan Wangji’s expression pinches; his body shudders through its climax. Wei Wuxian feels himself coming, too, like he’s falling from the sky again but knowing this time he’ll be caught. And caught he is, in the circle of Lan Wangji’s arms as his heartbeat slows back to normal and his breathing slowly evens out.

“It’s all right,” he breathes, turning to look at Lan Wangji, his chest still heaving. “You were wonderful.”

Lan Wangji kisses away the rest of his words.

that idiot

yo i’m thinking of performing a medley of memes for the banquet
what do u think

that’s the stupidest idea i’ve ever heard

thanks jc love your input as always

Call wasn’t answered by user.

wei ying
where the fuck are you
whered you go

Call wasn’t answered by user.

wei ying wtf answer your fucking phone!!!

WEI YING IM GONNA BREAK YOUR LEGS

Call wasn’t answered by user.

LAN WANGJI ISN’T ANSWERING HIS PHONE EITHER

WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU TWO UP TO

OH MY GODS

In the morning, Wei Wuxian wakes to the sound of buzzing. It’s coming from the phone in his trouser pocket; when he goes to check it, he’s inundated with several increasingly angry and worried texts from Jiang Cheng.

its ok im fine i hvent been murdered, he texts back. Moments later, Jiang Cheng retorts with i’ll murder you myself, followed by several knife emojis. Wei Wuxian chuckles, before noticing that his suit from last night is the only thing he owns in this room.

He blinks, looking around. The room is tidy, prim. The curtains are drawn, the clothes carefully hung in the wardrobe are in shades of white and blue, and there’s a stuffed rabbit on the desk alongside a bright, cold sword and a guqin.
He’s in Lan Wangji’s room. What’s more, he’s *naked* in Lan Wangji’s room.

And with that, the events of last night come crashing down around his ears.

There’s a brief knock, before the door opens to reveal Lan Wangji, fully dressed and prim, carrying in food on a tray. Wei Wuxian immediately clutches the bedsheets around his chest like the deflowered maiden he clearly was, the memories of last night still replaying in his mind’s eye. His body is still deliciously sore, and seeing Lan Wangji in his white street clothes now — knowing the touch of the body beneath — makes his heart soar and plummet with both happiness and guilt.

“Morning, Lan Zhan,” he ventures with a brave smile. “Smells delicious.”

“Breakfast,” says Lan Wangji, setting down the tray on his lap. It’s congee and youtiao, with small plates of soy sauce and zha cai. There’s also a mug full of soymilk. “They only had the sweet flavour, unfortunately.”

“I don’t mind,” says Wei Wuxian. It’ll taste bland nonetheless, but Lan Wangji’s the one delivering this, so he shouldn’t complain. As if to prove it, he takes a couple sips. “See, it’s delicious!”

Lan Wangji hums almost disbelievingly, and sits down on the bed beside him. Wei Wuxian runs a hand through his hair, stretching a little before tucking in to breakfast.

“What time is it?” he wonders through half a mouthful of congee.

“Halfpast nine,” says Lan Wangji. “Breakfast ends at ten.”

“Thanks,” says Wei Wuxian, gesturing to his tray. “Got a long drive ahead of me today.”


“Where else?” wonders Wei Wuxian through a mouthful of youtiao.

There’s a pause. The air between them is both warm and awkward. Wei Wuxian can only take a couple more bites before setting down the youtiao and frowning at Lan Wangji.

“What is it?” he asks. Lan Wangji’s fingers fiddle briefly with his plait before he catches himself and folds his hands in his lap. Wei Wuxian waits with bated breath.

“The Olympics are in Caiyi in a couple months,” says Lan Wangji after a moment, looking resolutely at his hands. “There are rumours that special weapons will be allowed.”

Wei Wuxian frowns. “Okay, and?”

“Come back to Gusu with me.” The words are rushed, as if Lan Wangji is shoving them out of his lips before he loses courage. “You could train there.”

“I could train in Yunmeng,” Wei Wuxian points out.

“Not as well.”

A pause. Wei Wuxian feels the temperature in the room drop by a couple degrees as his spoon falls into the congee with a soft splat.

“What do you mean?” he asks, desperately trying to keep his voice level.

“I misspoke,” says Lan Wangji. “I meant on your flute. The music of my family —”
Wei Wuxian shakes his head. “I can’t,” he says, as the feelings of guilt and inadequacy bubble up in
his stomach again, choking away his appetite. He pushes the tray off his lap. The soymilk sloshes a
little, getting onto the tray. “I’m sorry.”

Lan Wangji inclines his head. “I apologise. I did not mean to offend.”

“No, it’s —” Wei Wuxian sighs, rubbing at his eyes. “If I go to Gusu, then it’d look like — like we
— what happened last night can’t happen again.”

He rolls out of bed and starts to put his clothes back on, but after a moment of silence he turns just in
time to see Lan Wangji blink rapidly, as if holding back tears.

“Why not?” Lan Wangji’s voice is soft, wavering. It’s impossibly vulnerable, and it stabs at Wei
Wuxian’s heart to hear.

“I know you like someone else,” he replies.

Lan Wangji looks up at him, almost in disbelief. Wei Wuxian steels himself, before continuing:

“There’s no denying it: you wrote that song for them, you keep talking about them in your interviews
and stuff. So it’s no wonder you’d want to use me for practice. I know you’re a perfectionist, so
you’d want your first time with them to be the best it could be. I get it.”

Lan Wangji’s expression grows steadily more and more unreadable, more and more stony. A lump
rises in Wei Wuxian’s throat, as he watches the frost slowly creep back across Lan Wangji’s
beautiful face.

“I’m not mad at you, Lan Zhan,” he lies, swallowing down the lump and wiping at his eyes, even as
his fingers fumble with the buttons on his collared shirt. “It’s all good fun, right? Blow off some
steam between competitors. And maybe now that the sexual tension’s resolved, we’ll be able to be
professional with one another and put those stupid rumours to rest. Stop people from accusing you of
cheating because of whatever this is…” he gestures between them, “between us.”

He tries to smile, but it comes out pained, half-hearted. Lan Wangji’s eyes narrow with that ever-
familiar glare.

“Leave,” he says.

Wei Wuxian raises an eyebrow. The anger in Lan Wangji’s voice mounts into a slight growl.

“Leave,” he repeats, pointing to the door. Wei Wuxian doesn’t need telling twice, sliding out of the
room before Lan Wangji’s anger grows more destructive.

Out here, the hallway is quiet. Wei Wuxian barely makes it a couple steps away from Lan Wangji’s
door before his knees buckle, and he sinks to the floor, buries his face in his suit jacket, and lets
himself cry.

What he doesn’t hear, from the other side of the wall, are his sobs, echoing.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter title taken from "Skin" by Andrew Tan Warning: MV has nudity and mentions
of needles/body modifications.

There be smut ahoy in this chapter, so if that's not your speed, stop reading after “Come here, Lan Zhan,” he beckons. and pick up at the WeChat transcript between WWX and JC.

Drinking vinegar: also referenced in the goldencore wank but basically: being a sourpuss, being jealous, etc.

Ouyang Zicheng: Not Ouyang Zizhen. It's his dad.

Independent Olys athletes: That's a thing! Evgenia Medvedeva went to Pyeongchang as an athlete from Russia versus a Russian athlete because of Russia's doping scandal.

皮皮魏: naughty Wei (Wuxian) (or, in other words, WWX YOU TROLL in mandarin lol)

Putonghua: Since in this universe the different sects are their own countries instead of a unified China, the existence of Mandarin/Putonghua is more of a naturally-occurring lingua franca than irl, where those in power imposed the Beijing dialect as the standard dialect of Chinese. So I've decided to go Tolkien and refer to the language as putonghua, or Common Speech.

"Liang Liang": A song from the drama Ten Miles Of Peach Blossom/Eternal Love/Three Lives Three Worlds, used in the phrase "一首凉凉送给某某" ("send 'liang liang' to so and so"), which is roughly equivalent to "This is so sad, Alexa play Despacito". Thanks to bigbadredpanda for letting me know about this one!

"The Alpaca Song": Technically called "Song of the Grass-Mud Horse". This is, indeed, a song that's politically charged in China because the phrase grass-mud horse with a different set of tones means "fuck your mother", and therefore is used by Chinese netizens as a weapon of free expression.

"Shang Bu Qi": A Chinese meme to describe things that can't be hurt, but this song in question got famous because a busload of Chinese schoolkids sang it. (The lyrics... are pretty foreshadowy eh?)
“It’s Olympics week in Caiyi, and it seems even the rain has come to watch the events. We’re expecting highs in the mid-thirties, lows in the twenties, and intermittent rainstorms throughout the week.”

“Ugh, I hate the rain,” says Jiang Cheng as Wei Wuxian watches the droplets streak across the window of the bus. Outside, rolling mist-covered hills give way to small farming settlements and lonely, towering pagodas. “I hope it lets up in time for our competition; I heard our stadium’s open to the weather.”

“Your stadium is also hosting track and field and football,” adds Jiang Yanli, grinning. “Yunmeng’s playing Gusu in the opening bracket.”

Jiang Cheng leans up in his seat to look back at where the Yunmeng football team is clustered. “Oi, you guys! You better kick Gusu’s ass, okay? Don’t let those prissy stick-up-their-ass motherfuckers beat you!”

“Language, A-Cheng!” reprimands Jiang Yanli. Wei Wuxian laughs, pulling his shidi down by the back of his jacket. The radio continues to play banter between the two hosts, talking about their expectations for the Caiyi Olympics, before:

“— Speaking of Olympic Nighthunting, we have with us a very special guest today. He’s a local to Caiyi, actually, and won his first Olympic gold at the last Summer Games in… Manila, correct?”

“En.”

“Yes, and since then he’s been a two-time World Champion. You might also know him for his fierce rivalry with Yunmeng competitive cultivator Wei Wuxian — welcome, Lan Wangji!”

“It is my pleasure to be here today.”

Wei Wuxian feels his ears heating just at the sound of that familiar voice through the speakers. All of a sudden, it feels as if the eyes of everyone in the bus is focused on him.

“— There’s been a lot of rumours about you two, especially since the blackout last competition. What do you have to say to put those rumours to rest?”

“Ah, Tujiu, perhaps we —”

“No matter. Competitor Wei and I are merely fellow athletes. That is all.”

Jiang Yanli smacks him. “A-Cheng, don’t be mean.”

“He deserved it! Get your shit together, I said, and what the fuck did he do? He straight up took him —”

“We’re in public,” snaps Jiang Yanli. “How about we not air A-Ying’s personal troubles to everyone else on Team Yunmeng, yeah?”

“Fine. But all I’m going to say on the matter is kick. Gusu’s. Ass.” Jiang Cheng folds his arms. “Both you and Hanguang-jun are idiots, and I’m ashamed to know either of you.”

The radio host is talking again. “Wow, I think I’m a little heartbroken hearing that. The past couple World Championships have felt more like a TV drama than a sports event!”

“Well, I am guesting in Wisteria Blossoms next month, so you would not be alone in sharing that sentiment.”

“Ooh, moving into acting. I’m excited. You excited too, Xuexue?”

“Definitely. We’ll make sure to catch your episodes when they come out.”

“He’s what?” demands Wei Wuxian.

“Guesting on the longest-running drama in all of Asia,” says Jiang Yanli drily. “They gave up on taping the episodes in advance because every time they think it’s done, the fans clamour for more. I’m surprised the writers can still come up with plots.”

“How many seasons is it now?” asks Jiang Cheng.

“Twenty-seven, I think,” says Jiang Yanli. “Mom’s obsessed with it.”

“I love Wisteria Blossoms! Who are you playing? Or are you not allowed to say anything at present?”

“I play a celebrity.”

“Ahaha, very to the point, Competitor Lan. Thank you, thank you. Do you have anything else to say to our listeners, your fans, someone special… anyone?”

The bus grows so quiet that only the sound of the road rumbling beneath the wheels can be heard. Even the driver, who’d been frequently honking his horn at passing cars, has stilled his hand to hear what happens next. Wei Wuxian can feel a flush creeping down his neck.

“I am gratified for the Olympic Committee’s decision to host the Games in Caiyi. The eyes of the world will be upon Gusu, and I hope those who come to view the Games will discover Caiyi for the beautiful home it has been to me and my family for centuries. I am proud to represent Gusu at the Games this year. Thank you for your support.”

Wei Wuxian lets out a breath he hadn’t realised he was holding. He turns back to the window, just as they pass the sign on the highway indicating the rapid approach of city of Caiyi.

Then the last of the cloudy-headed mountains pass, and they emerge into a valley with a vast, shining lake and several rivers. Nestled in the cradle of these waterways lies the glittering metropolis of Caiyi, capital of Gusu and hometown of Lan Wangji.

The summer rain briefly passes to allow a peek of bleary sun to glint off the skyscrapers like bright
As they merge onto the elevated highway into the city centre, Wei Wuxian can’t help but wish he could somehow look out both sides of the bus at everything passing by. He ends up pressing his face to the glass, taking in all the brands emblazoned on department stores, all the ads flying by on the skyscraper faces, all the cars and bikes and people filling the streets.

“I wish I could stay for Caiyi Fashion Week,” laments Jiang Yanli, as they pass by bus stops that look like temples and arched pedestrian bridges over lush, willow-lined canals. Wei Wuxian laughs.

“I’m regretting only booking us for three days at the hotel in Old Town Caiyi after Olys,” he says.

“Yeah, well, you could’ve been here much earlier,” Jiang Cheng points out.

Wei Wuxian turns from the window with a sigh. “Let’s focus on kicking Gusu’s ass,” he suggests, as the radio turns from talk show into another stretch of international pop hits.

Excerpt from The Lan Dynasty: The Cultivation of Caiyi’s Prosperity by Robert Leung:

Caiyi’s roots are humble. Sprung up on the waterways and canals that flow from the Cloud Recesses Mountains to Lake Biling, this town first started as a simple fishing and farming commune, bringing together goods and food from all over the region in boisterous, happy markets. It was said that almost anything under the sun could be found in a Caiyi market, but eventually the town grew famous for two things: the renowned Emperor’s Smile rice wine, and ‘rainbow-woven’ silk. The former was officially eschewed by the straitlaced Lan family as a harbinger of moral decadence, but the latter proved to be a valuable family contribution to the prosperity of the water-town they called home.

Rainbow-woven silk, sometimes known as ‘Lan gossamer’, is silk whose threads have been imbued with spiritual energy during spinning. The women of the Lan family were renowned for their ability to weave this fine material, as well as turn it into protective yet functional garments. The famous ‘mourning robes’ of Lan family heads, which were worn all the way up to the 18th century, are classic examples of rainbow-woven silk garments. Nowadays the people of Caiyi wear a much more diverse assortment of items, though Lan gossamer still shows up, most noticeably in the traditional white ribbons still worn by Lan family members.

Thus, when considering the history of Caiyi and Gusu, it is hard to separate them from the history of the Lan family. The destinies of this renowned cultivation clan and the city neighbouring their ancestral home have been woven together for centuries. Through war and peace, prosperity and recession, the Lan family has remained a centerpiece of Gusu history and culture, and always will be. After all, the old saying goes: Gusu flourishes as long as a Lan lives there.

The bus drops them off at the Olympic Park in Caiqiao, where the campus buildings of the University of Caiyi have been cleaned up and renovated in preparation for the athletes. Jiang Yanli bids them farewell at the gate, and heads for her hotel across the street. Wei Wuxian and Jiang Cheng look at one another, shoulder their bags, and head through security into the Village.

Wei Wuxian remembers his first day at Yunmeng National University roughly this time last year. While the campus was in Lotus Pier, he and Jiang Cheng were still encouraged to room on campus. They had agreed, since the campus was in walking distance of their local cultivation training ground, but the first day of move-in had still been overwhelming for both of them as the campus filled up with students from all over Yunmeng and the rest of the world.

This is no different. The Village is already more than halfway filled with athletes, with bright welcoming banners dangling between balconies and balloons escaping their tethers into the air. Wei
Wuxian gets hit with a cannon of confetti from a screaming swimmer in the tiniest Speedo known to humankind, while Jiang Cheng gets waylaid by a bunch of beach-blonde volleyball players in bikinis.

“I don’t know if this is better or worse than the media at Baifeng,” says Jiang Cheng, as they shake off their fellow athletes with smiles and apologies, lugging their bags behind them to the check-in desk. Their rooms are in a dorm complex with a green courtyard that had, once upon a time, been quite neat and tidy — the well-manicured grass can still be seen under the veritable pile of confetti and condom wrappers.

Jiang Cheng boggles at the latter. “The stories are true,” he breathes. Wei Wuxian snorts, and heads for the lobby to get to their elevator.

On their floor, they pass by several open rooms with parties already raging hard in them. It seems Team Yunmeng shares the building with several Europeans, as there’s an Italian mankini hung over a chair visible from the doorway of one room blaring Eurotrash music. By the time Wei Wuxian finds their room, Jiang Cheng is already putting on his noise-cancelling headphones.

Their room offers them a view of the rest of the Olympic Park that isn’t the Village. Most of the Games will be played in the existing athletic structures of the University, which have all been upgraded and refurbished to accommodate the Olympians. Most noticeably, the iconic Caiqiao Stadium, which was once host to the earliest cultivation competitions and is now home base for both the University of Caiyi and Gusu national football teams, has been remodelled into something resembling a glittering tea bowl.

“I heard it was supposed to look like a supernova,” says Jiang Cheng, as he draws the curtains on their view, frowning at how the glittering panels of the stadium seem to catch the setting sun. “It just looks a bit sad to me.”

“Caiyi spent a lot of money upgrading the school’s athletic facilities for this,” says Wei Wuxian, patting him on the shoulder. “Hosting the Olympics is expensive.”

“Could’ve been worse,” says Jiang Cheng, now stalking over to fiddle with the air-conditioning unit. “And the students will benefit the most when it’s all said and done. These dorms probably didn’t have aircon last year. Ours didn’t.”

“And ours still won’t, when we get back.” Wei Wuxian sighs, as cool air starts to filter through the room. “Which bed do you want?” he adds, gesturing to the two small beds in the room.

Jiang Cheng flings his duffel onto the one closer to the air conditioning. Wei Wuxian rolls his eyes, but takes the other one anyway. He takes out his flute and Suibian, laying them out on one of the desks, before taking out his phone to take a selfie. “A-Cheng, say hi to our fans on Weibo!”

Jiang Cheng scowls harder. Wei Wuxian laughs, but just as he’s trying to figure out the wifi connection, someone comes running by yelling something about Gusu. Curiosity immediately piqued, Wei Wuxian pockets his phone, grabs the keys, and rushes out after them.

The first thing he hears is a deluge of notifications from Weibo and WeChat, as the host team’s arrival to the Village hits social media. Team Gusu is clad in white and beautiful to a fault, but Wei Wuxian only has eyes for the tall figure leading them into the Village courtyard.

Lan Wangji looks devastating in his suit, as usual. But what’s unusual this time is his new hairstyle. As he walks by, Wei Wuxian can’t help but call:
“Nice haircut, Lan Zhan! You look hot!”

Lan Wangji responds by briefly running a hand through his hair, before deliberately turning his back on Wei Wuxian as he heads for the check-in. Wei Wuxian is left breathless, staring at the back of his head where Lan Wangji’s iconic white-braided plait used to hang.

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The nighthunting pre-game briefing is held the next morning. The Olympics gamemasters are different from the INU ones, which means the game structure itself is a little different as well. Wei Wuxian’s not sure how he feels about it, as he tries not to stare too hard at the back of Lan Wangji’s newly-cropped head during the briefing.

“In the interest of time and needing to accommodate other athletes, the nighthunting competition will be simple and short as well,” the Olympic gamemaster is saying when he tunes back in. “There will be a timed semifinal round, and a final round. The top eight competitors of the semifinal advance to the final. Semifinals take place the day before finals, and the endgame monster will be in the final round. Special weapons will only be allowed in the final round.”

Nie Huaisang raises his hand. “How long is the semifinal round expected to take?” he asks.

“Half an hour per group,” replies the gamemaster, pulling up a chart. “The twenty-four of you here today have all qualified out of either the World Championships in Baifeng, or the Wushan Trophy held the month after. Based on your rankings from these two competitions, we have split you all into three groups of eight competitors. In the semifinal round, you will enter the arena with your group, take down as many monsters and corpses as you can in thirty minutes, and hope your resulting score will allow you to qualify for the final round.”

The chart itself has listed their names in three groups. The competitors press in to read it; Wei Wuxian can see his name listed with Jiang Cheng’s and Nie Huaisang’s. Lan Wangji’s name, on the other hand, is in the same group as Wen Ning’s.

Just the sight of his friend’s name makes him look around, and sure enough Wen Ning is waving cheerily at him from another row. When they are released from the briefing, Wen Ning comes over to greet him. Wei Wuxian immediately tackles him into a hug, laughing.

“You made it!” he exclaims, clapping Wen Ning on the shoulder as they pull apart. Wen Ning looks good in his silver-and-white gear with the words ‘Olympic Athlete from Qishan’ emblazoned across the front, and his cheeks are rosy with excitement. “You won at Wushan, right? You deserved it.”

Wen Ning nods, but there’s something wistful in his voice as he adds, “I had to compete under the Olympic flag, though. It’s a bit weird not having the Qishan flag around my shoulders or hearing the national anthem when I win.”
“I bet.” Wei Wuxian swallows down any snide comment about how the flag and the anthem haven’t done either of them any good in the past. Instead, he pats his friend on the shoulder, and asks, “well, now that we might get the chance to compete against one another, wanna go get McDonald’s?”

Wen Ning raises an eyebrow. “They have that here?” he asks.

“Well, sponsorship deals, yada yada. All the McDonald’s you could ever want to eat, all free.”

Wen Ning pulls a face. “I can almost smell the bad idea cooking in your head, and it smells like a hundred chicken McNuggets.”

Wei Wuxian scoffs, pushing his way out of the briefing room with Wen Ning following behind. “Okay, fine, maybe not McDonald’s. How about ice cream? I think Cornetto’s sponsoring the Caiyi Olympics this year, too.”

“I’m not sure if that’s any better,” protests Wen Ning as they hit the courtyard. The Village is a little more subdued now, as the athletes get in some last-minute training before the opening ceremony at the end of the week. The dining hall is a little more boisterous when they enter, and sure enough, there’s a sizeable line for both the popup McDonald’s stand and a Cornetto ice cream truck.

“Lan Zhan!” Wei Wuxian exclaims, seeing a familiar flash of white in the Cornetto line. After getting over the initial shock of Lan Wangji’s missing plait and ribbon, Wei Wuxian has to admit the man might look even better with short hair than with long. He’s not sure how that’s possible, and yet…

Lan Wangji flinches slightly at the sound of his name being called, but gives no other indicator he even heard it. Wei Wuxian tamps down his disappointment as he and Wen Ning get into the line.

“Something happened?” asks Wen Ning.

Wei Wuxian plasters on a smile he doesn’t feel. “He’s always like that,” he dismisses, before turning away. It had just occurred to him that, because Lan Wangji is in a different group from him, the only way he’ll get to compete with Lan Wangji at the Olympics is if they both make it to the finals.

He’s not quite sure if he feels relieved or disappointed at the prospect. But he doesn’t have much time to think on it, because almost as soon as they get their ice-cream, Wei Wuxian is grabbed from behind.

He turns, barely avoiding Jin Zixun’s arm as it swings out at him. “Nice to see you, too!” he exclaims, as the Lanling competitor lurches back, fuming harder than a bull in a bullring. “Look, if you’re trying to audition for the wrestling matches, maybe you should —”

“Can you fucking shut up for once in your life?” hisses Jin Zixun. A stunned silence falls over the rest of the dining hall, as Wei Wuxian clamps his mouth shut with an audible snap. “Look, my cousin is too fucking noble or something to tell you this, but: you better not fucking do what you did in Baifeng again.”

“I didn’t do anything in Baifeng.” protests Wei Wuxian. It’s partly true — he didn’t do anything to either Jin Zixuan or Jin Zixun. Other people, on the other hand —

“Yeah, sure. Like I’m going to believe that considering you stole my cousin’s victory.” Jin Zixun’s eyes narrow, and Wei Wuxian has to admit he has a point there. Though the gamemasters had awarded Jin Zixuan points for the first killing blow, it still hadn’t been enough to get him any higher than fourth. Again.
“I’m sorry, but what were we supposed to do then?” he wonders drily. “Float around on our swords waiting for the gamemasters to notice there was a problem? We needed to end the game. Jiang Cheng got attacked by the bird, so I attacked it. It’s not that deep.”

“You’re the one who keeps bringing up manipulating the game outside the command centre,” Jin Zixun retorts. “You could’ve gotten rid of the antidote and glitched my cousin that way.”

“Contrary to popular opinion, I haven’t actually done anything like that. I wouldn’t even know where to begin.” Wei Wuxian shakes his head. “Besides, we’re at the Olympics! A new set of gamemasters and a different game structure! Maybe your cousin can prove himself properly here?”

(He knows he wants to. Having a stolen victory amongst his laurels doesn’t sit well with him, either, even if he hadn’t been responsible for the glitch. Besides, winning Olympic gold with these new gamemasters would prove he’s not just being boosted by his rivalry with Lan Wangji.)

(He needs this victory.)

“You condescending — !” screams Jin Zixun, lunging for him. But before he can get ahold of him, someone else slides in to block him from moving further. Wei Wuxian wonders if he’s imagining things, or if the temperature of the room had indeed dropped a couple degrees just from Lan Wangji’s glare.

“Head Gamemaster Jin performed an independent investigation into the glitch and found it was not the fault of Competitor Wei,” Lan Wangji states, each word a bitter dagger. “Surely you must be aware, considering Head Gamemaster Jin is your cousin’s half-brother. Continuously blaming Competitor Wei for your own shortcomings is unsportsmanlike.”

“You sure are eager to jump to his defense,” sneers Jin Zixun. “Glad to see Competitor Wei’s trained you well.”

Lan Wangji’s eyes narrow. “I fail to understand how my defense of Competitor Wei is any form of ‘training’,” he remarks drily.

Jin Zixun rolls his eyes, before making a couple mocking barks. Wei Wuxian shudders, but thankfully Jin Zixun doesn’t seem to pick up on that as he turns to leave.

“Thanks, Lan Zhan,” Wei Wuxian says, but all he gets in response is a swift turn and exit. From his spot a couple steps away, Wen Ning shakes his head.

“Something definitely happened,” he says. “And your ice-cream is melting.”

Wei Wuxian sighs, popping the cone into his mouth. It’s not quite as sweet as he remembers.

———

You are watching: liz_wangji’s caiyiolys stream!!

liz_wangji: SO DID YOU GUYS HEAR THE NEWS
liz_wangji: LAN XICHEM IS LIGHTING THE OLYMPIC CAULDRON
banacotta: !!!
finalfrantasy: my lxc merch and i are staying right here in front of this screen until i see his beautiful face _(:3」∠)_
manhattanvamp: holy shit we are feasting this olympics,, lwj and wwx are supposed to be flag-bearers for their countries too ;w; my boys are doing so good
lecheflanflan: i can’t wait for the competition! i heard they switched up the game format again
liz_wangji: yeah they do the semifinal-final system for the olympics because of the need to share arena space and game time with other disciplines. they don’t want to run the risk of the game needing to take days to beat

intyalote: why can’t they do that for the other competitions too? it’d be more sport-like then i think

jinzhuyinzhu: there’s a bit of a movement in the INU to move that way but jgy thinks the current setup is closer to traditional nighthunting

intyalote:

jinzhuyinzhu: yeah that’s what you get when your head gamemaster has never competed himself lol

xZynahh: guys this opening ceremony is already so beautiful what the fuck

paccofleuris: that guqin!!! if only it was lwj playing 😄

coughtbyyou: what’s going on?

liz_wangji: the history of gusu! this dance is meant to represent cultivation, the guqin is demonstrating musical cultivation… and i think that calligraphy dance is meant to be the academic writings of the Lan ancestors…

domokunrainboz: the way they incorporate spiritual energy into the routines makes everything so beautiful 😊

Team Yunnmeng’s uniform for the Parade of Nations is in shades of purple, silver, and black, with the nine-petalled lotus crest emblazoned on their blazers’ right shoulders. Wei Wuxian feels like he’s been pressed into an airline host’s outfit, though the women on the team definitely have it worse considering their lotus crest-patterned lavender neckerchiefs.

“It’s pretty average, honestly,” says Jiang Cheng as Wei Wuxian picks at his blazer sleeve. “Wait until you see what Team Lanling’s wearing.”

They don’t have to wait for long. As the world’s best athletes gather for the Parade of Nations at the glittering tea bowl of Caiqiao Stadium, Wei Wuxian catches a glimpse of Jin Zixuan and Jin Zixun among the Lanling delegation. Both of them are dressed in capelets that appear to be endless layers of golden gossamer and tulle.

“It’s supposed to represent the Sparks Amidst Snow peony,” says Jiang Cheng, as Wei Wuxian struggles not to double over laughing as the Lanling delegation walks past to get into formation. “I dunno, I can kinda see it, if I stood on one foot and hopped a little.”

“They look like they’re wearing chicken capes,” retorts Wei Wuxian, hiding a snort behind his hand. Jin Zixun looks over and glares at him, but when Jin Zixuan does the same his expression looks more apologetic. Wei Wuxian blinks, especially as Jin Zixuan breaks formation to come over.

“I heard my cousin tried to punch you,” he says, right off the bat. “I’m sorry about that.”

Wei Wuxian sighs. “I deserved it a little,” he demurs, pulling him to the side from the Yunnmeng team as well. There’s not a lot of space in these backstage corridors, especially with the intermittent screens showing the opening ceremony’s artistic programme. Some dancers are flying across the stadium, dressed in flowing silk robes. Wei Wuxian half-suspects they’re trying to tell the story of silk-weaving through interpretive dance.

Jin Zixuan sighs, too. “I admit, I am a bit put off by the results of the last competition. But I don’t think you’re the one behind the glitches.”

“Nice of you to say that,” says Wei Wuxian. “It’s not because you’re trying to get into my shijie’s good graces, right?”
Jin Zixuan’s cheeks flare. “No, it’s not — I wouldn’t — I mean, I don’t see any reason for Lan Wangji to cheat, and he’s stuck to you like white on rice, so there’s literally no opportunity for you to cheat, either. My cousin spends too much time lurking on GoldenCore. I’m sorry.”

Wei Wuxian snorts. “Speaking of GoldenCore, you’d think people would come up with better conspiracy theories than ‘Lan Xichen is cooking his brother’s scores’. Do people ever accuse Jin Guangyao of doing the same to you? I mean, he is the head gamemaster.” He pauses. “Not that I think you’re being inflated, I’m just curious —”

Jin Zixuan rolls his eyes. “No one ever thinks fourth place is getting inflated,” he points out.

Wei Wuxian raises an eyebrow. “But you get first at a lot of competitions that aren’t Worlds.”

Jin Zixuan sighs. “To be honest, my half-brother and I don’t really talk. Family drama.”

“Ah.” Wei Wuxian knows that all too well. “Won’t pry, then. Yikes.”

Jin Zixuan snorts. “Yikes doesn’t even begin to cover it. Yanli’s heard the worst of it —” he cuts off, as his mobile chimes. The stupid layers of tulle flutter as he checks it with a groan. “I better get back, it’s almost time for us to go. Just wanted to clear the air, in case you thought I sicced my cousin on you or something.”

Wei Wuxian snorts at that. “Well, apparently he thinks I like siccing Lan Zhan on him, so fair’s fair.”

Jin Zixuan rolls his eyes, before extending a hand. “May the best man win,” he suggests.

Wei Wuxian grins, and shakes it. “You’re on.”

When he returns to the Yunmeng delegation, he’s just in time to see Team Gusu take their position as well. Lan Wangji, resplendent in the white robes of the Lan family, is already holding the Gusu flag while the rest of Team Gusu take photos with him in their white suits.

It’s only when the Parade of Nations starts and Wei Wuxian is handed the Yunmeng flag, though, that the reality of the situation properly hits him. This is how far he’s come: from the streets of Lotus Pier to Yunmeng’s flag-bearer at the Caiyi Olympics. The Lotus Standard feels unusually heavy in his hand, causing him to look back at Jiang Cheng for reassurance.

Jiang Cheng nods. Wei Wuxian smiles, takes a deep breath, and follows the woman in blue and white announcing Team Yunmeng out into the screaming stadium.

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banacotta: oH MY GOD WWX!!! HE LOOKS SO SURPRISED TO BE HERE HAHAHA
linneakou: he’s so pure 😁
iceglossandsun: roll call! countries of everyone in this chat!
liz_wangji: australia
sinkingorswimming: usa
costellations: uk!!
bvttles: murrica
bowldeepfannish: italy!!
linneakou: us, and timezones are terrible btw
sinkingorswimming: BIG mood
katriarch:
jinzhuyinizhu: lanling!
The semifinals take place after track and field wrap up, and the space can be converted into a nighthunting arena. Wei Wuxian’s group is the first to compete, so the eight of them suit up and grab their gear, heading out into a stadium jam-packed with screaming fans.

“I’m not sure if I like this,” Nie Huaisang mutters. “I almost miss the privacy of the regular arenas.”
“There were drone cameras in the regular arenas,” Jiang Cheng points out. Nie Huaisang flushes.

“Yeah, but at least you don’t hear people screaming at you while you’re trying to win,” he retorts, as the lights in the arena dim and fog begins to seep throughout the space. Then there’s the telltale groan of corpses, and the game is on. Nie Huaisang seemingly melts into the shadows; the sounds of his arrows hitting targets comes just minutes later.

Wei Wuxian realises quickly that Nie Huaisang has a point. The screaming of the fans had faded quickly in the eaves of Baifeng Mountain’s forest, so that it wasn’t as disruptive. Here, it feels like he’s being fenced in by their cheering, pierced by their gaze like a butterfly under glass. As if being at the Olympics wasn’t stressful enough!

“Earplugs,” says Jiang Cheng as he rushes by, shooting at a fleeing monster. Wei Wuxian blinks owlishly at him for a moment, before summoning two balls of spiritual energy and using them to silence the sound of the crowd around his ears.

Much better.

The timer counts down. Wei Wuxian starts to search through the mist and obstacles flung in his path, taking out all the corpses and monsters he can find. Here, it’s a free-for-all — he snipes several people’s targets, slashes through monsters almost as soon as they appear, and gets in the killing blow on some of the larger targets to claim more points.

By the time the buzzer rings to signal the end of the semifinal, he’s ranked quite high on the scoreboard, surpassed only by Nie Huaisang. The fans go wild, flinging flowers down from the stands as well as plush toys. Wei Wuxian nearly gets hit in the head with a stuffed rabbit. He takes it and waves, to tremendous applause.

Then the rest of the fog clears out, and the arena is reset for the next group. Still clutching the rabbit, Wei Wuxian heads up into the stands to find the spots reserved for the athletes.

Lan Wangji’s group is last. Wen Ning is in his group as well, but when Wei Wuxian cheers for both of them, he only gets Wen Ning to smile and wave back. Lan Wangji only looks up briefly before promptly turning his back. It cuts at Wei Wuxian a little, but he smiles and shrugs it off.

It’s harder to shrug away the pang in his heart when the last round begins, though, as he watches Lan Wangji gracefully and effortlessly slay everything in his path. Even though Wen Ning’s aim is scary good, and he takes out basically the rest of the targets, there’s no beating Lan Wangji for sheer skill and precision.

Naturally, when the final scoreboard goes up at the end, Lan Wangji is firmly at the top, and Wei Wuxian is in third after Nie Huaisang. The flowers begin to rain again. Wei Wuxian catches another peony from someone farther up the stands, before sending it out to Lan Wangji.

