

A Record 221

Chapter 221: Wine and Conversation

Over a year later, in a vast mountain range to the southwest of the Ancient Cloud Continent.

The entire mountain range was of an extremely vibrant crimson color, and the ground was riddled with countless volcanoes that were occasionally spewing forth pillars of molten lava.

One fiery pillar after another was erupting into the heavens, presenting a stunning marvel to behold. Bursts of thunderous rumbling were ringing out incessantly, and the sky was filled with fiery clouds, while a strong sulfurous odor was wafting through the air.

Deep inside the mountain range was a mountain that was riddled with holes, giving it the appearance of a honeycomb, and this was none other than the Fire Cloud Peak.

A streak of azure light arrived on the scene in a flash before fading to reveal Han Li, and he took a glance at his surroundings, then immediately flew toward one of the mine caves down below.

Around half a month later.

Two figures, one large and one small, were locked in a fierce battle inside a massive mine cave deep under the Fire Cloud Peak.

Each clash that took place between them resulted in a thunderous commotion that caused the entire mountain to tremble violently, while countless rocks came tumbling down like rain from above.

The smaller of the two figures was none other than Han Li, and there was azure light surging all over his body as he unleashed a flurry of fist projections.

The larger figure was a giant crimson lizard that was 70 to 80 feet in length, and it appeared to be extremely agile. Furthermore, it was blasting pillars of scorching fire out of its mouth, but none of them were able to strike Han Li even once.

In contrast, Han Li was frequently landing his punches, and with each punch that struck its target, a crack would be smashed into the crimson lizard's thick scales.

Before long, the lizard's entire body was already riddled with wounds, and its scales were broken over many parts of its body.

It had been attempting to flee the battle for quite some time now, but Han Li refused to allow it to get away.

Right at this moment, Han Li threw yet another punch at the lizard, yet for some reason, the lizard didn't bother to dodge at all this time, allowing itself to be sent flying before crashing into the rock face behind it.

A large section of the scales on its back were completely shattered by the punch, and it was bleeding profusely.

Right as it was approaching the rock face, the lizard abruptly opened its mouth to blast forth a pillar of crimson flames, which instantly melted the rock face into molten lava.

The crimson lizard was just about to scurry into the molten passageway that it had created for itself when a massive black saber projection swept toward it from behind.

The saber projection was imbued with a tremendous burst of law powers as it descended upon the lizard, and without the protection of its scales, the lizard's body was instantly sliced in half by the saber projection.

Immediately thereafter, the saber projection erupted into around a dozen smaller saber projections that flew in all directions, destroying the lizard's nascent soul before it had a chance to escape.

Han Li made a beckoning motion with one hand, and the black saber flew back into his grasp.

This giant crimson lizard was the culprit responsible for all of the miner disappearances. It wasn't all that powerful, but its scales were extremely resolute, and it was able to easily melt through rock faces to traverse through the belly of the mountain, allowing it to flee from battles or unleash effective surprise attacks.

Hence, even for Han Li, it had taken half a month to finally trap and slay the beast.

A series of crimson crystals, each of which was around the size of a human head, spilled out onto the ground from the beast's disemboweled belly.

The crystals were semi-transparent with a fiery red glow within them, and they were giving off scorching heat like red-hot pieces of charcoal, except countless times hotter.

"So these are Fire Origin Crystals," Han Li remarked to himself as he descended onto the ground and picked up one of the crystals, completely unaffected by the scorching heat that the crystal was releasing.

After examining the crystal briefly, he gathered all of the Fire Origin Crystals on the ground with a sweep of his sleeve.

He then turned his gaze to the crimson lizard, and he chopped off its four claws with a few casual slashes of his black saber and stowed them away before flying in another direction as a streak of azure light.

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Over a year later.

A figure strode quickly toward the entrance of the High Profound Palace's side hall, and it was none other than Han Li, who had only just returned to the sect.

He heaved a faint sigh of relief as he caught sight of the building up ahead. Having already completed two missions, he only had one more left to complete, and after that, he would be free to do whatever he wanted for the next century.

With that in mind, he strode into the hall and was just about to say something, only to discover that the gray-robed elderly man wasn't there.

Thus, he made his way out of the room, then stopped a young servant who just so happened to have been passing by.

"I pay my respects to the esteemed elder," the young man hurriedly said at the sight of Han Li's elder robes, and he extended a respectful bow toward Han Li as he spoke.

"Do you know where the elder in the side hall went?" Han Li asked.

"Elder Hu Yan should be in the Hundred Wine Cottage on the Hundred Wine Peak at the moment," the young man replied as he pointed to a nearby mountain.

From where they were standing, Han Li was able to see a cluster of buildings on the summit of that mountain.

A peculiar look appeared on Han Li's face upon hearing this, and he waved a hand to dismiss the young servant, then immediately flew toward the Hundred Wine Peak.

It didn't take long for him to arrive on the mountain, and he took a glance at the large estate up ahead, which had white walls and a red gate. Above the gate were inscribed the words "Hundred Wine Cottage" in extremely free-flowing text that was bordering on sloppiness, as if someone had made the inscription while drunk.

After a moment of hesitation, Han Li released his spiritual sense, and sure enough, the gray-robed elderly man was in the cottage.

He took a moment to adjust his robes, then made his way into the cottage through the gate.

Inside the cottage was a large open-air area, on either side of which were rows of potted plants much like the one in the side hall. The plants were quite varied and diverse, and not only were they all looking extremely vibrant and healthy, they were all giving off their own unique aromas.

Han Li's eyes lit up slightly upon seeing this.

In a nearby pot was a green spirit plant that was taller than a grown man, and the plant was laden with yellow beans, which were very similar to that Warrior Bean that Han Li had taken from the two Grand Ascension cultivators of the Heavenly Ghost Sect.

Only after examining the plant for a long while did he withdraw his gaze, then made his way over to a hall in the courtyard before knocking on the door.

"Elder Hu Yan, Junior Li Feiyu has come to see you."

After that, he stood outside the door and began to wait.

Moments later, the door swung open, and the rich aroma of wine poured forth from within. Elder Hu Yan's face was red with intoxication, and he was holding a bright green cup in one hand.

"Oh, it's you. I didn't think you'd be back so quickly," Elder Hu Yan said in a casual voice, then downed the contents of his cup in one go before smacking his lips with pleasure.

He then stumbled back into the hall before laying down onto a reclining chair, where he picked up a nearby flagon to fill his cup with before downing the contents of the cup in one go again.

"This is truly an exceptional wine..." Elder Hu Yan sighed in contentment.

Han Li made his way into the room, and his brows furrowed slightly at the sight of the drunk old man, but he then composed himself as he said, "Elder Hu Yan, I've completed the second mission assigned to me. A lizard beast that was about to break through to the True Immortal Stage had snuck into the Fire Cloud Peak, and it's been slain by me."

"Ah yes, I already received a message informing me of this. You did quite well, kid," Elder Hu Yan replied without even looking at Han Li, and during this time, he had drunk two more cups of wine.