This time, Lan Wangji tucks the peony into his jacket without hesitation, and Wei Wuxian’s heart beats a little with something approaching hope.

[PHOTOS: Series of GIFs showing recordings of each of the finalists during the semifinals.]

fyeahnighthunting

CONGRATS TO THE FINALISTS!

#caiyioly #compcult #wei wuxian #lan wangji #wen qionglin #jiang wanyin #jin zixuan #luo qingyang #nie
Anonymous asked:
Congrats to the finalists!! I’m so glad for them they all worked so hard! But I do have to ask who is Qin Su? I don’t think I’ve seen her at Worlds before…

fyeahnighthunting

Qin Su represents Laoling, which is an autonomous province in Lanling. Due to rising political tensions stemming from the Free Laoling movement, Lanling’s government has heavily restricted Laoling’s athletes from representing their province in international competition. And since the head gamemaster is in charge of the arena for Worlds, and the current head is from Lanling, Laoling has been boycotting Worlds as a symbolic protest. Fortunately, Competitor Qin was able to take second at the Wushan Trophy, which was not overseen by Jin Guangyao, to qualify for the Olympics!

starry_night @jiangstan
why can’t olympic format be regular format #caiyiolys #compcult

this shrew can’t be tamed @kissmekate
@jiangstan ikr it makes better sense? doesn’t take as long and also means wangxian isn’t up in our faces all the damn time #caiyiolys #compcult

xuan 含光军队 @hanyuzuwus
when the lantis are wanking on main because they hate how good #wangxian really are #caiyiolys #compcult

jiang cheng gold medal WHEN @goldencheng
@jiangstan @kissmekate we have a new nickname! cute that the 含光军队 will call anyone with sense a ‘lanti’.

(lwj voice) lust @sassquil
Iwj at the lantis: #caiyiolys #compcult

In the first week of competitions, the Olympic Village dances the delicate balance between a hedonistic paradise and a sterile pre-competition waiting room. Some teams have coaches enforcing strict curfews and noise violations, so the celebrating has to be taken strictly off-campus. Which is how, while celebrating making it to the finals, Wei Wuxian finds himself sandwiched between two pretty British gymnasts at a bar in downtown Caiyi.

“Heard you did well in your semifinal, Wuxian,” one of them purrs. The gymnastics events are yet to
come, but some of the teams are clearly blowing off steam in advance through intense partying.
“Where’s your rival? We’ve only seen a couple of the tapes, but you two were always together last
competition.”

“He doesn’t do parties,” says Wei Wuxian, sending a slightly despairing look at Wen Ning, who’s
too busy discussing recurve bow tension with some cute South Korean archer to pay any attention to
him. The gymnasts giggle harder at that, and one of them daringly puts a hand on his leg.

“So that means you’re here by yourself, then?” she asks, pressing a glass of Emperor’s Smile into his
hand. He downs it immediately, savouring the sweet burn down his throat.

“My rivalry isn’t a relationship,” he protests, setting down the cup and putting an arm around each of
them. “Contrary to popular opinion, I’m not actually dating Lan Wangji.”

(If Lan Wangji can go on the radio saying they’re just fellow athletes, then he can say this, too.)

“That’s good,” says the American swimmer half-draped over Nie Huaisang’s shoulders. “You don’t
want to come to the Olympics with a partner. You’ll have much less fun then.”

(But even though he himself had told Lan Wangji that remaining professional was better for them, he
still can’t shake the feeling that if he takes any other athlete back to his room, he’d regret it much
later.)

(But why should Lan Wangji’s opinion matter so much?)

“That’s what I thought,” Wei Wuxian says, grinning. “And hey, I’m down for all kinds. But maybe
after the finals, though — I need my body in perfect condition for that.” He winks, and the gymnasts
giggle.

“If you win, we’ll show you just how flexible we can get,” teases the one with her hand on his leg.
Wei Wuxian can’t help but notice it’s gotten higher in the past couple of minutes.

“I’m going to assume you don’t normally talk like you just walked out of a porno,” he says, running
a hand through her hair. Memories of someone else’s long, dark hair flashes across his mind’s eye,
but he blinks them away before the guilt comes running back. “Or into one, since that sounds like an
invitation.”

She laughs and refills his cup, presenting it to his lips. “Depends on how well you do tomorrow,
Wuxian-gege.”

Wei Wuxian can’t help the flush rising to his cheeks as he drinks and tries to take his mind off Lan
Wangji for the night.

_____________________________________________________

weibowifi
i want cornetto…
Like 5.7k | Comment 902 | Repost 521

lulu_compcult
aren’t you supposed to be competing?

weibowifi
yeah in a couple minutes im a bit hangry though 😌
The finals are the next evening, and somehow, impossibly, the crowd is even bigger.

“You usually only see this kind of turnout for the football final,” remarks Nie Huaisang as they watch the screens in the green room. Caiqiao Stadium is packed to the gills, noisemakers and flags flying from almost every available surface. Most of the other competitors seem determined not to look over at the screen; Luo Qingyang in particular looks a little nauseous.

Wei Wuxian claps her on the shoulder. “Cheer up, Mianmian! This is the Olympics! If you lose, you’ll at least have lost amongst the best.”

That immediately gets her to scowl at him. “You’re really not making this any better, Yuandao,” she snaps. There’s an erratic twang of guqin strings, causing Wei Wuxian’s heart to skip a beat.

The countdown begins to play, as they’re ushered out of the green room into a corridor before the arena itself. Gamemasters and support staff are gathered here, clapping for them as they stride out onto the field with swords, bows, and special weapons in hand. The terrain is slightly different from the semifinals, but the fog still billows through the crevices in the rocks, and the sound of screaming fans is ever-present.

Wei Wuxian takes a deep breath. Two red sparks appear in his hands, and he uses them to silence the crowd. The ground quakes beneath his feet, and suddenly with a roar that echoes against his new barrier, a vast white serpent bursts out of the stadium floor. A collective shudder ripples through the crowd.

The serpent hisses, and suddenly the arena floor fills with water, mimicking the rush of a raging river. Competitors with swords immediately hop onto them, flying around the head of the snake. Wen Ning and Nie Huaisang, however, have clambered further up the terrain to find perches for shooting. Similarly, Qin Su, a competitor Wei Wuxian had never seen before, has leapt directly onto the serpent itself and dealt the first wound with her daggers. The serpent starts to thrash, splashing the stands while Qin Su clings onto her daggers for dear life. Immediately, Wei Wuxian zips in, extending a hand.

“Come on!” he shouts, weaving around to try and avoid the serpent as it lunges for him, too. Two bowstrings twang: Nie Huaisang and Wen Ning have both shot at the serpent. The arrows lodge in its back, causing it to swish its tail to knock them out of their perches.

Wen Ning manages to catch himself in time, but Nie Huaisang is swept into the current. Jiang Cheng immediately flies down to pluck him from the water, but Nie Huaisang’s timeout flare flies out before he can get to him.

Wei Wuxian, on the other hand, has successfully extricated Qin Su from the serpent’s back, flying back up into the air. But as they circle just out of range of the serpent’s jaws, there’s a sudden rumble of thunder, and fat droplets of summer rain begin to fall.

“Did you see any vulnerabilities on the serpent?” Wei Wuxian asks Qin Su. She nods.
“It’s a water creature. Its gills are the most sensitive,” she says, just as the serpent hisses and shakes, splitting itself into nine heads. There’s a moment of stunned silence from all of the competitors at that, before Wei Wuxian gathers all the airborne cultivators closer.

“We need to get Competitor Wen off the ground,” he says. “Who’s strong enough to do it?”

Lan Wangji raises his hand. “This serpent is a Xiangliu, and I cannot evade all nine of its heads at once. I require a distraction.”

“I have one,” says Wei Wuxian, holding up his flute. “Jin Zixuan, Mianmian, you two also help distract whichever heads aren’t paying attention to my flute, okay?”

“What am I doing?” asks Jiang Cheng.

“Use Zidian to tie down the Xiangliu,” replies Wei Wuxian. The electricity crackles around Jiang Cheng’s fist. “Water conducts electricity, so we’ll all have to be careful once Zidian’s in play, but hopefully between Hanguang-jun’s guqin strings, Zidian, and the water itself, we’ll be able to subdue the monster.”

“And the killing blow?” asks Qin Su.

Wei Wuxian shrugs. “Whoever is first, is first.” He puts his flute to his lips. “On my note, then?”

Everyone nods. Wei Wuxian begins to play, and everyone else bursts into action. Lan Wangji dives for Wen Ning, while Jin Zixuan and Mianmian fly around the other serpent heads. An upswell of something Wei Wuxian can’t quite name rises deep in his chest, causing him to put even more energy and heart into the song.

The Xiangliu sways. Spiritual energy from the black dizi surrounds it, lulling it. From the corner of Wei Wuxian’s eye, he spots Jiang Cheng’s Zidian ready to fly, spots Lan Wangji already soaring back up with Wen Ning beside him, spots the knots forming in the Xiangliu’s necks as Jin Zixuan and Mianmian tie the heads together.

“Any minute now,” Qin Su mutters. Wei Wuxian yanks the flute from his lips.

“Now!” he shouts, and Zidian lashes out, followed quickly by Lan Wangji’s guqin strings. They start to pull in opposite directions, electricity and spiritually-reinforced silk grinding taut against the Xiangliu’s body. Wei Wuxian flies up, positioning Qin Su near its central head.

“Think you can hit the gills?” he asks. She nods, before leaping from Suibian back onto the Xiangliu. The nine heads scream in agony as she slashes its gills with her daggers before stabbing a line down its body, spraying its blood into the water and all over her.

A mistake. The instant the blood touches her, her timeout flare shoots out. Wei Wuxian can only watch as she collapses into the churning, bloodied water.

“The blood is poisonous!” shouts Lan Wangji. “Surely you did not forget that?”

“The gamemasters didn’t tell us this was what we were fighting!” Wei Wuxian shouts back. Lan Wangji’s jaw tenses at that.

“Part of cultivation is recognising and categorising monsters. The Xiangliu is a famous creature whose blood poisoned entire fields, rendering them infertile for centuries. How could you not —”

“Spare me your lecturing, Hanguang-jun,” snaps Wei Wuxian. “Do you want to kill this thing or
Already, the tension of the two cords pulling it in different direction is proving too much for the Xiangliu to bear. With a growl, Wei Wuxian rises back to face the central head of the monster, before leaping off of Suibian straight into its open jaws.

“Wei Ying!” shouts Lan Wangji, but as the central head’s mouth starts to close, Wei Wuxian thrusts his sword straight into the roof of its mouth. Almost immediately after, both Zidian and the guqin strings collapse as the Xiangliu is sliced into pieces.

The monster vanishes, the water recedes, and Wei Wuxian lands on Suibian back onto the arena floor, adrenaline still punching through him. The scores unfurl on the board above, and Jiang Cheng smacks his shoulder.

Wei Wuxian removes the barrier around his ears, just in time to hear the ecstatic, deafening screams. Stuffed rabbits and peonies begin raining down from the stands as his name stands at the top of the scoreboard, followed by a golden number 1.

He’d won. He’d won gold at the Olympics.

cornetto
Congratulations @weibowifi on your spectacular CompCult win! You deserve all the Cornetto you can possibly eat! #compcult #caiyiolyso #weiwuxian#

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weibowifi
you’re underestimating the amount of cornetto i can eat 😊

meteor_x
AN ICON 😎

popsicletwink

@ all the wwx haters on goldencore:

#wei wuxian #compcult #caiyiolyso #cry harder babies #wwx 300% earned this one

Wei Wuxian’s not sure how he managed to stay standing throughout the medal ceremony. Both he and Jiang Cheng, who had taken bronze, are draped into the Yunmeng flag and laden with flowers. On the silver tier, Lan Wangji is as stoic as ever in the Gusu flag, his silver medal shining bright on his chest.
Now that he’d won, the Olympic Village transforms into an oyster of possibilities. With the golden disc snug around his neck, Wei Wuxian finds himself fielding invites left, right, and centre for parties and get-togethers, bar hopping and rendezvous. Almost every single one of them is presented with seductive intent, be it a bold touch to his chest or a flutter of lashes. One American pole vaulter even murmurs something in his ear about how he’d love to vault him on his pole. Wei Wuxian feels the urge to take a very long, cleansing shower after hearing that.

Of course, second place is nothing to sneeze at, either, and coupled with Lan Wangji’s perfect everything it’s quite a dangerous cocktail for this athlete’s playground. Lan Wangji, however, seems determined to pay attention to one thing and one thing only — cornettos.

(Wei Wuxian vaguely wonders if he should be jealous of that. After seeing Lan Wangji’s tongue lap at the dessert, though, he has to admit he is, indeed, very jealous of an ice cream cone.)

“Wuxian-gege!” The familiar trill distracts Wei Wuxian from his fiftieth Chicken McNugget. He looks up, grinning as the British gymnasts drape themselves around him. “Congratulations on your win!”

“There’s going to be a party in our room later, if you’re interested,” a Brazilian football player adds sweetly, sliding up to rub against him. “We got lots of the local wine… the Emperor’s Smile? Heard it’s your favourite.”

“I could drink a jug of that and not get drunk,” boasts Wei Wuxian. A cheer rises through the nearby Olympians.

“Well, that’s a sight I don’t want to miss,” declares a Swiss diver. Wei Wuxian has the distinct feeling he’s going to regret making that claim, even if it’s true. Sure enough, the deep scowl on Lan Wangji’s face at the sight of all these other athletes hanging onto him makes guilt rear its ugly head.

And that’s how Wei Wuxian finds himself in the Brazilian quarter of the Olympic Village, drinking several of the other athletes under the table. By the time he looks up from what must be his fifth jug, the world is brighter and fuzzier than before, and his clothes are a bit too tight and hot on him.

“Wuxian-gege,” slurs the British gymnast, looking soppily up at him from her own bowl. “You’re a fuckin’ lege, you know?”

Wei Wuxian can’t help but laugh. “I knew you didn’t usually speak like a porn star,” he teases, squatting down next to her and patting her shoulder. She reaches out, cupping his cheek.

“Lan… Lan whatsit… is a lucky bloke.” Even while inebriated, her fingers are daring — they slip from his cheek to his shoulders, along his back. Wei Wuxian feels a slight shiver from her touch. “Your arse… is like, the talk of the town… everyone wants a piece of it.”

Wei Wuxian can’t help the flush in his cheeks at that. “Really now,” he intones, patting her hand as he returns it to the table.

“S true,” she murmurs, grinning soppily up at him. “Should’ve invited y’rival… ’ve always wanted to be in a CompCult sandwich.” Then her eyes droop closed, and a small snore wheezes out of her. Wei Wuxian chuckles, rising to his feet and tiptoeing over the drunken athletes, heading out of the room.

He’s immediately barred from entering his own room by the presence of a sock on the door. “Really, A-Cheng?” he demands, banging at the door.

“Fuck off!” Jiang Cheng’s voice hisses from the other side. Wei Wuxian opens his mouth, but any
suggestion that his shidi was having a hot date with his own hand shrivels on his tongue when he hears feminine laughter from the other side.

Familiar feminine laughter, at that.

“Okay. Wow. Didn’t need to know that,” Wei Wuxian declares, striding away from the door as fast as he can. But even the halls and courtyards of the Village provide little comfort, as almost every single dark corner (and a couple lighted ones) is full of athletes making out... and worse.

“Condoms?” a helpful man in green asks, holding out a bag full of them. Wei Wuxian can see the rather deadened look in his eyes — clearly this fellow has seen more about human sexuality than he ever cared to know. He takes a couple packets anyway, as well as a tube of lube. Just in case.

He bumps into the South Korean archer on their way to the Independent Athletes section, and Jin Zixuan sneaking out of the Olympic Village altogether. It seems almost as if every Olympian in Caiyi has paired off for the night, which makes something rather awful and green-eyed brew in the pit of his stomach.

After all, he and Lan Wangji aren’t together, which makes Lan Wangji just as fair game for the other athletes as he himself is. Still, out of literally everyone else he knows, Lan Wangji would probably be the one Olympian least likely to indulge tonight, especially considering the mystery recipient of his love song.

He feels a bit bad for that person, whoever they are. And maybe a little jealous, if Lan Wangji is, in fact, spending the night alone. It must take an iron core to resist the cocktail of hormones flowing out of every room and corner, but everyone already knew Lan Wangji had one of those.

The night air is crisp and bracing as he enters the quad of the complex hosting the Gusu athletes. Here things are a bit more subdued; more people here are asleep than sleeping with one another. Granted, some of them are clad in little more than their medals and socks, but at least they aren’t actively going at it. Wei Wuxian quietly steps past them, and is about to debate whether or not it would be creepy to knock on every door until he finds Lan Wangji’s when his dilemma is solved immediately by running into the man himself.

“Wei Ying,” says Lan Wangji, half-stunned. Wei Wuxian sighs.

“Jiang Cheng sexiled me,” he says. “Do you have space on your floor or something?”

“I have a bed,” says Lan Wangji. A pause. “Separate beds. My roommate is... indisposed.”

He casts a slightly withering glance towards one of the other dorm complexes. Wei Wuxian has a pretty good idea what his roommate is up to.

“Well, like I said, Jiang Cheng somehow managed to hook up with Mianmian, so... here I am.” He spreads his hands. “I swear, I’ll just shower real quick and fall right asleep. Won’t bother you at all.”

Lan Wangji hums at that, before pressing the elevator button. The ride up to his floor is quiet, slightly awkward. Even the elevator itself smells a bit of sex.

“Did you anticipate that this is what’d happen to your school when Caiyi got the bid to host the Olympics?” Wei Wuxian asks, when they get off at his landing. Lan Wangji strides on ahead, not replying. “I mean, everyone has this view of athletes as celibate, stoic people dedicated to their sport, so it probably came as a shock exactly how much sex goes on at the Olympics.”

“Mm.” Lan Wangji unlocks his door. “I suspected.”
“But you gotta admit, even this is a bit much.” Wei Wuxian steps into the room, looking around. Lan Wangji’s roommate is as neat as he is; they seem to have barely even unpacked their suitcase. Lan Wangji rummages in his bags, handing Wei Wuxian a towel.

“You said you wanted to shower,” he explains brusquely. A nightshirt of white linen is pressed into his other hand, followed by a pair of shower shoes. “There is soap in the bathroom.”

Wei Wuxian almost forgets to take off his gold medal on his way to the showers.

He showers and returns as quickly as he can, arrayed in the nightshirt with the towel snug around his hips. Lan Wangji opens the door in pyjamas, his gaze only briefly straying down before darting back up to his face. Wei Wuxian crosses his legs, before striding into the room and slipping under the covers of the the bed of Lan Wangji’s roommate. The same warm awkwardness that had filled the room in Baifeng the morning after fills this room now, punctuated only by the breathless moaning of Lan Wangji’s neighbours.

Of course, thinks Wei Wuxian sourly. Hammer it in, why don’t you.

“I know you’re mad at me,” he says. Lan Wangji, who had been trying to assume a lotus position for meditation, arches an eyebrow. “You know, for what I said at Baifeng.”

“I am not,” says Lan Wangji, though the grit of his jaw tells Wei Wuxian otherwise.

“Don’t lie to me,” he scoffs. “I rejected you, didn’t I? People tend to get mad about that.”

“You had your reasons,” replies Lan Wangji stiffly. “I intend to honour them.”

“Really.” Wei Wuxian’s not sure what’s possessing him to goad Lan Wangji like this, but it sure as hell isn’t honour. “What’s with the vinegary look you were throwing everyone in the dining hall, then? You ignore me for half of the competition, even turn your back on me when I greet you, and then you act all offended when other people express interest in me? You know I could have fucked my way around the world with these athletes by now, if it weren’t for the fact that every time I consider it, I think about you instead?”

Lan Wangji rises swiftly from the ground, expression thunderous. “Do not blame me for your own shortcomings in… finding a mate,” he spits, leaning into Wei Wuxian’s personal space with a glare. “I am not your keeper, as you have made abundantly clear.”

You are not mine, lies unspoken between them, and I am not yours.

But I want to be yours, Wei Wuxian protests, in a little, tiny portion of his heart that he keeps trying to squash. But like hope itself, it always seems to spring back up. He looks up, deep into the beautiful mask of Lan Wangji’s face, and does something very, very stupid.

He reaches out and kisses him.

And Lan Wangji kisses back with the force of a tidal wave. It’s as if he, too, has had his resolve whittled down to the finest of threads by everything that’d happened today — winning silver, fielding propositions, avoiding the worst of the parties — and now, finally, it had met its final straw.

Given enough heat and pressure, even an iron core will buckle and melt. Lan Wangji’s is melting right before Wei Wuxian’s eyes, as his mouth sucks a hungry line down the column of Wei Wuxian’s neck. He pauses, just at Wei Wuxian’s collar, and reaches for the nightstand, pressing the familiar disc of Wei Wuxian’s gold medal into his hands.
“Put this on,” he murmurs, pressing a kiss to the gold before resting it on his chest. Wei Wuxian can feel himself hardening under his gaze. He shrugs out of the nightshirt, medal hanging bright and cold over his sternum. Lan Wangji swallows at the sight before rushing to discard his own pyjamas, baring his cock to Wei Wuxian’s fumbling, eager hands.

Wei Wuxian’s fingers wrap around it, pressing Lan Wangji back down against the mattress. Though he’d seen this cock before, he hadn’t properly held it in his hands. It’s warm and heavy, a familiar, welcome weight in Wei Wuxian’s hand. He strokes it softly at first, hesitant, but at the hitch in Lan Wangji’s breath he grows bolder and leans in to kiss the tip.

“Wei Ying —” Lan Wangji’s voice is rough with desire. Wei Wuxian looks up at him, and Lan Wangji cradles the back of his head, fingers tightening against his ponytail.

Wei Wuxian opens his mouth, and takes Lan Wangji in as far as he can go.

He almost gags in his eagerness at first, but Lan Wangji senses it too and stills his head, concern knitting at his brow. Wei Wuxian pulls back, slightly stunned, before trying again. It’s still sloppy — imperfect — but it makes Lan Wangji’s fingers clench in his hair, and that’s more important.

If this is what Lan Wangji needs, then Wei Wuxian will do it, even if his heart aches with every stroke. Lan Wangji’s body is perfect in the golden lamplight of the room — sculpted like marble, polished like jade. The only signs of his pleasure lie in the flush of his earlobes and the erratic rise and fall of his chest. As Wei Wuxian moves, he feels the burden of the gold medal around his neck, the golden disc flashing in the light.

“I think I’ve cracked the code,” he jokes, laving his tongue along the underside of Lan Wangji’s shaft. “You’ll only have sex with me if I win gold, right? If you can’t win, you’ll at least get to fuck the winner.”

Lan Wangji only response is to yank his hair. Wei Wuxian laughs, even as pain smarts along his scalp.

“Didn’t know the great Hanguang-jun had such a thing for gold medals,” he continues, now running his tongue across the ridge under the tip. Lan Wangji gasps. “Gotcha.”

“Wei Ying,” groans Lan Wangji. “You can put your mouth to better use.”

Wei Wuxian laughs at that, and does. He takes Lan Wangji close to the edge, but just before he can take him any farther, Lan Wangji sits up and pulls himself out. Turning Wei Wuxian around, Lan Wangji drops soft kisses down along his shoulders and back, hands straying down to cup Wei Wuxian’s ass.

Wei Wuxian is suddenly grateful he ran into the sad green man earlier. “There’s condoms and lube in my pocket,” he says. Lan Wangji’s lips pause against his medal ribbon. “Yeah, I… ran into someone handing them out. I wasn’t really planning — but you know —”

Lan Wangji kisses his nape and gets up from the bed. Wei Wuxian’s body tingles with anticipation as he hears rustling from behind him, followed by the press of a slender finger against his entrance. Lan Wangji’s fingers tease into him, warm and slick, but Wei Wuxian can feel the impatience thrumming through him, like the pull of a bowstring just before release.

“Do it,” he breathes, pushing his hips back and resting his head on his arms, bumping his ass against Lan Wangji’s hand. “Fuck me, Lan Zhan.”

(Use me. Practice with me.)
Tears spring into his eyes unbidden as Lan Wangji enters him, the sudden stretch shocking and painful. He’s still mostly dry and definitely unprepared, but as Lan Wangji begins to move, the discomfort eases quickly into pleasure.

The moaning of the neighbours have faded into silence, and now all Wei Wuxian can hear is the rhythm of their own bodies against the bed. He grabs the pillow, burying his moans into it as Lan Wangji fucks him harder and deeper than before, his fingers pressed so hard against Wei Wuxian’s hips that he’s sure there’ll be bruises in the morning. There’s still a bit of angry heat in him, in the punishing pace of his thrusts and his rough bites along Wei Wuxian’s shoulders. But it’s exactly what Wei Wuxian needs, as he curls his toes against the comforter and loses himself to Lan Wangji.

Lan Wangji’s hands now move up to tug at Wei Wuxian’s medal, pulling the ribbon taut. The heavy gold flies to Wei Wuxian’s throat, the pressure at once terrifying and wonderful. “Lan Zhan!” he gasps, and Lan Wangji’s fingers immediately loosen on the ribbon. “No, no — do it again — please —”

Lan Wangji’s growl resounds low in his chest, vibrating against Wei Wuxian’s back. It thrills him, even moreso as Lan Wangji’s hands tug at the medal’s ribbon again. Wei Wuxian’s head spins; every nerve in his body feels like it’s been set alight.

The fingers loosen again, and Wei Wuxian gasps as Lan Wangji’s hands move down his front. They bring him flush against Lan Wangji’s chest, before reaching down to stroke at his own neglected cock. Wei Wuxian gasps, as Lan Wangji noses against the crook of his neck, pressing soft kisses at odds with his rough thrusts and strokes.

He’s so close; every touch only drives his body more wild. With each thrust, he feels the medal heavy against his chest, feels the brush of Lan Wangji’s cock against that sweet spot inside him. He loses all sense of himself and the world around them, reduced only to a creature of desperate moans and rutting until he’s coming messily across Lan Wangji’s fingers, and Lan Wangji’s breath is hot against his ears as he follows.

Panting heavily, Wei Wuxian slides off Lan Wangji’s cock, flopping back onto the comforter. Lan Wangji leans in, and tugs him up by his medal to kiss him.

Now sated and lethargic, Wei Wuxian reaches up to run his hands across Lan Wangji’s cropped hair. “Like I said, you look hot,” he murmurs, grinning. Lan Wangji huffs, half-amused, before pulling back to admire his handiwork: Wei Wuxian covered in bruises and marks, his abdomen still splashed with come, his hair mussed and wild across the comforter.

“We are fortunate my roommate never seems to sleep in his own bed,” Lan Wangji mumbles, slightly rueful. Wei Wuxian laughs.

“I don’t think he’ll want to anyway, after this.” He spreads his legs, bracketing Lan Wangji’s hips with his ankles. “You haven’t gotten rid of your condom yet. Aren’t you done?”

Lan Wangji closes his eyes and shakes his head, a faint pink flush spreading across his cheeks. Wei Wuxian whistles in appreciation, even as Lan Wangji lines himself up and thrusts back in, turning his amusement back into overstimulated pleasure.

It’s so easy to lose himself like this. It’s so easy to fall.

In the morning, Wei Wuxian wakes to a mild pounding in his head and the feeling of someone carding their hands through his hair. He can feel the tingling warmth of spiritual energy gracing his
temples, and with a soft groan he opens his eyes to see Lan Wangji, peering down at him from beside him.

For one moment, all Wei Wuxian wants is for this to be how he wakes every morning — to Lan Wangji’s eyes, in Lan Wangji’s arms. He leans up, smiling as he cups Lan Wangji’s cheek. “Good morning.”

Lan Wangji swallows, his fingers now trailing along the bite marks he’d left on Wei Wuxian’s body. “My apologies for my rashness,” he murmurs, as his hands linger against one particularly angry bruise.

“It’s fine,” says Wei Wuxian automatically, a strange desperation tugging inside him. “You weren’t the only one being stupid last night.”

Lan Wangji’s fingers freeze, before swiftly retracting. “I know.” He purses his lips, before rising from the bed and striding over to his own. The distance between them echoes like a chasm. “We should not have done that.”

Wei Wuxian suddenly feels as if he’d been doused in ice water. He starts to gather his clothes, throwing them on with a viciousness he wishes he actually felt. Stupid, stupid Wei Ying, for even daring to pretend for this moment that Lan Zhan could love you like this!

All good things must come at a price. Lan Wangji’s love seems to be the steepest one of them all, built on gold medals and stolen moments at competitions. The world might see Wei Wuxian as the new Olympic champion in nighthunting, but victory is truly a double-edged sword. Especially when it makes his relationships with the ones he loves so precarious.

The gold medal is heavy against his neck. Wei Wuxian takes it off and stuffs it into his jacket pocket.

“Well,” he says. “What happens at the Olympics?”


Wei Wuxian raises an eyebrow, as Lan Wangji seems to bite his lip as he tries to pick out his next words. “But?”

“How long are you staying in Caiyi? Now that your event is over?”

The first tinglings of warmth begin to return to Wei Wuxian’s heart. “We’re… going to be sightseeing for a couple days after the closing ceremony,” he manages. “Why do you ask?”

Lan Wangji’s hands fiddle with themselves in a way reminiscent of how he once fiddled with his plait. It’s almost like déjà-vu, except this time he says, “We could get dinner.”

Wei Wuxian’s world tilts slightly on its axis. “You’ve never asked to hang with me outside of competitions before,” he remarks, flabbergasted.

Lan Wangji huffs at that, and turns his face from Wei Wuxian as if trying to hide something. “First time for everything.”

Wei Wuxian can’t help but laugh at that, even as he agrees to the dinner. Even if this is all Lan Wangji wants from him, then Wei Wuxian will gladly take all that he can get.

imseong-hun
Chapter End Notes

Chapter title taken from "Loved" by Claire Kuo.

WARNING: Smut ahoy, with rough sex and breathplay. Please read at your own discretion! If you aren't into that, stop reading at “Put this on,” he murmurs, pressing a kiss to the gold before resting it on his chest. and pick up at In the morning, Wei Wuxian wakes to a mild pounding in his head and the feeling of someone carding their hands through his hair.

The Caiyi arc is literally my favourite part tbh, so I'm SUPER EXCITED about these chapters! They're also... a lot longer than usual, because a LOT of stuff happens! RIP Wisteria Blossoms: ... if you've read my Roman Holiday AU in YOI, you might recognise this show. I guess LWJ speaks Japanese too

Rainbow-woven silk/Lan gossamer: I tried to make these names sound like they definitely had Mandarin counterparts: 虹织丝 and 蓝游丝. It's also the material in LWJ's arena uniform, too! Insert joke about him being saruman of many colours here

Similarly, the names Caqiao and the University of Caiyi in Mandarin would be: 彩桥 and 彩大, and Yunmeng National University would be 云大.
The Olympics Village: Yes, it is that depraved. Every single article on the Internet tells me so.

Karma's a bitch: A hot Chinese meme in 2018 where people would mouth "Oh well, karma's a bitch" ala that scene in Riverdale, and then "Gucci Gucci" plays as they transform into a hotter version of themselves. I set it to Yiling Laozu lol

A hundred chicken McNuggets: to be fair, Usain Bolt ate like a thousand of those in Beijing...

Flag-bearers/cauldron lighters: flag-bearers are usually athletes on the team, voted by their fellow athletes or picked by their olys committee. cauldron lighters are usually retired athletes or non-athletes with significant cultural importance.

Comments about LWJ: taken from the discourse surrounding Yuzuru Hanyu during Sochi

Where is LXC: my friend Liz said her figure skating chat was doing this constantly re: Yuna Kim at Pyeongchang so I had to add this

Laoling vs Lanling: Inspired by how the Chinese government treats Hong Kong (a similarly autonomous province in China) and Taiwan (a separate government, but not in the eyes of the PRC). The PRC has tried to blackball Taiwan from numerous international organisations, to the point that at the Olympics and other International sporting events that they both participate in, Taiwan is referred to as "Chinese Taipei". Because of the protests in Hong Kong, it's likely the PRC will get more hardline with them too...

I want Cornetto...: inspired by Chloe Kim's tweet during Pyeongchang. I'm not sponsored by Cornetto, but man I wish I was though.

The condom man: yes. there is a guy whose job it is to go around the olympic village with a bag of condoms.

The final insta comments: Sorry not sorry.
The rest of the Olympics is a bit of a giddy, drunken blur. Between sleeping, eating, and partying, Wei Wuxian loses track of time altogether.

His only other worry is cheering up his shidi. Apparently, Mianmian had fled their room just before Jiang Cheng woke and is currently ghosting his texts. Wei Wuxian tries to push him in the direction of some other athletes and parties, but Jiang Cheng keeps on returning from them empty-handed, so after a while he gives up.

“Your brother is absolute rubbish at pulling,” the British gymnast declares on the morning of the closing ceremony. Wei Wuxian laughs, rubbing at his nape as he tries not to look over at where Lan Wangji is eating yet another cornetto. “You know, the night’s growing old and I just want a shag, and instead he takes out his mobile and tries to show me dog photos.”

“My brother can… be a little confused about what women want,” says Wei Wuxian. She snorts.

“Confused is one thing. Your brother’s on an entirely different level.” She reaches over, patting his forearm. “And you’ve mended things between yourself and Wangji, right? I’ve seen you two spending a little more time together now.”

Wei Wuxian smiles and nods, though the truth is a bit more complicated. While he has spent some time with Lan Wangji in the past couple of days, they had not repeated the night after finals. Not that Wei Wuxian’s counting, or paying attention.

(He’s still reeling from the prospect of dinner. An evening without the spectre of competition. Just the two of them as ordinary people.)

“Pity,” the gymnast sighs. “I guess that puts you on the straight and narrow? Unless, you know, he’s not unwelcome to the concept of a party.”

“You did mention an interest in CompCult sandwiches,” says Wei Wuxian. The gymnast’s cheeks flush at that. “You might need to find some other competitors, though. Lan Wangji’s off the market.”

She raises an eyebrow. “I just asked if you’d share,” she points out.

“Oh, no. It’s not like that.” Wei Wuxian shakes his head. “I’m just… a friend.”

“A friend.” The word is slow, disbelieving. “No benefits?”

Many benefits. But Wei Wuxian suspects if he says that, he’ll probably cause some sort of minor cataclysm on the Internet. So he shrugs instead, and returns his attention to his burger. He’s never eating McDonald’s if he can help it, ever again.

The closing ceremony itself is half-forgotten in a drunken stupor. Wen Ning and his gaggle of teenage Olympians are the only ones sober for it, as fireworks shoot into the air and sporting bigwigs make speeches about unity and peace. Wei Wuxian, on the other hand, is more interested in checking out of the Village and heading to their hotel in Old Town Caiyi. They’re spending a couple extra days in the city for proper sightseeing, as bar-hopping around the Caiqiao District really isn’t the best way to take in what the city has to offer.
Old Town Caiyi, or Gucai, is the site of the original water town and marketplace. Most of the buildings have been rebuilt and refurbished over the years, with precious little of the original stone and mortar left. Instead of houses, they now serve as hotels, shops, and restaurants catering mostly to tourists trying to get photos of the old-style buildings.

“It’s a different style from the new town, isn’t it?” wonders Jiang Yanli as they drop off their luggage in their adjoining rooms. Down on the pavement below, crowds of tourists swarm shops and teahouses, while fleets of tour boats line the nearby canals.

“Yeah, no skyscrapers here,” says Jiang Cheng, gesturing to the buildings and townhomes lining the streets. “I guess they have something against them in this part of Caiyi?”

“It’s the historical district; they don’t want to spoil the skyline,” replies Jiang Yanli, as her phone chimes. “Oh, Zixuan-gege wants to go to tea. Are you two interested?”