"Thank you for your kind praise, Elder Hu Yan. I would like my next mission now," Han Li said as he cupped his fist in a salute.

"Why the hurry? You've already attained immortality, so why are you still scurrying around as if there were a limit to your lifespan? Do you desire more power, or do you wish to be revered by heaven and earth themselves? If you ask me, all of that is superficial, and it's nowhere near as appealing as this cup of wine in my hand. Come and have a drink with me, and we'll set everything else aside for later," Elder Hu Yan said as he pulled out another cup and filled it, then patted a chair next to his as an invitation.

Han Li didn't want to waste any time here, but a thought then occurred to him, and he sat down before picking up the cup.

"In that case, please pardon my intrusion."

"That's the spirit! Drink all the fine wine you can, and enjoy every moment of life to its fullest! That's my mantra! Cheers!" Elder Hu Yan tapped his cup against Han Li's before downing his drink in one go, and Han Li also followed suit.

The wine was very sweet and fragrant, and as it slid down his throat, it was initially quite cold, but transformed into a surge of warmth as it flowed into his dantian. That surge of warmth then spread through his entire body, striking him with an incredibly relaxing sensation.

He felt as if he had suddenly risen up into the clouds with immortal music playing beside his ears, and it was a truly blissful state.

"This is an exceptional wine!" Han Li exclaimed.

"I like you, kid! People always say that wine confounds the senses, but they neglect to mention that only when drunk can one cast aside all inhibitions and be true to oneself. The 3,000 Great Dao laws and the meaning of life can perhaps only be gleaned while in a drunken state! You and I may be immortals, but this is something we can't obtain from anything else! Here, have some more!"

Elder Hu Yan chortled with mirth as he filled Han Li's and his own cup again.

Han Li's heart stirred slightly upon hearing this.

It seemed that Elder Hu Yan was only making drunken ramblings, but there was some deeper meaning to his words.

Following Han Li's return to the Immortal Realm, there had been danger at every turn, and he had constantly been on his guard, making him unable to cast aside his inhibitions and be true to himself. This was completely different from the carefree life of an immortal that he had previously envisioned.

However, after drinking this cup of wine and hearing these words from Elder Hu Yan, he felt as if all of his worries and frustration had faded away, and he couldn't help but want to agree.

He had once been just a boy in a village, and up to this point in his cultivation journey, he had constantly been under immense pressure. Was this how he was supposed to live out the rest of his existence?

He had already attained immortality, and he now owned a vast territory in a powerful sect, so it seemed that it was time that he also enjoyed life to its fullest.

On top of that, perhaps only by setting aside some of his shackles and inhibitions could he get closer to the Great Dao...

No, this isn't right!

All of a sudden, he shook his head forcefully to rid himself of these thoughts.

Back when he first entered the Immortal Realm, it was perhaps precisely because he had gotten complacent that he had ended up losing his memories and his treasures. Otherwise, given his cautious and steadfast nature, there should've been no way that he had fallen into such a terrible state.

He had only just re-established himself in the Immortal Realm, and if he were to let down his guard again, there was a very good chance that he would suffer the same fate.

It appeared that all was safe and well in the Immortal Realm, but in reality, there was danger lurking at every turn, and he had to be even more cautious if he wanted to survive in this hostile environment.

All of these thoughts passed through his mind in a flash, and in that instant, his determination and resolve toward pursuing the Great Dao was reaffirmed.

"This is Green Pear Wine, right? As expected, it truly is an outstanding wine," Han Li praised as he tipped his cup back, but his eyes had become extremely clear, and the complacent sensation that had clouded his heart had completely faded.

Chapter 222: Soul Mates in Wine

"Oh? You're a wine expert as well?" Elder Hu Yan asked as a hint of surprise appeared in his eyes.

"I wouldn't dare to call myself an expert in front of you, Elder Hu Yan," Han Li replied with a smile.

Indeed, he was far from a wine expert. He had only learned some things about this subject as he was often dragged along by Sun Ke to drink with him while crossing the Thunderstorm Sea, and it just so happened to have been the case that this was one of the wines that he had drunk with Sun Ke.

However, drinking the wine back then hadn't inspired any of these revelations in his heart.

"This is fantastic! I took a liking to you as soon as I saw you, but I didn't think you would be an avid wine enthusiast as well! Come, let's have a few more drinks!"

Elder Hu Yan was ecstatic, and he stood up from his reclining chair before returning to the room.

By the time he re-emerged, he was holding seven or eight different flagons, which he set down onto the table one by one.

The styles of the flagons were all quite varied, as was the case with the accompanying cups.

There was a copper goblet, as well as cups made from jade, wood, stone, gold, and various other types of materials. Furthermore, each cup had some peculiar designs engraved upon them, and these designs appeared to have been runes, rather than purely for decoration.

Han Li was immediately able to tell that every single one of these cups and flagons was a treasure, but he had no idea what effects they had.

A hint of intrigue welled up in Han Li's heart upon seeing this, and he smiled as he asked, "Why have you brought out so many cups, Elder Hu Yan? Could it be that each type of wine has to be served in its own cup?"

Elder Hu Yan was looking extremely excited, and he eagerly replied, "Of course! A fine steed requires a good saddle, and the same applies to wine. If you don't have the right cup, even the finest wine won't taste as good as it's meant to. For example, this Green Pear Wine must be served in Heavenly Azure Jade cups. Another example is this Red Mulberry Immortal Wine, which must be served using 10,000-year-old green vine cups to maximize its aroma..."

Han Li nodded in response and picked up the cup of Red Mulberry Immortal Wine, which was another type of wine that he had drunk with Sun Ke while crossing the Thunderstorm Sea.

After just a small sip, his eyes instantly lit up.

The Red Mulberry Immortal Wine that he had drunk with Sun Ke had been one of the most precious wines in Sun Ke's collection, so it was definitely of no lesser a quality than this one, but this cup of wine was far more fragrant in comparison.

Han Li took another, and after carefully savoring it for a moment, he quickly realized why this was the case.

As it turned out, the green vine cup was giving off an ancient vine aura that significantly enhanced the aroma of the wine.

"This Red Mulberry Immortal Wine is brewed from 1,000-year-old Red Mulberry Fruit, which is a fire-attribute spirit ingredient, while this green vine cup contains wood-attribute spiritual qi. Wood gives rise to fire, so it naturally enhances the aroma of the wine!" Han Li mused as a hint of admiration appeared in his eyes.

Initially, he had been rather skeptical about Elder Hu Yan's claims, but he now knew that it really was necessary to pair certain wines with the right cups.

"That's correct. You really do have a knack for wine. Here, have a taste of this Flowing Light Immortal Wine," Elder Hu Yan praised as he picked up a white flagon, then poured out a cup of shimmering amber-colored wine.

Han Li was treated to several types of wine in a row, and all of them were rare and exquisite wines.

He knew very little about wine, but he was a great listener, and his willingness to listen and learn presented a very pleasing sight for Elder Hu Yan.