“He’s still in town?” demands Wei Wuxian, scowling. “How long?”

“His flight leaves in a couple days,” says Jiang Yanli. “Some business thing in New York.”

“We can go,” says Jiang Cheng. “Better than sitting around moping and feeling sorry for myself.”

“That’s the spirit,” says Jiang Yanli, patting him on the shoulder. Jiang Cheng rolls his eyes, but grabs his room key nonetheless.

“He’s had a rough week,” murmurs Wei Wuxian as they head downstairs.

“Yeah, I can tell,” says Jiang Yanli. “Some athlete ditch him at the Village?”

“A couple,” says Wei Wuxian, shrugging. “What about Zixuan-gege, huh? Can’t imagine why he would want to invite all of us to tea.”

Jiang Yanli rolls her eyes. “Because he wants to get to know you two better?”


Jiang Yanli’s entire face flushes red at that. Wei Wuxian claps his hands to his mouth.

“Oh my gods. No.”

Jiang Yanli suddenly seems to find the wooden whorls on the stairs much more interesting. Wei Wuxian gasps, tugging at her sleeve.

“You did! Unbelievable. Congratulations on the peacock, I guess?”

Jiang Yanli narrows her eyes. “You’re not allowed to threaten him,” she warns.

“Why would I?” wonders Wei Wuxian, feigning innocence. “He’s not going to be an asshole to you, is he?”

Jiang Yanli smacks his forearm. “A-Ying! I can take care of myself!”

Wei Wuxian knows she can. If Jin Zixuan tried anything dishonorable, he’d have to reckon with her first.

“Please tell me you’re using protection,” he offers instead, and Jiang Yanli immediately hides her
face in her hands.

“We’re not having this conversation in public,” she insists, just as Jiang Cheng heads back to the stairs to demand what’s taking them so long.

They locate the tea-house pretty quickly on Baidu, and sure enough, when they arrive, Jin Zixuan is waiting for them. “You two came,” he says, more of a statement than anything else.


“No, I mean, when Yanli said there was a chance you two may not accept the invitation, I — never mind. Come on, I reserved a table.”

“Where are you staying?” Jiang Cheng wonders.

“The Grand Hotel Caiyi in the new town,” replies Jin Zixuan almost matter-of-factly, as he leads them over the threshold. The tea-house is traditional style, spanning multiple levels and bustling with clients. It overlooks a small park before a wide, glimmering river, with weeping willows bent over the banks on both sides. “I could have you all moved over if you would like. It would be much nicer than Gucai, at least in terms of amenities.”

“We’re here to see Gucai, not the new town,” says Wei Wuxian immediately. Jiang Yanli arches an eyebrow at him. “What? It’s the truth. I like to be where the action is.”

“A-Xuan, ignore him,” says Jiang Yanli, rolling her eyes. “We thank you for your kind offer, but we like our current hotel.” She stares over at Wei Wuxian, her expression screaming See? That wasn’t so hard.

Jin Zixuan looks between the two of them, before placing a hand on Jiang Yanli’s forearm. “We can still spend the day together, then,” he says. “I can have a driver come pick you up in the morning and take us places.”

“Which takes all the fun out of travelling,” says Wei Wuxian, rolling his eyes. “The point of going to a new place is to try new things, right? Like how locals experience it?”

“People in Caiyi get around in cars,” Jiang Cheng points out. “Having a driver would be safer, considering the number of pickpockets that get drawn to cities during tourist season.”

Wei Wuxian sends his shidi a look of utter betrayal. Jiang Cheng rolls his eyes and buries his face behind the tea-house menu.

They order their tea and snacks, and it comes by quickly and silently, the servers preparing the pot and serving them with soft voices and lowered gazes. Their table offers a view of the park outside, and during the course of the conversation Wei Wuxian finds himself drifting away, focusing instead on the glimmering willow leaves in the late afternoon sunlight as they drip into the river below.

Perhaps Lan Wangji has been to this tea-house before — has looked out at this same vista with a cup of oolong in his hands, contemplating the beauty of nature or whatever else goes through that pretty head of his. It’s remarkable how a place known to be inhabited by someone can become so quickly populated by their ghost; Wei Wuxian sees Lan Wangji in every dark-haired man in white down below, even though he knows deep down that none of them could ever compare.

He’s brought back to earth by Jiang Cheng’s elbow. “Stop daydreaming about Lan Wangji,” rebukes his shidi, scowling. “What? You’re so obvious. It’s disgusting.”
“Yeah, but at least I have someone to daydream about,” taunts Wei Wuxian. Jiang Cheng’s scowl deepens.

“Fuck off,” he says.

“He got ghosted,” adds Wei Wuxian in a stage whisper to Jin Zixuan, who arches an eyebrow.

“That’s rough, buddy,” he says, and Wei Wuxian bursts into laughter.

“That’s what I said!” he shortles, patting Jiang Cheng on the back. “Honestly, A-Cheng, maybe being forever alone will suit you better. You keep getting blacklisted anyway.”

“Even with men?” wonders Jin Zixuan.

“I haven’t — no!” splutters Jiang Cheng.

“I thought the Olympics Village had everything,” Jin Zixuan muses innocently.

“Yes, but I didn’t —” Jiang Cheng shakes his head. “I’d have expected this sort of ribbing from A-Ying, but you, Zixuan? This is betrayal.”

“What’s the point of medaling at the Olympics if you can’t use it to score a date?” Jin Zixuan pretends to check his fingernails. “Congratulations on that, by the way. Nice to see that me being in fourth can happen even with different gamemasters.”

Wei Wuxian bristles at that. “Look, Zixuan, just because —”

“No, you three deserved it,” says Jin Zixuan, shaking his head. “I didn’t really do that much in the final round. I think maybe seeing Qin Su there threw me off my game a little.”

“Yes, but I don’t think I’ve seen her since Juniors,” says Jiang Cheng, frowning over his cup. “I heard the situation in Laoling’s kinda —” Jiang Yanli glares at him, and he promptly snaps his mouth shut.

“It’s all right,” says Jin Zixuan, shaking his head. “My half-brother is accomplished, but he can be… rather divisive without realising it.”

“Oh, I think he knows he’s being divisive,” sighs Jiang Yanli. “He refuses to refer to his father as anything except your father. That’s pretty petty, if you ask me.”

Jin Zixuan’s face colours at that. “I mean, I don’t blame him for that,” he admits. “I just also don’t talk to him, either. The internet can say what it likes, but I know my half-brother got his position without family interference. In fact, I’d bet you anything if Father had tried to get him the job, Jin Guangyao would’ve refused it.”

“ Weird flex, but okay,” quips Wei Wuxian, just as his mobile pings with a WeChat notification. He checks it, frowning.

“Something wrong, A-Ying?” wonders Jiang Yanli as she refills Jin Zixuan’s teacup.

“No, it’s just…” Wei Wuxian laughs a bit, disbelieving. “Lan Xichen friended me on WeChat.”

Lan Xichen

I’ve added you as a friend on WeChat. Let’s talk!
Hello!

hi! how did you find me?

Yanli sent me your contact card

oh

what can i do for you xichen-gege?

Heard you were still in town. Interested in getting dinner? My treat. Bring Jiang Wanyin and Yanli too.

...lemme ask?

they said yes

well, jiang cheng said yes. my shijie has plans

Pity :(

Here’s the location:

*Lan Xichen has shared a map.*

We have a reservation at 6:30
It’s on Wujiang Road, so if you’re in Gucai it won’t be too far

Oh, btw! My brother’s WeChat:

*Lan Xichen has shared a contact card.*

You’re welcome! :)

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Wei Wuxian had suspected Lan Xichen would bring his brother to dinner with him, but he’s a bit surprised anyway when the server directs him to the private dining room and Lan Wangji is there.

“Jiang Wanyin! Wei Wuxian!” Lan Xichen is all congeniality and smiles as he greets them both, shaking their hands and directing them to their seats which he pulls out with a flick of his wrist. “This is my favourite place in all of Gucai. They’ve preserved our family’s traditional dishes perfectly!”

Wei Wuxian has a bad feeling about that, but he smiles nonetheless. “Can’t wait to eat it,” he says, as the server pours them both cups of tea. It’s almost medicinally strong and bitter, and he has to struggle not to cough after downing it.

Lan Wangji’s eyebrow twitches in amusement. Wei Wuxian makes a face at him.

“Do they have a menu?” he asks instead. Lan Xichen waves an airy hand.

“I’ve already ordered the specials,” he says. “It’ll be like a family feast!”

Wei Wuxian suspects that if the food is anything like the tea itself, the only reason this restaurant preserved the Lan family dishes is so that tourists can challenge themselves with an array of intensely bitter dishes. The bright orange fishes and savoury-looking shrimp being carried to other private rooms only furthers his suspicions.
In comparison, the vegetable-and-root soup they are served first in a black stone tureen makes even the tea itself taste sweet in comparison. Jiang Cheng almost gags upon the first sip, but he makes an even more valiant effort to save face in front of Lan Xichen, his face turning purple with his exertions. Wei Wuxian almost wants to take a picture of it.

Lan Wangji and Lan Xichen, having obviously been raised on this concoction, down their bowls of soup without batting an eye. Wei Wuxian stares down at his own bowl, knowing it would make him lose face if he didn’t finish.

He steels himself to try another sip, and finds the bowl in front of him empty. Looking to the side, he notices Lan Wangji finishing another bowl of soup, delicately patting his mouth with a napkin as if nothing had happened.

“What do you think?” Lan Xichen asks cheerily from across the table. Jiang Cheng’s smile looks more like a grimace.

“Delicious,” he deadpans. Wei Wuxian hides his snort with a bout of coughing, and refills everyone’s teacups. It goes down oddly sweeter this time.

“Your family does seem to find joy in adversity,” he manages. Lan Xichen beams. “Are the rest of the dishes… just like that?”

Lan Xichen bursts into laughter. “Oh heavens, the looks on your faces,” he wheezes, before turning to his brother. “Wangji, thank you for this. I haven’t had this much fun in ages.”

Wei Wuxian makes to protest, but then the smell of something delicious hits him as the servers come in with a fish rendered golden in sweet-and-sour sauce, followed rapidly by crackling eels, Biluo shrimp, and braised pork belly on a bed of mei gan cai.

“Did you really think we would subject you to an actual Lan family dinner?” wonders Lan Xichen innocently. “Even we don’t inflict our ancestors’ cuisine on ourselves these days!”

“Nutritionist,” Lan Wangji points out drily. Lan Xichen’s smile falters.

“Well, during the off-season we don’t,” he says, waving a hand. “And when you’re retired like me, you don’t need to eat boiled bitter greens three times a day. Thank heavens.”

Wei Wuxian has to admit, though, Lan Xichen’s physique is still amazing for someone not restricted to a nutritionist’s guidelines. Jiang Cheng seems to have come to the same conclusion, based on the way he suddenly seems determined to look anywhere except in Lan Xichen’s direction.

Nevertheless, the dinner becomes a bit more cheerful after that. Wei Wuxian tucks into the fish without complaint, and the room fills with a warm, companionable silence as they eat.

Throughout dinner, Wei Wuxian can hardly keep his eyes off Lan Wangji. Was this the dinner he’d promised? He wouldn’t be too surprised, though — having both of their brothers here does make the intention a little less pointed, a little less… romantic.

(Not that Wei Wuxian was hoping for romantic, of course, but hope does have a tendency to spring up in his chest like a weed.)

Nevertheless, there’s definitely still an undercurrent of something running between them. Like Lan Wangji is trying to tell him something in a language he doesn’t understand, or trying to show him a painting while he’s blindfolded.
Wei Wuxian’s only distantly aware of his name being called. He straightens up, watching Lan Wangji refill his teacup before tapping the lazy susan in thanks. “Yes?” he asks, as Lan Xichen tilts his head at him.

“I was saying, it’s a pity Jiang Yanli couldn’t be here with us. You mentioned she had plans?”


“Competitor Jin,” he says, sighing. “I still feel terrible for what happened to him at Baifeng. I… definitely don’t remember programming the Zhuque to behave like that.”

“The glitch?” asks Jiang Cheng, his brows knitting. Lan Xichen nods. “I had been wondering about that. Jin Zixuan says his cousin’s antidote vanished the first night.”

“Vanished,” echoes Lan Xichen, frowning.

“It’s not the first time something strange has happened to him,” continues Jiang Cheng. “A couple times in Xinglu and Qishan the corpses he shot wouldn’t go away, or give him points.”

“Very odd,” murmurs Lan Xichen.

“But he usually got those eventually so he reckoned it was a bug in the system. The Zhuque and the vanishing antidote, though…”

“And the zhenniao attacking him immediately after the glitch,” adds Wei Wuxian. “It seemed a bit odd to me that they would single him out.”

“Well, he did very well at the Olympics,” says Lan Xichen, his expression thoughtful. “Fourth place, after you three.” He inclines his head. “I know there has been some frustration regarding the scoring, but I can assure you, I do not manipulate anyone’s technical bonuses. Not even my brother’s.”

Wei Wuxian smiles. “I wouldn’t think of it,” he replies. “Lan Zhan wins these competitions on his own merit, right?”

Lan Wangji looks down at his teacup. “And so do you,” he replies. Wei Wuxian beams, and pats his hand. Lan Wangji’s arm twitches, but he doesn’t actually flinch away.

Lan Xichen steeples his fingers. “Well, thank you all for bringing these issues to me,” he says. “I’ll look into it and let you know what I find out.”

“Do you think it’s someone manipulating the game from outside the command center?” asks Wei Wuxian. “You know, like what I asked about back at Lotus Pier?”

“Manipulation?” Lan Xichen’s expression grows pained. “I… I would hope not. That’d be a deliberate violation of everything this game stands for. It’d be like… like…”

“The demonic path,” says Lan Wangji.

“Yes, like that, back in the old days.” Lan Xichen shudders. “Let’s not think too much about it, all right? Finish your food, and let’s go wander around Wujiang Road for a bit. The night scenery is particularly beautiful!”
Wujiang Road, as one of the old-style roads renovated to cater to tourists, runs along an old canal through the heart of the old town. Willow trees dip thin green leaves into the waters, while on the banks, bright lights bedazzle the railings of walkways and bridges.

Wei Wuxian can barely restrain himself from wandering into every shop he sees. From bright silks, to jade, to porcelain, each shop is bursting with marvellous curios and souvenirs. In some of them, there’s even entertainers arrayed in the traditional white robes of the Lan family, studiously playing instruments for clients and visitors.

“Tourist fare,” says Lan Xichen, waving a hand. “Very few of them are actually cultivators, and even fewer train at our family’s school. They just play guqin or pipa well enough to sing kunqu.”

“Gusu-style opera,” adds Lan Wangji.

“Do either of you ever get asked to perform?” wonders Jiang Cheng.

“Plenty of times!” Lan Xichen laughs. “But Wangji and I are both unfortunately very busy. We both have sponsors to please.”

“We perform at Ten Lion Rock for Mid-Autumn,” adds Lan Wangji. “It is a family tradition.”

“Ten Lion Rock,” echoes Jiang Cheng, his expression contorting as he tries to work his tongue around the words. “Which sadistic fuck thought of that name?”

“Well, according to the writings of our founder, Lan An —” begins Lan Xichen, but at the obvious mortification on Jiang Cheng’s face, he bursts out laughing and shakes his head. “I jest again, Jiang Wanyin. Ten Lion Rock is supposed to look like ten lions, hence the name.”

“I still do not think it looks like ten lions,” says Lan Wangji. “Perhaps if you were blind, it would.”

“This argument has divided our entire family,” adds Lan Xichen. “Whether Ten Lion Rock actually looks like ten lions, or if it’s supposed to have gotten its name from something else. Wangji is convinced some cultivator defeated ten lions at the rock, hence the name.”

“There are historical documents —” begins Lan Wangji, but Lan Xichen shakes his head.

“If we wanted to bore our guests with discourse over the origins of Ten Lion Rock’s name, we could have just invited them to one of Uncle’s Mahjong Nights.” At that moment, they pass through a series of food stalls selling different types of snacks, and Lan Xichen’s expression lights up.

“Crab roe tang bao! Wangji, remember how much you loved these when you were a kid?”

Wei Wuxian wonders if it’s a trick of the light, or if Lan Wangji’s ears had flushed red at his brother’s words. “They look like large xiaolongbao,” he remarks, staring at them longingly.
Lan Wangji purses his lips. “They are,” he says, “but bigger, and filled with crab.”

“Sold,” says Wei Wuxian, immediately ordering one. However, before he can even whip out his phone to pay for it, Lan Wangji has beaten him to the punch. “Lan Zhan, come on.”

“You are my guest,” says Lan Wangji simply. Lan Xichen grins, and turns to Jiang Cheng.

“Would you also like one?”

Jiang Cheng shakes his head. “I’m allergic,” he says, before wandering over to sample some pork jerky.

“He’s not,” Wei Wuxian mutters to Lan Wangji, who merely raises an eyebrow in amusement. “Okay, how do you eat this?”

“You drink the soup with the straw,” replies Lan Wangji. Wei Wuxian tries a little and almost gets scalded for his troubles.

They spend the rest of the evening wandering in and out of shops and trying different foods at different stalls. But almost every time Wei Wuxian goes to the cashier, he finds out that Lan Wangji had already covered it for him. By the time the shops along the street begin to close, Wei Wuxian has done all of his souvenir shopping without having spent any of his own money.

“This is embarrassing for me,” he declares, as he and Lan Wangji wait for Lan Xichen and Jiang Cheng to catch up. Apparently the two of them have been sampling fruit wines and variants on Emperor’s Smile at one of the stores, and Lan Xichen has gotten more and more giddy with each cup. Jiang Cheng, too, is swaying a little by the time they reach them. “I have my own Alipay, I really shouldn’t oblige you like this —”

“You are my guest,” repeats Lan Wangji.

“But half of these purchases aren’t even things for me,” protests Wei Wuxian.

Lan Wangji’s mouth twitches in a way that on another person would’ve probably been a shrug. Wei Wuxian’s stomach flutters unexpectedly at that.

“Well, it’s getting late,” declares Lan Xichen. “Where are you two staying, again? We should escort you.”

“It’s no matter,” dismisses Wei Wuxian, even as Jiang Cheng lurches over his shoulder. “We’re in walking distance of Wujiang Road, I think? Just past that weird temple…”

“Oh! You mean our primary school?” Lan Xichen claps his hands. “Our mother always said it looked more like a temple than a school.”

“At this point I can’t tell if you’re joking or not,” Wei Wuxian mutters.

“He was serious,” says Lan Wangji. “Wujuang Primary was built in the architectural style of the ancient Cloud Recesses and enforced a similar academic rigour. It was the only school our uncle approved of.”

“We can still walk you to your hotel, then,” continues Lan Xichen, as Wei Wuxian starts retracing their steps along the bank. The lights along the avenue flicker out as shops and stalls close for the night, but the streetlamps still cast the tourist road with a friendly golden glow. Once they hit the street, Jiang Cheng sways harder against Wei Wuxian, almost causing him to topple over.
Lan Wangji quickly puts an arm around Wei Wuxian’s waist to steady him. Wei Wuxian, in turn, flushes like a flustered schoolgirl. They pass Wujiang Primary’s front gates, and Wei Wuxian tries to imagine a little Lan Wangji going to school there. Yunmeng schoolchildren wore silver bells on purple tassels; what did Gusu schoolchildren wear?

“Blue neckerchiefs,” says Lan Wangji. Wei Wuxian blinks, and realises he’d said his question aloud. “Wujiang Primary had an all-white uniform as well.”

“You really have never worn another colour in your life, huh,” says Wei Wuxian. Lan Wangji huffs at that.

At the doors to the lobby of their hotel, however, Jiang Yanli is already there with Jin Zixuan. “Oh, A-Cheng, what did the Lans do to you?” she teases as Jiang Cheng flops into her arms.

“We sampled some wines,” says Lan Xichen.

“Lots and lots of samples,” agrees Jiang Cheng, pouting. “Jie, I’m tired. I want to sleep.”

“We’ll get you in bed, stupid,” says Jiang Yanli, rolling her eyes. Jin Zixuan reaches out to help her support her brother. “A-Ying, you coming up? Or is the night still young?”

Wei Wuxian blinks, and looks between them and the Lan brothers. “Are you two going somewhere else?” he wonders.

“Just back home,” says Lan Xichen. “Though we wouldn’t mind if you came for a nightcap, right, Wangji?” He elbows his brother, whose cheeks are now also faintly pink.

“Alcohol is forbidden at the Cloud Recesses,” mutters Lan Wangji.

“You know I still have the permit from the moon-watching party,” says Lan Xichen, rolling his eyes. “There’s a snifter of brandy and a lot of paperwork calling my name, brother dearest; we can’t stay here gawking at your friend for too long.”

Lan Wangji looks as if he’d like to shove his brother for that comment, but then clears his throat. “You are welcome to have tea with us,” he says, “as alcohol is forbidden.”

Lan Xichen’s expression screams of ‘god my brother’s adorable’. “We can call you a Didi back here if you’d like,” he adds.

Wei Wuxian shrugs, and steps back towards them. “I’ll call if something comes up, then?” he asks Jiang Yanli, who waves cheerily at him in reply.

“Good night, A-Ying,” she teases, before the three of them head into the hotel lobby. Wei Wuxian turns towards the Lans, who are headed farther down the pavement.

“Where are we going now?” he asks.

“Metro stop,” says Lan Wangji, leading the way.

It’s lightly drizzling by the time they emerge from the Blue Line stop at the Cloud Recesses, and in the light of the streetlamps, the shadows of the apartment community in the distance tower like some unknown behemoth.

This part of town is a little more quiet, but no less populated. Here the streets are well-paved, the avenues carefully lined with manicured trees. The stores are all upscale and modern, and it seems
every single corner boasts either a coffeeshop or a bookstore. Or both.

“Haha, of course the Cloud Recesses would be on the Blue Line,” says Wei Wuxian, as they cross the street before the gates leading to the main apartment community. “Is that how you first learnt your name, Lan Zhan?”


“Suuuure,” he says. Lan Xichen scans a QR code with his phone, and the pedestrian gate slides open with a small beep.

“I’ve got to go pick up a package,” he says, gesturing to some parcel lockers just inside the gate. “Wangji, be a dear and bring our guest up, hm?”

“En.” Lan Wangji sets off down a garden path, and Wei Wuxian quickly follows.

He soon realises this community is much larger than he initially thought, especially as it borders a larger park with several ponds and a small lake. Several small traditional-style buildings and pagodas are scattered through the park as well, their forms elegant even under the harsh streetlights.

“The Cloud Recesses gardens,” says Lan Wangji, when Wei Wuxian stops to take photos. “They are what is left of the Lan family ancestral home. Most of us live in these buildings now,” he gestures to the more modern high-rises bordering the garden, “so we can maintain the park and the library still.”

“Aren’t these gardens a tourist destination?” asks Wei Wuxian. Lan Wangji nods.

“The residential and tourist parts are separated by guard towers. There are also strict rules for tourists in the gardens.” They wander through a smaller park, with a little river trickling into a pool of golden carp. In the dark, a rabbit peeks out from behind one of the bushes. “Parking is only allowed underground, to maintain the beauty of the surface.”

Wei Wuxian snorts. “People who aren’t your family willingly adhere to these rules?” he wonders.

“It is the most exclusive postcode in East Asia,” replies Lan Wangji. Wei Wuxian has to concede that argument. People would do anything for exclusivity.

They stop in front of a building marked with the number 1. Lan Wangji scans a code with his phone as well, and the lock clicks open almost silently. He lets Wei Wuxian inside before summoning the lift. Once inside, he scans another code, and the lift immediately begins to take them up.

“It knows what floor you’re on?” demands Wei Wuxian. Lan Wangji hums in agreement, before gesturing towards a pad clearly meant for scanning a keycard or token.

“You need verification to go in and out,” he says. Wei Wuxian has to admit that’s a little bit creepy.

The lift finally reaches the top, depositing them in a spotless landing. There is only one front door; the other is a glass door leading out to a vast roof patio with its own carefully-curated garden.

“Brother’s garden,” says Lan Wangji, nodding towards the glass door. “He has his moon-watching and tan hua parties there.”

“Your brother has tan hua parties,” states Wei Wuxian.

“And plum blossom viewings,” replies Lan Wangji, scanning his thumbprint at the door to unlock it. It swings into a vast, open space. Lan Wangji flicks on the lights, and Wei Wuxian’s breath is taken
away. The apartment is simple, borderline minimalist, with sleek tile flooring and carefully-curated furniture. It almost looks like something out of an interior design magazine, except there’s still an element of lived-in-ness in the coats hanging on the wall and the neat array of shoes by the door.

Wei Wuxian steps out of his trainers, wiggling his toes against the floor. “It’s heated,” he remarks, surprised. Lan Wangji nods, already crossing the living space towards the open kitchen. Wei Wuxian has a sneaking suspicion neither of the Lan brothers cooks a lot.

As the kettle brews, Wei Wuxian looks through the display shelves, admiring the well-worn book spines, the porcelain and jade figurines, and the family photos. There’s even baby photos here, and Wei Wuxian can’t help but chuckle at the difference between the two brothers — Lan Xichen grins widely and toothily up at the cameras, interacting with the toys spread on the blanket next to him, while Lan Wangji merely stares forward, impassive and untouchable.

“It’s like you were born stoic,” Wei Wuxian jokes, looking at a family photograph of the two brothers and their parents. It’s pretty clear Lan Wangji gets most of his looks from his mother, though Lan Xichen had inherited her smile. “Are your parents doing well?”

Lan Wangji, who had been filling a teapot with leaves, freezes at the question. Wei Wuxian immediately steps away from the pictures, turning his attention instead to a watercolour painting of what was probably the ancient Cloud Recesses. He pretends to examine it, until he feels a brief tap on his shoulder.

Lan Wangji leads him back through the entry, to a door just past the coats and shoes. He unlocks it with a small key, and Wei Wuxian steps inside to see a small shrine, alongside black-and-white photographs of Lan Wangji’s parents.

“Oh,” he says, sinking to his knees before the altar. “I’m so sorry, Lan Zhan. I didn’t realise…”

“It was on my Wikipedia page,” Lan Wangji points out. Wei Wuxian chuckles ruefully.

“Yeah, but I read that a couple years ago and promptly forgot.” Spying an incense box, Wei Wuxian raises an eyebrow as he reaches for it. Lan Wangji nods, so Wei Wuxian takes out three sticks, lights them with some spiritual energy, and places them in the holder.

He then bows before Mr and Mrs Lan, and Lan Wangji kneels beside him to light his own incense and greet his parents.

“What… happened? If I may ask?” Wei Wuxian asks, when Lan Wangji rises from his prostration. Lan Wangji looks up at their photographs, his face handsome in the light from the low lamps of the shrine.

“My mother had an incurable illness,” he says. “My father could not cope with her passing, and followed her shortly after. Our uncle has raised us most of our lives.”

“My parents passed, too,” says Wei Wuxian, looking back up at the photographs. “The wrong place at the wrong time, with the wrong cultivation sect. I fended for myself for several months after, until Mr Jiang — Jiang Cheng’s dad — found me.”

“People who do not care about you do not stop to critique your form,” murmurs Lan Wangji, nodding. Wei Wuxian sighs.

“You’re much better at this orphan thing than I am,” he jokes, before bowing to the Lan parents again just in case he offended them. “I mean, you’re accomplished, successful, crazy smart —”
Beautiful, kind, surprisingly funny. The longing coils again, tight in his chest, burning ever so soft like the faint glow on the end of an incense stick. You are not mine, but I wish you were.

The sound of the kettle whistling from the kitchen causes Lan Wangji to rise and exit abruptly. Wei Wuxian follows, watching as Lan Wangji finishes preparing their tea. The smell of oolong drifts through the apartment, complemented by the sound of the rain hitting the wide windows and sliding glass doors.

“Those family photos of you and your brother have both of you with long hair,” Wei Wuxian suddenly remembers, as he sips at the tea Lan Wangji pours for him. “When did Lan Xichen cut his hair?”

“After our parents’ deaths,” says Lan Wangji.

“And you didn’t do the same?” wonders Wei Wuxian. Lan Wangji lowers his head.

“I was very young at the time,” he admits, before downing his tea to avoid explaining further. Wei Wuxian doesn’t want to pry further, either, so he turns his attention to the light glancing off the raindrops running along the glass door, and drinks his tea.

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Excerpt from The Lan Dynasty: The Cultivation of Caiyi’s Prosperity by Robert Leung:

While Gusu was prescient enough to adopt the oncoming tide of Western culture in order to avoid the same humiliating domination of the new foreign powers suffered by neighbouring countries such as Qishan and Lanling, on one aspect of their traditional culture they refused to budge: cutting their hair. The long locks of a Lan cultivator signified good fortune and honour, while the cutting of one’s hair meant said cultivator had suffered some terrible misfortune or lost their honour in some way.

Nowadays, the Lan family is not so adherent to the long hair tradition, nor do its members have to cut their hair for things such as going bankrupt or suffering a family death. Nevertheless, many of the younger Lan family members still choose to keep their hair long regardless of their gender, and then cut it upon entering university or getting married to signify that they have finally come of age.

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Lan Xichen’s arrival disrupts Wei Wuxian from his window-gazing. “Oolong again, Wangji?”

“Mm.” Lan Wangji pours him a cup and pulls out his chair. Lan Xichen takes his seat with a grateful tap of the tea tray. “You took a while with the package.”

“Had some trouble with the code.” Lan Xichen sighs. “Anyway, Wei Wuxian, how are you liking our little home?”

“It’s spacious,” says Wei Wuxian. Jiang Fengmian and Madam Yu were fortunate enough to have a single-family house in Lotus Pier, but that house still feels much more crammed and chaotic than this. The view outside the windows alone shows the high status the Lan brothers enjoy in Gusu, but Wei Wuxian can’t help but wonder if that loftiness equates all too easily to loneliness.

Lan Wangji’s mobile rings at that moment, and he excuses himself to go take it. Lan Xichen waits until the sliding glass doors to the back patio close, before setting down his cup to fix the full brunt of a brotherly glare at Wei Wuxian.

The sudden switch from congeniality to protectiveness throws him for a curve. Wei Wuxian’s stomach plummets, and he vaguely wonders if he should try to get his affairs in order.
“I can smell the incense, so I assume my brother has introduced you to our parents,” begins Lan Xichen. “Which, of course, means you know he is all I have left of them.”

Wei Wuxian remembers Mrs Lan’s cold beauty, perfectly preserved in Lan Wangji’s face. He nods.

“My brother was too young to understand death when our mother passed,” says Lan Xichen, no trace of mirth left in his face as he continues to stare at Wei Wuxian. “All he knew was that suddenly there were no more monthly trips to the hospital, and Father had locked himself in his rooms and wouldn’t come out. All of this was before Caiyi got its metro lines, so he bought a ticket by himself and rode the bus to the hospital to see our mother.”

Something terrible and sad rises in Wei Wuxian’s throat, prickles at his eyes. Lan Xichen’s fingers run along the edge of his teacup.

“Uncle and I searched for him for hours before the hospital called. We found him sleeping in her empty bed, tear tracks fresh on his face.” He sighs. “I don’t tell you this story just to embarrass him, but because I want to impress upon you exactly what you are playing with here. My brother’s heart is deeper than the ocean, more vast than the horizon. If you break it…”

He trails off, taking a sip of his tea. Wei Wuxian glances sidelong at the bookshelf that holds Lan Xichen’s xiao and sword, and shudders.

“Against his better judgement, he seems to think you are what makes him happy,” says Lan Xichen after a moment. “And all I want is my brother’s happiness.”

Wei Wuxian wishes it was true that it was him. But before he could say anything about it, the door to the patio opens again, and Lan Wangji walks back in. “My apologies,” he says, before looking between the two of them. “Dada, please.”

“What?” wonders Lan Xichen, all grins and smiles again. “I was telling our guest here some silly stories of yourself as a kid! Oh, oh, how could I forget that time with the red bean paste —”

“It is getting late,” interrupts Lan Wangji. “We have a guest room, or we could call you a Didi.”

“I suppose I’ll have to save the red bean paste story for another day,” laments Lan Xichen. “I do have so much work left to do.” He finishes his tea with a smile. “Thank you for this, Wangji.”

Lan Wangji inclines his head, as Lan Xichen disappears through the study doors and leaves the two of them alone at the dining table. Wei Wuxian refills their cups, and sighs.

“You know, if… if you wanted me to stay… I wouldn’t mind,” he says. “You could do whatever you’d like. It’d only be fair, since you paid for all that food and stuff from earlier.”

Lan Wangji surveys him from over the rim of his cup. “You do not need to repay me,” he says, “and certainly not in that way.”

“I’m just —” Wei Wuxian rubs at his eyes, feeling his cheeks and ears burning. “The offer is there, Hanguang-jun, if you want it. I know our last time was — if you were concerned about hurting me — I don’t mind. If it’s you, I don’t mind at all.”

Slowly, with trembling fingers, Lan Wangji sets down his teacup. Reaching out, he takes Wei Wuxian’s hand and presses a kiss to his knuckles.

“I do not want to oblige you to stay,” he says, “and I do not wish to take advantage of this offer.” Of you, his eyes seem to add, which makes Wei Wuxian’s treacherous heart skip a beat.
“But — the person you wrote that song for,” he mumbles stupidly. Lan Wangji actually chuckles at that, slightly rueful, but endearing to Wei Wuxian all the same.

“The title of that song,” he says quietly, “is forgetting envies.”

Wei Wuxian is lost for words, for thought, for breath, as Lan Wangji gently lets his hand fall back to the table before rising from his chair.

“The guest room is next to the study,” he adds, at the door to his own room. “Good night, Wei Ying.”

And as the door to his room clicks shut, Wei Wuxian is left staring at the raindrops falling against the glass, still reeling.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter title taken from "Rhythm of the Rain" by Queen Wei (yes, same Wei character as in Wei Wuxian), originally sung by Jay Chou. If there is one song in this entire fic I would beg you to listen to, it's this one. I like to think the chorus plays at the very end of the chapter here...

So Caiyi is very much inspired by my recent trip to Gusu! Notes ahoy, because I spent a lot of time developing this city lol

Gucai (古彩) is the historical district, and it has a very low skyline. Reasons will be explained next chapter.

Joy in adversity: It does kinda lose the fun in English, but technically the term in Mandarin is 爱吃苦, or "love eating bitter", which is... what the Lan family cuisine is like in the Family Feast extra lol

Fish in sweet-and-sour sauce, crackling eels, Biluo shrimp, braised pork belly with mei gan cai: All things you can find in Suzhou cuisine. The fish is specifically called "squirrel-style mandarin fish". The one I had tasted like the sauce was ketchup, so I wasn't a fan RIP

Wujiang Road: inspired by Pingjiang Road in Gusu. Check out this sick LWJ-style graffiti there

Ten Lion Rock: im so sorry mandarin speakers... 十狮石 (shi shi shi) is a tongue twister in Mandarin. there's also like an entire story you could tell using only that pinyin. chinese is fucking wild. the performance at Ten Lion Rock at Mid-Autumn comment is based on how in Suzhou in the old days people would go to Tiger Hill to sing kunqu opera at Mid-Autumn.

Crab roe tang bao: YES! IT REALLY IS LIKE A GIANT XIAOLONGBAO!

Wujiang Primary: This school actually exists but is not called Wujiang Primary lol.

Cloud Recesses: Okay, imagine a combination of Gramercy Park with Sinan Road in Shanghai, Shanghai’s Central Park, and the Humble Administrator's Garden in Suzhou, and you get roughly where I'm going with this community. LXC and LWJ's apartment
layout is based on a family friend's house in Zhujiajiao, too.

Paying/accessing things with your phone: A thing in China. Alipay and WeChat Pay are how you buy things, and you can access a lot of things with QR codes. The heavy amount of scanning need to get in and out of the CR is inspired by the jade tokens in canon.

Blue Line: another joke here... the "Zhan" in Lan Zhan is a homophone with the Mandarin word for "station".

Tan hua parties: just like the Youngs in Crazy Rich Asians, Lan Xichen holds parties to watch the night cactus flower bloom. aahaha

Dada: Suzhou dialect for gege.

Didi: Again, in case you didn't catch it earlier: taxi service similar to Uber.
Wei Wuxian wakes up somewhere hard, warm, and very, very white.

Groaning and rubbing the sleep from his eyes, he slowly clambers into a sitting position before feeling around him to try to figure out where he is. The bed is spacious, but the mattress is almost laughably firm. At least the silk comforter is soft and luxurious.

Bleak morning sunlight pours in through muted gossamer drapes, and the rest of the room around him is clean in shades of white and neutrals, with an occasional splash of blue. His clothes are folded on a wooden chair beside a chrome-and-glass desk, while he himself is wearing an all-too-familiar linen nightshirt.

Warmth crawls through him at that, and as he checks his messages on his phone, his heart picks back up the marathon it had ran last night after Lan Wangji left for bed.

*Forgotten envies.*

It was him. It had been him all along.

But what does he even do with that sort of information? They always made it so easy in the movies — boy confesses to girl, girl accepts, they kiss under an umbrella or the falling leaves or something else stupidly romantic. But what do they do if it had all started backwards? Or if Wei Wuxian himself is too consumed with the idea that this must all be some terrible mistake?

How could it have been him? Lan Wangji barely puts up with him in competition, always glaring and scowling and pushing and biting. Wei Wuxian is nothing but his rival, the thing standing between him and perpetual victory in competitive cultivation. If he were Lan Wangji, he’d be nothing but annoyed and determined to beat him. Not in love with him.

There’s a ping from WeChat. 🌟❓

Wei Wuxian frowns at it, until he realises it’s sent by Lan Wangji. *yeah*, he replies.

♫ & → , is the response. Wei Wuxian is more confused at that, until he realises the arrow must be pointing to the door of the guest room, which is to his right.

*ok thanks*, he says, before getting up to get ready to face the man in person.

Both of the Lan brothers are having breakfast when he arrives. “Morning, Wei Wuxian! Hope you don’t mind congee and soymilk,” says Lan Xichen cheerily.

Wei Wuxian shakes his head, serving himself a bowl full of each. The congee appears to be just rice, without anything else in it.

“The zha cai is over here,” says Lan Xichen, evidently sensing his hesitation. Wei Wuxian takes a seat and tries some of the pickled vegetable, frowning when he finds it just as mild as the congee itself.

“Do you have some chilli oil?” he asks. “Or Sriracha?”
The two brothers look at one another. “We could buy some?” wonders Lan Xichen.

Wei Wuxian shakes his head. “Oh no, no, I’ll live,” he says, shovelling the congee into his mouth. “I’m just… I’m more used to spicy things.”

Lan Wangji hums, as if taking that into consideration. Wei Wuxian laughs sheepishly as he sips at his bowl of soymilk.

“Latté?” asks Lan Wangji, after a moment. “We recently got an espresso machine.”

“Thank heavens for a Nespresso sponsorship,” adds Lan Xichen, beaming.

“Sure!” says Wei Wuxian. “I usually take it —”


“Yeah,” says Wei Wuxian, feeling a bit winded. Lan Wangji begins fiddling with the espresso machine sitting next to the fridge in their pristine, barely-used kitchen, working the scoops and dials and frothers as if he’d actually been a barista at some point in his life. In the seat next to Wei Wuxian, Lan Xichen sips at his soymilk and scrolls through his phone as if checking the morning paper.

“Got any plans today, Wei Wuxian?” he asks casually, as the sound of frothing milk echoes through the flat.

“Uh,” says Wei Wuxian intelligently. “Not… that I really know of, no.” Jiang Yanli had the itinerary, but if she’s off with Jin Zixuan, then he would just be third wheeling or tending to Jiang Cheng’s hangover. Not exactly the best plans for sightseeing.

“Wangji had some meetings today that he was able to postpone, but unfortunately I didn’t have the same luck,” laments Lan Xichen. “You won’t mind if he took you around?”

“Oh no, not at all,” says Wei Wuxian. “I just don’t want to be too much trouble.”

Lan Wangji suddenly comes down with a disbelieving coughing fit, which in turn makes Wei Wuxian laugh.

“You don’t believe me, Lan er-gege?” he teases, as Lan Wangji throws a spark of spiritual energy into his latté before starting to pour in the foam. “I’ll make sure to be on my best behaviour, then!”

“You said you would transfer to the University of Caiyi just to bother me,” Lan Wangji points out. Wei Wuxian splutters. “You said I wouldn’t get in.”

“I think he might have a chance,” Lan Xichen remarks from behind his phone.

“Dada,” sighs Lan Wangji, as he sets the latté down in front of Wei Wuxian. “Do not give him ideas.”

“Ideas?” sniffs Wei Wuxian, pouting up at him. “Don’t you want me to come and bother you? Why else write such a beautiful song for me, huh?”

Lan Wangji’s expression, though placid to an outsider’s eye, screams volumes of ‘I regret ever telling you this information’. Wei Wuxian chuckles and takes a couple pictures of his latté.

“Hey, Hanguang-jun, when did you learn to make such perfect hearts?” he teases. “Did you work as
a barista once?”

“I attended a latté art seminar,” replies Lan Wangji.

“Of course,” mutters Wei Wuxian. It still tastes just like the ones he had in Qishan, though, so he isn’t complaining too much.

Lan Xichen finally finishes his soymilk as Lan Wangji starts to clear the table. “We should take our guest to the Cloud Recesses gardens,” he suggests, gesturing to the view outside the glass doors. The early morning fog has cleared somewhat, revealing lush green trees amid elegant curved rooftops. “If we get in before ten, we might beat most of the tour group crowds!”

“We have to feed the rabbits first,” says Lan Wangji.

“Then go feed your rabbits.” Lan Xichen chuckles, and looks sidelong at Wei Wuxian. “I blame you for them, by the way. He didn’t have a favourite animal until he met you.”

Wei Wuxian raises an eyebrow, before remembering the stuffed bunny he had given Lan Wangji in Qishan. “I did that, huh,” he says.

“You truly underestimate the influence you have on him,” remarks Lan Xichen, and Wei Wuxian is certain he was meant to pick up the edge of steel in his voice.

weibowifi

their names are bengbeng and tiaotiao #whonamedthese# #bunsofweibo#

[VIDEO: Two rabbits, one all black, one all white, hopping about a small grassy enclosure with a ramp leading into a hutch]

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wangxian_fans

WOW! where is this?

weibowifi

wouldn’t you like to know 😊

There’s a long line already starting to form outside the main gates into the Cloud Recesses’ classical garden, but Lan Xichen and Lan Wangji circumvent it through a side gate marked for residents of the community and their guests. Wei Wuxian supposes that if someone really wants to pay top dollar to live in this community, the least they could do is offer free access to the gardens.

“Actually, it’s subscription-based,” says Lan Xichen when Wei Wuxian mentions it. “Residents pay about a thousand yuan each month for garden access.”


Lan Wangji shakes his head. “Brother is joking again,” he says. “Access to the gardens is free for everyone. Community association fees include maintenance for the garden and library.”

Wei Wuxian snorts. “Your brother’s sense of humour might be worse than yours.”
“I’m still here,” Lan Xichen points out cheerily. “And since those fees are about a thousand yuan per household each month, it’s still basically the same thing.”

“I bet those meetings must be fun,” mutters Wei Wuxian.

“They are, actually! This one lady always brings good food.” Lan Xichen grins, as they wander through a series of small courtyards and corridors before reaching the main garden. Wei Wuxian’s breath flees him at the sight of the meandering streams and ponds and the elegant bridges spanning these waterways. Most of the buildings connecting these gardens, too, have all been meticulously preserved, filled with replicas of antique furnishings to demonstrate how the Cloud Recesses would’ve looked like when the Lan family had resided in it in ancient times.

“Many of the buildings were once specifically marked for men and women, since our sect divided its members by gender,” explains Lan Xichen as they step through one of the pavilions. “You can usually tell based on the furnishings. The rooms designated for men were full of scholarly and administrative equipment, while the rooms designated for women had all these little round stools.”


“I could never do that,” complains Wei Wuxian, examining the stools and chairs with a critical eye. They are all elegantly carved, but it’s obvious the chairs had more workmanship put into them than the stools. “I don’t even know how shijie manages in this century, much less how any woman would’ve managed in previous ones.”

“We can imagine it would be a lot of spinning and weaving, and some low-level cultivation.” Lan Xichen sighs. “There’s always been a traditional bias against high-level women cultivators, and I’ve told local gamemasters countless times to look past that when scoring girls in local competitions. But it’s ridiculous how difficult it still is for women to break into the top-level competitions.”

“What, do local gamemasters inflate the boys’ scores?” wonders Wei Wuxian.

“Score deflation is a more common practice than score inflation,” says Lan Wangji.

They step away from the room into another one. “Ah, see? Looms for making silk,” says Lan Xichen. A woman dressed in the white Lan family robes is demonstrating at one of the looms, fingers skilfully weaving spiritual energy into the threads as she goes. Next to her, another woman is demonstrating transforming her spiritual energy into thread to stitch onto a jacket of the same silk. “I believe they sell these in a shop on the premises somewhere.”

“Do they sell the forehead ribbons?” wonders Wei Wuxian, nudging Lan Wangji, whose ribbon now usually adorns his wrist instead of his forehead.

“No,” says Lan Wangji. “Not the ones with the family crest, anyway.”

“Shame.” Wei Wuxian clicks his tongue. “Would’ve been cool if we matched.”

Lan Wangji huffs in amusement, and leads them across a courtyard to another pavilion.

“The Room of Quiet,” he says. “Supposed to be one of the rooms of a male cultivator in the family.” Sure enough, the room is furnished with the trappings of a gentleman-scholar, from a small guqin
table, to shelves of books and baskets of scrolls, to an incense burner infusing the room with the scent of sandalwood.

“Not very quiet, is it,” says Wei Wuxian, gesturing to the tourists snapping photos of the room, and the air-conditioning unit strategically placed in the corner to ward off the worst of the summer heat.

Lan Wangji raises an eyebrow at him. “I am sure in older times it was much quieter,” he remarks drily.

“And much stuffier,” retorts Wei Wuxian, sticking his tongue out. Lan Wangji scoffs something that sounds like ‘tedious’, before striding out of the hall. Wei Wuxian follows suit, letting Lan Wangji explain some of the other rooms as they go.

They meet with Lan Xichen again in one of the bigger halls, which features several hollowed-out windows in the walls depicting elaborate scenes from the annals of Lan family history. “Hey, Lan Zhan, maybe someday you’ll end up immortalised in one of these,” jokes Wei Wuxian, gesturing to one of them.

“That one is part of the series depicting the life of Lan An,” replies Lan Wangji. “He was a monk who became a musician, met his fated one, and left the earth shortly after her death. Those four scenes are shown on each of the windows.”

“That’s… surprisingly romantic, considering he was a monk.” They walk past a tour group, whose guide is explaining the same thing to a group of enraptured tourists. “Latent romanticism seems to run in the family, then.”

Lan Wangji hums. “So it seems,” he agrees. Wei Wuxian can almost hear his song again, haunting the corners of his mind. Most of him is still convinced it’s all a big misunderstanding, or part of a longer practical joke played on him by the Lan brothers. How could he have inspired anything of such terrible, lingering beauty?

“How do you know, then?” he wonders, as they step through a series of covered corridors leading them across the lake at the heart of the gardens. This one is covered in lotuses, with a small fleet of wooden boats waiting to ferry tourists to opposite banks. Through the haze of the summer heat and humidity, the vast spires of the Cloud Recesses Free Library peek out at them from the distant lake shore.

Lan Wangji quirks an eyebrow in confusion, so Wei Wuxian asks, “How do you know you’ve met your fated one?”

How do you know it’s me?

Lan Wangji purses his lips. “I cannot explain it,” he says, as they step onto a blue-and-white covered bridge spanning a portion of the lake. A plaque on the bridge itself says it is the “flying cloud bridge”, the only covered bridge preserved in the Cloud Recesses. Other people on the bridge are busy taking selfies.

“Try me,” Wei Wuxian suggests. Lan Wangji shakes his head and takes his hands. Wei Wuxian’s stomach swoops like the curve of the bridge itself.

“You just know,” says Lan Wangji, looking down at their hands. “There is neither rhyme nor reason to it. I have searched.”

Loving you defies reason, his hands say as they rub sweet circles into the backs of Wei Wuxian’s. He has the urge to step forward, to close the distance between them, to taste the smoke of the incense
from the Room of Quiet upon Lan Wangji’s lips.

All he does in the end is squeeze Lan Wangji’s hands and push up a smile he wishes he felt.

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**weibowifi**

The #cloudrecesses# gardens are so lovely! Thank you @lanxichenofficial for getting me in without waiting in line haha

[PHOTO: The Flying Cloud Bridge at the Cloud Recesses gardens. Lan Wangji’s back can be seen, though blurry, to the side]

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**lanxichenofficial**

Haha, glad you enjoyed!

**lanxichenofficial**

**weibowifi**

petition for #lanwangji# to get his own weibo account #getwangjionweibo#

**minahomine**

I NEED THIS #getwangjionweibo#

**blueforgettingmachine**

IS THAT LAN WANGJI NEXT TO YOU

**weibowifi**

...wow you can spot that from a blurry background shot?

**blueforgettingmachine**

is now a bad time to mention i can basically recognise him from his hands

**wangxian_fans**

WAIT THAT’S LAN WANGJI? HOLY SHIT ARE YOU WITH HIM WERE THE BUNNIES HIS BUNNIES

**weibowifi**

whoops you got me

**wangxian_fans**

!!!!!!!

“I’m afraid this is where I leave you two to fend for yourselves,” declares Lan Xichen as they stand at the back entrance of the Cloud Recesses Free Library. There are tourists coming into the gardens from here, too, but in smaller batches than from the main gate. “Work calls, and I must answer.”

“Hold on, didn’t this library get burnt down a couple years back?” wonders Wei Wuxian. Lan Wangji nods. “I can’t even see a single mark on it.”
“It was rebuilt exactly like the old building,” replies Lan Wangji. “And the rest of the damage was to the carpark and a couple of the flats across the street. Caiyi Police caught the arsonist, too.”

“Who was it?”

“Some drunk kid from Qishan on holiday thought it’d be a great prank,” says Lan Xichen, rolling his eyes. “Which is why they tightened alcohol regulations even more afterwards.”

“Well, thankfully all the rare books got saved,” teases Wei Wuxian, nudging Lan Wangji again. “I guess it was worth the broken leg, huh?”

“Mm.” The tips of Lan Wangji’s ears are pink, and he turns away from Wei Wuxian. “Brother, you will be late to your meeting if you do not leave now.”

Lan Xichen sighs. “The driver is stuck in traffic,” he laments, before waving at them. “You kids go have fun, okay? Wei Wuxian, please keep my brother out of trouble.”

“Shouldn’t that be the other way around?” wonders Wei Wuxian, but the twinkle in Lan Xichen’s eyes tells him more than he really wants to know.

Lan Wangji buys him a metro day pass and takes him on an alarmingly comprehensive tour of Caiyi. They feed the pigeons in Central Park, sip overpriced frappuccinos from the Starbucks at Caiyi’s Times Square, and stroll through the market at the base of Ten Lion Rock. Again, it seems that every time Wei Wuxian even considers buying something, Lan Wangji has already paid for it. After a while, it becomes useless to try and argue that he could do it himself.

Ten Lion Rock itself is more of a hill than a rock, though the most prominent feature is indeed the rock, which Wei Wuxian has to admit looks nothing like a lion, let alone ten. By the time they climb up to the rock, swathes of tourists are already swarming the place. Little crackles of spiritual energy pop up every time someone ventures too close to the rock, knocking them back a couple steps.

“The rock has already been damaged numerous times because tourists kept climbing on top of it,” explains Lan Wangji, as they make their way to the front for photos. Wei Wuxian has to admit he’s shocked no one has waylaid Lan Wangji for autographs yet — the man’s face is plastered all over the billboards in Times Square, yet here at this tourist hotspot he might as well have been a mite on Pangu’s body. Lan Wangji himself doesn’t seem to mind, though.

“So the government decides to set up some spiritual energy barriers, huh?” he asks, experimentally pressing his hand against the energy field. He can feel it thrumming under his fingertips, alive and vibrant. It’s fairly low-level; any cultivator at a high enough level could manipulate this. “What’s stopping someone with the power to destroy the barrier and deface the stone, then?”

“Hefty fines and imprisonment,” replies Lan Wangji. Wei Wuxian makes a face.

“I bet Gusu prisons serve you nothing but Lan clan food.” He laughs. “A perfect deterrent.”

Lan Wangji huffs, before taking Wei Wuxian over to a part of the rock closest to the barrier. Here, it’s possible to reach out to touch the rock, and years of people rubbing this part of the rock has indeed worn it smooth.

“Carvings,” says Lan Wangji, pointing upwards. Wei Wuxian looks to see faint carvings of words, barely legible against the stone. “There are over four thousand of these lines stretching from this rock all around the hill.”

“Maybe there was some mixup when naming this place and it should’ve been ‘Ten Poets Rock’,”
mutters Wei Wuxian.

Lan Wangji hums. “That is a theory, yes.” He gestures to the pagoda tower perched at the top of the rock. “That tower is the highest point in Gucai. No other buildings in this district are allowed to be taller than that tower.”

“We were wondering why the buildings here were so short!” Wei Wuxian snaps a picture, just as a cloud passes over the sun and a summer storm starts to brew. Undeterred, the tourists take out their umbrellas, and so does Lan Wangji.

“Come here,” he says, beckoning Wei Wuxian underneath. Wei Wuxian laughs, and heads for the park exit instead.

“I don’t mind getting a bit wet,” he says, when Lan Wangji catches up with him on the long hike back down to the market. “I suppose you do, though, since you’re all in white?”

Lan Wangji responds by folding his umbrella. His white jacket deflects most of the rain, but his jeans and shirt still get wet at some angles, and the way his wet fringe falls in his eyes briefly makes Wei Wuxian forget his own name.

“You will catch a cold, Wei Ying,” reprimands Lan Wangji, despite being just as soaked as he is.

“Then we’ll go somewhere that doesn’t need an umbrella,” replies Wei Wuxian. “What about your favourite museum?”

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**Selected items from the Lan family collection at the National History Museum of Gusu:**

**Mingshi Bell • Pewter, intaid with spiritual energy**

The Mingshi, or Room of Darkness, was a watchtower at the western side of the Cloud Recesses. It was in here that the Lan family cultivators would summon spirits in various rituals. The Mingshi Bell would therefore serve as a distress beacon to the others. If it began to ring, that meant the summoning has gone wrong, and the cultivators in the Mingshi needed help. However, the last time the Mingshi Bell rang was as an evacuation signal in the War Against Japanese Aggression, shortly before occupying Japanese forces burned down the Cloud Recesses.

**Guqin Strings of Lan Yi, the Silent Swallow • Rainbow-woven silk**

Lan Yi, a direct descendant of family founder Lan An and one of the most notable matriarchs of the family, was a young woman when the Japanese occupied Gusu during the War. Whilst in hiding as a travelling opera performer, Lan Yi would use her shows to seduce military officers before assassinating them with her guqin strings. Before she could be caught, she fled to London and started working as a spy in earnest with the Allied forces.

**Erotic Picture Book • Paper**

Contemporary accounts of the Lan family and their sect all stressed their rigid, semi-monastic lifestyle, but of course not everyone in the sect adhered to such moral purity. This erotic picture book was discovered beneath the floorboards of the Room of Quiet at the Cloud Recesses. It is notable for its depiction of homosexual acts, euphemised as ‘cut-sleeve inclinations’.

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The storm has ebbed by late afternoon, and by then both of them have dried out inside the National History museum. Wei Wuxian manages to distract Lan Wangji with a history book about the Lan family and their influence on Gusu’s history and culture long enough to buy a set of tea bowls with bunnies painted onto them from the museum shop.
It’s kinda stupid, considering Lan Wangji could have come by and gotten the bowls himself whenever he wants, but hopefully it’s the thought that counts.

Lan Wangji takes him down to the Lake Biling waterfront for dinner. Wei Wuxian had been down to the northern banks of this lake during his post-competition pub crawls, but the southern banks sport more old-style buildings and cobblestoned pedestrian shopping streets. They eat on the deck of a boat restaurant, where the food is delicious albeit not nearly spicy enough for Wei Wuxian’s tastes. In any case, he’s more enraptured by the early sunset creeping towards the horizon of Lake Biling, by the little fey lights dancing throughout the venue like jade-green fireflies, and by the cool evening breeze stirring the late lotuses on the lake.

“Think I could steal some lotus pods?” he wonders, dangling his hand over the railing. Lan Wangji’s brows furrow slightly.

“Inadvisable,” he says. Wei Wuxian laughs.

“They are a bit out of reach,” he agrees, looking wistfully out at the blushing pink blooms. “This part of Caiyi reminds me of the Floating Gardens of Lotus Pier.”

“I have heard the Floating Gardens are a marvel,” agrees Lan Wangji as he refills Wei Wuxian’s teacup. The tea bowls sit in their museum bag on the chair next to him, as he had insisted on carrying them for Wei Wuxian for the rest of the afternoon. “I did not get the opportunity to see them during Worlds when it was at Lotus Pier, and I have regretted it since.”

“The Pavilion wasn’t too far from it,” says Wei Wuxian. “You could have gone, if you’d just agreed to go clubbing with me like I suggested back then.”

“I doubt there is a nightclub at the Floating Gardens,” says Lan Wangji.

“No, but there’s plenty of them nearby,” replies Wei Wuxian. Lan Wangji huffs, and returns to his fish.

After dinner, they take a boat tour through the twilit canals of Gucai. Already the banks and bridges are aglow with twinkling fey lights, while paper lanterns in all varieties of colours hang from the trees and houses. As their boat passes beneath each bridge, the old lady punting their boat explains their histories and name origins.

“This is the Broken Bridge,” she says as they round the corner and pass between two bridges of the same style, extending upwards to the same corner. “Because the bank on the other end is higher, the two bridges look like one that’s been broken into pieces.”

Lan Wangji hums, looking up at the bridges as they go by. “In Caiyi, there is a saying that the Broken Bridge is not broken, and the Long Bridge is not long,” he says. Wei Wuxian laughs at that, reaching over the edge of the boat to trail his fingers through the water.

“How long is the Long Bridge, then?” he wonders.

“It spans the width of the Lan River,” says their tour guide. “Which is not even the widest river in Caiyi.” Their boat now drifts beneath the fey-lit golden canopies of several weeping willows, passing by rows of neat little houses and well-manicured parks full of strolling families and couples. “We’re now on Meteor River.”

Lan Wangji straightens up. “You can let us off here,” he says suddenly. Wei Wuxian looks over at him, confused, but their tour guide nods in agreement and starts to row towards a small loading dock by the bank of the river. Here, Lan Wangji helps her moor the boat and leaps out to help Wei
Wuxian disembark.

To Wei Wuxian’s surprise, Lan Wangji doesn’t pull away once he’s on solid land. He pays their tour guide with a flick of his mobile before setting off up the stairs up to the embankment. Wei Wuxian can’t help but notice the scarlet wedding barges tied just a little farther down from their landing dock, and the locks engraved with names secured onto the railings along the embankment.

“Why is this place called Meteor River?” he wonders, hefting the museum bag with his free hand. Lan Wangji pulls him along with uncharacteristic urgency, through the lantern-lit park adorned with sculptures of couples embracing and rows upon rows of late-blooming roses. The air is almost tinted pink with the scent of sentiment, and Wei Wuxian’s heart beats wildly with each step.

“Look,” says Lan Wangji, pointing out to the river. The reflection of the fey-lights in the trees against the water ripples like stars. “The heavens may have stars, but the earth has Caiyi.”

Wei Wuxian raises an eyebrow. “I’ve heard that saying before. Was it really referring to Meteor River?”

Lan Wangji makes a hum that on anyone else would’ve been a shrug. Wei Wuxian chuckles, and swings their joined hands. “There’s something you’re not telling me, Lan er-gege,” he teases. “Trying to surprise me, huh?”

“Look,” repeats Lan Wangji, just as their path turns from the park towards a gap in the willow trees on the bank. Wei Wuxian does, and gasps at the sight of a slender pedestrian bridge made of iron with thousands of vibrant scarlet ribbons tied to its railings.

“This bridge seems a bit modern,” he says.

“It was rebuilt after the old stone one was destroyed in the war,” replies Lan Wangji. “But the original design was kept. Look at the engravings.”

Wei Wuxian does, his eyes widening at the designs on the metal grilles. “Magpies!” he exclaims.

Lan Wangji nods. “This is Magpie Bridge,” he says. “Local legend has it that this is actually the spot where Niulang flew to heaven to chase his wife, Zhinu.”

Sure enough, as they ascend the stairs towards the bridge, they pass by a statue of a man wrapped in a cow hide. In the glow of the streetlamps his expression is resolute, as he looks across the river to a beautiful woman holding a spindle and two children. Wei Wuxian can’t help but notice her outfit is eerily similar to those of the Lan family weavers he’d seen this morning.

“I’ve heard the story,” he says, “but why the red ribbons?”

Lan Wangji waits until they’re at the middle of the bridge. Here, amid the crowds of couples tying crêpe ribbons to the railings and kissing, he finally lets go of Wei Wuxian’s hand.

“Wait here,” he says, before vanishing into the crowd. Wei Wuxian turns towards the railings, looking out along the river as he tries to ignore the couples all around him.

Why did Lan Wangji cut their tour short to bring him here? Where is he now? Part of Wei Wuxian is convinced he’s still dreaming, while another part of him is convinced all of this is part of some greater cosmic joke.

Who did he bless in a previous life to be so fortunate in this one?
The crowds part again, and Lan Wangji is back with crêpe ribbon of his own. He hands one end to Wei Wuxian, and together they tie the ribbon around the railing of the bridge. Wei Wuxian’s all too aware of his hands trembling, of his heart racing, of a lump forming in his throat that he can’t quite swallow.

“Wei Ying?” asks Lan Wangji, brows furrowing. Wei Wuxian realises the crêpe paper is getting wet under his hands. He laughs, reaching up to wipe at his eyes.

“It’s nothing,” he says. “I’m just — if you told me all those years ago that I’d end up in Caiyi tying some love ribbon to a bridge with you… I’d have laughed you out of town.”

And part of him still thinks this is bordering on ridiculous. When will Lan Wangji wake up and realise he deserves so much more than what Wei Wuxian can offer?

“This is no laughing matter,” says Lan Wangji. The other couples have dissipated now, so he steps closer, until he’s all but pressing Wei Wuxian against the cold metal railing of the bridge. His body is solid and warm against the evening chill, as his hands run calming circles along Wei Wuxian’s back.

“If you — if you do not feel —”

Wei Wuxian’s lips are on his before he can even finish the sentence, open and wanting. Lan Wangji makes a ’mmph’ of surprise, before closing his eyes and pulling Wei Wuxian impossibly closer. His hands cup Wei Wuxian’s face, tangle into his hair. Wei Wuxian angles up, hands grabbing fistfuls of Lan Wangji’s probably very expensive collared shirt.

Lan Wangji is there when they part, when Wei Wuxian stumbles as his knees buckle under the weight of everything that has happened in the past couple days. He catches him, like he always seems to, topaz eyes now like honey as he looks down at Wei Wuxian.

(Wei Wuxian doesn’t mind falling a little harder, as long as Lan Wangji is there to catch him.)

“Let’s go home,” he says, before catching himself. “Your place, I mean, sorry —”

Lan Wangji puts a finger to his lips. “Home,” he agrees, and when Wei Wuxian extends a hand to lead him off the bridge, Lan Wangji takes it and doesn’t let go.

Excerpt from The Lan Dynasty: The Cultivation of Caiyi’s Prosperity by Robert Leung:

Lan Yuling, the youngest and boldest of the great-grandchildren of Lan An, did not wish to marry. In order to deter the men of other cultivation families from asking for her hand, she devised a series
of tests so difficult that many who tried it gave up before the final task. This did not deter many princes and cultivation lords, though, and they started hiring proxies to take the tests in their place.

Such a proxy was Mo Lihua, a brilliant young woman from a rural town in Lanling. Because of her ability to think like the test maker, Mo Lihua passed all of Lan Yuling’s challenges with ease, but in the end she had to admit she was taking the test in the name of Jin Fubao, patriarch of the Lanling Jin Sect.

Because she had actually fallen for Mo Lihua in earnest, Lan Yuling informed the sect elders that, as Mo Lihua had been the one to pass her tests, she would have no other for her cultivation partner and spouse. The elders then tasked Mo Lihua with one final test: to weave ten thousand bolts of crimson silk for their wedding next week. Using her cultivation, Mo Lihua summoned a flock of magpies to help her work, and completed the task successfully.

At their wedding, Lan Yuling and Mo Lihua gifted the magpies with red ribbons for their nests in thanks. To this day, lovers in Caiyi still offer ribbons with wishes of love written on them to the magpies of Magpie Bridge, in the hopes of making sure those wishes come true.

The metro ride back to the apartment is warm but silent, punctuated only by cheerful announcements to mind the gap. Wei Wuxian laughs a little at the metro etiquette videos playing on the little screens, but all that really does is amplify the rest of his nerves. Next to him, Lan Wangji sits as impassively as ever, his fingers mere inches from Wei Wuxian’s own.

At one stop, Wei Wuxian brushes their hands together, entwining their pinkies. Lan Wangji’s lips twitch upwards in reply, ever so slightly.

The Cloud Recesses are quiet when they emerge from the metro stop, and Lan Wangji’s hand finds his again the instant they’re past the gates of the community. With a grin, Wei Wuxian squeezes it and tugs him closer. “What are you planning for the rest of the night, Lan er-gege?” he teases.

Lan Wangji hums. “Whatever you wish to do,” he replies as he scans them into the building, into the lift. Wei Wuxian’s stomach swoops with anticipatory excitement.

“Will your brother be back by now, do you think? I feel like that’d kill the mood a bit, if he was.” He leans in, brushing a bit of Lan Wangji’s fringe out of his face. “I want you all to myself.”

“I am,” replies Lan Wangji.

“I also want the flat to myself,” says Wei Wuxian, with a pout. “Otherwise we’ll have to keep it down.”

Lan Wangji considers it. “Sometimes Brother works late,” he concedes, as they arrive at the landing at last. Wei Wuxian bounces out of the carriage, pressing his face to the glass door leading to the garden patio.

“Should we feed Bengbeng and Tiaotiao?” he wonders. Lan Wangji hums in agreement, before unlocking the door out to the patio.

The moon shines bright and full down on the carefully-maintained Zen garden, as Lan Wangji goes to feed the rabbits and change their water. Wei Wuxian, on the other hand, contents himself with trying to play with them, only to have the bonded pair bounce away from him whenever he ventures too close.

“They don’t like me,” he complains. Lan Wangji raises an eyebrow, before bending down to pick up
the black one. It calms down immediately, peering almost smugly at Wei Wuxian from its owner’s arms. Wei Wuxian sticks his tongue out at it, before reaching out to pat its head.

“You little scamp. You’re lucky your daddy likes you, or I’d be roasting you for dinner.” Lan Wangji’s eyes narrow at that, causing Wei Wuxian to laugh harder. “I’m joking, Lan Zhan! I swear. I’ve sworn off rabbit meat for life.”

Lan Wangji looks satisfied at that answer. He sets down the rabbit before leading Wei Wuxian back into the flat. To Wei Wuxian’s relief, Lan Xichen doesn’t seem to have returned from work just yet.

Lan Wangji walks over to the kitchen area and places one hand on the kettle, his eyebrows raised in question. Wei Wuxian nods, taking out the tea bowls he’d purchased today and washing them in the sink.

“Look, it’s your rabbits,” he teases, setting them down on the tea-tray. Lan Wangji’s lips quirk slightly, as he takes one and examines it in the light. Wei Wuxian stretches. “I’m going to go shower, okay? I’ll be back in time for tea, I promise.”

Lan Wangji hums in agreement, and Wei Wuxian all but rushes into the guest bathroom before his heart starts racing again.

What is he doing? Wei Wuxian splashes water onto his face, looking at himself in the mirror. His hair’s getting a bit long again; the night breeze has ruffled it into disarray, making him look more like a lunatic than usual. How could a wild creature like the man staring out of the mirror at him have ensnared anyone, let alone Lan Wangji?

He’s already slept with Lan Wangji twice, yet somehow this feels like another first time. The first time he’ll have done it knowing full well Lan Wangji had only ever meant to ‘practice’ for him.

The shower itself doesn’t help. Nor does coming out of it and realising he’d forgotten to grab his sleep clothes. He ties a towel around his waist and exits the bathroom with his clothes bundled in his arms, only to hear a loud ‘clank’ as Lan Wangji almost drops the tea tray at the sight of him. Embarrassed heat briefly crawls up his nape when he turns to see Lan Wangji scrambling to mop up some of the spilled tea, but the air of flustered indignation around the other man quickly chases it away. “Like what you see?” he teases, hiding his clothes behind his back as he leans against the nearby shelf, grinning widely.

Lan Wangji swallows visibly and deliberately lowers his gaze. Wei Wuxian laughs, dropping his clothes and sashaying over, one hand holding up the towel.

“Really not going to look at me?” he wonders. “There’s nothing here you haven’t seen before already.” Even some of the marks Lan Wangji had sucked into his skin at the Olympics are still there, though already fading. Lan Wangji’s fingers tremble on the teapot.

“Put on some clothes,” he manages.

Wei Wuxian pouts. “I thought that was the opposite of what you wanted to do tonight.”

Lan Wangji’s eyes flash at him. “Please.” Wei Wuxian coos at that.

“I do like hearing you beg,” he muses, leaning in closer. Lan Wangji’s gaze flits down over his body, barely concealing the hunger evident in his eyes. Wei Wuxian shivers, and only partly due to the cold.
Then Lan Wangji rounds the table and pushes him, walking him backwards all the way to his room. The instant the door closes behind him, they’re kissing again, Wei Wuxian casually letting the towel go so he can press himself entirely against Lan Wangji’s clothed body, needy and wanton. A low growl echoes deep in Lan Wangji’s chest at that, and pretty soon Wei Wuxian finds himself thrown back onto the bed, hair fanning back against the sheets as Lan Wangji clammers on to kiss him.

With the exception of getting rid of his shirt, Lan Wangji does not let his lips depart from Wei Wuxian’s for more than a second. Wei Wuxian kisses back, eager to please, desperate for more, as his hands roam and re-map the planes of Lan Wangji’s body, tracing reverently along muscular shoulder blades and rock-hard abs. He pulls briefly at Lan Wangji’s lower lip with his teeth, before chasing the hurt with softer kisses.

“Think you’re the only one who can bite?” he wonders, and Lan Wangji buries a smile against the side of his head.

Now that he’s been given permission to take, Wei Wuxian realises he can’t get enough of it. Now that he knows he has Lan Wangji entirely, he finds himself craving even more. He wants to mark his ownership into Lan Wangji’s jade-like skin, wants to memorise every reaction Lan Wangji has to his touches. Even then, part of him maintains that he better get what he can now, before Lan Wangji comes to his senses and realises he’s only making a fool of himself tying his name like this to Wei Wuxian’s.