These wines weren't like ordinary wines in that they were immortal wines that were extremely beneficial for cultivation. Han Li was only at the early-True Immortal Stage, and after drinking so much, his dantian was already filled to the brim with chaotic energies, so it was most likely going to take him a long time to completely digest everything.

With that in mind, he immediately stopped drinking.

Meanwhile, Elder Hu Yan continued to down one cup of wine after another, and it was clear that his cultivation base was significantly superior to Han Li's.

Han Li waited for a short while, but he could see that Elder Hu Yan had no intention of stopping anytime soon, so he interjected, "Could we take a little break, Elder Hu Yan? I have something I would like to report to you."

"You're a real spoilsport, you know that? Fine, spit it out then!" Elder Hu Yan harrumphed in a disgruntled voice as he sat up in his chair.

Han Li gave an apologetic smile as he pulled out a storage treasure before offering it to Elder Hu Yan.

"All of the Fire Origin Crystals excavated from the Fire Cloud Peak over the past decade are in there."

Elder Hu Yan accepted the storage treasure, then examined its contents briefly with his spiritual sense before tossing it aside, following which he pulled out that azure book and scribbled something down onto it.

"It seems like the sect holds these Fire Origin Crystals in very high regard, Elder Hu Yan. May I ask what these crystals are used for? I can tell that they contained immense fire-attribute spiritual qi, but they're very brittle, and I'd say they're more like spirit stones than other types of fire-attribute ore," Han Li said.

"They're a type of fuel used for refining Immortal Origin Stones," Elder Hu Yan replied without even raising his head.

Han Li was rather taken aback to hear this, and he asked, "How are these Fire Origin Crystals used in the refinement of Immortal Origin Stones?"

Elder Hu Yan raised his head to take a puzzled glance at Han Li, then asked, "Are you not aware of the Nine Turns Immortal Origin Array?"

"I haven't heard of it before this," Han Li replied in a truthful manner.

"I see. You must've only recently joined the sect, right? Where do you come from?" Elder Hu Yan asked.

"You are correct, Elder Hu Yan. I've only been in the sect for less than a century, and I came from a secluded island on the Primordial Wave Continent," Han Li replied.

"That makes sense. The Primordial Wave Continent is a very secluded place, so it's no wonder you don't know about these things. The Nine Turns Immortal Origin Array is an extremely renowned array in the Northern Glacial Immortal Region, and it's capable of fusing 100 top-grade spirit stones into one in a short time to form a single Immortal Origin Stone," Elder Hu Yan explained.

"I see. It's no wonder that Immortal Origin Stones are so rare on the Primordial Wave Continent, yet they seem to be a lot more common in the sect," Han Li mused with an enlightened expression.

"Of course. The Primordial Wave Continent can't even begin to compare with our sect," Elder Hu Yan said in a proud manner.

He flipped a hand over to stow the azure book away as he spoke, then took Han Li's elder badge from him before adding 180 merit points to it.

"Thank you, Elder Hu Yan. Please spare me a bit more of your time and assign me my next mission. It'll only take a short while, and we can get back to drinking after that," Han Li said as he cupped his fist in a salute.

"I finally get some time to slack off, yet here you are, nagging me to no end!"

Elder Hu Yan glared at Han Li with a displeased expression as he spoke, then flipped through a few pages of the mission book before raising his head to look back at Han Li.

"Seeing as you're in such a hurry to complete your three missions, I presume you want to get them done as quickly as possible so you can return to cultivation, right? In that case, I have just the right mission for you. In total, it'll only take several months to complete."

Han Li was very happy to hear this, and he asked, "What's the mission?"

"In order for inner sect disciples to be promoted to direct disciples, they have to pass a trial, and your mission is very simple: you are required to protect some of the inner sect disciples in secret as they undertake the trial," Elder Hu Yan explained.

Han Li was rather taken aback to hear this. "Protect them in secret?"

"That's right. Those inner sect disciples must pass the trial through their own power, and under normal circumstances, they are to receive no assistance. However, many unforeseen mishaps have taken place

during past trials, so it's become a convention to have one or two True Immortal Stage elders accompanying the trial-takers in secret for their safety," Elder Hu Yan explained.

"I see. When does this mission start?" Han Li asked.

"You're in luck, the mission starts in three days. When the time comes, go to the Rising Sun Palace, and someone will notify you of the specific details," Elder Hu Yan replied.

"Thank you, Elder Hu Yan," Han Li said with a grateful look on his face.

Elder Hu Yan had a rather sharp tongue, but he had been quite good to Han Li, and the three missions he had assigned to him had all been relatively easy to complete.

"No need to thank me, just make sure to come over and have a few drinks with me whenever you get some spare time," Elder Hu Yan said with a dismissive wave of his hand.

"I'll be sure to do so," Han Li replied with a smile, then stood up to depart.

As he left the room, he passed by that spirit plant that was laden with yellow beans again, and he couldn't help but stop in his tracks to examine it again.

"Are you familiar with Dao Warriors as well?"

Elder Hu Yan's voice had rung out directly behind Han Li, and Han Li was quite startled by the fact that Elder Hu Yan had gotten so close to him without his detection.

However, he had already composed himself by the time he turned around, and he said, "I only heard about these things by chance in the past. It looks like you're quite an expert in Dao Warriors."

"Of course! If I rank myself as second in terms of Dao Warrior mastery, no one in the Blaze Dragon Dao would dare to claim the top spot!" Elder Hu Yan declared with a hint of pride in his voice.

Han Li was ecstatic to hear this, and he cupped his fist in a salute as he said, "I've always been very interested in Dao Warriors, but it's something that very few people are familiar with, so I've never been able to find someone to teach me. Would it be possible for you to..."

"You want to learn the art of Dao Warriors from me? No, absolutely not! There's no way I'll teach this to you, so don't even think about it," Elder Hu Yan interjected as he shook his head vigorously before Han Li even had a chance to finish his sentence.

"Is there really no room for discussion on this subject, Elder Hu Yan?" Han Li asked.

Elder Hu Yan was just about to turn Han Li down once and for all, but it was clear that he had taken a liking to Han Li after drinking with him, and he said in a meaningful voice, "It's not entirely out of the question. I have two vices in life, one of which is wine, while the other is the art of Dao Warriors. If you can find an immortal wine recipe better than the ones I currently possess, then I could perhaps teach you."

He had scoured the land for countless years for delectable wines and recipes, so he was confident that even in the entire Northern Glacial Immortal Region, there weren't many people who could exceed him in this area.

Han Li heaved an internal sigh at the sight of Elder Hu Yan's confident expression.

He didn't know much about wine, but even he could still tell that Elder Hu Yan was an expert in this area. All of the immortal wines that he had presented to Han Li just now had been extremely rare and delectable, and he had no idea where he was supposed to find better ones.

It seemed that Elder Hu Yan really didn't want to instruct Han Li in the art of Dao Warriors.