The thought of that — of Lan Wangji leaving him someday — makes something deep inside his heart curl up and shrivel away. Briefly, Lan Wangji pauses and quirks an eyebrow at him. Wei Wuxian laughs it off.

“It’s nothing,” he says, despite the lump in his throat at just how adorable Lan Wangji looks, all slightly confused in the half-light from the window. “Just — I want you. I need you. I love you.

Lan Wangji makes a satisfied hum at that, before bowing his head to press kisses down his neck, along his collar, down his sternum. He pauses against where Wei Wuxian’s heartbeat flutters, lips lingering to count his pulse. Wei Wuxian’s toes curl and his legs fall farther apart, especially as Lan Wangji moves farther and farther down along his body.

“Oh,” he breathes, as Lan Wangji’s breath ghosts mere inches from the tip of his hardening cock. “Lan Zhan, you don’t have to —”

“No,” says Lan Wangji. “I want to.”

Wei Wuxian has to think about compcult scoring strategies to keep himself from coming the second Lan Wangji’s lips close around his cock. It only barely works, as Lan Wangji’s tongue slides along his shaft, as his mouth takes him in as deep as he can. Even like this — shirtless with a cock in his mouth — Lan Wangji is impassively beautiful, his attention focused on nothing except for Wei Wuxian’s pleasure.

“Oh my gods.” Wei Wuxian’s fingers curl against the sheets as he throws his head back. “Lan Zhan, did you really take all of me in? You’re so talented, I couldn’t even get halfway. Don’t you have a gag reflex? How did you learn to suppress it? You haven’t been practicing with anyone else, have you?”

Lan Wangji slides back up, tongue teasing against the underside of his tip. “No,” he says. “Only you.”

Wei Wuxian bites down a moan, and his fingers reach down to tangle themselves in Lan Wangji’s
hair. It’s not quite like it was when it was longer, but when he tugs, Lan Wangji goes boneless against him all the same. “Oh, please, Lan er-gege, Hanguang-jun — please keep going. I might explode if you don’t.”

Lan Wangji’s lips twitch around his cock, almost as if he’s trying to smirk. Wei Wuxian has to think about compcult scoring again, adding in memories of that foul-smelling Xuanwu cave just to make sure he doesn’t come too soon.

Slowly, steadily, Lan Wangji teases out of him every last sensitive spot, his lips and fingers worshiping him with every touch. Wei Wuxian rewards him with moans and sighs and small cries of his name, his fingers buried tight in Lan Wangji’s hair. He wants nothing more than this in the world; if he could somehow spend the rest of his life with Lan Wangji in his arms, he would take it no matter the price.

(It’s amazing how something so right can feel so terrifying at the same time.)

Lan Wangji swallows him down when he comes, just the faintest hint of come slipping down the corner of his mouth when he raises his head. Wei Wuxian pulls him in for a kiss, tasting that familiar bitter tang against his tongue. Lan Wangji’s fingers venture lower along his body, and Wei Wuxian pulls him in to breathe his assent against his ear.

“Love me, Lan Zhan,” he murmurs, and Lan Wangji freezes momentarily before he kisses him again. Wei Wuxian trembles as Lan Wangji’s fingers slip inside. For as long as Lan Wangji will have him, Wei Wuxian will be here.

When Lan Wangji thrusts in, the flush of his ears are the only sign of how much this is devastating him. Wei Wuxian tries to kiss the flush farther in, tries to chase all remaining cogent thoughts out of his head. In turn, Lan Wangji thrusts harder, pulling Wei Wuxian into his lap to move him along his cock.

Despite having already come, Wei Wuxian suspects he won’t last long this time, either. Not when Lan Wangji moves so desperately inside him, not when Lan Wangji looks up at him like a poet trying to memorise the moon. All he can do is pull him closer, moving his body in time to Lan Wangji’s thrusts. All he needs, though, is for this moment to last forever.

Neither of them last much longer after that. Lan Wangji lays him down against the sheets as climax hits them both, and Wei Wuxian has to wrap his legs around him just to keep him in a little longer.

“Wei Ying,” murmurs Lan Wangji, his voice a solemn prayer. “Stay with me.”

It’s not the first time in the past several months that Wei Wuxian has wished he could. “I have a train at five,” he says regretfully. Lan Wangji pulls out of him with a little sigh, and Wei Wuxian checks his phone to realise it’s well past when Lan Wangji should be going to bed.

“Then linger,” murmurs Lan Wangji when he returns with a washcloth to clean them up. He kisses briefly at Wei Wuxian’s shoulder as the towel mops up traces of their encounter from their bodies. “I will ask Yanli to take your luggage with her and call a Didi for you to the station.”

Wei Wuxian’s chest is filled with warm fondness. “You’re really that desperate to monopolise my time, huh?”

Lan Wangji merely crawls into bed beside him, his eyes soft with adoration. “Linger,” he repeats, cupping Wei Wuxian’s cheek.

And Wei Wuxian does.
It’s still dark out when the Didi pulls up to the gates of the Cloud Recesses. Wei Wuxian stands at
the curb, now fully dressed and shivering in the cold.

“You don’t have to come with me,” he protests as Lan Wangji opens the door for him and clammers
in after. “It’s twice as expensive, isn’t it? If you do?”

“I do not mind,” says Lan Wangji, as the driver begins to take them to the railway station.

It begins to rain as they hit downtown, golden droplets rolling down along the glass. Lan Wangji’s
hand is warm in his, and Wei Wuxian cuddles in closer against his chest, listening to his heartbeat.

“Do you hear it?” Lan Wangji wonders after a moment. Wei Wuxian looks up at him, briefly struck
by the golden streetlights against his long, inky lashes. “My heart.”

“So frantic,” he murmurs. “Don’t have a heart attack on my behalf, Lan Zhan.”

Lan Wangji nuzzles his nose against the side of Wei Wuxian’s head. “Mine,” he murmurs, breath
tickling Wei Wuxian’s ears. Something smooth and silky presses into his hands, and he looks down
to see the white-and-blue ribbon that Lan Wangji used to wear in his hair, shining up at him.

Lan Wangji once bit him for touching this, but now —

The lump rises in his throat again, and his vision blurs. “You’re — you’re giving this?” he asks, even
as Lan Wangji’s hands curl his fingers around the cloth. “But isn’t this lucky for you?”

(Isn’t this sacred?)


Wei Wuxian frowns. “It’s not like I won’t come back,” he says. “And it’s definitely not like we’ll
never see each other again. We still have other seasons. We’ll always have other seasons.”

(Yes, they would, until they’re no longer in their athletic prime and the younger generation comes to
overthrow them from their plinths, or an injury takes them out sooner than that. The lifespan of a
competitive cultivator isn’t all that long, considering how dangerous the sport can be.)

(Lan Wangji knows this too. His hands remain tight against Wei Wuxian’s.)

“I am sorry,” he says, “for any hurt I may have ever caused you.”

“So am I,” says Wei Wuxian, rubbing absently at his eyes. “And yet I can’t think of a single time
you’ve ever hurt me.”

Lan Wangji frowns, opening his mouth as if to protest, but Wei Wuxian kisses that away, as the Didi
finally pulls into the drop-off zone at Caiqiao Station. In the rain, the pavement outside the station
shines like a mirror.

Wei Wuxian’s mobile buzzes. Jiang Yanli and Jiang Cheng have probably reached the station, too,
and are checking to see where he is. He sighs, and memorises Lan Wangji one last time.

“I —” He falters, as the words once again stumble and shrivel in his throat, like so many dead
flowers after the season passes, after the spell breaks. Lan Wangji looks up, beautiful and impassive,
and Wei Wuxian has the distinct feeling he’s running against time, rushing for a carriage about to
turn into a pumpkin.
“I’m not good at this,” he admits, as he opens the car door and ventures out into the rain. Lan Wangji moves to follow, but Wei Wuxian quickly slams the door shut, keeping him inside. The window quickly scrolls down, and Lan Wangji peers out at him, slightly hurt. “I have — I have so many words, so many feelings inside me, and not a single one of them would do any justice to what I feel.”

“Wei Ying,” murmurs Lan Wangji, his eyes wide. Wei Wuxian looks back at the station, before leaning in through the car window and kissing him one last time.

“I wish I knew how to love you the way you deserve,” he breathes, before stepping back onto the curb. The Didi pulls away, and Wei Wuxian tries not to watch it go.

Then he turns towards the vast pagoda-like structure of Caiqiao Station, and with his heart heavy in his chest, tries to find his way back home.

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**Found written on a length of red crêpe ribbon tied to Magpie Bridge:**

Wei Ying —

I wish you knew you were all I ever needed.

Lan Zhan

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**Chapter End Notes**

Chapter title taken from "Did You Hear Me?" by Andrew Tan. Give it a listen, it... is very similar to Christina Perri's "A Thousand Years" ahaha

If you'd like to skip the smut, stop reading at "Wei Wuxian’s toes curl and his legs fall farther apart, especially as Lan Wangji moves farther and farther down along his body." and start at “Wei Ying,” murmurs Lan Wangji, his voice a solemn prayer. “Stay with me.”

Forgetting envies: In case any readers happen to live under a rock and got stumped by the ending of the last chapter, the title of Lan Wangji's song is indeed "忘羡", which translates to English as "Forgetting Envies".

Cloud Recesses' community association: As mentioned before, the Cloud Recesses have a ridiculously strict set of rules for the community banning things like alcohol, parking aboveground, and excessive trash. Interestingly, though, Chinese HOAs are actually one of the few examples of a truly democratic organisation in modern Chinese life, as they protect the interests of homeowners against developers and the government. So even though the Cloud Recesses have a lot of rules, the community is also well-funded and the Gusu government respects them and mostly stays out of their way haha

1/3rd of a stool: Yeah, that's actual etiquette for ancient Chinese women. You only get upgraded to the nicer chair if you get married lol

Flying Cloud Bridge: Inspired by Little Flying Rainbow (小飞红), the only covered bridge in the Humble Administrator's Garden.

Central Park/Times Square: Fun fact: there's both of these in Suzhou.
Pagoda at Ten Lion Rock: There is a pagoda at Tiger Hill in Suzhou, too, but I was told in Gusu the buildings aren't allowed to exceed the height of the Beisi Pagoda. It's similar to how in DC the buildings can't be taller than the Capitol, so it's not too surprising lol

War Against Japanese Aggression: That is... what the Chinese call The Second Sino-Japanese War. Suzhou was indeed occupied by the Japanese during this time, so in this verse Gusu was occupied. (This was alluded to in an earlier chapter, so...)

Broken Bridge/Long Bridge: This saying originally refs two of Hangzhou's bridges; the Broken Bridge of Hangzhou looks like that esp in winter when the snow only gathers on one side, but is a functional bridge, while the Long Bridge is tiny.

"The heavens may have stars...": Allusion to the proverb "up above heaven, down below Suzhou and Hangzhou". This one would basically be: 天堂有星星，地下有彩衣.

Magpie Bridge: #lily'sbackonherqixibullshit ok so. Niulang (Cowherd) and Zhinu (Weaver) have a star-crossed romance right. They're separated by the Milky Way (Meteor River), and on Qixi magpies form a bridge so they can meet. Wangxian AU when, tho.

The illustration for this scene is done by the lovely minatu! thank u mina;;;

As always, if you're impatient for more Rivals content, check my Twitter for how to get it ;) See you guys next week for the FINAL ARC!
Thump. Thump.

The silvery ropes of the deity-binding net glimmer ominously in the firelight. With every excessive movement, the lurid temple walls press in closer. When his latest attempt to free Suibian from its sheath only causes the wall to inch in farther, Wei Wuxian curses and tries to remain still. Calm. Still.

Thumpthump. Thumpthump.

Maybe if he just gets the walls in close enough to brace against them — no, too dangerous. The sword is only a little bit exposed; maybe if he inches it down he’ll be able to cut some of the ropes on this net.

The corridor is empty save for flickering shadows. The other competitors’ voices echo in the distance, scrambling to and fro. There’s even the faint sound of some sort of battle, followed by a horrific roar as a fierce corpse is swiftly dispatched.

As he inches Suibian closer to the ropes to try and cut himself free, Wei Wuxian presses rewind on his memories and tries to remember how he got himself into this situation.

A couple days earlier:

“Welcome to Lanling, Ms Jiang and Competitors Jiang and Wei.” The man in the sharp-cut suit and sunglasses bows to them as his assistant puts the clipboard with their names on it away in her satchel. “We are here to escort you safely to Koi Towers.”

“Did you ask Jin Zixuan to fetch us like we’re about to get knocked off by some international triad?” demands Wei Wuxian. Jiang Yanli looks nervously between the man in the suit and his assistance, and mutely shakes her head.

“I thought he was meeting us himself,” she mumbles.

“Change of plans, Ms Jiang,” replies the man shortly, gesturing towards the airport exit. “Due to increased concerns for the safety of the members of the Jin family, as well as the national security threat posed by people protesting the 52nd World Nighthunting Championships in Lanling City, we have deemed it better to take you to Master Jin rather than vice versa.”

Wei Wuxian frowns. “Increased concerns for… what?” he wonders. “What have the Jins done now?”

The assistant pipes up. “Mr Jin, Master Jin’s father, has recently announced his candidacy for the Presidency of Lanling,” she says, as she leads them out to the pavement where a sleek black limousine with tinted windows is waiting for them. Wei Wuxian can’t help but groan at the sight, as the man in the suit gets into the driver’s seat and the assistant opens the door for them. “The safety of his family members is now a national security concern.”

Wei Wuxian makes a face. “Jin Guangshan is running for President?” he asks.
Jiang Yanli shakes her head. “It’s been all over the news even in Yunmeng; don’t you pay attention? Or do you spend most of your time on the internet Baiduing Lan Zhan?”

“I don’t need to Baidu him, I know most of the stuff already out there,” protests Wei Wuxian.

Jiang Cheng pinches the bridge of his nose. “You’re hopeless,” he says. The door to the limousine closes, and the car pulls away from the curb like a silent shadow. Wei Wuxian presses his face to the glass, looking out at the glittering skyscrapers of Lanling City.

His mobile pings suddenly, and he smiles when he sees that Lan Wangji had sent him 😊 on WeChat. yes, he replies immediately. omw to koi towers.

Lan Wangji sends him 😊, and Wei Wuxian smiles at it throughout the rest of the drive.

#52wnc #compcult #news

INU increases security demands on Lanling City as #FreeLaoling protests continue
8,287 views

GBC News

Amy L
#FreeLaoling

PowertothePeople
#FREELAOLING! the rich landlords in laoling shouldn’t be making the decisions! independence and self-determination for the people!

barbie becky
look at those unruly mobs, ruining a perfectly good sports competition.

S Gallifrey
look at the corrupt governments the inu plays with. they stuck with qishan for 50wnc and it turns out qishan’s full of doping cheaters. lanling’s just as corrupt but since they’re ‘democratic’ and ‘capitalist’ their atrocities are more acceptable. nighthunting needs heads with actual spines.

libertarianweedlord420
lanling city’s gonna be blowing so much money with this extra security guess we know who’ll end up footing the bill

yeet me up scotty
yeah especially the secret service protection for the jin family, who are already richer than god and should be able to afford their own guards

bluelivesmatter
wonder how many of those protestors were paid to be there? #fakenews

q su
fuck you
bluelivesmatter
so much for the tolerant left, folks

ryan lee
since @q su’s tone was too intolerant for you i’ll break it down: laoling, a special autonomous province in lanling, has been trying to get its independence since the 60s after it was ‘returned’ to lanling from great britain. every 10 years or so they try to run a referendum for its independence but somehow each of these referendums fail, partly because rich conservative landlords from lanling keep intimidating people into voting stay. these protests are happening because the head gamemaster of the inu is from lanling and the illegitimate son of presidential candidate jin guangshan, whose platform calls for increased control over laoling.

so people are pissed. and i’m pretty sure most of them are here for free.

also, fuck you.

The closer the limo gets to Koi Towers, the more apparent the need for extra security becomes. As they approach the gates of the Jin family residence, the crowds of protestors waving picket signs and banners increase in size. Several of the signs say ‘#Free Laoling’ on them, along with bloodied X marks over the Sparks Amidst Snow Peony of Lanling.

“What the hell,” mutters Jiang Cheng, as police scramble forth to stop the protestors from crowding the limo. “Why are they protesting here, of all places?”

“Jin Guangshan,” says Wei Wuxian, looking up from his mobile. “Baidu says he’s been advocating increasing control over Laoling.”

“His platform only says strengthening national security,” Jiang Yanli points out.

“Which is a euphemism for controlling Laoling,” Wei Wuxian insists.

“You’re just jumping to conclusions, A-Ying. National security is a reasonable thing to worry about.”

“And you clearly don’t want to be on the bad side of a potential future father-in-law,” scoffs Wei Wuxian, only to get smacked by Jiang Cheng for his troubles.

“Remember where we are, yeah?” his shidi hisses, as the car pulls through the gate and starts traversing down a long, cobblestoned driveway. Numerous statues and reliefs line the road in, as the car slows down to a meander so that they can take in all the artwork.

“Here are all the ancestors of the Jin family, as well as their cultivation sect’s greatest disciples,” says the assistant, before launching into a tour guide explanation of all of the biggest, most distinguished statues along the drive. Wei Wuxian tunes her out, noticing how avidly his shijie is listening. It makes his stomach churn a bit uneasily.

He looks over at Jiang Cheng, who makes a grimace before turning to the window. Wei Wuxian looks down and texts Lan Wangji: im at jin family residence and the drive up is already a boring history lecture, save me.

Almost immediately, Lan Wangji sends a picture of Bengbeng and Tiaotiao. Wei Wuxian grins.

what do u think about jgs being a prez candidate? he wonders.
that’s what u look like all the time, protests Wei Wuxian.

Wei Wuxian chuckles before turning back to the window. They’re finally drawing up to the end of the endless driveway, crossing a bridge along one corner of a vast lake covered in pure white lotuses. Another set of gates, these ones golden, swing open to admit them through a Western-style courtyard. The courtyard itself ends in a sweeping imperial staircase of gorgeous alabaster, leading up to an ostentatious golden mansion.

“My heavens,” breathes Jiang Yanli, as a set of footmen open the doors of the limousine to let them out onto plush red carpet. The three of them exit, Jiang Yanli quickly adjusting her hair and reapplying her lipstick against her reflection in the car window.

“I don’t think heaven was consulted in the making of this,” says Wei Wuxian darkly as he dusts off his shirt, which feels decidedly frumpy and underdressed compared to his surroundings. “Maybe somewhere closer to Europe?”

“It was once the residence of the British Minister to Lanling,” says the assistant. “Koi Towers will be serving as the Cultivators’ Pavilion for the competition this year.”

Wei Wuxian chuckles darkly. “Gotta keep it in the family, I guess,” he remarks, earning himself an elbow and a glare from Jiang Yanli. “What? I’m not wrong, am I?”

“Yanli!” someone calls. There’s a clatter of footsteps, and moments later Jin Zixuan comes racing down the stairs with almost comical urgency. As soon as he reaches Jiang Yanli, he sweeps her off her feet and swings her in a circle. “You’re here! You’re finally here!”

The last thing Wei Wuxian needs to see is his shijie kissing her boyfriend, of all people, so he pointedly starts counting the individual fibers on the red carpet under his feet. Flustered, Jin Zixuan sets Jiang Yanli down, before snapping to attention and bowing stiffly at him and Jiang Cheng.

“We’re honoured to have you here, too,” he says.

“Yeah, I get it, we’re chopped liver,” says Jiang Cheng, crossing his arms. “An entire year of dating my sister and she’s finally meeting the family, huh?”

“Oh, I went skiing with them in Switzerland last January,” says Jiang Yanli. “You two were busy with school, remember?”


“Well, Yanli wanted her first trip to Koi Towers to be with her family,” he says. “I couldn’t argue with that — she’s very stubborn when she puts her mind to it.”

“You’re talking to people who grew up with her,” Jiang Cheng points out drily, as Jiang Yanli’s cheeks flare pink. Jin Zixuan squeezes her hand.

Wei Wuxian has an urge to make retching noises, and then distantly realises this might be what Jiang Cheng feels whenever he talks about Lan Wangji.

Speaking of which…
“Have the other competitors shown up yet?” he asks. Jin Zixuan, already leading them up the stairs, pauses thoughtfully.

“Most of them,” he says, “But I don’t think Gusu has shown up yet. They informed us they would be travelling via transportation talisman, so we have someone on standby for whenever they show up.” He pauses, looking over at Wei Wuxian. “Won’t be long, I hope.”

“What’s *that* supposed to mean?” demands Wei Wuxian.

“Nothing.” Jin Zixuan turns back to his shijie. “Things have been a bit tense here lately since half-brother is around, but… you know. Business as usual.”

Wei Wuxian is tempted to retort something about Jin Zixuan clearly mislabelling the source of the tension, but Jiang Cheng’s glare causes him to bite it back. Contrary to popular opinion, he doesn’t actually have a death wish, and having his shijie murder him because he’s making her look bad to her boyfriend’s posh and snobby family isn’t high on his list of ways he wants to die.

They enter into a lavish lobby with another magnificent imperial staircase, this one made out of handsome mahogany. It’s bustling with staff and caterers trying to set the place up for some sort of event.

“Is there a party tonight?” wonders Jiang Cheng.

Jin Zixuan nods. “A small reception for the competitors. Father wants to meet everyone.”

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**The Lanling City Times | NEWS**

**Jin Guangshan holds steady as 15th richest person in the world**

Jin Guangshan, chairman of real estate development firm Golden Futures Group, holds steady in global rankings as the 15th richest person in the world according to Forbes’ list of billionaires released on Tuesday. As the richest person in Lanling, Mr Jin is worth an estimated $49.3 billion.

Golden Futures Group is responsible for over 800 projects in Lanling as well as other countries like Yunmeng and Baling. Its current major project is Mercy Gardens in Yunping City, Yunmeng, a ‘self-contained’ luxury high-rise apartment community with its own shopping centre, recreational centre, and office spaces. [MORE]

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**Activist and former adult film star Meng Shi found dead in hotel room**

Meng Shi, a sex workers’ rights activist, was found dead in a hotel room in Fuxiao District this morning. Ms Meng, who used to work in the adult film industry under the stage name Golden Goddess, and who had once posed for adult magazines such as *Playboy, Hustler, and Incense*, had recently been embroiled in a six-figure lawsuit against Presidential candidate and real estate developer Jin Guangshan, whom she claimed had tried to bribe and threaten her into signing a non-disclosure agreement regarding an affair they had over thirty years ago.

The Lanling City Medical Examiner’s office is still determining the cause and manner of death. “We are looking into all possible options,” says Liu Jinshen, Chief Medical Examiner. “The timing of the death to the most recent wave of online harassment suffered by Ms Meng makes a final determination difficult to ascertain in such a short period of time.” [MORE]
The evening reception is about as boring as Wei Wuxian had expected it to be. Inoffensive jazz music filters through the opulent halls of Koi Towers as all of the competitors queue up in their nice suits and dresses to shake Jin Guangshan’s hand.

Wei Wuxian knows in theory Jin Guangshan doesn’t look nearly as old as he really is. Baidu had told him he’s a notorious lady-killer, a connoisseur of all things fine and beautiful. But seeing the man in person is another thing. No man whose political platform sparks so much unrest should be allowed to age so gracefully, and yet sixty-year-old Jin Guangshan doesn’t seem to look a day older than forty.

Feeling his shijie’s hawk-like glare at the back of his head (she really could get like Madam Yu when she puts her mind to it), Wei Wuxian puts on his least pained-looking smile and shakes Jin Guangshan’s hand, before rushing as fast as manners would allow to the refreshments table.

“Why is all the food so small?” he mutters to Jiang Cheng as the other man joins him, downing a cup of Emperor’s Smile almost as soon as he grabs it. Wei Wuxian holds out a tiny plate with tiny crackers smeared with tinier portions of caviar. “This is barely a bite.”

“Jie says apparently ‘bitelets’ are in style with rich people,” says Jiang Cheng. Wei Wuxian grimaces, before looking around the room at the other competitors.

“Qin Su is here again,” he remarks. “I thought Laoling was boycotting?”

“Nie Huaisang told me she was competing independently,” says Jiang Cheng.

“Yeah, you really want to represent Laoling at a time like this?” wonders Nie Huaisang as he sidles out of seemingly nowhere with his own champagne flute. “Honestly, not sure why the INU went ahead with holding Worlds here. You’d think they’d learnt from Qishan.”

“Pretty sure I know why,” says Jiang Cheng, nodding over to where Jin Guangyao is determinedly not looking at his father even as the two of them greet the competitors together. “Textbook-style daddy issues, right there.”

“Speaking from personal experience, are we?” wonders Nie Huaisang. Jiang Cheng elbows him. Wei Wuxian chuckles. “But actually, da-ge’s mentioned the INU heads took the Lanling bid over the objections of Jin Guangyao. I guess Jin Guangshan made them an offer they couldn’t refuse.”

Wei Wuxian snorts into his bitelet morsels. “Ominous,” he remarks. “No wonder people think this is a political stunt and are protesting outside the gates.”

“Well, the actual opening ceremony’s going to be in the Sparks Amidst Snow Stadium, and the game itself is supposed to be on some man-made island in Lanling Bay,” says Nie Huaisang. “Da-ge was complaining about how impractical the entire thing was, since the only way to get to the island is by air or transportation talisman. Considering the lack of extra funding from Qishan this year, I really don’t know why…” he trails off, sighing.

Jiang Cheng suddenly spots someone in the crowd and peels away, his face thunderous. “Hey! Qingyang!” he snaps, as Mianmian takes one look at him and whirls away. “I need to talk to you, dammit!”

Nie Huaisang raises both eyebrows. Wei Wuxian shrugs. “No comment,” he says.

“I’ll find out eventually,” says Nie Huaisang, contemplatively tapping at his phone. Wei Wuxian rolls his eyes before waving at Wen Ning, who briefly waves back before returning to some sort of
discussion with a bunch of serious-looking men in suits.

As the reception continues, Wei Wuxian finds himself desperately scanning the crowd for that familiar glimpse of Gusu blue and white. Lan Wangji hasn’t sent him anything since their last conversation that afternoon, and the longer the silence stretches, the more worried Wei Wuxian gets.

“Wonder what’s taking them so long,” he mumbles through a sip of Emperor’s Smile. Nie Huaisang raises an eyebrow. “Gusu. The Lans are supposed to be good at punctuality, but I haven’t seen them yet.”

“Worried about your rival?” teases Nie Huaisang. Wei Wuxian splutters.

“Well, yeah, a rivalry implies there’s more than one person,” he points out.

“Uhhuh,” says Nie Huaisang. “Who are you kidding, Wei Wuxian? We all have eyes, you know.”

“What kind of ominous statement is that?” demands Wei Wuxian. “I know you all have eyes. So what?”

“So… you’re basically the only one who still thinks it’s a rivalry?” Nie Huaisang taps his phone thoughtfully to his lips, almost like a fan. “I mean, there’s so much photo and video evidence now; it’d be stupid to deny it. Everyone knows Lan Wangji’s been in love with you since at least Xinglu, if not earlier.”

The word ‘love’ throws Wei Wuxian for a curve, even if it’s something he’s been secretly wishing for ever since that first night at the Cloud Recesses. “The song, right?” he asks. “I know about the song.”

“I mean, yes,” says Nie Huaisang, rolling his eyes. “But also… everything else. Again, the rest of us have known him since Juniors. He was so mean then; I think half the kids came out of the competitions crying because Hanguang-jun sniped their targets…”

“They should’ve been faster, then,” says Wei Wuxian.

“Well, he’s definitely softened up since you arrived,” replies Nie Huaisang. “How could he not? You’re basically the only one who makes these nighthunts worthwhile for him anymore.”

Wei Wuxian’s not sure what to do with this revelation, especially since at that moment his mobile pings with a new message:

Lan Wangji has arrived, slightly travel-worn but still devastatingly handsome as he shakes Jin Guangshan’s hand. He steps back with a small bow, falling easily into position beside his brother. The two of them then start to make their rounds of the sponsors as if they’ve done this a thousand times — which they probably have, considering how early the two of them started doing competitive cultivation. Wei Wuxian’s breath is stolen all the same, at the casual grace of Lan Wangji’s steps, the dashing cut of his hair, the flattering style of his white blazer over his light-washed jeans.

“Yup, and there’s also the way you stare at him like he painted the moon and hung it up just for you,” Nie Huaisang mutters from next to him. Wei Wuxian shushes him as he moves away, drawn towards Lan Wangji like a moth to a distant flame.

“Lan Zhan!” he calls. Lan Wangji turns at the sound of his name, the corner of his mouth quirking just slightly.
It’s been far too many months since they last saw one another in person at the station in Caiyi. They’d bridged the distance somewhat with WeChat, but in this moment the couple of feet left between them feels more like a wide chasm.

Lan Wangji is pulled back immediately into the crowd of sponsors, but before he vanishes, Wei Wuxian gets one more message:

😊

It’s amazing how a single emoji can get him through the rest of the night.

GOLDENCORE > Forums > Cultivators

wwxian
member for 1 year

WangXian rivalry: still ongoing? Discuss.

goldencheng
member for 4 years

No. Everyone knows it’s some publicity ploy by the gamemasters.

popsicletwink
member for 6 years

goldencheng said:
No. Everyone knows it’s some publicity ploy by the gamemasters.

Say WHAT? I’ve never seen such a fetid pile of bullsh!t in my life omfg. They’re not rivals, yeah, but that’s because they’re DATING, not because of some stupid score inflation racket.

wwxian
member for 1 year

Wait, really? Dating? Was there an official announcement? Are you even allowed to date a competitor; wouldn’t it be a conflict of interest? And if they were dating would it affect their careers? I mean, since homophobia’s such a problem in so many sports…

popsicletwink
member for 6 years

Oh no, it’s not an official announcement. The INU doesn’t care if you date your fellow competitors, since it’s definitely happened before — Yu Ziyuan and Jiang Fengmian first met as competitors in Yunmeng back in the day. And as far as homophobia goes that’d probably depend on the countries in question — Qishan’s definitely passed laws restricting LGBTQ+ rights before, but neither Yunmeng nor Gusu have any solid legislation either denying or protecting the rights of their LGBTQ+ population…

lfitzgerald
member for 3 years

popsicletwink said:
neither Yunmeng nor Gusu have any solid legislation either denying or protecting the
rights of their LGBTQ+ population…

Aren’t the Lans like, the Kennedies of Gusu? I’d always gotten the feeling they basically ran the country. Would they pass anything hurting one of their own?

**brittlepeanut**  
*member for 2 years*

Yeah, the Lan family has had members with same-sex partners. I don’t say ‘gay’ per se since all the examples are like, before we started using those labels. But since they haven’t erased Lan Yuling from the family tree for marrying a woman (yet), I think they’re pretty chill with Wangxian.

**miriluvscmpcult**  
*member for 2 years*

Okay okay maybe I’m stupid and have been living under a rock but why are we jumping to the ‘they’re dating’ conclusion? Sauce nao pls.

**popsicletwink**  
*member for 6 years*

*miriluvscmpcult said:*

Okay okay maybe I’m stupid and have been living under a rock but why are we jumping to the ‘they’re dating’ conclusion? Sauce nao pls.

YOU’VE ACTIVATED MY TRAP CARD ok here goes:

WWX’s weibo posts showing himself hanging out with LWJ: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

Supercut of INU drone camera footage of their in-game flirting

NHS’s banquet livestream from 50WNC showing WWX and LWJ dancing

LWJ’s song from 49WNC, and WWX’s reaction to it

Supercut of every time LWJ has mentioned WWX during his interviews

LWJ’s magazine interview about his soulmate

Friends and family pics and vids of the two of them: 1, 2, 3

Olympic athlete insta stories with them. Note how LWJ won’t leave WWX’s side: 1, 2, 3, 4

Fan candids of them in Caiyi: look they’re holding hands. More handholding. MORE HANDHOLDING ON MAGPIE BRIDGE. Magpie Bridge is supposed to be the most romantic spot in Caiyi, so I highly doubt they were reaffirming their bromance or skinship or whatever…

And the tour de fucking force: screenshots people grabbed of the 51WNC maybe-kiss before the streams went down. Like… there’s nothing heterosexual about how close they’re standing.

Thanks for coming to my TED talk. /micdrop

**miriluvscmpcult**  
*member for 2 years*

*popsicletwink said:*


Okay wow that’s a lot of stuff. I mean I can see it but I’d prefer to wait for them to confirm themselves. It seems like an intrusion of privacy otherwise. But if they’re really dating, congrats to them! They make such a cute couple.

adoracats
member for 3 months

This post has been deemed off-topic and moved to the correct forum. - The Mods

youmakemebejin
member for 5 months

Ooh those fics look cool! I love the idea of an AU with them as ancient cultivators that’s so unique! Will have to check it out soon…

Thump. Thump.

Back in the present, Wei Wuxian clenches his teeth as Suibian cuts through the rope, cord by cord. The spiritual energy woven into the slender silver rope makes the entire endeavour a lot tougher than it looks.

Finally, he frees himself from the net, quickly landing on his feet and dashing out of the corridor before the walls close entirely. He rounds the corner, his heart lodged in his throat with worry. Where is he? Where are the other competitors?

Where is Lan Wangji?

A day earlier:

“Did… did someone die?” asks Wei Wuxian as he enters the briefing room, looking around at everyone’s somber faces. “You guys all look like you’re about to go to a funeral.”

Luo Qingyang glares at him from her seat. “It’ll be your funeral if you don’t shut up,” she hisses.

Wei Wuxian raises his eyebrows, but says nothing as he finds the seat Jiang Cheng had saved for him. His shidi cuffs him about the head as he takes his seat.

“Didn’t you see the signs from last night?” he hisses. “The protestors at the opening ceremony?”

“The Free Laoling ones, right?” whispers Wei Wuxian. “Did… did something else happen?”

“They started a riot,” murmurs Wen Ning, leaning in from behind. “The police had to get called, there was looting in the area around the stadium. Didn’t you hear about it? It was all over the news this morning.”

Wei Wuxian’s eyes narrow, but before he could say anything else, the gamemasters file into the room for the briefing. Jin Guangyao in particular looks a bit more haggard than he did last night.

“Before we begin,” says one of the other gamemasters as they pull up the arena map, “I’d like to mention that we’re doing all we can to make sure this game goes on without a hitch. Koi Towers is an extremely secure location, and we will be sending all competitors into the game this year through
transportation talismans for extra security.”

Wei Wuxian raises his hand. “Does Koi Towers have its own transit hub for that?” he wonders.

“It does, actually,” says Jin Zixuan. “It’s near the airfield out back.”

“You have an airfield,” states Wei Wuxian.

“Sword travel is restricted outside of competitions,” Jin Zixuan points out.

The gamemaster clears their throat. “The other reason we decided to use transportation talismans is because this year, the structure of the game is a little unique,” they say. “The arena itself is going to be a maze, and the objective is to defeat the endgame at the centre before finding your way back out.”

“Are we all going to be entering the same spot?” asks Qin Su.

“Yes. The transportation talisman will take you to the starting point.” The gamemaster flicks their wrist, and a green arrow hovers above a large open space on one side of the maze. The gold star marking the endgame monster appears to be right in the centre of the map, whilst a red arrow marking the exit hovers at the other side. “Points will be awarded for completing the maze as well as defeating the endgame. It may be possible to complete the maze without encountering the endgame, but doing that may not get you first place.”

Wei Wuxian raises his hand again. “The previous Worlds competition had the endgame monster glitch on one of the competitors. Do you think that’s going to happen again?”

Murmurs of assent rise from the other competitors. Jin Guangyao steps forward with a smile.

“We are doing all we can to ensure the integrity of the game design,” he says. “Special weapons will only be permitted against the endgame monster, and this year we will have security teams on standby to ensure no sabotage occurs on either side of the command centre.”

Despite the comforting nature of his words, and the placating tone with which he’d said it, Wei Wuxian still feels a curl of unease in his gut. Even after the competitors are dismissed, and Lan Xichen arrives in the briefing room to discuss something with Jin Guangyao, Wei Wuxian remains rooted with a strange feeling of foreboding.

“Wei Ying.” The familiar voice causes him to blink and look up, smiling widely as Lan Wangji sinks into the seat beside him. “You are still concerned about the integrity of this game.”

“Yeah. Jin Guangyao’s just…” Wei Wuxian pinches up his expression as he nods over to where the gamemasters are conversing quietly amongst themselves at the front of the room. “I’m not digging his vibe, you know?”

“He does seem to be acting strangely,” agrees Lan Wangji. “I imagine being under the roof of the father he detests would be a factor.”

“Yes, and the riot,” says Wei Wuxian. “You know, I heard a very different story about that this morning. People on Weibo say that the riot wasn’t started by the protestors, but the police took it as an excuse to arrest them anyway.”

“Weibo is not a reliable source of news,” Lan Wangji points out.

“Yeah, I guess.” Wei Wuxian chuckles. “I mean, Weibo also thinks we’re secretly dating, so…”
Lan Wangji’s expression stiffens a little, and he draws into himself a little more at that. Wei Wuxian’s heart splinters a little between concern and guilt.

“I’m sorry if I offended you,” he says. Lan Wangji shakes his head.

“No, it is the truth,” he says. “We are not.”

*But I want to* hovers in the air between them, though Wei Wuxian’s not nearly brave enough to point it out.

He’s about to reach over to pat Lan Wangji’s hand, when someone clears their throat next to them. Lan Xichen is standing there, expectant. The other gamemasters and Jin Guangyao have already left the room.

“Any reason you two are still here?” wonders Lan Xichen.

Wei Wuxian shakes his head, slowly clambering to his feet. Lan Wangji rises as well, falling into step with his brother as always.

“Brother,” he says as they exit the briefing room. “I had a question I meant to ask with Wei Ying present, hence my own delay.”

“Mm.” Lan Xichen nods at some passing officials, all smiles and congeniality.

Lan Wangji looks sidelong at Wei Wuxian. “Have you managed to enquire about the glitches?” he asks his brother, who briefly falters in his step before recovering swiftly and turning on his heel to a smaller side corridor.

“I do feel like inspecting the Jin family’s bonsai garden, don’t you?” he wonders cheerily. Wei Wuxian wants to ask why he’s avoiding the question, but a brief warning brush of Lan Wangji’s hand against his makes the question wither in his throat. “I heard they have bonsai fruit trees.”

“Do they make bonsai fruit?” Wei Wuxian asks, hoping Lan Wangji can see the look of utter confusion on his face. “Or is it like… tiny tree but regular-sized fruit?”

They step outside. The estate gardens of Koi Towers are a testament to the ways in which humans can try to tame nature. Unlike the semi-naturalistic setting of the Cloud Recesses, the Koi Towers gardens are almost boxed-in, where every blade of grass knows its place.

Naturally, the bonsai collection is extensive. As they stroll between planters and boxes full of carefully-wrangled tiny trees, Lan Xichen stops to examine each one of them closely.

“A-Yao insists there was no tampering,” he says after a moment, straightening up and looking back at the glittering estate behind them. “But I did a little digging on my own, and found a little tear in the Zhuque’s design. It’s not something anyone else would notice, if they hadn’t worked on the bird as long as I have. “

“A tear,” echoes Wei Wuxian.

“Residual spiritual energy,” says Lan Wangji, “from unauthorised access. Were you able to identify whose energy it was?”

Lan Xichen shakes his head. “No, the signature was very faint,” he admits. “But it does tell me someone manipulated the Zhuque from somewhere that wasn’t the command centre.”
“Like, from the game itself?” asks Wei Wuxian.

“All I really know is that it’s there,” says Lan Xichen. “I’ll keep an eye out for it this competition, but I’m sorry I can’t really offer more information at the moment. This is the best I can do right now.”

Wei Wuxian nods. “I think it’s pretty helpful,” he says. “It tells us at least someone has tampered with it. And either Jin Guangyao couldn’t tell because he didn’t design the bird himself, or —”

“No,” says Lan Xichen immediately. “I do not want to entertain the alternative.”

“It is a possibility,” Lan Wangji points out.

“You don’t know him as well as I do, brother,” Lan Xichen insists, picking up his pace a couple steps. “If he knew there was proof of tampering, I don’t know why he wouldn’t tell me.”

Wei Wuxian could think of a lot of reasons, but one look from Lan Wangji and he immediately bites them all back. Lan Xichen straightens up from the last bonsai in the collection, turning back to look at them.

“I am doing what I can to ensure the safety of the competitors for this game,” he says. “Which means the two of you need to play it safe, okay?” He looks between them, an edge of steel evident in his voice. “Promise me, Wangji, Competitor Wei, that you two will look out for one another and not do something reckless in the maze this year.”

Lan Wangji nods and turns to leave, but Wei Wuxian frowns and lingers. “You’re actually worried your brother is going to do something reckless?” he asks.

Lan Xichen’s eyes narrow. “I’ve noticed that with you, my brother will do anything.”

He pats Wei Wuxian’s shoulder, gaze fixed on the retreating head of his little brother.

“What let him.”

---

jiang cheng gold medal WHEN @goldencheng
well #52wnc’s already off to a great start #compcult

jay @ compcult screaming @jiang_wayne
so far we’ve got:
-political protests
-riots
-arrests
and the game hasn’t even started, what a YEAR #compcult #52wnc

marie @ 含光军队 @lightbrigademarie
did the heads of the #INU not learn from #50wnc? don’t hold competitions in politically tense countries! #freelaoling #kickjgy #52wnc #compcult

this shrew can’t be tamed @kissmekate
the #INU’s decision to hold #52WNC in Lanling was either the result of 1) nepotism 2) corruption or 3) both #kickjgy #freelaoling #compcult

starry_night @jiangstan
people really think jin guangyao, who hates his dad, would’ve willingly let the lanling competition
be hosted in koi towers. REALLY. #compcult #52wnc

xuan | 含光军队 @hanyuzuwus
@certain lantis who have blocked me because i know y’all are secretly hatereading: #compcult #52wnc

Heartbreaking: The Worst Person You Know Just Made A Great Point

Thump. Thump.

Back in the present, Wei Wuxian stumbles down the corridor, wondering if it would be a good idea at all to start calling for Lan Wangji until he finds the man somehow. He doesn’t know exactly how big this maze is; the transportation talismans had dropped them at the entrance to a foggy temple and it’s been a nightmare locating anyone else since.

There’s a scream, followed by the sound of a timeout flare. Wei Wuxian runs in that direction, just in time to collide with a figure who seems to be covered in glitches.

Wei Wuxian blinks. Is this some new monster the gamemasters have sprung on them? The figure’s face is obscured by static; their sword also flickers like it can’t decide what it should look like. Their outfit switches colours and countries, between Yunmeng and Lanling and Qishan and Gusu —

They take just one look at Wei Wuxian before lunging straight at him. He ducks just in time to avoid their blade, bringing Suibian up to block their next attack. He kicks out, but the figure jumps in anticipation before lunging forward again. Wei Wuxian rolls away just in time, before leaping to his feet and leveraging the wall to launch his next attack.

He manages to take the figure by surprise, knocking them back a couple steps, but they recover just as quickly and start to gain ground. Briefly, Wei Wuxian remembers a different swordfight several years ago, with an opponent well-versed in sword forms but lacking in improvisation.

“Lan Zhan?” he breathes, hoping against hope, but the person’s attacks grow even more vicious at the sound of that name. Wei Wuxian frowns; if this attacker was Lan Wangji, surely they wouldn’t become angrier at the sound of their name.

They’ve arrived in a hall full of golden goddess statues. Wei Wuxian ducks as his opponent’s sword swipes through a pillar. He swipes out, catching a scrap of black cloth with his sword, before flinging one of the smaller statues at his assailant’s head. They duck, and the statue smashes into the stone ground, causing the other ones to suddenly blink into life around them.

The assailant curses, and with a sudden flicker of spiritual energy, they vanish. Wei Wuxian whirls around, ducking a wild grab from a large golden arm. Thousands of little goddesses swarm the floor like beetles heading straight for him, and he slashes away as many as he can before dodging another
arm from the larger statues and leaping over the threshold of the hall.

The statues don’t follow him. Wei Wuxian looks back to see them having reverted to their original positions as if nothing had happened. Panting, he sheathes Suibian before slumping against the nearest pillar.

Who was that attacker? Were they part of the game? His instinct tells him yes, since they vanished just like any other monster in the arena. But Wei Wuxian didn’t manage to defeat them before they vanished, which implied they had an agenda of their own.

And they knew Lan sect sword forms, too.

*Thumpthump. Thumpthump.* Wei Wuxian’s heart pounds in his ears still as he struggles to recover his breath. He’d promised Lan Xichen he’d find Lan Wangji, and the monitor wristband tells him it’s been hours since the game started and he still hasn’t found him.

Has he timed out already? Unlikely, knowing Lan Wangji’s skill. But there’s clearly already glitches in this year’s game…

Ahead of him sits a courtyard with a trough of burning incense. The sickly sweet smoke filters into the night air, making Wei Wuxian feel slightly light-headed. The sounds of other competitors fighting ring out in the distance, yet no matter how far he walks in their direction, he never seems to come across anyone else.

*Lan Zhan! Lan Zhan, where are you?*

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*A couple hours earlier:*

Wei Wuxian’s still only halfway into his arena uniform when he hears the knock at his door. Somehow there are enough rooms at Koi Towers to ensure each competitor has their own, which means on the one hand, he doesn’t have to share with Jiang Cheng this year, but on the other hand, at night the room is too big and too empty without Jiang Cheng’s snores from the other bed.

When he goes to answer, Lan Wangji is at the threshold, his eyes widening as Wei Wuxian hastily finishes putting on his shirt. “I can return,” he says immediately.

“No, it’s fine,” says Wei Wuxian, stepping aside to let him in. “Not like you haven’t seen this before.”

Lan Wangji’s earlobes turn pink at that. Wei Wuxian laughs, closing the door behind them before wrapping his arms around Lan Wangji’s shoulders and bringing him in for a kiss.

“Wei Ying,” murmurs Lan Wangji when they pull apart. His eyes are both sad and fond, as his hands stroke Wei Wuxian’s face, tuck his hair behind his ears. Wei Wuxian’s gut twists at the sight, foreboding gripping him like frost on metal.

“Did… did you want to tell me something?” he asks. *That perhaps you’ve come to your senses after what I told you in Caiyi, and realised you deserve more after all? Finally believed your brother’s words when he said you could do better?*

*Look how selfish I am, Lan Zhan, holding you at arm’s length but also keeping you close.*

It’s true. Wei Wuxian doesn’t want Lan Wangji to ignore him. He wants to wake to Lan Wangji’s good morning emojis and bunny photos, wants to linger in his arms and fall asleep to the rhythm of
his breathing. The problem is, he’s still not sure if he could ever be worthy of such treatment. He’d been plucked from the streets and brought into this brave new world of competitive cultivation like a cuckoo fostered in another bird’s nest.

None of this was his birthright, like it had been for Lan Wangji. And surely someday that spell has to break.

Lan Wangji is silent, like always. He brings Wei Wuxian in closer, presses kisses along his collar. His hands ghost along the hem of Wei Wuxian’s t-shirt, lingering against the small of his back.

“If we are separated in the maze, I will look for you.” Lan Wangji’s voice murmurs against the shell of his ear. “We can face the endgame together.”

“We always end up doing that,” Wei Wuxian points out. Lan Wangji bites his ear, causing him to yelp. “What? I’m right, aren’t I?”

“The setup this year makes reaching the endgame less certain,” says Lan Wangji, pulling back to help him put on his jacket. Wei Wuxian zips it up, as Lan Wangji smooths down the shoulders. “But I will only fight it with you.”

Wei Wuxian frowns. “What if I time out?”

Lan Wangji inhales. “Then so shall I,” he replies. “Wei Ying, you must know — there is no victory for me without you.”

“What, you only feel good about winning gold if it’s beating me?” teases Wei Wuxian.

Lan Wangji’s expression turns a shade exasperated, but he leans in and presses a kiss to his forehead nonetheless. Wei Wuxian flushes, before reaching into his pocket and pulling out the white ribbon Lan Wangji had given him in Caiyi.

“Do you want this back? You know, for luck?” he asks. Lan Wangji takes it, but gestures for Wei Wuxian to turn around. Slowly, reverently, he cards his fingers through his hair, before using the ribbon to tie up a small ponytail.

Wei Wuxian thinks back to what Nie Huaisang had said. You’re basically the only one who makes these nighthunts worthwhile for him anymore. Lan Wangji had been extraordinary since childhood, his cultivational prowess unmatched by all his peers in juniors. Even at his first Olympics his skills were unparalleled. It’s no wonder he doesn’t show up at the Five Countries Cup or any other competitions where he’s more likely than not to dominate the scoreboard.

Wei Wuxian’s been challenging him since day one, and it’s only now that he properly realises the true extent of that challenge.

“Lan Zhan,” he murmurs, turning to cup his face. Lan Wangji’s eyes widen slightly, as Wei Wuxian traces a thumb along his cheek. “If we get separated in the maze, I’ll find you.”

He takes Lan Wangji’s hand, pressing a kiss to his wrist.

“Let’s face the endgame together.”

Thump. Thump.

“Lan Zhan!” Wei Wuxian calls, now moving through the temple at a slight jog. “Lan Zhan!”
The night wraps around him, suffocatingly humid and perfumed with incense. The sounds of other competitors always seem to come at a distance, and Lan Wangji is nowhere to be found. Wei Wuxian takes several deep breaths, trying to slow the racing of his panicking heart.

“Lan Zhan!”

He finally sees a figure at the end of one courtyard, but when he approaches he notices they’re clad in black and pressed close to a bronze mirror of some sort. An odd blue glow — which by all means should probably not be coming from a mirror — hovers about their features as they type at something on a keypad, frowning.

Wei Wuxian unsheathes Suibian. The sound of the sword causes the figure to pause, before slowly turning around and raising their hands. Suibian falters, as Wei Wuxian recognises them.

“Qin Su?” he asks, frowning. “What… what are you doing?”

Qin Su smiles weakly. “I can explain,” she says, before reaching out and tugging him through the bronze mirror with her.

They step out into darkness, defined only by the faint flickering of golden gridlines. “What is this?” Wei Wuxian asks, as Qin Su summons a series of documents with a flick of her wrist and some spiritual energy.

“The arena,” she says, “in its purest form. You can create anything in this space, before deploying it into the game itself.”

Wei Wuxian raises an eyebrow. “Doesn’t this count as manipulating the game outside the command centre?”

“Technically,” says Qin Su. She starts scrolling through the documents with her fingers, discarding unneeded ones with a flick of her wrist. “Do you happen to know anything about the glitches from recent games?”

“Like the one that took down Jin Zixuan last Worlds? Or the glitch-faced weirdo that tried attacking me tonight?”

Qin Su’s fingers pause, and she frowns at him between lines of text hovering mid-air. “You saw a glitch… what?”

“A person with their face, uniform, and sword obscured by glitches,” says Wei Wuxian. “Like… they were using the game to hide who they were.” He pauses. “But why do you care?”

Qin Su ignores him as she brings up a map of the game itself. Wei Wuxian watches, riveted, as coloured dots marking each of the competitors move across the map. He reaches out to the one marked ‘Lan Wangji’, but Qin Su smacks his hand away.

“If what you’re saying is true,” she says, as she pulls up another set of files, “then there’s probably already been a breach and the game is not going to work as intended. I’ve been trying to get a message out, but the system is… not optimal right now.”

“Can it be fixed?” asks Wei Wuxian, but no sooner had the words left his mouth do the golden gridlines suddenly flash red.

WARNING, the game blares. TIMEOUT SYSTEM BREACH DETECTED.
Qin Su curses. Wei Wuxian’s stomach twists unpleasantly.

“What does that mean?” he asks, as Qin Su tries to type frantically at the keyboard.

“That’s not good, that’s not good,” she mutters. “Someone’s tampering with the timeout system.”

“Do you know who?” wonders Wei Wuxian, as the map itself begins to glitch in and out, as the coloured dots all suddenly turn red.

**WARNING**, the game blares. **UNAUTHORISED ACCESS DETECTED**.

Qin Su points to the bronze mirror. “Get back inside and find your way out.” Wei Wuxian’s expression must have been too rebellious, because she shakes her head and starts shoving him towards the mirror. “I’m serious. Get out of the arena. Don’t even stay for the endgame — just get out.”

Wei Wuxian makes to protest, but Qin Su pushes him with a bolt of spiritual energy, forcing him back through the mirror and into the temple. Here, none of the warning flares and messages are showing, but there’s still a strange sense of unease, as if the game is holding its breath.

Then the howling starts, and icy fear bolts through Wei Wuxian’s veins as thousands of cruel golden eyes flicker from the darkness.

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You are watching: *liz_wangji’s 52wnc stream!*

**regentertiary**: how have they not found one another yet im screaming
**battles**: WWX HONEY LAN ZHAN IS COMING
**killedbythesketchbook**: probably also what he said last night
**dairycakes**: oh my god
**sassquil**: LOL
**iratehearse**: o7
**intyalote**: press f for that dude nhs sniped
**caughtbyyou**: f
**paintherblue**: f
**tbiris**: F
**tangerinechar**: f
**ebbehmoth**: @liz_wangji can we go back and see if we can find wwx?
**liz_wangji**: lemme check the controls hang on
**minahomine**: lwj’s so frantic looking for him im so!!
**cutelittlegreenraccoon**: did you guys see what wwx was wearing in his hair at the start
**stomp_loudly**: omg no what
**cutelittlegreenraccoon**: HE WAS WEARING LWJ’S RIBBON
**swanlings**: !!!!! WHAT
**liz_wangji**: sorry the controls are being wonky there’s some server issues
**CathainDonnelaith**: THERE HE IS

---

**Thumpthumpthumpthumpthumpthumpthumpthump —**

Wei Wuxian is running for his life. No matter where he turns, the wolf pack behind him finds him all the same. He’s running now along the roof of the buildings, not caring what direction his feet take
him. Down below, the cruel eyes of the wolves follow him out of the darkness.

Someone suddenly collides with him, nearly causing him to slip off the roof. Wei Wuxian manages to steady himself, though, before getting a good look at who he ran into.

“Wen Ning!” His friend’s hair is askew and his clothes are rumpled and torn. He steadies Wei Wuxian by the shoulders, eyes wide.

“Thank gods you’re still here. You don’t happen to have any arrows?”

Wei Wuxian pulls a couple arrows from his quiver, handing them over with a frown. “I think the points would go to me if you shot these, though,” he points out.

“Someone took mine,” replies Wen Ning, already nocking one to his bow. Wei Wuxian’s frown deepens.

“Someone… with glitches?” he ventures. Wen Ning nods.

“I don’t know if they took my arrows, but I bumped into them and the next thing I knew I had no arrows. Do you think it’s part of the game?”

“I’ve been trying to figure that out myself,” mutters Wei Wuxian. Wen Ning hums, his arms trembling slightly as he takes aim.

But before he can fire, a flash of purple light ripples down the corridor. Jiang Cheng has burst out of nowhere, his sword bright against the moonlight as he takes down the wolves. He’s accompanied by a volley of arrows, as Mianmian’s figure appears on the roof of the building across from theirs.

“There you are!” shrieks Jiang Cheng, once the last of the wolves have vanished. He leaps onto the roof, advancing towards Wei Wuxian. “Your boyfriend’s going mad looking for you.”

“He’s not my —” begins Wei Wuxian, but Jiang Cheng’s glare causes him to change tack quickly. “Where is he?”

“I don’t know, I left him near the hall with the Guanyin statue,” says Jiang Cheng, just as the howling returns again. There’s a flicker of electricity, a glitch of static, and the forms of the wolves rematerialise onto the roof, growling and salivating.

Wei Wuxian immediately ducks behind Wen Ning. “I will give you all my arrows,” he begs.

“Get out of here,” replies Wen Ning. Wei Wuxian hands him his quiver before taking off on his sword, flying away from the sound of battle.

*Hall with the Guanyin statue. Hall with the Guanyin statue —*

A glimpse of white catches his eye. Wei Wuxian quickly descends into the courtyard where it had appeared, leaping lightly off of Suibian as he pursues the fleeing white cloth. It leads him through corridors and across somewhat-familiar courtyards, until finally stopping inside a hall stuffed full of statues of various deities and spirits.

Wei Wuxian frowns, stepping over the threshold. “Lan Zhan?” he asks, peering around a statue to try and get a better look at his quarry.

The white cloth flickers and vanishes. Frowning, Wei Wuxian steps forward, but freezes at the sound of a small twang, and the feel of something metal against his skin.
“One scream out of you, and this thing will slice your throat,” mutters a deep voice in his ear.

Wei Wuxian nearly goes cross-eyed as he stares down at the faint string sparkling in the lamplight of the temple. “What do you want?” he asks.

There’s a pause. Then, the next thing Wei Wuxian feels is a sharp pain in the back of his head, and then he knows no more.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter title taken from "If You Have Heard" by A-Mei Chang Lyric translation here.

So, the final arc!! Again, any resemblance between Lanling and certain first-world countries with corrupt womanising leaders previously involved in real estate is completely coincidental, of course.

Koi Towers is inspired by -cough- the new Winter White House, plus Tyersall Park in Singapore, plus Carcosa Seri Negara in Malaysia.

The protests at the games are inspired by the Tibetan protest at the 2008 Olympics in Beijing. Once again, the Laoling situation is inspired by the protests in Hong Kong and the treatment of Taiwan by China, with a dash of the Scottish Independence referendum controversy.

If you're impatient and want the next chapter (plus other bonus Rivals content), please check my Twitter for how to access!
The world is fuzzy when Wei Wuxian returns to consciousness, faint hints of beige and gold swimming in his vision. His head pounds as he tries to pull himself into a sitting position, only to find that he’s been tied down onto some sort of rocky surface with deity-binding ropes.

His wrists are bound with Lan Wangji’s hair ribbon, if the looseness of his hair is of any indication. He groans and is greeted by that same deep voice.

“No nice to see you again.” The glitch-faced figure steps into sight. “Don’t try to struggle too hard, the knots will only get tighter if you do.”

“What the fuck,” spits Wei Wuxian. “Who the fuck are you?”

“Take a guess,” replies the figure. Wei Wuxian grits his teeth.

“You’re the one that’s been manipulating the game outside the control centre,” he says.

The figure shakes their head. “Why would I do that? That’s a disqualifying offense.”

“So you’re a competitor,” says Wei Wuxian. The figure says nothing to that, only turns towards the giant golden statue taking up the rest of the hall. With a jolt, Wei Wuxian realises that it’s of the goddess Guanyin.

Lan Wangji.

“What have you done with Hanguang-jun?” he demands.

“What makes you think I’m not him?” wonders the figure.

The ridiculousness of that question makes Wei Wuxian want to laugh. “Really? You think Lan Wangji would run around picking fights with people? Or steal their arrows? Or ambush them somewhere just to tie them up?” He pauses. “Were you also the one who stole the zhenniao antidote back at Baifeng? And glitched the Zhuque?”

“The glitch? That wasn’t me,” says the figure, scornful.

“But the other things were?” Wei Wuxian can’t believe his ears. “You really put all that effort into trying to trick me into thinking you’re Hanguang-jun, huh? Sorry to disappoint, but you’re really bad at it. He’s at least ten times the cultivator you’ll ever be. He’s honourable, and good, and — and nice, and probably a lot more handsome than whatever you’ve got under that mask —”

The figure bristles at that, and the metal cord swiftly reappears at Wei Wuxian’s throat. “Give me one good reason why I shouldn’t just kill you right now.”

“You can’t kill a competitor,” scoffs Wei Wuxian. “The timeout system wouldn’t allow it. And trying to do that on camera looks bad for you; you’d be disqualified.”

“The cameras and timeout system are down.” The figure laughs darkly, as the strings press in harder against his skin. “Shame, honestly, that Lan Wangji will never get to hear how you feel about him.”
Wei Wuxian swallows, staring up into the cloud of static surrounding their face. “The cameras and timeout system are down, but you claim you haven’t manipulated anything outside the command centre.”

The figure says nothing. Wei Wuxian feels cold foreboding settle into his gut.

“You’re working with someone in the command centre.”

__inu_official__

We are currently experiencing some technical difficulties. Please be patient. The streams will be back online shortly. #52wnc# #compcult#

_______________________

__lanxichenofficial__

All I can say at present is that the camera feeds have been disabled and we are working as hard as we can to get them back up. Thank you for your patience! #52wnc# #compcult#

_______________________

__xiaohuaisang__

well thank heaven i decided to sneak in my phone this year because something is ROTTEN in the state of lanling #52wnc# #compcult# #guanyinglitch# #whereswwx#

_______________________

__wangxian_fans__

@xiaohuaisang what’s going on? ☹️ #52wnc# #compcult# #guanyinglitch# #whereswwx#

_______________________

__xiaohuaisang__

thank you for the concern everyone! so here’s what i’ve heard so far:

-the camera feeds aren’t working (i’ll fix that in a sec)

-there’s been some glitches in the game

-wwx is missing

can confirm the last one has driven lwj mad though he’s been looking for wwx since the maze started ☹️ let’s keep cheering for them! #52wnc# #compcult# #guanyinglitch# #whereswwx# #wangxian#

You are watching: 52wnc #guanyinglitch

liz_wangji: thank you nhs for keeping us updated on this!
tangerinechar: we stan 1 cryptid boy
iratehearse: o7
domokunrainboz: o7
The figure hums, but doesn’t deny the accusation. The cord still presses against Wei Wuxian’s neck.

“If you work with someone in the command centre, then they could tamper with the game and have it be perfectly valid.” Wei Wuxian looks around him, at the large statue of the goddess Guanyin, at the carvings all over the wall. None of this is inherently real, all constructed out of spiritual energy within the confines of an arena meant to amplify it. “I just don’t understand who the target’s supposed to be, and why.”

The figure says nothing. Wei Wuxian continues to think.

“You stole Jin Zixun’s zhenniao antidote so that he’d assume I did it. You also fought me, took Wen Ning’s arrows, and ambushed me later, so I’d think you were trying to target me, except—” he nods towards the strings at his throat, “something tells me you’ve got someone else in mind.”

“Shut up,” spits the figure.

“Now, who would have such a grudge against Hanguang-jun, I wonder, to try and learn his family’s sword forms and cultivation techniques, ambush and attack someone else, and then try to pin the blame on him?” Wei Wuxian smiles. “I can really only think of one person who might have such a problem with him, someone who felt wronged by the Light Brigade.” The smile grows wider. “I know that feeling, Su She, but I don’t think wallowing in it and then trying to frame Lan Zhan for attacking his friends is really a good plan at all.”

The figure’s hand clenches into a fist. “Shut up!” he hisses.

“Come on, Su She, you can take off your helmet or mask or whatever,” teases Wei Wuxian. “The cameras are down now; it doesn’t even matter.”

“He can’t,” a new voice says. Another dark figure has flickered into the room, lingering in the shadows of the Guanyin statue. “I control what he looks like in the game.”

“You’re the one glitching the game,” breathes Wei Wuxian. “I’m guessing the Zhuque was also you?”

The figure hums, stepping forward into the light. Wei Wuxian’s breath hitches when he sees who it is.

“Do you really hate Jin Zixuan that much?” he wonders, as Jin Guangyao’s fingers lightly strum against the metal cords poised breaths away from his throat. The vibration of one of them causes the hairs on the back of his neck to stand up. “He’s your half-brother, yet you robbed him of his victory at Baifeng. Why?”

Jin Guangyao raises an eyebrow. “You don’t know?” he wonders. “But then, I suppose that’s only natural, given your own shadow. Competitor Jiang,” he adds, since Wei Wuxian’s confusion must have shown on his face. “He was the favourite in the family for a long while, wasn’t he? Always had the best coaches and trainers, the best teachers to help him form his golden core, while you had to sit to the side and take notes, listen in. Everything was kept theoretical for you, so you remembered your place.”
Wei Wuxian shakes his head. “I trained alongside Jiang Cheng. I just didn’t compete.”

“And why not?” wonders Jin Guangyao. “Was it because Yu Ziyuan was scared some street kid was going to upstage her son?”

“It wasn’t like that —”

“Oh, you and I both know it was exactly like that.” Jin Guangyao’s laughter is harsh, bitter. “My father has made it plenty clear to me he wished my mother had been on the pill during their affair. I’m proof of an indiscretion he’s trying to blot out just so he can be the President of this corrupt little nation. He’s the reason my mother is dead!”

“Your mother dying isn’t exactly a reason to disable the timeout function and try to kill the rest of us,” Wei Wuxian reasons, as Jin Guangyao starts to pace around him, his breath coming in ragged bursts. “What kind of revenge is that, requiting the sins of the father on the son?”

“Nothing I say or do can hurt that man,” sneers Jin Guangyao, “with one exception: his legitimate son. If I humble Jin Zixuan, I bring shame to Jin Guangshan.”

“So the glitches,” says Wei Wuxian, raising an eyebrow.

“Your rivalry with Competitor Lan was the perfect distraction,” agrees Jin Guangyao. “No one ever pays attention to fourth place, not when first and second are so heavily contested.”

Wei Wuxian hums. “But people have been paying attention,” he points out. “They’ve been accusing the rest of us of being in on it. Hell, they’ve been accusing Lan Xichen of all people of cheating by inflating his brother’s scores. Did you think about that?”

Jin Guangyao stiffens at that. “Regrettable,” he says, after a moment. “But that’s the problem with people’s relationship to the truth, isn’t it? It’s always relative to what they’re willing to believe. Even the most kind and successful people have others trying to pull them down, and no matter how much context you offer for the things you say or the choices you make, someone will still assume you mean them harm.”

Wei Wuxian frowns. “But that still doesn’t justify turning off the timeout system.”

“I think I’ve said enough,” replies Jin Guangyao, his outline already starting to flicker. “Have a nice life, Competitor Wei. It’s a real shame that, since now you know too much, it won’t be a very long one.”

And as Jin Guangyao vanishes, Su She also starts to walk towards the hall entrance. “Where the fuck do you think you’re going?” demands Wei Wuxian to Su She’s back.

The other competitor pauses, before turning towards him. “Out,” he says, just as the grind of stone against stone begins to echo through the hall and the tall statue of Guanyin slowly blinks its golden eyelids. “I can’t wait to see the look on Wangji’s face when he realises he’s too late to save you.”

Anger rises like bile in Wei Wuxian’s throat. “You fucker!” he screams, as Su She vanishes, and the Guanyin statue starts to bear down on him.
As the statue’s arm swipes towards him, Wei Wuxian closes his eyes and braces himself for impact. Strangely, it never comes, so he cracks open one eye to see what’s going on.

“Take that!” Wen Ning’s voice resounds over the sound of metal against metal. “And that!”

Wei Wuxian blinks at the sight of the mask of cold fury shining on Wen Ning’s usually soft face. He’s out of arrows again, but somehow he’d broken off a set of chains along one of the outdoor fence-posts and is using them to deadly effect against the statue.

“There you are!” A golden figure leaps into the room, crouching in time to avoid a wild swing from the statue’s arm. Wen Ning wraps one of his chains around the statue’s arm and starts trying to pull it back. “Everyone’s been looking for you! How did you even end up like this?”

Wei Wuxian jerks his head to where his hands have been tied to the rock with Lan Wangji’s ribbon. “You’re in danger, Zixuan,” he warns. “You have to get out of here.

“You have to get out of here in one piece, though. Wen Ning can’t hold that statue off for long.”

Wei Wuxian nods towards where Wen Ning is still tying down the struggling statue. “Did you know he could do that?” he asks.

Jin Zixuan shakes his head. “He ate a caffeine pill and just ran into this mess.”

Wei Wuxian whistles, as Wen Ning manages to wrestle down one of the deity-binding ropes. Wei Wuxian springs from the rock, and Jin Zixuan starts trying to untie his wrists. “You have to get out of here in one piece, though. Wen Ning can’t hold that statue off for long.”

“Yeah, same.” Jin Zixuan tugs at the ribbon, but the knots hold. “Do you mind if I cut this?”
Wei Wuxian freezes. “It’s Lan Wangji’s ribbon. I don’t want to.”

“What?” splutters Jin Zixuan. “You’d really let yourself get killed for a fucking ribbon?”

“But it’s Lan Wangji’s,” protests Wei Wuxian, even as the ribbon cuts deeper into his wrists. “It’s a present from him, I couldn’t possibly damage it…"

“I can’t believe I’m hearing this,” mutters Jin Zixuan, before turning back towards the statue and Wen Ning, who’d managed to subdue it. But not for long — suddenly, the statue glitches, vanishing the chains tied to its body.

“Look out!” screams Wei Wuxian, but it’s too late — the statue knocks back Wen Ning, causing him to hit the wall and fall to the ground, unmoving. Jin Zixuan immediately leaps up with his sword, slashing spiritual energy at the advancing statue.

Wei Wuxian can feel the thrum of the spiritual energy imbued in the ribbon. It’s familiar, reassuring, even though the material itself is holding his wrists. Lan Wangji gave this to him, so there must be some way to control it…

Almost as if he’d thought it into being, the ribbon loosens. There’s a twang of a guqin from the entrance, as Lan Wangji enters the room with incandescent fury shining in his eyes.

Wei Wuxian has never seen anything so beautiful. All of a sudden nothing else in the world seems to matter except for the few meters of space left between them. Lan Wangji looks towards him, he looks back, and time itself seems to stop.

“Wei Ying!” Lan Wangji breathes, putting his guqin back with wide eyes.

“Lan Zhan!” Wei Wuxian isn’t sure what the rest of his body is doing, since all his brain wants is to be closer. Closer, always closer, running towards Lan Wangji.

Then, suddenly, there’s no space left between them. No space left between their lips, their bodies, as Wei Wuxian presses in and tries to steal all of the air from Lan Wangji’s lungs. Desperation, hopefulness, fear, love — all of it comes rushing through him like a river. Like the sparkling Meteor River where they had tied a promise he had not fully accepted until now, at this very moment.

“I am here,” breathes Lan Wangji when they pull apart, his ears flushed, his eyes shining. “Wei Ying, I —”

“I love you, Lan Zhan.”

He had to get it out before the rest of him chickens out again; there’s no other explanation. Wei Wuxian pulls him in closer, pressing their foreheads together. “I’m not… I’m not good at any of this. I run away from things that bore me, from things that scare me, and I’ve never been so scared of anything in my life than — than the thought of messing up again and breaking your heart more than I already have.”

Lan Wangji goes still in his arms, his breath hitched. Wei Wuxian cups his cheeks, takes a deep breath.

“But I want you, and I love you, and I don’t ever want to be parted from you. For as long as you’ll have me, I’ll be here with you. I fall more in love with you every day than I did the day before and it scares me how much I want this — how much I want you.”

He takes Lan Wangji’s hand in his own, pressing a kiss to his knuckles.
“From now on and for the rest of our lives, and every life before and after, I’ll never stop loving you.”

Lan Wangji blinks rapidly several times. A stray tear slips down his cheeks, and for a moment Wei Wuxian feels as if he’d been pierced by an arrow of doubt. But then Lan Wangji’s lips curve upwards in a smile, and it’s as if spring had finally emerged out of a long, dark winter.

“Love you,” breathes Lan Wangji, returning the kiss to his knuckles. “Want you. Never want to be parted from you.”

Wei Wuxian’s world falls away from under his feet. Lan Wangji cups his cheeks, presses their foreheads together.