"Alright, I'll be sure to do my best, and if I do find something that fits your criteria, I hope you won't go back on your word, Elder Hu Yan," Han Li said.

Even though the chances were extremely slim, he still didn't want to give up. If worse came to worst, he would just have to release a mission in the Transient Guild, and he was sure that he would be able to find something as long as he was willing to pay the price.

"I never go back on my word, so there's no need to try and goad me. If you really can find such an exceptional wine recipe, then I'd be more than willing to impart my knowledge in the art of Dao Warriors upon you," Elder Hu Yan harrumphed.

"In that case, I'll be taking my leave now," Han Li said with a faint smile, then cupped his fist in a parting salute before departing.

Chapter 223: Mark

After leaving the Hundred Wine Cottage, Han Li returned straight to the secret chamber of his cave abode, and after activating all of the restrictions inside, he sat down on the spot with his legs crossed.

Having completed two regular elder missions in a row, he was feeling quite weary from his rigorous travels, even though neither mission had been particularly difficult to complete. Now that he had three days to rest, he could digest the immortal wines that had just consumed and also recuperate somewhat.

However, not long after he closed his eyes, he abruptly reopened them again as his expression changed ever so slightly.

The storage bracelet on his wrist had suddenly begun vibrating without any warning.

Before he had a chance to do anything, a streak of black light flashed past, and the black saber flew out on its own, then shot forth into the distance at an incredible speed like a bolt of black lightning.

Due to how abruptly all of this had unfolded, Han Li was unable to immediately stop the saber, but he was able to quickly react before making a hand seal, and layers of azure light instantly appeared within the secret chamber to prevent the saber's escape.

Dazzling black light erupted from the saber, accompanied by what sounded like an animalistic roar, and the black saber was able to slice through the layers of azure light with ease, but it was also slowed down slightly as a result.

Right at this moment, Han Li conjured up his Mantra Treasured Axis amid a flash of golden light, and golden ripples spread through the surrounding area in a radius of 100 feet, encompassing the black saber within.

As a result, the saber was slowed down once again, this time to only a third of its previous speed, immediately following which it was drawn back into Han Li's grasp by a burst of invisible suction force.

The black saber began to vibrate incessantly as it struggled to break free, but it was completely ensnared within Han Li's vice-like grip.

What's going on?

Han Li's brows were tightly furrowed upon seeing this.

Fang Pan was already dead, and during all these years in which the black saber had been in his possession, he had already carefully refined it once, so why was this happening?

With that in mind, he injected his enormous spiritual sense into the black saber, and what he saw was not a very pleasing sight.

As it turned out, the black saber had already completely escaped from his control, and there were bursts of invisible force inside that kept out his spiritual sense.

Han Li harrumphed coldly upon seeing this, and translucent light flashed from his glabella as a burst of even more tremendous spiritual sense erupted forth in a frenzy, forming a semi-transparent sword projection that was around a foot in length before piercing into the black saber.

The saber projection had been conjured up by Han Li using his Sword Observation Art, and it was able to slice through the bursts of invisible force with ease.

Thus, Han Li was able to force his spiritual sense through the layers of restrictions within the black saber, and his spiritual sense quickly reached a black space that was nestled within the saber's deepest part.

The space was riddled with countless black patterns that varied in thickness, resembling countless cobwebs that formed an enormous and complex array, while a black altar stood at the center of the array.

A ball of warped black light was hovering within the altar, flashing incessantly, and the array patterns around it were also constantly flashing, as if they were resonating with the ball of black light.

Han Li was quite stunned by what he was seeing.

He had meticulously refined the black saber in the past, and his spiritual sense had reached this place before, but at the time, the array patterns here hadn't been anywhere near this complex.

This was most likely the true form of the core restriction within the black saber.

He cast his gaze toward the ball of black light, and it seemed to have detected his gaze as a rather indistinct face appeared within it before looking back at Han Li.

The features of the face were quite blurry, but its eyes were quite clear, and they were thin and long, resembling sharp blades, while giving off an enraged and arrogant gleam.

Han Li's heart stirred slightly upon seeing this.

The face wasn't very clear, but it definitely didn't belong to Fang Pan.

With that in mind, it immediately dawned on him that the owner of the saber wasn't Fang Pan. Instead, he had most likely borrowed it from someone else.

Even though he had meticulously refined the saber, there was no way that he could've detected these concealed restrictions planted within the saber by its original owner.

All of a sudden, Han Li realized the peril that he was in.

The owner of the saber had activated the mark within it most likely to sense its exact location so that he could recover it, and if that person were to track him down, then he would be in a world of trouble.

As soon as these thoughts sprang into Han Li's mind, he immediately conjured up a massive semi-transparent sword projection that lashed out viciously at the ball of black light.

The blurry face let loose an infuriated roar, and it transformed into a length of translucent black chain that was rather similar in appearance to an Origin Separation Law Chain before whipping itself at the sword projection.

A ferocious clash took place, and the black chain was sliced into two by the sword projection before disintegrating into countless specks of black light.

All of the array patterns inside the black space instantly fell dark, and at the same time, the black saber also ceased its struggles, while the light radiating from it faded.

It had become completely still and obedient, and only now did it appear to have been completely refined.

However, Han Li wasn't particularly elated to see this. Instead, he turned his gaze toward the black altar, within which was something that resembled a cross between a rune and a mark, and it was giving off faint spiritual light.

That's a bonded mark!

Han Li immediately conjured up another semi-transparent sword projection above the altar before sending it crashing down onto the mark.

A loud thump rang out, and the sword projection was repelled, while the bonded mark only shuddered slightly before reverting back to its original form, seemingly completely indestructible.

Han Li's expression darkened slightly upon seeing this, and instead of continuing to unleash more attacks, he withdrew all of his spiritual sense.

Back in the secret chamber, he looked down at the black saber in his hand with an indecisive expression.

Right as Han Li forced his spiritual sense into the black saber and attempted to erase the mark within it, there was a massive black crane that was several thousand feet in size flying through the sky countless kilometers away on the Ancient Cloud Continent.

The crane's entire body was covered in metallic black plumage, but the feathers on the top of its head were golden in color, resembling a crown. Faint black flames could be seen on the surface of its feathers, and these flames were particularly pronounced on its wings, forming two even larger fiery black wings around its actual wings.

The crane was flapping its wings rapidly as it flew at an extraordinary pace, covering a distance of several hundred kilometers with every single flap.

A burly yellow-robed man that was close to 10 feet in height was seated on the black crane's back with his legs crossed.

There were over 100 yellow array flags hovering in the air around him, and they were all giving off bursts of yellow light to form an array that was several hundred feet in size, which was fluctuating in brightness as it slowly revolved on the spot.

He made a hand seal, and countless yellow runes surged out of hands, then circled around momentarily in the air before flowing into the surrounding array, and it seemed that he was unleashing some type of secret technique.

All of a sudden, the yellow array shuddered violently before exploding, and all of the array flags were sent flying in all directions.

The yellow-robed man's face paled slightly, and he opened his eyes as he cursed, "Damn it!"

With a sweep of his sleeve, all of the scattered array flags converged back together before flying into his head, vanishing without a trace.

"Were you able to track him down, Master?" the giant black crane asked in a sharp and piercing voice.

"I almost managed to do it. Having said that, I've determined the rough direction that he's in. What a useless piece of trash that Fang Pan was. Not only did he end up dead, he lost my Black Emperor Immortal Slaying Blade as well!" the yellow-robed man grumbled.

"Fang Pan was nothing more than a fool with mediocre aptitude, how could he possibly compare with you?" the giant crane remarked with a hint of derision in its voice.

"In any case, the Black Emperor Immortal Slaying Blade is my bonded immortal treasure, and I can't afford to lose it. If I had known this would happen, I would've never lent it to Fang Pan," the yellow-robed man grumbled with a frustrated expression.

"Speaking of which, that Han Li sure is a lucky fellow. Not only did he not die 300 years ago, he's managed to kill Fang Pan now. Having said that, now that you're going after him, it seems like his good fortune has come to an end," the black crane said in a sycophantic manner.

"I don't know what secret this Han Li is harboring that made Fang Pan so determined to hunt him down. I have to say, I'm extremely curious! I have to make sure that old fart doesn't find out. Otherwise, I won't get to claim his secrets for myself," the yellow-robed man said in a cold voice, and an enormous aura began to emanate from his body, causing his robes to bulge around him.

The nearby air began to buzz and tremble as a string of loud cracks and pops rang out.

The giant black crane couldn't help but shudder slightly in the face of the yellow-robed man's terrifying aura, and it lowered its head as it sped up a little more.

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After staring at the black saber in his hand for a while, Han Li suddenly set it down before making a rapid string of hand seals.

Dazzling azure light instantly erupted from his hands, forming a series of large azure runes that descended onto the black saber.

A series of azure runes instantly appeared on the surface of the saber, and these runes were only increasing in number, spreading over the entire saber in the blink of an eye.

All of a sudden, the black saber had transformed into an azure saber that wasn't giving off even the slightest aura.

This was a treasure sealing technique that Han Li had learned in the past, and after unleashing the technique, he pulled out a long black box, which was clearly a treasure as well.

The surface of the box was flashing with spiritual light, and it was giving off a peculiar aura.

He placed the black saber into the box, then flipped a hand over to produce several talismans, all of which he also plastered onto the box.

His brows were slightly furrowed as he looked down at the black box in his hand.

Even after casting so many seals onto the saber, he still wasn't confident that its former owner would be completely unable to sense it.

Hence, as long as this saber remained by his side, there was always the risk that its former owner could track him down.

He didn't know what type of relationship Fang Pan shared with the saber's former owner, but they were both definitely enemies to him.

It seemed that the owner of the saber had to have used some type of special refinement method to have planted such a resolute seal within the saber.

By Han Li's own estimates, given his current level of power, if he wanted to completely erase the seal, then the only way to do so would be to slowly refine it using his nascent flame, and that would take him at least a century.

This was far too much time to waste on a single weapon, and he was at a slight loss for what to do.

Chapter 224: Passing the Trouble Onto Someone Else

After pondering the issue for a long time, Han Li finally arrived at a decision.

This saber is nothing but trouble, so as opposed to wasting the time it would take to refine it, it would be better for me to sell it.

The saber was indeed quite powerful, but his own safety was naturally far more important in comparison.

After making up his mind, Han Li didn't waste any time as he flipped his hand over to produce his Transient Guild mask, which he promptly put on.

A massive azure array projection soon appeared, and Han Li turned his gaze to the trade section before releasing a trade mission.

There were two ways to sell things in the Transient Guild, one of which was to only display images of the item being sold in a mission and setting out one's intentions. If someone were interested in the item, then the two parties could negotiate a price.

The second method was to list a set price that was non-negotiable.

Han Li chose the second option without any hesitation, listing the saber at a price of 50 Immortal Origin Stones.

Given the power and caliber of the saber, this was definitely a favorable price for prospective buyers.

In this current situation, all he wanted was to sell the saber as soon as possible to rid himself of this trouble, and he didn't conceal the fact that the bonded mark of the saber's previous owner still remained within it.

There were many pieces of stolen goods being sold in the Transient Guild, so this wasn't something that was frowned upon. In the world of cultivation, people were constantly stealing treasures from others, so the buyers in the Transient Guild didn't care where the items that they purchased had come from.

This was most likely why so many people were willing to pay a heavy price to join the Transient Guild.

Han Li placed the wooden box onto the teleportation array at the center of the array projection, and it instantly vanished amid a flash of light.

Han Li naturally didn't want to give up such a powerful treasure, but at the same time, it was a relief to do so.

He was just about to remove his mask when a thought suddenly occurred to him, and he released another mission searching for recipes for immortal wines.

Elder Hu Yan had countless fine wines in his Hundred Wine Cottage, so it wasn't going to be an easy task finding one that wasn't in his extensive collection, but Han Li was still eager to try his luck.

After that, he removed his mask and heaved a faint sigh of relief.

He was feeling a little weary after that rather tense sequence of events, and he closed his eyes as a layer of faint azure light appeared over his body.

Two days flew by in a flash, and by the time Han Li reopened his eyes, he was completely reinvigorated.

He immediately pulled out his Transient Guild mask before putting it on, and sure enough, the black saber had already been sold.

"Thank heavens for that," Han Li murmured to himself as he counted the 50 Immortal Origin Stones in his hands.

As for whether the buyer of the saber was going to be pursued by its original owner, that wasn't something for Han Li to be worried about.

After all, clinching such a powerful Acquired Immortal Treasure for only 50 Immortal Origin Stones was a massive steal, so they had to pay an additional price elsewhere.

Even though the saber had been sold, the mission that he had released requesting wine recipes hadn't received any responses.

Han Li didn't have very high hopes for the mission anyway, so he immediately stowed the mask away before leaving his secret chamber.

It was only first light, and the sun had just begun to rise in the east, basking the earth in a warm golden glow.

A layer of golden radiance had appeared over the snow-covered Bell Toll Mountain Range, giving a far more dazzling and beautiful appearance than usual.

Han Li took a deep breath, feeling further reinvigorated by the cold air.

This was already the third day, and it was time that he went to the Rising Sun Palace.

Even though there wasn't supposed to have been any danger associated with this mission, given his careful and cautious nature, he still made sure to sort through all of his pills and belongings, making sure that he had everything that he might need before departing from the Crimson Dawn Peak.

Close to half a day later, Han Li emerged from a teleportation hall, then flew away in a certain direction as a streak of azure light, arriving at a golden palace shortly thereafter.

The palace was over 100 feet tall and extremely majestic to behold. On either side of the palace gates was a sun diagram, and a plaque was hanging above the gate with the words "Rising Sun Palace" inscribed upon it.