“For as long as you will have me, for the rest of our lives, for every life before and after, I will never stop loving you.”

He would have captured Wei Wuxian’s lips — and there was just the briefest of brushes — but at that moment, Jin Zixuan’s pointed coughing punctures their golden bubble.

“Time and place?” he asks, his hair and clothes already mussed and torn from fighting the statue. Wei Wuxian then realises, to his chagrin, that Nie Huaisang had snuck into the room as well, and had been recording them for the past several minutes.

“Right.” He and Lan Wangji immediately pull apart. Lan Wangji readies his guqin, and Wei Wuxian takes out his dizi. He looks over at Lan Wangji, who nods.

“Let’s end this.”
The statue is glitching. Every time Wei Wuxian thinks they’ve managed to defeat it for good, the thing flickers and reverts back to its original appearance.

It’s unsustainable, and everyone in the room knows it.

“I don’t like this,” announces Nie Huaisang to his phone as he troubleshoots Wen Ning’s wristband and timeout flare. “It seems like the timeout system has been tampered with? The flare won’t release no matter what I do.”

“The system is down,” says Wei Wuxian, as the statue manages to escape yet another set of chains. “The glitch-faced person who tied me up told me as much.”

“Glitch-faced person,” repeats Lan Wangji, his scowl deepening.

“Yeah, funny story, they seemed to know a lot about Lan sect sword forms.” Wei Wuxian ducks a swing from the statue, swiping spiritual energy at it in an attempt to block its advance. “They were trying to pass themselves off as you, probably.”

Lan Wangji’s lips curl, but he says nothing else as the statue starts bashing in the columns supporting the hall. The ceiling starts to cave, causing Nie Huaisang to start dragging Wen Ning towards the exit. Lan Wangji rushes to help, picking up Wen Ning without hesitation and moving him out of the room.

“Are there other contestants still in the maze?” wonders Wei Wuxian.

“The timeout system is down, so I don’t know if they’re in good shape,” replies Jin Zixuan. They follow Lan Wangji and Nie Huaisang out into the corridor, fleeing the collapsing hall at their back. “There were some people who managed to get out in time, but then…”

“This is bad,” mutters Wei Wuxian. They find a half-covered courtyard, where the moon is still shining bright against a small pond of lotuses and floating candles. Lan Wangji sets Wen Ning down on a bench, and Nie Huaisang immediately gets back to poking around with his wristband.

“I encountered the glitch-faced figure,” says Lan Wangji, turning back to Wei Wuxian. “They said you were going to die.”

“Someone’s after you,” adds Nie Huaisang.

Wei Wuxian shakes his head. “Not really. He just wanted to pin my death on Lan Wangji.”

“He?” echoes Lan Wangji, frowning. “How can you be sure of this?”

Wei Wuxian swallows, looking over at Jin Zixuan. Would it be a mercy to tell him about the second saboteur? Or would that make things worse?
“Where’s Jiang Cheng?” he asks instead.

“He and Mianmian were still fighting the wolves, last time I saw,” says Jin Zixuan, looking pensively at his sword. “I hope they’re alright — I’m sorry, I just —” His knees buckle, causing Lan Wangji to guide him over to the bench with Nie Huaisang and Wen Ning. “I feel responsible for all of this, somehow. As if maybe if this competition hadn’t been in Lanling, none of this would’ve happened.”

“Those glitches have been following you,” Lan Wangji points out gravely.

“Yeah, but —” Jin Zixuan shakes his head. “Not like this. Not where it would affect everyone else.”

Wei Wuxian says nothing, only taking a seat at the side of the pool with his dizi and sword in his lap. He dips a couple fingers into the water, feeling the energy of the game thrumming at his fingertips. With a low whistle, he moves his fingers in a circle. The energy reacts to his fingers, letting the water spin around him in a whirlpool.

The whistle isn’t strong enough, doesn’t have the right resonance. He needs to go deeper, to access the data of the water itself. Since someone else has already breached the game, it should just be a matter of finding their entry point as well. But —

“Wei Ying.” Lan Wangji’s voice cuts through his thoughts. “What are you doing?”

Wei Wuxian retracts his fingers. “Trying to figure out how to get us out,” he says.

Lan Wangji looks as if he’d like to ask more, but suddenly there’s a crash. Nie Huaisang shrieks, as Jiang Cheng is thrown into the courtyard by the golden Guanyin statue. He immediately clambers back to his feet, lashing out with a flash of purple lightning.

“What the fuck are the rest of you guys doing!” he screams, looking around at them. “Help me defeat this ugly bitch!”

“She’s just going to glitch out of whatever you throw at her,” says Jin Zixuan, flinging a talisman at her just to make a point. They flicker and vanish just centimetres from her. “She learns quickly, too.”

“You call yourself a cultivator?” snaps Jiang Cheng. “She’s just a bunch of code and spiritual energy! You can take her down simply because you exist and she doesn’t!”

“Her code’s been corrupted by the saboteurs!” hisses Jin Zixuan. “The entire game’s been compromised — we need to get out of here —”

“A-Cheng’s right,” says Wei Wuxian suddenly, picking up his dizi and clambering back to his feet. “She’s just a bunch of code and spiritual energy.”

His first couple songs are faltering, wavery. The melodies fizzle out, ineffective. The statue lunges for him, and he rolls away barely in time.

“Wei Ying!” An alarmed guqin chord echoes through the courtyard. Wei Wuxian suddenly has an idea.

The song comes to him as easily as breathing, its tendrils having haunted his memory for the past several years of his life. As he plays, Wei Wuxian can sense the reverberations of the song’s spiritual energy against the data of the game.

Then he hits the refrain, and tears past the game’s defenses and weakened firewall. The world flares
into bright red all around them, the alarms he’d heard in the room beyond the bronze mirror now ringing here in the game itself: WARNING. UNAUTHORISED ACCESS DETECTED.

Wei Wuxian summons the thousands of little statues from the other courtyard. Summons fierce corpses and spirits. Summons all of the monsters that had been designed for this game, and turns them all against the Guanyin statue. They descend upon her, tearing her into pieces. She tries to flicker out of their reach, but the system is clearly becoming more and more overloaded.

With one final screech of golden metal, the statue tries to lunge past the monsters holding her down, clawing at Wei Wuxian. But before she can get any closer, Jiang Cheng lashes Zidian out at her, striking her with deadly purple lightning.

Like a fuse blowing out, the game immediately goes dark.

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patpatpat @dappachicode
does anyone know what the FUCK is going on because i sure don’t #52wnc #compcult

yeetchen @mimi_compcult
@dappachicode I DON’T KNOW ALL I KNOW IS WANGXIAN CONFESSIONED? #compcult #52wnc

patpatpat @dappachicode
@mimi_compcult WANGXIAN DID WHAT #compcult #52wnc

---

Capie @CapieChat
@mimi_compcult WAIT THAT WAS REAL? #compcult #52wnc

---

yeetchen @mimi_compcult
!!! @dappachicode @ CapieChat HERE YOU GO HAVE SOME #WANGXIAN FOOD #compcult #52wnc #wangxiankiss
[PHOTO: Screenshots of Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji kissing]

gem @swanlings
etire compcult fandom @ #wangxiankiss: #52wnc #compcult
EWE@HOLY SHIT THEY KISSED @eweiwuxian
@mimi_compcult AM I EXPERIENCING A FEVERED DREAM #compcult #52wnc

nan zeuwu-jun @wheywuxians
huh, i didn’t know lwj could handle spicy food #compcult #52wnc #wangxiankiss
[PHOTO: Screenshots of Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji kissing]

Kurolover @blazing_lycoris
i’m not a cultivator but i’m p sure that’s what ascension feels like,,, #52wnc #compcult #wangxiankiss
[PHOTO: Screenshots of Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji kissing]

plumblossoms_

@inu_official Please respond as to the continued evidence of sabotage and game manipulation of the game at #52wnc# #compcult#

wangxian_fans

We’re as excited about #WangXian# confessing this game as anyone else, but we are more concerned at present about making sure they get out of the game safely! @inu_official please make sure they are okay!

lulu_compcult

@lanxichenofficial why did you delete this?

[PHOTO: Screenshot of @lanxichenofficial’s now-deleted post saying ‘When you thought you
knew someone, but it turns out they were capable of more than you ever knew.’]  

阿瑶

Talk to me

A-Yao, what were you thinking?

I can help you

Please, I meant that! I don’t want to judge you! This is just me approaching as a friend and not a colleague.

Please talk to me, A-Yao!

i’m sorry.

i did not mean to drag you down, too.

A-Yao I just want to understand

The message was successfully sent but rejected by the receiver.

With a clap of his hands, Wei Wuxian draws up a fire talisman. It lights up the space around them, but reveals nothing more than pitch black darkness.

The statue is gone now, as are the other monsters, as well as the temple itself. As his eyes adjust, Wei Wuxian can see faint, pulsing red grid lines spanning all around them, marking out the coordinates of the game.

They nearly stumble over the unconscious form of a competitor as they walk through the space. Lan Wangji, who had been carrying Wen Ning on his back, moves to try and scoop up this person as well, but Jiang Cheng beats him to the punch. It’s Mianmian; claw marks at her abdomen suggest that she’d been injured by the wolves from earlier.

Jiang Cheng’s expression is unreadable as he scoops her into his arms. Wei Wuxian raises an eyebrow, and he responds by flipping him the bird.

Finally, in the distance, a larger red sign appears, glowing right above the closed exit door. The group picks up their pace, rushing across the final hall amid the blaring alarms and flashing red light. When they reach the door, however, they realise that it’s still locked.

“Let us out!” hisses Nie Huaisang, kicking at the door. All that does is cause him to hurt his toe, and curse in a way that makes Wei Wuxian suspect his brother might flay him alive if they ever get out of this.

He moves towards the door, but before he can touch it, a figure in Lanling gold comes barrelling out of nowhere and tackles him to the floor. The flames in Wei Wuxian’s hands promptly go out.

“You!” Jin Zixun roars. Wei Wuxian struggles to get out of his grip, but considering how much he already aches from the rest of the game, fighting him feels more and more like an uphill battle.

“Manipulating the game! I saw you this time; don’t deny it!”

“You!” shrieks Jin Zixuan. “He had no choice!”
“How could you stick up for such a cheater?” Jin Zixun hisses. His hands claw at Wei Wuxian’s face, but Wei Wuxian manages to pry him off with a burst of spiritual energy. “And he had the nerve to do it in Lanling, too, making this competition a complete disaster — as if our family has not dealt with enough shame and scandal—”

His hands close around Wei Wuxian’s throat. Wei Wuxian spits into his face, bringing his knees up to jab into his crotch. Jin Zixun grunts, but only freezes at the sound of metal moving from its sheath.

In the light of another fire talisman, Jin Zixuan’s face is a mask of rage. “Get off him, cousin,” he growls. “There are injured competitors here and you’re more worried about our pride?”

“But he —”

“The saboteur wanted to kill him,” hisses Jin Zixuan, as a sulky and shaky Jin Zixun slowly clambers to his feet with his palms up in the air. “Don’t misplace your anger, cousin, it leads to rash decisions.”

Wei Wuxian feels the weight of the truth against his tongue as he rubs gingerly at his throat, but before he can say anything else, Jiang Cheng suddenly shouts and lashes Zidian out at a figure trying to slip out of the game. The whip catches them around the leg, pulling them back. It’s Su She, the glitches finally removed from his face and clothes.

“Oh!” he screeches, as Jiang Cheng keeps Zidian bound tight around his ankles. He turns, glaring at all of them. “What the hell is this?”

“Could ask the same for you,” rasps Wei Wuxian, slowly clambering back to his feet. He looks over at Jin Zixuan and his cousin, before taking a deep breath. “Why did you agree to work with Jin Guangyao to sabotage these games?”

Su She pales visibly at that, especially as Nie Huaisang raises his phone towards him. “Who — who said anything about sabotaging?”

“Jin Guangyao confirmed it to me, remember?” snaps Wei Wuxian. “Guess you might have gotten away with it, too, if the Guanyin statue had killed me. Too bad I didn’t die.”


“He’s been deflating your scores ever since he became Head,” says Wei Wuxian. “He glitched the Zhuque. He’s behind the glitches in this game, too.”

“It’s just your word against his,” sneers Su She. “I won’t say a thing. You’re the one who was caught manipulating the game. You’ll be disqualified for sure.”

Wei Wuxian scoffs. “They can ban me from competing ever again, if they’d like,” he says, as his gaze flits back to where Lan Wangji is standing, tall and resolute. “I don’t care about that. I care about other people getting hurt in future games if this is allowed to continue.”

“I care about making sure Lan Zhan isn’t hurt in future games because of your own petty vendetta.”

“That’s adorable.” Su She glares at him. “You have no proof of me or Head Gamemaster Jin sabotaging anything. As far as anyone can tell, you’re the only one who’s been openly manipulating the game. What’s keeping anyone from saying it’s just been you all along?”

“The game itself,” cuts in a new voice. Qin Su steps into the light of the fire talisman, the grid lines shimmering across her face. “Dao Enterprises sponsored my entry into this year’s competition so I could help them investigate breaches in the game’s firewall.”
“You knew about this?” Jiang Cheng asks Nie Huaisang, who gasps and shakes his head.

“Nope,” he says, though his tone is unconvincing. “Da-ge never tells me anything!”

There’s a sudden explosion, as the door is blown open by a bolt of spiritual energy. Illuminated in the light from the corridor is Nie Mingjue, his scowl thunderous as he steps over the threshold. He’s followed by Lan Xichen, whose expression still lies at the tail end of shock.

“Wangji!” Lan Xichen gasps, relief clearly flooding his features at the sight of Lan Wangji standing there, Wen Ning still hefted on his back. “Thank heavens you’re all right!”

“Brother, there are others who require medical assistance,” says Lan Wangji, before Lan Xichen can move in to check him over. Lan Xichen nods, stepping away from the door as a team of medics come rushing through with stretchers, followed by Dr Wen, whose expression pales at the sight of her little brother unconscious against Lan Wangji’s back.

“Give him to me,” she pleads. Lan Wangji complies, lowering Wen Ning onto a stretcher. Dr Wen waves him off, just as more stretchers begin heading into the arena to collect the other injured competitors.

Wei Wuxian looks over at Lan Xichen, who has descended upon his little brother with fretting and concerned noises. He looks at Jiang Cheng, who has relinquished Mianmian as well as Su She, Zidian crackling like a warning as the other competitor slinks away. He looks at Jin Zixun, who’s limping out after some other stretchers, and Nie Huaisang, who is tapping away at his phone. Then he sees Jin Zixuan standing off to the side, and heads over to him.

“I’m sorry I didn’t tell you earlier,” he says. Jin Zixuan nods at him. “It’s why I wanted to get you out.”

“You were in danger,” insists Jin Zixuan stiffly. “I would have refused even if I knew.”

Wei Wuxian considers it. “You’re taking this rather well,” he remarks. “Especially considering the lack of proof I have, personally.”

Jin Zixuan shakes his head, nodding towards Qin Su, who is passing a scroll into Nie Mingjue’s hands. “I think a part of me has always suspected,” he admits. “I hate to say this, but I’m glad I’m not the only one affected this year. It’s just proof I haven’t been going crazy for these past few years.”

Wei Wuxian swallows. “What are you going to do, then?” he asks.

Jin Zixuan shakes his head, clearly unsure. The stretchers file past them, and for each unconscious (or worse, but Wei Wuxian doesn’t want to think about that) competitor being carried out, Jin Zixuan’s shoulders slump harder and harder with guilt.

“Wei Ying.” Wei Wuxian is jolted out of his thoughts by Lan Wangji, who has managed to free himself from his brother to come join him. “You are hurt.”

Wei Wuxian realises then that he really is quite sore, as the adrenaline flees his body. With a groan, he sways against Lan Wangji, letting the other man catch him and hold him closer.

“I’ll live,” he manages, leaning against his shoulder with a sigh. “Let’s get out of here.”

“Mm,” agrees Lan Wangji, as he takes him over the threshold and out of the game at last.
Chapter title taken from "Because of Love" by William Wei.

The message was successfully sent but rejected by the receiver. -- actually what wechat sends you if someone blocks you on it RIP wechat is so dramatic lol

Thank you to everyone on Twitter who answered my very scientific question about how they'd react if Wangxian kissed on camera lol

If you're interested in getting the next chapter (and some Rivals bonuses) early, please check my Twitter for how to access!
Natira Tucker (andorablereature) wrote in nighthunt_fc:

**52WNC Results Are In!**

(Spoilers: They’re not pretty. Honestly, I’m surprised they’re even issuing these results given that the game got so compromised.)

So as everyone knows 52WNC was a mess. Some of the monsters kept glitching and the official streams got taken offline. From what Nie Huaisang’s stream told us, though:

1. Wei Wuxian did, to some extent, manipulate the game outside the command centre.
2. Su Minshan is allegedly behind some of the sabotage of the other competitors.
3. and Jin Guangyao is allegedly behind the glitches both in this game and at 51WNC.

In light of #1, the INU has disqualified Wei Wuxian’s scores for this competition. So he’s completely out of the running.

The winner of the 52 WNC should be Jin Zixuan, but because he just found out about #3, and how Jin Guangyao’s alleged glitches have hurt the other players, he is refusing the medal.

So Jiang Wanyin is the winner of 52WNC.

And Wen Qionglin and Lan Wangji are in 2nd and 3rd place.

IMHO they should just redo this game, it was a big mess and honestly I’d like to see a version where things don’t go horribly wrong. The setup had looked so promising, too…

Thoughts?

tagged with: 52wnc, competitive cultivation, compcult, wei wuxian, jin zixuan, jiang wanyin, su minshan, jin guangyao, wen qionglin, lan wangji, tldr, scores, results

_______________________

5628 comments

**aeryi**
I’m not the only one who saw WWX doing that coming from like a mile off right

**kissmekate**
Yeah he does always kinda have the ‘rules are for other people’ kinda attitude. I wouldn’t be surprised if they don’t let him compete anymore. Game manipulation doesn’t lead to an equal playing field after all.

**coronaborialis**
Imao you’re really out here thinking the playing field was ever level

**lightbrigademail**
YNF at least stands behind WWX’s manipulation as an attempt to end the game so everyone can get out safely. Fuck INU for trying to punish a good deed.

**starry_night**
I admit this is not exactly how I imagined Jiang Wanyin or Jin Zixuan winning gold. Disappointing.

**regentertiary**
I bet they’re a lot more disappointed than you

“I’m fine,” insists Wei Wuxian for what feels like the umpteenth time as a nurse tries to check on him. “Dr Wen gave me the all-clear an hour ago.”

“Dr Wen is a little preoccupied,” says the nurse, nodding down the hospital corridor at the other competitors waiting to be attended to. “Let me check for a concussion at least.”

“I don’t have one,” says Wei Wuxian. The nurse frowns in a way so reminiscent of Lan Wangji, though, that he groans and lets her check anyway.

“Just wanted to be safe,” she says, nodding and stepping back. “The timeout system usually means we can treat people as soon as they come in, so without it we’ve been a bit swamped.”

Wei Wuxian winces. “I can imagine,” he mutters, gingerly rubbing at his wrists. Miraculously, there hasn’t been much chafing.

The nurse hums. “Well, I’ll leave you to it,” she says, before moving down the line to where Nie Huaisang is sitting. Wei Wuxian sighs, leaning his head back against the ugly hospital walls, and thinks about the results again.

*Disqualification.*

He’d known this was coming. He’d expected this reaction. It still doesn’t make the reality any less upsetting. And while this disqualification doesn’t mean he’s completely banned from the sport, it’s as good as a ban.

After all, no one wants to play against someone who can manipulate the game.

*Well, Madam Yu would be satisfied with that.* The thought is bitter, petty even. All those years learning alongside Jiang Cheng despite her protests — all those arguments about whether or not he himself is qualified to compete — all thrown away, because of an event partially out of his control.

Wei Wuxian swallows down the lump in his throat. The worst thing is, if he had to do this again, he would still choose to do the same. Manipulate a broken game to save lives, even if it meant he could never compete again in the future.

There must be a life outside of compcult, he knows. It wouldn’t have nutritionists trying to convince his shijie to stop feeding him his favourite foods. He wouldn’t be training at unreasonable times in the morning. And there would be no more travelling to competitions, no more playing the dizi at banquets, no more —

No more regular excuses to see Lan Wangji in person, unless they do something about that too. About the ashes of the rivalry set at their feet, or the fragile new *something* quickly blossoming between them.

*(Has been blossoming* for some time, while Wei Wuxian wasn’t watching, but nonetheless still new
Wei Wuxian looks down the hall again. Lan Wangji is nowhere to be seen, but Jiang Cheng is just a couple chairs away, moodily running his fingers through the ribbon on his medal.

“A-Cheng,” he calls. Jiang Cheng looks up at him, before jerking his head at the empty seat next to him. Wei Wuxian looks around, ascertaining that the nurses and doctors are occupied, before moving over to sit next to his shidi.


“Recovering,” he says.


Jiang Cheng subsides, returning his attention to his medal. Wei Wuxian sighs and pats his shoulder.


“I didn’t earn this,” he mutters. “I only got it because Zixuan feels guilty, and because the entire glitch thing has hurt other people. I don’t understand why they can’t just try to run the game again.”

“The gamemasters have to get their own shit together first,” Wei Wuxian points out. “You know, all that stuff with Jin Guangyao and his score deflation…”

“That’s the thing I don’t get,” says Jiang Cheng, staring down at the medal still. “Zixuan got deflated, but he regularly took third and fourth. He even got fourth at the Olympics, where he didn’t get deflated. How does any of that match up? Would he have won any earlier competitions if Jin Guangyao hadn’t been pulling the strings?”


“I hate to say this, but Su She’s right. It’s just your word against his,” he says. “There’s actual proof of you manipulating the game, and none of him or Jin Guangyao doing the same.”

“There’s the information scroll Qin Su gave to Dao Enterprises,” says Wei Wuxian.

“I doubt that’s going to be made public knowledge,” scoffs Jiang Cheng. “It’s not looking good for you, even though Yunmeng supports you. You might not be able to compete again.”


“That’s what they’re hoping, yes,” Jiang Cheng remarks drily.

“I can’t,” says Wei Wuxian automatically. “Other people might get hurt.”


Wei Wuxian shrugs. “It doesn’t matter if I swallow my pride and recant my accusation,” he points out. “Now that people know I’ve manipulated the game, no one will ever trust any wins I get after this. You know how people are when they’re determined to hate you.”

“So you’re going to lie down and give up?” wonders Jiang Cheng. “Seems uncharacteristic of you.”
Wei Wuxian laughs: short, harsh, teeth bared. “You think I’m going to give up?”

Jiang Cheng’s eyes narrow as he looks him up and down. “Well, then, what do you plan to do?”

“Competitor Wei, we heard you had something to say?” asks one of the reporters amidst the flurry of flashing cameras in one of the too-many parlours of Koi Towers. Wei Wuxian nods, looking over at where Lan Xichen and the heads of the INU are waiting. Lan Xichen nods at him, though his expression is bittersweet.

“I’d like to make a brief statement,” Wei Wuxian says. “First off, a clarification. Regarding my manipulation of the game in the arena this year — that was indeed something I did, but I believed at the time that I had no choice, and I stand by that decision.”

The INU heads’ expressions darken. Wei Wuxian continues to smile at the cameras as he continues.

“I also know the allegations I made against Head Gamemaster Jin are very serious. I can assure you, though, that they are not unsubstantiated. There is proof that Jin Guangyao and Su Minshan are guilty of what I’ve accused them of. I’d like to ask the Board of Directors of Dao Enterprises, who ordered an investigation into the security of this last game, to release the game logs of both the 51st and 52nd World Nightunting Championships.”

His smile broadens further, as he sees a flash of white at the entrance to the room, sees Lan Wangji’s tall figure quietly slipping through the crowd.

“In light of my first statement, of course, I understand the concerns from the INU regarding whether or not my ability to compete has been compromised. In deference towards the situation, and in the interest of focusing on my studies, I’d like to announce that I will be taking a break from competitive cultivation.”

Lan Wangji freezes mid-stride. Wei Wuxian’s heart leaps into his throat.

“How long do you anticipate this break being?” wonders the reporter next to him.

Wei Wuxian shrugs. “For as long as it takes for the game to develop stronger safeguards against internal and external sabotage, as well as additional safety measures for the competitors,” he says.

“Any other questions?”

“Besides studying, what do you plan to do during your time off?” asks another reporter.

Wei Wuxian looks at Lan Wangji, whose eyes are wide. He takes a deep breath, as his heart pounds madly with the anticipation of something he knows he has to say.

“I… I realised there were things in life I was taking for granted,” he says, “and I want to spend more time pursuing them. To devote every day of this break to appreciating the ones I love.”

A stunned hush falls through the room. Lan Wangji reaches for a reporter’s microphone, clears his throat.

“Wei Ying, I have a question.”

“Yeah?” Wei Wuxian tilts his head, slightly confused. “What’s your news?”

“What would you do… if the third place competitor relinquished their medal, too?”

Wei Wuxian blinks, as the reporters begin to murmur amongst themselves. Lan Wangji holds the
microphone just so that only the faintest hints of a smile can be seen.

“Why — why would the third place competitor do such a thing?” Wei Wuxian wonders, his voice slightly hoarse.

Lan Wangji nods. “Because there is no victory for me without you,” he replies.

In the ensuing uproar and the flash of the cameras, Wei Wuxian distinctly sees Lan Wangji’s mouth move to form three words. He returns them, heart swelling in equal measure.

I love you.

After the pandemonium is contained and the press conference concluded, Lan Wangji catches up to Wei Wuxian in the hallway outside the parlour. “Wei Ying,” he says, taking Wei Wuxian’s wrist and pulling him closer. Wei Wuxian leans in readily, pressing a kiss into his shoulder.

“Are you… okay?” he asks, looking back up at Lan Wangji’s handsome face. His words echo still in Wei Wuxian’s ears. Victory, victory. In the end, it just narrows down to the two of them standing in front of one another in a hallway, doesn’t it?

“Your announcement,” he says after a moment. “You didn’t need to.”

Lan Wangji holds him tighter, his sandalwood aftershave flooding Wei Wuxian’s senses. “I mean what I said. I informed the INU of my decision prior to joining you.”

“You didn’t have to,” mutters Wei Wuxian.

“I am responsible for the song that enabled you to manipulate the game,” replies Lan Wangji. “I should face the consequences with you.”

Wei Wuxian sighs. “You couldn’t have known,” he points out.

“It resonated with you and amplified your spiritual energy,” replies Lan Wangji. “That, for me, is proof enough.”

Wei Wuxian’s shoulders slump as he tucks himself in, closing his eyes. He can feel Lan Wangji’s hands against the small of his back, soft, hesitant.

After a moment, Lan Wangji mumbles, “Your announcement.”

“Yeah?” wonders Wei Wuxian.

“Are you sure?”

“About what?” Lan Wangji raises an unamused eyebrow, so Wei Wuxian laughs, reaching up to cup his face. “About what I said? Yeah, I meant that. I was actually thinking of transferring to the University of Caiyi to bother you for real.”

“But… taking a break.” Lan Wangji falters, fumbles for the words. “Are you sure about that?”

“Lan Zhan,” murmurs Wei Wuxian, pressing their foreheads together. “If there’s one thing I’ve learnt from us, it’s that it’s okay to be unsure. And I’m not sure about this at all.”

His fingers tangle in Lan Wangji’s hair. He can feel Lan Wangji’s breath against his skin.
“I might go stir-crazy next week and return to the game. I might get into an accident with my sword and never nighthunt again. I might even actually end up top of the class at the University of Caiyi, if you’re not careful.” He winks at that, and Lan Wangji shakes his head. “And I’m absolutely, absolutely not sure what will happen if we end up dating for real, and you know how much that scares me — but I’m sure of one thing, at least. I’m sure that I love you.” He pauses. “And I can only hope that being sure of that means everything will be okay.”

Lan Wangji exhales softly at that, his shoulders sinking slightly in the closest approximation he dares to slumping in relief. “Wei Ying,” he manages, kissing Wei Wuxian’s forehead, his eyelids, his cheeks. “I am sure I love you, too.”

“Then you’re — you’re trusting my decision, right?”

Lan Wangji nods, entwining their fingers. “I trust Wei Ying,” he agrees, before burying his face against the crook of Wei Wuxian’s shoulder. It’s at this moment that Wei Wuxian realises that this might be the longest that Lan Wangji has ever held anyone close, much less him, and his heart skips a beat.

The world around them is changing. The game they’re playing is changing, too. Even they will change, as they continue to grow as athletes and people. But in spite of all of that, of all the upheavals, Wei Wuxian knows he can count on Lan Wangji to be there for him.

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**The Lanling City Times | NEWS**

**Jin Guangyao Steps Down as Head Gamemaster of INU Amid Flurry of Criticism, Lawsuits**

Jin Guangyao announced his retirement from the INU as Head Gamemaster shortly after the conclusion of the 52nd World Nighthunting Championships. This announcement comes on the heels of several lawsuits from the families of competitors injured during the competition as well as from Dao Enterprises, the company responsible for developing the technology used in the games.

Mr Jin is allegedly responsible for deliberate tampering with the integrity of the obstacles and safety features of the game deployed for the 52WNC. Amid tremendous pressure from the families affected, as well as from the general populace and social media, the Lanling City Police Department is opening a criminal negligence investigation into Mr Jin’s actions during the 52WNC.

“We have reason to believe there may be evidence of negligence on the part of Mr Jin regarding the events of 52WNC,” said the Lanling City Police in its press briefing. “We are doing what we can to ensure a fair and truthful investigation.”

In the meantime, the International Nighthunting Union has selected Lan Xichen to succeed him as interim Head Gamemaster, until the spot can be properly appointed at the start of the next CompCult season… [MORE]

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As Koi Towers hurriedly prepares for the banquet all around them, Wei Wuxian finds Jin Zixuan watching the pandemonium from the upstairs landing, his face pensive.


“She mentioned something about the kitchens a couple hours ago,” he says. “Probably putting the fear of god into the caterers.”
“Ah.” Wei Wuxian chuckles. “Classic Yanli.” He leans on the mahogany banister, watching the people below hurry to and fro with flowers and draperies. “Your father’s really insisting on having a banquet even after all this mess?” *Even after you denied your gold medal?*

“Appearances,” scoffs Jin Zixuan. “Competitions end with banquets. We already paid for everything anyway.”

“And your half-brother?” Wei Wuxian scrolls through his Weibo feed, pulling up the news article. “It says he stepped down.”

“His work is done,” says Jin Zixuan, his voice bitter. “People keep talking about this as if the games will continue, as if there will be another season… but somehow I doubt it. Some sponsors are threatening to pull out; it’ll be harder to find others, and… well. If Father keeps trying to foot the bill, his chances of winning the election will plummet.”

Wei Wuxian feels guilt curl in his stomach. “I did this, didn’t I,” he mutters.

“You know, I wish I could say you did,” replies Jin Zixuan, “but it was me. Your manipulation was the most visible part of it, of course, but… Qin Su showed me the logs. There were recordings. They’re… damning.”

“How was it you? You didn’t do anything,” Wei Wuxian points out.

Jin Zixuan laughs harshly. “I was born, wasn’t I?” he wonders, before turning to walk down the stairs. Wei Wuxian jogs to catch up with him, confused.

“So what if you were born?” he demands. “If you heard the recordings — he compared himself to me —”

“That’s exactly it!” Jin Zixuan bellows, whirling around halfway down the stairs. His entire face is red with the exertion of wanting to say what’s on his mind, but then he looks out at the room and thinks better of it. Taking a deep breath, he shakes his head and rushes for a side door, out to the gardens.

Wei Wuxian follows. Only once they’re out amid the bonsais does Jin Zixuan take a deep breath and continue.

“My half-brother’s mother — you’ve heard, right? The ex-porn star? She was found dead in a hotel just days before all of this happened. I can understand grief, I can understand rage — but murder? What possessed him to hate me so much — to hate the rest of this world so much that he would attempt to use a game to kill us off?”

Wei Wuxian doesn’t know what to say. Jin Zixuan’s fists crackle with spiritual energy, in a way reminiscent of Jiang Cheng’s when he’s on the verge of losing control. It would be easier, wouldn’t it, if he himself was the only one taking the blame. If his manipulation had been just that, and not out of an attempt to save the lives of others stuck in the game.

“That’s what I don’t understand,” says Jin Zixuan, his chest heaving with tears he’s trying valiantly — desperately — to hold back. “When did he cross the line? He was still family, even if he hardly ever acknowledged that in private. I would’ve tried to help him.”

Wei Wuxian thinks to the gold medal clutched tight and bitter in Jiang Cheng’s fist, and doesn’t know what else to say.
left my heart in caiyi (jinzhu_yinzhu) wrote in ohnotheydidnt:

Meng Shi’s Death Officially Ruled as Suicide

News comes on the heels of her son Jin Guangyao’s resignation amid the flurry of controversy surrounding the 52nd World Nighthunting Championships.

Meng Shi, former Playboy bunny and adult film actress, was a champion for the rights of adult entertainment actors like herself. However her last brush with media notoriety came at the cost of her life, as she was preparing to sue real estate developer and Presidential candidate Jin Guangshan for attempting to blackmail her into signing an NDA about their past affair.

Prior to her death, Ms Meng had been facing intense media scrutiny as well as online harassment. Her attempt to open up about her experience only resulted in an escalation. Police believe the harassment and threats led directly to her taking her own life.

Jin Guangyao could not be reached for comment regarding the matter.

(Source)

tagged with: asian celebrities

2849 comments

cutelittlegreenraccoon
Lil Apple Daily is a trash paper but for once I think they might be onto something. """"Suicide"""" my ass there’s no way the officials handling this case didn’t get paid off

jiang.wayne
Well none of the Official Sources are gonna talk about it because censorship and just trying to get the entire thing swept under the rug quickly so ¯\_(ツ)_/¯

stuchai
Something about the fact that JGS is a Prez candidate makes me side-eye whether or not the suicide ruling is legit.

bvtlles
i know right? something seems fucky here it’s just too convenient for him for her to commit suicide at this stage…

jiggypuff
You know, taking this news into account I’m honestly no longer surprised her son did what he did at 52WNC. Was it still shitty? Yeah. But dude should’ve gotten mental health counselling instead of trying to kill a bunch of kids.

kickjgy
Hope he gets locked up though. He’s traumatised an entire generation of young athletes with that shithshow of a game.

lora-willow
This continues to be an utter mess. We really should have more discussions about online harassment
and holding people accountable for the shit they send when they’re on anon.

**bro420**
a lot of people harassed her off anon, chief, she was an acceptable target bc she did porn

**lora-willow**
Yeah, the slut shaming thing was. Ugh.

**pureofheart**
I hope those monsters who sent her hate are forced to live the rest of their lives knowing they caused her death. They killed her with their words.

**popsicletwink**
What if it turns out it was actually foul play?

**pureofheart**
The Internet killed her long before JGS’s goons did.

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After Jin Zixuan leaves the gardens, saying something about finding Jiang Yanli, Wei Wuxian checks his phone to see that Wen Ning had returned to Koi Towers.

Wen Ning is all smiles when Wei Wuxian goes to visit him. There’s still a couple bandages around his head, but he looks none the worse for wear. “I was told I was out for quite some time,” he says, looking up from the phone he’d been browsing through in bed.

Wei Wuxian snorts. “Do you always Hulk out when you consume caffeine?” he wonders.

Wen Ning’s cheeks flush bright red at that. “Um… it does sometimes happen,” he hedges, suddenly very interested in his phone again. “I’m sorry, it won’t happen again.”

“No! I don’t think you hurt anyone. And you got second place out of it, so that’s good.”