At this point, there were already quite a few people in the palace. Judging from their attire, they seemed to have all been inner court disciples, and all of them appeared to have been waiting for something.

Right as Han Li was hesitating about whether to go in, a square-faced young man in an attendant's robe approached Han Li from one side of the gate, then cupped his fist in a salute as he asked, "You must be Elder Li, right?"

Han Li nodded in response.

"My name is Fang Yu, and I'm an attendant here at the Rising Sun Palace. Please come with me, Elder Li," the square-faced young man said with a smile, then made his way toward a side door in the Rising Sun Palace.

Han Li followed along, and the two of them made their way into a side hall with only nothing more than a set of tables and chairs inside.

A middle-aged man in a scholarly robe was seated in the room, and his head was lowered as he savored the cup of spirit tea in his hand.

The man raised his head upon hearing the sound of footsteps, and Han Li faltered slightly at the sight of him, then cupped his fist in a salute as he greeted, "Long time no see, Brother Su."

The scholarly-robed man was one of the non-native elders that had undertaken Deputy Dao Lord Xiong's sword refinement mission alongside Han Li, and the two of them were on friendly terms.

"Indeed, Brother Li. I heard that you've been cultivating in seclusion this entire time. When did you come out of seclusion?" Su Tongxiao asked with a wide smile as he set down his teacup before leading Han Li to his chair in a hospitable manner.

Meanwhile, the square-faced young man had already prepared a cup of spirit tea for Han Li as well.

"I've been out of seclusion for a while now," Han Li replied with a smile. "Have you also taken on the mission to protect the inner court disciples during their promotion trial?"

"I have. I'm very short on funds at the moment, so I have to do more missions to earn some merit points," Su Tongxiao replied with a wry smile.

Han Li nodded in response, following which he seemed to have made an unexpected observation, and a hint of surprise appeared in his eyes as he cupped his fist in a salute and said, "It appears that you've already opened 12 immortal acupoints! This is truly worthy of celebration, Brother Su!"

There were quite a few True Immortal cultivators in the sect, but the majority of them were at the early-True Immortal Stage. Mid-True Immortal cultivators were quite rare, and as for late-True Immortal cultivators, there were barely any aside from the deputy dao lords.

"I was stuck at the early-True Immortal Stage for many years, and it was only just over 10 years ago that I finally managed to make a breakthrough. However, in order to do so, I had to spend virtually all of my merit points, and that's why I had to take on this mission," Su Tongxiao replied, and he was trying to put on a calm facade, but there was an undeniable hint of excitement in his eyes.

"If I can make the same breakthrough, I'd be willing to give up everything in my possession, let alone just some merit points. I must say, I'm extremely envious, Brother Su," Han Li chuckled.

The flattery in Han Li's words was inflating Su Tongxiao's ego, and he couldn't help but burst into laughter as he replied, "Surely you jest, Brother Li. I see that you've also made quite some progress in your cultivation base during these past few decades of seclusion."

The square-faced young man had been standing off to the side this entire time, and he interjected, "Please wait here for a moment, esteemed elders. The trial mission won't commence for some time, and when that time comes, someone will inform you of the specific details of the mission."

"I see. I'm sure you're quite busy, so you can go now," Su Tongxiao said with a wave of his hand.

The square-faced young man extended a salute toward the two elders before departing.

"Do you know him, Brother Su?" Han Li asked as he picked up his teacup before taking a sip.

The tea was very rich and fragrant, and its aroma lingered in the mouth for a long time even after it had already been swallowed, indicating that it was an exceptional tea.

"I've taken on this mission several times in the past, so I've met him a few times," Su Tongxiao explained.

"I see. In that case, I'll have to learn from you, Brother Su. This mission doesn't seem like much, but I can't shake the feeling that it's not as simple as it appears on the surface," Han Li said as he set down his teacup.

"That's well-observed of you, Brother Li. Indeed, there's more to this mission than meets the eye. Take a look at the inner court disciples in the main hall."

Su Tongxiao flicked a finger through the air as he spoke, releasing a streak of blue light that landed on one of the walls of the side hall.

A layer of gentle blue light instantly appeared over the wall, which gradually turned transparent.

On the other side of the wall was the main hall, and they were able to see everything inside, but what was quite interesting was that no one in the main hall seemed to have noticed the change in the wall.

"Your control over your water-attribute abilities is still as immaculate as ever, Brother Su," Han Li praised as he raised an eyebrow.

"You're far too kind, Brother Li," Su Tongxiao replied with a pleased smile.

Han Li cast his gaze toward the inner court disciples in the main hall, and they all appeared to have been quite young.

It was clear that they possessed exceptional aptitude, and all of them had reached the Spatial Tempering Stage.

Even though the age of a cultivator couldn't be determined solely based on their physical appearance, Han Li was able to tell at a glance that none of the cultivators in the hall were over 1,000 years of age.

Even in the Northern Glacial Immortal Region, it was extremely rare for someone to reach the Spatial Tempering Stage at such a young age, and it was apparent from this that these disciples most likely had enormous support in terms of resources to complement their outstanding aptitudes.

All of a sudden, Han Li noticed a beautiful young woman in a white dress. The woman was none other than Bai Suyuan, and he had only taken a rough glance at the disciples earlier, so he had failed to notice her.

Her appearance hadn't changed much at all, but she had already reached the mid-Spatial Tempering Stage. It seemed that she had only recently made the breakthrough, but that was still an astonishing rate of progress.

Then again, it wasn't all that remarkable once one considered that she possessed the Moonlight Immortal Physique with seven innately awakened immortal acupoints, in addition to the guidance of a Golden Immortal Stage master and an endless supply of pills from the sect.

"As I'm sure you can tell, all of these disciples possess outstanding aptitude. Furthermore, most of them are the descendants of various elders and even deputy dao lords of the sect," Su Tongxiao said in a meaningful voice.

Han Li merely nodded in response, and it was impossible to tell what he was thinking.

All of the inner court disciples in the main hall carried an air of superiority, and they were all quite relaxed, even though they were standing in the prestigious Rising Sun Palace. Furthermore, their bodies

were all glowing faintly with spiritual light, clearly indicating that they were carrying exceptional protective spirit treasures.

However, this wasn't the case for all of the disciples. Instead, there were four or five of them standing near the edge of the hall in silence, and their bodies weren't radiating spiritual light, either, making them appear rather shabby in comparison.

"Direct disciples will either become disciples to the 13 Golden Immortal Stage Dao Lords, or to the deputy dao lords. Not only do they have to be at least at the Spatial Tempering Stage, they must complete this final trial to be officially granted such a status.

"These disciples are considered to be the cream of the crop, and they'll receive unreserved support from the sect in all areas, including cultivation arts, pills, resources, and territories. The benefits that direct disciples receive far exceed those of the average inner court disciples.

"Otherwise, there's no way those elders and deputy dao lords would allow their precious descendants to undertake this trial," Su Tongxiao continued, and there was a hint of mockery in his voice.

"What is the purpose of this trial, Brother Su?" Han Li asked.

"You see, all of these disciples possess exceptional aptitude, and they've been cultivating arduously for centuries, but they're lacking experience in true life-and-death situations, and that's where this trial comes in," Su Tongxiao explained.

Han Li nodded in response, then turned his gaze back to Bai Suyuan as a hint of befuddlement flashed through his eyes.

Su Tongxiao quickly noticed the object of Han Li's attention, and he asked, "That woman is Bai Suyuan. Do you know her, Brother Li?"

Chapter 225: Meeting Sun Ke Again

"She's an acquaintance of mine. She and I joined the Blaze Dragon Dao at the same time. It sounds like you know of her as well, Brother Su," Han Li replied with a nod.

Bai Suyuan's exceptional aptitude had seen her catch the eye of the dao lord with the Yun surname as soon as she joined the sect, but ever since then, she had kept quite a low profile, so there shouldn't have been that many people who knew of her.

"I took on a mission released by Dao Lord Yun some years ago, and I just so happened to meet her then. Apparently, she possesses the Moonlight Immortal Physique, and she's reached her current cultivation base after no more than a century of cultivation. I'm sure it won't be long before she forges a resounding reputation for herself in the entire sect," Su Tongxiao remarked.

"Bai Suyuan has been accepted as Dao Lord Yun's disciple, so that already makes her a direct disciple, right? In that case, why is she participating in this trial?" Han Li asked with a befuddled expression.

"She may already be a direct disciple, but the rules of the sect have to be followed. Prior to this, she's been in seclusion this entire time, but now that she's reached the Spatial Tempering Stage, she must also pass this trial in order to officially become a direct disciple," Su Tongxiao explained.

"I see," Han Li replied with a contemplative expression.

Right at this moment, a slightly portly young man strode into the Rising Sun Palace. He was wearing an inner court disciple robe, and he also seemed to have been one of the trial-takers.

Han Li took a casual glance at this newcomer, and a hint of surprise flashed through his eyes.

The newcomer was none other than Sun Ke, together with whom Han Li had traveled to the Ancient Cloud Continent. Somehow, he had managed to join the Blaze Dragon Dao and earned the right to participate in this trial during the few decades since then.

As soon as he stepped into the hall, all of the other disciples instantly turned to him as well.

He seemed to have been rather uncomfortable from all the scrutiny, and he paused momentarily in his footsteps before flashing everyone a smile.

All of the inner court disciples gazed upon Sun Ke with hints of derision in their eyes for a moment before quickly returning to their conversations, and Bai Suyuan was the only one who returned his smile.

Sun Ke didn't seem to have been surprised by this rather frosty reception, and he made his way over to a corner of the main hall on his own, where he began to inspect his surroundings and all of the other disciples.

The disciples in the hall had split themselves up into three distinct circles, with the largest one containing eight or nine people, which was close to half of all of the disciples present. At the center of the circle was a handsome brocade-robed young man with a purple mark on his glabella that was giving off a purple glow, and his cultivation base was at the late-Spatial Tempering Stage.

Standing nearby was a group of five or six people, gathered around another handsome young man with a slightly dark complexion.

However, his eyes were rather long and thin, and he was giving off a rather effeminate aura.

The dark-skinned young man was also at the late-Spatial Tempering Stage, and these two circles of disciples were the most relaxed of the bunch, chatting amicably with one another, seemingly without a care in the world.

The final circle was the one that Bai Suyuan was in. She was surrounded by several female cultivators who were also quite gorgeous, but paled in comparison to her stunning beauty.

Bai Suyuan's eyes were slightly downcast as she remained silent, and her entire body was giving off a faint white glow, giving her the appearance of a silently blooming snow lotus flower.

In contrast with her silence, the female cultivators around her were chatting quietly among themselves as they inspected their surroundings.

While conversing with those around them, both the brocade-robed young man and the dark-skinned young man were shooting occasional glances at Bai Suyuan with a hint of lust and desire in their eyes.

As for the rest of the disciples, they were all standing in silence around the hall like Sun Ke.

A short while later, the brocade-robed young man took one more glance at Bai Suyuan, then cleared his throat before approaching her.

"You must be Junior Martial Sister Bai Suyuan, right? My name is Qi Huanyu. It's a pleasure to make your acquaintance. I've heard a lot about you, including the fact that you're a secret disciple of Dao Lord Yun's, but unfortunately, I never had the chance to meet you before this," Qi Huanyu said with a polite smile.

"You're far too kind, Senior Martial Brother Qi. As a descendant to Deputy Dao Lord Qi, your outstanding aptitude is known to everyone in the sect, and I've heard that you're the leading figure among all inner court disciples," Bai Suyuan replied with a faint smile.

Qi Huanyu faltered slightly upon hearing this. He was indeed quite a renowned figure, but no one had ever referred to him as the leading figure among all inner court disciples before. Could it be that this title had been bestowed upon him without his knowledge?

In any case, he was certainly more than happy to play along, and he made no effort to deny the title as he chuckled, "You're far too kind, Junior Martial Sister Bai. Such an arbitrary title is not one to be taken seriously. Given your exceptional aptitude, I'm sure it won't be long before you surpass me."

Right at this moment, the dark-skinned young man approached them with a cold sneer on his face as he scoffed, "Leading figure? When did you receive such a title, Qi Huanyu? How come I've never heard anyone mention it? Could it be that you gave yourself that title?"

A cold look appeared on Qi Huanyu's face as he glared at the dark-skinned young man, then turned back to Bai Suyuan as he introduced, "You've probably never heard of him, but his name is Tang Chuan, and he's also an inner court disciple."

The dark-skinned young man's expression darkened slightly upon hearing this, yet before he could issue a retort, Bai Suyuan said, "How could I possibly not have heard of Senior Martial Brother Tang? Senior Martial Brother Tang is the only son to Elder Jing Ming of the Heavenly Pill Palace, and your mastery of the Profound Spirit Walking Arts is unmatched. Please teach me some time, Senior Martial Brother Tang."

There was a hint of seduction in Bai Suyuan's smile as she spoke, and the anger in Tang Chuan's heart at Qi Huanyu's snide remarks instantly faded as he hurriedly replied, "You're far too kind, Junior Martial Sister Bai. Truth be told, I've only just begun to make my initial forays into the Profound Spirit Walking Arts, and..."

Qi Huanyu was very displeased to have been suddenly shut out of the conversation, and he sneered, "It would be an extremely unwise use of your time to learn a cultivation art as mediocre as the Profound Spirit Walking Arts, Junior Martial Sister Bai."

"How dare you look down on the Profound Spirit Walking Arts! I'm going to make you eat your words!"

Tang Chuan immediately flared up with rage as wisps of black mist rose up from his body alongside a layer of faint black light.

Qi Huanyu was completely unfazed, and the mark on his glabella began to glow with purple radiance.

The disciples around them also began to glower at one another, and all of a sudden, the atmosphere in the hall had become extremely tense.