“Oh.” Wen Ning swallows. “I did hear… I did hear you got disqualified. Because you manipulated the game.”

Wei Wuxian sighs, nods. “The statue was glitching; we had to end it for her somehow.”

Wen Ning nods as well. “I see,” he says, worrying his fingers into the comforter. “And you also said you were taking a break, too. So you won’t be coming back next year?”

“I wonder if there’ll even be a World Championship next year,” wonders Wei Wuxian. “Unless Lan Xichen can make some changes as interim Head — but I don’t know, Jin Zixuan seemed very gloomy about the entire thing when I asked him about it.”

“Of course he would be,” says Wen Ning. “His half-brother was responsible for everything.”

Wei Wuxian nods. “I suppose.”

Leaning back against the pillow, Wen Ning folds his arms across his chest and raises an eyebrow at him. “And… did you finally get to talk with Lan Wangji?”

Wei Wuxian looks down at his hands, feeling his cheeks heat just at the sound of Lan Wangji’s name. “Yeah,” he says. “He’s… fine with my decision to take a break.”
“And what about the two of you?” asks Wen Ning, tilting his head to the side. “Like, have you two finally figured it out with one another?”

“I think so?” Even just saying that makes him feel lighter, like he’s suspended on a golden string heading for the moon. Wei Wuxian’s heart has not been this warm in ages. “I think maybe — maybe we’re going to be fine. We’re going to work things out.”

“I’m glad to hear that.” Wen Ning’s own smile is wistful as he reaches out to pat Wei Wuxian’s hand. “It’ll be strange not competing with you. I don’t think I’d even be here without you.”

“Well, you wouldn’t have been hurt if I hadn’t been there,” mutters Wei Wuxian, but Wen Ning shakes his head at that.

“You don’t know that,” he rebukes. “What’s done is done. I’m glad I was able to help save you.”

And before Wei Wuxian can properly grasp what’s going on, Wen Ning folds him into a hug, tucking his face against Wei Wuxian’s shoulder. If he mouths anything into Wei Wuxian’s jacket, neither of them acknowledge it as they pull away.

“I might be going to Yunn meng after all,” Wen Ning adds, as Wei Wuxian checks his phone in time to see that the banquet is starting to get underway. “My sister’s seeking asylum there because of the work she did with the Song Investigation.”

Wei Wuxian blinks. “She was the one…?”

“I can’t confirm or deny anything,” says Wen Ning immediately. “If I told you, then I’d have to kill you.”

Wei Wuxian laughs. “That sounds like a yes,” he says. Wen Ning’s cheeks flush at that. “I wish you two all the best with that. I myself might be moving soon, too.”

“Oh?” wonders Wen Ning. “Where to?”

Since he was disqualified, Wei Wuxian technically doesn’t need to show up at the banquet. But when he gets a WeChat message saying nothing but ❤️, he immediately jumps at the opportunity.

“Are you ready?” asks Lan Wangji.

Wei Wuxian nods, his hands lightly clutching his dizi. “Are you sure?” he asks. “I’m technically supposed to be a disgraced cheater, you know.”

Lan Wangji’s eyes twinkle. I want you by my side, he seems to say, as he takes Wei Wuxian’s hand. To me, you are victorious.

Wei Wuxian wishes he could never let go.

They step down the staircase in front of the assembled crowd, heading for the small dais where Lan Wangji’s guqin lies waiting for them. He takes a seat at it, looking up at Wei Wuxian as he does.

Wei Wuxian nods, and Lan Wangji begins to play. That familiar song fills the room, ensnaring the will, bewitching the senses. It’s a song of joy and sorrow, a song of longing and love. Lan Wangji’s gaze never leaves his as he hits the first refrain, and Wei Wuxian joins in on his dizi, his fingers dancing across the stops as if he’d been born to play this piece.
Out of the corner of his eye, Wei Wuxian sees Nie Huaisang filming them for his online fans. He smiles a little brighter when the phone is pointed towards him, but other than that, his gaze never leaves Lan Wangji’s. With every note of their song, Wei Wuxian’s heart soars a little higher.

It’s over all too soon — they bow for the cheering crowd, Lan Wangji extends a hand, Wei Wuxian takes it. Together they head out of the banquet, towards a set of back stairs leading upwards.

Upwards, where their rooms are.

“Everyone who saw us go was expecting this,” Wei Wuxian remarks as he unlocks his door. Lan Wangji follows him in unceremoniously, closing the door behind them with a soft click. “We probably could’ve been a lot less obvious.”

Lan Wangji snorts. “You would not have understood otherwise,” he remarks. Wei Wuxian gasps in mock-offense.

“Give a man some warning before you drag him so mercilessly!” he exclaims, but strides closer nonetheless, wrapping his arms around Lan Wangji’s neck. “I have a request, Lan er-gege.”

Lan Wangji raises an eyebrow. Wei Wuxian grins.

“Could you kiss me?” he asks.

Lan Wangji’s lips twitch a little, but he acquiesces nonetheless, pressing his lips gently against Wei Wuxian’s. Wei Wuxian deepens the kiss, his hands now moving to cup the sides of Lan Wangji’s head.

He’s lost track of how many times he’s kissed Lan Wangji by now, but each one feels like he’s kissing him again for the first time, doing and redoing things over and over again until they find the exact, perfect first kiss. This one, he realises as they pull apart and he notices the note of breathlessness in his own lungs and the flush lingering in Lan Wangji’s ears, could be it.

Lan Wangji impatiently walks him back to the bed. “Would you…” he begins, but then trails off with his cheeks flushed and expression uncertain. Wei Wuixan laughs, leaning in to kiss him again.

“What would you want, Lan er-gege?” he wonders gently. “There’s very precious little I wouldn’t do for you.”

“You… in me,” murmurs Lan Wangji, the words slowly pulled out of him as if he’s not quite sure how to phrase this brave new something that he’s asking for. “Love me.”

Wei Wuxian’s breath hitches. “Absolutely,” he says, even as his knees crumple against the bed and he sits down heavily. “Do you have supplies?”

“Nightstand,” says Lan Wangji, and sure enough, the nightstand holds a couple condoms and lube. “I checked mine the first night.”

Wei Wuxian can’t help the laughter that wheezes out of him. Given Jin Guangshan’s reputation, the ready availability of such supplies should be cause for concern, but in this moment all he can do is cackle at just how prepared his — ex-rival? boyfriend? — Lan Zhan is.

“Why am I not surprised?” he wonders, before shuffling backwards across the comforter a little more. “Come here.”
Lan Wangji goes eagerly, chasing after him as always. His hands make short work of his suit, leaving him in nothing but a white tank top and briefs. Clambering over to straddle Wei Wuxian’s legs, Lan Wangji cups his face and captures his lips hungrily.

Wei Wuxian surrenders himself just as needily, as he leans hard into the pillows with his hands on Lan Wangji’s hips. His fingers skim along the pale skin just under the hem of his tank top before hooking into the waistband of his briefs.

Lan Wangji bucks into him, guiding Wei Wuxian’s hand to grab his ass. Wei Wuxian chuckles. “So needy,” he breathes. Lan Wangji’s’s fringe ghosts across his face as his fingers trace his jaw.

Lan Wangji raises an eyebrow, as if to tell him he’s one to talk. Wei Wuxian’s amusement only grows.

“What? Lan er-gege, there’s no need to rush. I’m not going anywhere this time, I swear.” Saying that, he flips their positions, pressing Lan Wangji down into the comforter with eager kisses. His nerves threaten to overwhelm him as he takes off his own jacket, shirt, trousers, flinging them away somewhere.

Lan Wangji’s hands have wandered to palm himself through his briefs, a visible tent forming as his hands stroke and his lashes flutter. Wei Wuxian swallows, reaching out to help, and Lan Wangji bucks into him again with eager need.

Given his inexperience in leading, all he can really do is recall what Lan Wangji did for him, and try to mimic that to the best of his ability. He takes off Lan Wangji’s tank top, kissing a sloppy but reverent trail down his body until he hits his waistband, and pauses.

“Are you sure?” he asks, half to make sure, half to reassure himself as well. Lan Wangji nods furiously, tangling his hands into Wei Wuxian’s hair. When Wei Wuxian peels back his briefs and takes him into his mouth, he’s immediately rewarded with a soft gasp.

This is the first time he’s done this knowing Lan Wangji loves him, needs him, has only ever been waiting for him. It makes the guilt of his previous assumptions pile up inside, makes him want to do this right. Do this perfectly, not only because it’s penitence for the hurt Wei Wuxian has caused, but also because it’s what he deserves. He clenches his hand as his mouth moves down Lan Wangji’s shaft, taking him in as deep as he can.

“Wei Ying,” breathes Lan Wangji, his tone soft and adoring. “You —”

Wei Wuxian starts to move along the length of his cock, one hand gripping the root as his head bobs along the shaft. Lan Wangji moans, his fingers tightening in Wei Wuxian’s hair. His breathing is already ragged, his ears flushed with sensation.

He remembers what he did the last time, and he tries to replicate that — bobbing, stroking, sucking as if to convince Lan Wangji to pick him, choose him. But he did. He picked Wei Wuxian from the very start, and it was Wei Wuxian himself who did not realise that.

So he pours his heart into this, worshipping Lan Wangji’s cock with his touches and kisses. He picks up the pace in time with Lan Wangji’s hips, pressing him down as he bobs eagerly and sloppily along his length. Lan Wangji’s fingers tug at his hair, clench in the sheets; he bites off his moans, but Wei Wuxian can tell from the erratic rise and fall of his chest how much of an effect this is having on him.

“Let go, Lan er-gege,” he breathes, pressing a kiss to Lan Wangji’s tip. When he runs his tongue
along the underside of his shaft, Lan Wangji makes a strange, choked-off noise. “Let me know how you feel.”

“Wei Ying —” groans Lan Wangji, “I’m gonna —”

The bitter tang of him suddenly coats Wei Wuxian’s lips and tongue. Wei Wuxian blinks in sudden surprise, as Lan Wangji’s body relaxes soft against the pillows.

“You don’t have to —” he begins, his cheeks flushed, but Wei Wuxian has already swallowed and licked his lips clean, shifting upwards to kiss him again. Lan Wangji’s hands dig into the waistband of his pants, pulling the thin black material down over his hips.

Wei Wuxian gasps into the kiss as Lan Wangji’s fingers close around his own cock, teasing out pre-come with slender, calloused fingers. He hardens quickly under Lan Wangji’s touch, but before it gets into more dangerous territory he swats Lan Wangji’s hands away, pressing himself between Lan Wangji’s legs.

“Spread yourself for me,” he says, and Lan Wangji obeys, his eyes visibly nervous as he bares himself to Wei Wuxian’s gaze. His hole is flushed and pink; when Wei Wuxian rubs a finger against it, it slips in easily.

“I…” mumbles Lan Wangji, biting his lip. “I prepared in the shower before the banquet.”

“Oh my heavens,” murmurs Wei Wuxian, unable to stop the mental image jolting through him at that — Lan Wangji pressed against the shower wall, legs spread, fingers moving desperately into himself. “You… you planned this, huh?”

“I had hoped,” hedges Lan Wangji, and the flush spreads from his ears to his cheeks as he looks away, clearly embarrassed at having admitted to anything.

“Well, you planned well,” says Wei Wuxian, grabbing the lube from the dresser. “I’m sorry in advance if I don’t perform to your expectations.”

“Wei Ying,” rebukes Lan Wangji. “You could never disappoint me.”

Lan Wangji is still loose from his preparations, but Wei Wuxian slicks up a finger anyway, just to make sure. The heat of him is intoxicating around his fingers; Wei Wuxian vaguely wonders how he’s going to last later, with Lan Wangji already pressing instinctively against his fingers.

“Relax a little,” he pleads, stroking at Lan Wangji’s cock again. Lan Wangji nods, his fingers clenching in the sheets nonetheless. Wei Wuxian crooks his fingers inside him, and Lan Wangji’s eyes go wide.

Slowly, Wei Wuxian slips his fingers out. He moves to roll on a condom, but Lan Wangji stills his hand. *It has only been you for me,* his eyes seem to say. *Has it only been me, for you?*

“You’re right.” Wei Wuxian leans in to kiss him again. “Are you sure, though?”

Lan Wangji nods. Wei Wuxian presses the tip of his cock against him, and continues to kiss him as he slowly enters.

It’s just as he suspected — he’s not going to last long if he doesn’t distract himself quick. Lan Wangji is so tight and hot against him, taking him in eagerly inch by inch. Wei Wuxian briefly looks down, takes in the sight of Lan Wangji spread beneath him, and has to close his eyes.
“Wei Ying?” wonders Lan Wangji, cupping his face. Wei Wuxian cracks one eye open and chuckles.

“You look so good,” he confesses, “so beautiful. I couldn’t look for long, or else I’d come immediately, and what’s the fun in that?”

Lan Wangji huffs in amusement, his lips quirking like a cat that got the cream. Wei Wuxian kisses him again — lips, neck, collar. His fingers tweak at Lan Wangji’s rosy nipples, before skimming down the planes of his abdominals to rest against his waist.

“Tell me what you want me to do, Lan Zhan,” he teases.

Lan Wangji swallows. “Please,” he mumbles. “You are already inside.”

“Yeah, but I wanna hear you say it.” Wei Wuxian grins. “Say it ~”

Lan Wangji’s cheeks flush even brighter pink. He hides his face in his hands. Wei Wuxian laughs, his hands stilling Lan Wangji’s hips before they can buck against him.

He wants to hear it, not just because it’d be cute to hear Lan Wangji say something so dirty, but also because it would reassure him that this is what Lan Wangji wants.

And Lan Wangji seems to realise that, too, as he takes a deep breath, and pulls him in for another kiss.

“Fuck me, Wei Ying,” he murmurs, and the sound of it sends shivers down Wei Wuxian’s spine. He moves, and Lan Wangji’s moans fill his ears.

Wei Wuxian is never going to forget that, for sure. Slowly, he begins to set a rhythm, letting his instinct take over as Lan Wangji arches needily against him. “You feel so good, Lan Zhan,” he breathes, panting heavily against Lan Wangji’s shoulder. Just the press of their bodies against one another is intoxicating; Lan Wangji’s heat all around his cock is surely going to drive him insane.

How could he have been so blind, so stupid? He can’t help but think back to Baifeng, to Qishan, to Xinglu. All those cracks in Lan Wangji’s exterior, the slow melting of his icy persona in the face of Wei Wuxian’s spring — all of that had only ever been for him, and he had been too blinded by his own doubts to realise it sooner.

But it’s no use dwelling on the past. All he can do is make it up to Lan Wangji, over and over and over again. And he does that now, with each thrust deep into Lan Wangji, with each stroke of his hand against Lan Wangji’s length as he coaxes him back to hardness. Lan Wangji bites off a moan into his hand, draws Wei Wuxian in by the nape to kiss him.

“But Zhan, I’m close,” he breathes against Lan Wangji’s lips, as the edge swiftly approaches and his heartbeat grows erratic, wild. His hands and hips pick up their pace, desperate to bring Lan Wangji to climax with him, too. “Come with me, Lan er-gege, I want to see your cute face again…”

“Wei Ying,” mumbles Lan Wangji, biting at his lip.

“Please,” breathes Wei Wuxian. That’s all the encouragement Lan Wangji needs to flip them back again, his fringe falling into Wei Wuxian’s face as his hips pick up against Wei Wuxian’s cock.

Wei Wuxian can’t help but laugh at it, though Lan Wangji briefly stills in confusion. “No, no!” he gasps, hands flying to guide Lan Wangji’s hips along his cock again. “I wasn’t laughing because it was — it’s not strange, it’s just — you’re so hot when you’re like this.”
Lan Wangji places a finger to his lips, shushes him. He leans in, seals it with a kiss, before returning to ride Wei Wuxian until they’re both coming. Lan Wangji spills messily across Wei Wuxian’s abdomen, but when Wei Wuxian pulls out of him, a small rivulet of white drips down along Lan Wangji’s thigh.

He can’t help but commit that to memory, as he cleans them up and clambers under the sheets, wrapping Lan Wangji close to him. Lan Wangji leans in to listen to his heartbeat, which Wei Wuxian hopes isn’t fluttering as erratically as he thinks it feels.

“Mine,” breathes Lan Wangji, and this time Wei Wuxian knows exactly what he means.

“Yours,” he agrees, pressing Lan Wangji’s fingers against his heart.

Lan Wangji snuggles into the crook of his neck, tangling their fingers together and kissing the tips. “Come home with me,” he says.

This time, Wei Wuxian agrees without hesitation.

that idiot

mianmian and i had a chat
she said it was better for us to stay as friends
i didn’t even realise we were friends to begin with?
am i just that bad at people?
maybe i’m really destined to be forever alone.
wei ying?
oh, right, you’re probably with lan wangji
i guess i’ll just watch dog videos on youku then

湛湛

Wangji, you’ve caused quite the stir with the sponsors again.
Playing that song with Wei Wuxian? Controversial choice.
But I suppose it can’t be helped, you just can’t seem to go a competition without surprising the world with him, haha!
I guess we’ll be expecting him to come home with you this time?

Is he?
I’ll leave you to it, then.

In the morning, they slip out before the rest of the competitors wake. A Jin family chauffeur drives
them to the station, and in the back of the car they keep their hands tight against one another, savouring each other’s warmth and presence.

The protestors still line the gates and streets, though in less populous flocks than before. Jin Guangyao’s resignation has sent some of them home, but the full fight has not ended yet. If Wei Wuxian’s cursory glance into the relevant tags on Weibo indicate, Lanling’s fight against electing Jin Guangshan has yet to begin.

(He can only hope Jin Guangshan won’t win, but that’s moreso because if he does, his shijie is likely to be thrust into the limelight alongside the rest of the Jin family. Or so he’d like to think.)

The next high-speed train from Lanling City to Caiyi is already starting to board by the time they arrive on the platform, wheeling their suitcases down the escalator and trying not to hit too many people with Lan Wangji’s guqin. People whisper and stare at them, but Wei Wuxian only clutches tight onto Lan Wangji’s arm as they find their seats.

“What would you like us to be, Lan Zhan?” he wonders, leaning against Lan Wangji’s shoulder as he takes out the faded white hair ribbon, running it through his fingers. “You know, from now on, now that we aren’t rivals. I know you said once you didn’t like imposing simplistic, human narratives onto content taken out of context, but…”

“Husbands,” says Lan Wangji immediately. Wei Wuxian gasps.

“That’s going a bit fast, isn’t it?” he demands, but he’s grinning nonetheless, a golden something blooming in his chest at the idea that Lan Wangji has already envisioned forever with him. Him, of all people!

“Someday,” agrees Lan Wangji, as he takes the ribbon from Wei Wuxian and ties it around his wrist like a promise. “But for now, boyfriends will suffice.”

Wei Wuxian laughs at that, as the train slowly begins to pull out of the station, heading for Caiyi and the rest of their future together.

“I like the sound of that,” he says, brushing his lips against the ribbon on his wrist before entwining their fingers. “Husbands.”

It has taken him years of running and doubt to finally stop and realise that he doesn’t need to do that anymore. It has taken him years of striving for the gold to realise that the only gold he really wants is reflected in Lan Wangji’s eyes, warm and loving.

And as Wei Wuxian leans in to kiss his boyfriend, he realises that’s the only victory worth having.

Chapter End Notes

Every day I live in your embrace,
Every night I feel your presence,
Through all the pain,
I look back
to see our brilliant love.
This time I decided to bravely face love
This time I'll accompany you to the future
So how do I live, how do I live, how do I live without you?
—"Every Day and Every Night" by F.I.R.

SMUT AHOY! If you're not here for that (feat. bottom LWJ), stop reading at "Given his inexperience in leading, all he can really do is recall what Lan Wangji did for him, and try to mimic that to the best of his ability. He takes off Lan Wangji's tank top, kissing a sloppy but reverent trail down his body until he hits his waistband, and pauses." and pick up again at "He can’t help but commit that to memory, as he cleans them up and clambers under the sheets, wrapping Lan Wangji close to him. Lan Wangji leans in to listen to his heartbeat, which Wei Wuxian hopes isn’t fluttering as erratically as he thinks it feels."

Thank you all so much for your support through this story!! I know we're peacing out of the narrative right before the dirty work of revising the game comes into play... but this had only ever been "5 competitions where WWX and LWJ were rivals, and 1 where they weren't"... so now that WWX is on hiatus who knows what hijinks he's getting into ;)

A big big big thank you to xuantime for being my wonderful editor and cheerleader on this. I couldn't have done it without you and your constant FS salting asdgasdfsdf

More thank-yous to minatu and pancakesprince for illustrating parts of the fic! If you ever feel similarly inspired, toss me a link and I'll put it into the relevant chapter.

Finally, the BIGGEST thank-you to everyone who's read, reviewed, kudosed, and screamed at me on twitter about this, especially those of you who consented to letting me stick your username into the fic. Your support means the world to me, and I know I don't respond to a lot of the comments but know that each one warms my heart and makes my day. I can't wait to embark on another fic adventure with you all.

And of course, I have a lot of fun Rivals bonuses I'll be slowly moving over to AO3 in the coming weeks. In the meantime, if you want to find them, please check out my Twitter!
NEWS > SPORTS

Wei Wuxian Makes Coaching Debut at 65th World Nighthunting Championships in Caiyi

by RACHEL WONG-LEE

Former Yunmeng Nighthunting champion Wei Wuxian is making his coaching debut at the 65th World Nighthunting Championships in Caiyi this autumn. He will be taking over as coach to Wen Sizhui in his debut in the senior international circuit.

“I’m honoured to be Sizhui’s coach,” Mr Wei said in a press conference this Thursday regarding his return to the Competitive Cultivation scene after thirteen years of absence. “He’s a promising boy — he takes after Hanguang-jun [Competitor Wen’s former coach] a lot, so his technique is flawless, but I’m excited to coach him in his senior debut this year!”

Competitor Wen, despite having left Qishan at the age of 3 due to rising political tensions against his family, will be representing it this year at the World Championships, hoping to bring some redemption to a country long tarred by the dictatorial rule of former President Wen Ruohan. The country has also only recently regained its right to send representatives to INU competitions, after the doping scandal uncovered by the Song Investigation and whistleblowers Wen Baiyang and Wen Qing had banned the country from INU and other sports competitions for several years. Wen Sizhui would be one of the first athletes of a new generation of Qishan competitors, refreshing the country much in the same way as the democratic reforms led by activist Xiao Xingchen are doing for the government of Qishan itself.

“I hope I can do well by everyone — by the homeland I left, and by the countries I adopted,” Competitor Wen said on Thursday. “I especially want to make sure Hanguang-jun and Coach Wei are proud of me.”

No stranger to controversy himself, Wei Wuxian had also been banned from Qishan for 5 years, in response to some of his actions at the 50th World Nighthunting Championships at Nightless City. In addition to that, Mr Wei was also caught in a scandal at the 52nd World Nighthunting Championships in Lanling City, when he manipulated the game to help his fellow competitors escape to safety… [MORE]
3dumaster
get a fucking room you two.

3dumaster
also YOU DID WHAT?!

weibowifi
we’re having a party later!! but we wanted to get this out of the way

3dumaster
YOU GOT MARRIED AND DIDN’T INVITE ANYONE? WHAT THE FUCK?

xiaohuaisang
AND AFTER ALL WE DID TO GET YOU TWO TOGETHER!

3dumaster
@xiaohuaisang you did jack shit

minatu @minahomine
GUYS THIS IS NOT A DRILL THEY’RE MARRIED! #wangxian
weibo.gs/share67563896.html?weibo_id=4364593595995877
[PHOTO: A picture of Bengbeng and Tiaotiao with two golden rings.]

xuan | TEAM WANGXIAN!! @hanyuzuwu
[PHOTOS: A picture of Bengbeng and Tiaotiao with two golden rings, followed by a screenshot of Tyler the Creator saying “Un-Follow Me Now, This Is Gonna Be the Only Thing I Tweet About For The Next Week. I’ve Wanted This For Years Fuck. What The Fuck.”]

Cat @ OH MY GOD THEY GOT MARRIED @CathainDonnelai
HOLY SHIT CONGRATS TO #wangxian 😂
[PHOTO: A picture of Bengbeng and Tiaotiao with two golden rings.]

含光军队 @ WANGXIAN WEDDING @pancakesprince
i can’t believe we’re really seeing #wangxian get married and become dads I MEAN COACHES this is the best thing that’s ever happened to #compcult #65wnc
[PHOTOS: A picture of Bengbeng and Tiaotiao with two golden rings, followed by pictures of Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji with their charges Wen Sizhui and Lan Jingyi.]

wwxian
member for 14 years

Having been in the Cult since #glitchgate I have to ask… what are people’s thoughts on the changes in the game structure since then?

popsicletwink
I can’t believe we dinosaurs have actually been around to watch Lan Xichen completely overhaul competitive cultivation. What a time to be alive.

Wait, what was it like before?

F*cking insane. The games used to be more like actual nighthunts eg. take place over 2-3 days of the competitors wandering around in the wilderness. Lan Xichen as Head Gamemaster petitioned the INU to switch to our current format for the health and safety of the competitors. Good call on him, honestly, though if you’d told me even 10 years ago that I’d be cheering for Lan “My Cultivation Is Prettier Than Your Cultivation Therefore I’m Better” Xichen, I’d have laughed at you.

Yeah, Kellie and I really hated the Lans back then ahaha. But things got more fair after LWJ retired. The new format that came out after LXC became head really levelled the field, though — JWY and JZX, who used to not be able to beat LWJ at all, even managed to do that a couple times before he retired.

I think it’s a shame WWX never fully made a comeback until now as a coach. Even when faced with the proof that he had no choice but to manipulate the game people were still so unwilling to let him in the arena.

I wonder if that might affect Wen Sizhui now that WWX is coaching him… I hope not!

But yeah, the news of his last attempt to return broke my heart. But LWJ retired soon after that, so at least they’re ride or die?
sizhuisradishes
member for 2 years

How do you guys even figure out who ‘deserves’ to win during the old format?

popsicletwink
member for 19 years

sizhuisradishes said:
How do you guys even figure out who ‘deserves’ to win during the old format?

So. Basically it used to be that the game would keep track of your points, minus deductions for rule infractions and timing out. That was your base score, plus bonuses for killing the endgame monster, plus technical bonus for cultivation artistry. That added up to your final score, displayed when the game ends. LXC’s reforms have moved the system usually in place at the Olympics — the semifinal-final round format — into a standardised game format.

You probably know what that format is like, but if you’re completely new, basically it’s: semis are a timed round of 1 hr of battle royale, killing/banishing as many monsters and spirits as are available to you in the arena. Then finals is like the old style game, except only against the endgame monster.

Also, LXC axing technical bonuses cut down basically most of the wank. We get a lot of people complaining that the new style loses the traditional hunt aspect of nighthuting, but honestly it’s a small price to pay for peace of mind 😊😊

kissmekate
member for 16 years

popsicletwink said:
but honestly it’s a small price to pay for peace of mind 😊😊

LOL! Ten bucks LXC got mad at all the people accusing him of inflating his brother.

goldencheng
member for 17 years

Anyway I’m excited for the new crop of baby seniors! Wen Sizhui’s story is touching in particular 🙂) I hope he does well, though my fave is still Jin Rulan…

popsicletwink
member for 19 years

I’m rooting for Lan Jingyi, myself. Always love a good underdog. Lan Wangji is so patient with him, even though he’s such a little sh*t Imao

starrynight
member for 18 years

Mo Xuanyu still has my love despite being much older than the rest of these kids. Hang in there, Xuanyu, you’ll get the gold someday!!

It’s been too many years since he last stepped into an arena green room, but at least the one at Caqiao Stadium is familiar. He’s been here several times during his break, though those times had been spent in the Lan family box, trying to avoid University of Caiyi rector Lan Qiren’s
disapproving stare as he cheered on Lan Wangji, then Lan Jingyi, and now both Lan Jingyi and Wen Sizhui.

Wei Wuxian takes a deep breath, grinning as Wen Sizhui runs off to greet his friends. He’s arrayed in the red-and-white uniform of Qishan, which seems to startle a couple of the other competitors, if their sidelong glances are of any indication. His friends, though, seem to take it in stride — Lan Jingyi basically tackles him the instant he arrives.

“You! You’re finally here!” Lan Jingyi pulls back, holds him at arm’s length. “You look good! Weird seeing you in red, honestly, but good!”

Wen Sizhui’s cheeks flush pink, and he sends a long-suffering look towards his coach. Wei Wuxian laughs.

“Jingyi, where’s your coach?” he asks.

“You mean your husband?” demands Lan Jingyi. “I last saw him talking with Head Gamemaster Lan, why?”

“It’s been three hours since they last saw one another,” says Wen Sizhui in a stage whisper. Lan Jingyi makes a dramatic ‘aah’ of realisation.

“He’ll be here soon,” he says, beaming at Wei Wuxian like an indulgent mother. Wei Wuxian sticks his tongue out in response.

Soon, of course, means a couple minutes later, as the doors to the green room swing open and a hush falls over the competitors. It’s like déjà-vu, watching Lan Wangji enter with his pristine white suit and icy expression. But when his husband turns his gaze towards him, Wei Wuxian’s heart can’t help but skip a beat.

The faintest hint of a smile quirks at Lan Wangji’s lips. Wei Wuxian feels his cheeks heating at the sight, which he then quickly tamps down by going over and slinging an arm around his husband’s shoulders. “Hanguang-jun, you’re finally here!” he chirps. “The kids were getting ready to cancel the entire game if you didn’t show up!”

“We weren’t!” protests Lan Jingyi, but Wen Sizhui steps on his foot.

Lan Wangji seems to take it in stride. “Thankfully, I am here,” he replies, as his arm slips around Wei Wuxian’s waist. “I expect Sizhui will do well this competition.”

“He’s gonna kick Jingyi’s ass,” replies Wei Wuxian cheerily.

“I would rather not kick anyone’s asses,” mutters Wen Sizhui.

“Eyes on the prize, Sizhui,” says Wei Wuxian, clucking his tongue. Wen Sizhui’s cheeks flush. “After all, everyone knows the best way to beat a Lan is to flirt with them — or in Lan Zhan’s words, ‘unnerve your opponent with ceaseless inanity’.”

Lan Wangji looks like he’s barely resisting the urge to pinch the bridge of his nose. Wei Wuxian chuckles, patting Wen Sizhui’s shoulder.

“Really, though,” he adds, more quietly, “you’ve got this.”

“Adorable,” says a new voice. All eyes turn back to the doors to see Jiang Cheng and Jiang Yanli, with Jin Rulan hovering just behind them. “Finally deciding to get off your ass to play coach, A-
“Well, better late than never,” replies Wei Wuxian sweetly, leaning forward to ruffle Jin Rulan’s hair. “He gets more and more handsome every time I see him!”

“Stop,” whines Jin Rulan, especially as his mother starts fussing over his uniform again.

Jiang Cheng steps over to Wei Wuxian, crossing his arms. “Again, what the fuck,” he says. “You two got married and invited no one? I can’t believe your nerve.”

“We didn’t want to make it big and loud like A-Li’s wedding,” protests Wei Wuxian.

“There’s an entire spectrum between what you two did and what the Jins did to A-Li’s wedding,” mutters Jiang Cheng.

“Yes, and what happened at A-Li’s wedding is exactly why we told no-one,” says Wei Wuxian, his voice sing-song. “We’ll have a party soon, promise!”

“Dibs on the food!” exclaims Jiang Yanli immediately. Wei Wuxian laughs.

“But of course! Why would I have a party to celebrate the happiest moment of my life and not include my shijie’s cooking? Don’t be ridiculous.”

Jiang Cheng looks as if he’d like to comment further, but before he can, the door to the green room opens again, and Head Gamemaster Lan Xichen steps inside. His robes are pristine, his expression placid, but Wei Wuxian knows there’s more beneath the surface of that shiny, press-ready smile.

Completely overhauling the structure of a sport and its scoring system must have been difficult. Wei Wuxian had noticed his longer hours at work, his less frequent laughter. But Lan Xichen hides it well — now, his smile is bright as he claps his hands and tells the competitors to get to their horses.

Against the flow of departing competitors and their families, Lan Wangji steps to his brother’s side.

“Lan Zhan,” Wei Wuxian calls, as Wen Sizhui and his friends start to leave, “I’m going to go get a seat with Jiang Cheng, okay?”

Lan Wangji nods, and Wei Wuxian follows his charges out to the stables. After making sure Wen Sizhui and Lan Jingyi are comfortably mounted, Wei Wuxian goes up into the stands to the competitors’ family section, where Jiang Yanli, Jin Zixuan, and Jiang Cheng are already seated. Jin Zixuan nods at him as he approaches. Wei Wuxian nods back, a quiet acknowledgement.

(He’d only heard about the fallout in the family following Jin Guangshan’s defeat at the polls for the Lanling Presidency and the subsequent criminal investigations. Jin Zixuan looks none the worse for wear on the outside, but his shijie has confessed he still doesn’t sleep well.)

(It’ll take time — like it’s taking time for Lan Xichen, too — to return to some semblance of normal there. Wei Wuxian can only hope for the best.)

“Here, you save the spot for Lan Wangji,” says Jiang Cheng, shuffling down a seat to make room. Wei Wuxian is startled out of his thoughts as his shidi tugs him down onto the seat. “It’s cold and I want my jacket back.”

“Suit yourself,” says Wei Wuxian, setting down his own jacket. “A lot of people out here tonight.”

Sure enough, the stands are filled with screaming and cheering fans waving a multitude of flags and colours. Gusu blue is prominent, of course, but there’s even some banners bearing the Qishan sun,
and enthused shouts of Sizhui’s name.

Lan Wangji shows up just before the gong goes off, taking the seat Wei Wuxian had saved for him. The competitors begin to enter, drone cameras capturing their faces as they ride forth around the arena, and flowers begin to rain through the stands.

“A-Yuan!” screams Wei Wuxian as Wen Sizhui rides by, waving happily up at the crowd. He jumps to his feet, ignoring the dismayed groans from other parents and coaches as he dashes to the railing to wave back. “Over here!”

He feels Lan Wangji’s hand against his waist, Lan Wangji’s steadfast presence beside him. Lan Wangji presents him with a peony, and Wei Wuxian throws it towards his charge. Wen Sizhui catches it, looking up towards them and blowing a kiss.

“He learns so fast,” says Wei Wuxian, pretending to wipe a tear from his eyes. Lan Wangji chuckles, and they retake their seats.

In the coming days, the competition will play out, and they’ll all tear each other apart over whether or not their charges deserved the points they got. He’ll probably end up in an argument with Jiang Cheng over whether or not a target was sniped, or if the monster taken down was worth the points awarded, or if the effort put into the endgame was acknowledged at all in the final scores. But life will go on afterwards as he and Sizhui train for the next season, setting their goals ever higher.

But in the meantime, Wei Wuxian entwines his fingers with Lan Wangji’s, and kisses him under the fireworks of Caiqiao Stadium.

Let the games begin.

Chapter End Notes

surprise! (this is like, a Thing with me, i guess,~~)

thank you all again for reading this fic!! if you'd like a playlist of all the songs that show up in this fic, they can be found here. this chapter's title is taken from “fairytales” by michael wong. (the most basic chinese karaoke song every kid learns lol).

End Notes

And so my heart beat wildly
from dusk to dawn
I couldn't bear it anymore.
All of my feelings and hopes have fallen in your hands,
turning into a nighttime rainbow,
metamorphosing into a moonlit breeze.
Happiness
is plunging into your river
and swimming until the end.
— "Yellow (Mandarin Cover)" by Katharine Ho Full fic playlist here!

A big thank you to hanyuzuwu for betaing and enabling so much in-universe discourse and memes

Scream about MDZS with me on Twitter!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!