A faint smile appeared on Bai Suyuan's face, and she took a couple of steps backward in a subtle manner, opening up some space for Qi Huanyu and Tang Chuan.

All of a sudden, an authoritative voice rang out within the hall. "Insolence! You're here to participate in a trial, not to fight among yourselves!"

At the same time, a burst of invisible pressure descended upon the entire palace, and everyone in the two opposing groups, including Qi Huanyu and Tang Chuan, were instantly rooted to the spot. Even Bai Suyuan was somewhat affected, and a faint unnatural flush had appeared on her face.

The burst of pressure only encompassed the palace for an instant before fading, and everyone was able to move as normal again.

However, the tense atmosphere in the hall had completely faded due to this intervention.

The square-faced young man by the name of Fang Yu appeared amid a flash of white light, and he was making no effort to disguise his Grand Ascension Stage aura, causing the surrounding air to buzz and tremble incessantly.

He swept his gaze over Qi Huanyu and Tang Chuan, then gave Bai Suyuan a meaningful look before withdrawing his gaze.

Qi Huanyu and Tang Chuan exchanged a final cold glare, then turned and went their separate ways.

Bai Suyuan had also backed away to the side with her head slightly lowered.

"Alright, now that everyone's here, we can commence the trial. Before we begin, I'm going to tell you what you need to do during the trial. I'm only going to say this once, so listen carefully. I am not exaggerating when I say that successful completion of the trial is a matter of life or death for all of you!" Fang Yu declared, administering no further punishment to Qi Huanyu and Tang Chuan.

Sun Ke and everyone else who was standing around the hall also gathered around Fang Yu to hear what he had to say.

"You will be undertaking your trial in the Profound Ice Mountain Range. I'll take you to the outskirts of the mountain range, and in order to complete the trial, you're required to venture into the mountain range and slay a Body Integration Stage Dark Snow Bear. You can choose to work with others or slay the bear yourself..."

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Meanwhile, in the side hall, Han Li was watching everything unfolding in the main hall with a hint of exasperation in his eyes.

Even after so many years, Bai Suyuan was still just as mischievous as ever.

He also noticed that she seemed to have begun using the same cultivation art as Dao Lord Yun. The seductive techniques that she had just displayed were extremely advanced, and the two young men had completely fallen prey to them without their detection.

Thinking back, even with his enormous spiritual sense, he had almost fallen for Dao Lord Yun's seduction, so it was no surprise that those two prodigies had fallen prey to Bai Suyuan's allure.

Just like the inner court disciples, he was also listening carefully as Fang Yu introduced the content of the trial.

"The Profound Ice Mountain Range, eh? That's not far away," Su Tongxiao murmured to himself.

Han Li nodded in response.

At this point, he had already somewhat familiarized himself with the geography of the Ancient Cloud Continent, and indeed, the Profound Ice Mountain Range wasn't very far away, situated northward of the Bell Toll Mountain Range.

Furthermore, the Profound Ice Mountain Range wasn't particularly large. There were supposed to have been many demon beasts lurking within it, but even so, it shouldn't have been very difficult for a pair of True Immortals like them to protect these inner sect disciples.

All of a sudden, Han Li raised his head and cast his gaze toward the entrance of the side hall.

Almost at the exact same moment, two figures appeared there amid a burst of spatial fluctuations.

One of them was a purple-robed middle-aged man with a square face and a pair of bright eyes under a set of thin eyebrows. He had an elegant and refined demeanor, but still cut an authoritative figure.

Beside him was an incredibly seductive young woman in a white robe, and it was none other than Dao Lord Yun, Bai Suyuan's mistress.

The two of them were giving off enormous auras, with the purple-robed middle-aged man's aura slightly superior to that of Dao Lord Yun.

"Dao Lord Ouyang! Dao Lord Yun!" Su Tongxiao hurriedly rose to his feet before cupping his fist in a salute.

Han Li also hurriedly stood up before extending a salute of his own.

"You two are the ones assigned with protecting the trial-takers in secret, is that correct?" Dao Lord Ouyang asked.

"That's right," Han Li and Su Tongxiao replied in unison.

"I'm sure you've already been made aware of the contents of the trial. During this trial, your mission will be to deal with any unforeseen mishaps that may arise. Aside from that, these disciples are to take on the perils that arise under normal circumstances on their own, and if they're unable to do so, then it's fine to allow them to perish during the trial.

"The sect has no need for incompetent disciples, so if they can't even survive a trial like this, then it would be better for them to die within the sect than elsewhere," Dao Lord Ouyang said in an implacable voice.

Su Tongxiao hesitated for a moment, then asked, "Dao Lord Ouyang, would you be able to elaborate on what you mean by perils that arise under normal circumstances?"

"The two of you can exercise your own discretion in this regard. As long as you think it's something that they can handle, then do not intervene. There's no need to go into this with any psychological burdens.

"Disciples have always had to put their lives on the line during these trials, so even if some of them end up dead, no one would dare to blame the two of you. You two act as both their guardian and their examination overseers, so you have to ensure fairness above all else, understood?"

"Yes," Su Tongxiao and Han Li hurriedly replied.

Dao Lord Ouyang gave Han Li's duo a nod, then turned his gaze to Dao Lord Yun, who looked directly back at him.

Dao Lord Ouyang didn't say anything further before turning around and flying away as a streak of light, while Dao Lord Yun swept her gaze over Han Li and Su Tongxiao.

In the end, her gaze lingered on Han Li for a moment, but in the next instant, she also flew away into the distance.

In the instant that Dao Lord Yun turned around, a peculiar look appeared in Han Li's eyes, only to instantly fade a moment later.

Only after the two dao lords had vanished into the distance did Han Li and Su Tongxiao raise their heads before exchanging a glance.

"Brother Su, was that the ninth-ranked dao lord, Ouyang Kuishan just now?" Han Li asked.

"Precisely. The 13 Golden Immortal Stage dao lords are on a rotating roster, with each dao lord serving as the sect master for 100,000 years before the next dao lord takes over, and Dao Lord Ouyang is the incumbent sect master at the moment. I just didn't think that Dao Lord Yun would accompany him and depart without saying anything. It seems like she's quite concerned for that precious disciple of hers," Su Tongxiao replied with a nod.

Han Li cast his gaze toward the main hall as he said, "Looks like they're about to set off. We should prepare for departure as well."

Sure enough, the inner court disciples there were already departing from the palace, led by Fang Yu.

"There's no need to hurry, Brother Li. Let them go on their own for now, and we'll catch up a bit later," Su Tongxiao replied with a wave of his hand.

As soon as his voice trailed off, a gray-haired elderly man suddenly appeared in the side hall without any warning, and judging from his attire, he was also an inner sect elder.

The elderly man took a glance at Han Li and Su Tongxiao, then quickly settled his gaze on the latter before approaching him with a warm smile.

"Long time no see, Elder Su."

"It's always a pleasure, Elder Wang," Su Tongxiao replied with a warm smile of his own.

A thought occurred to Han Li upon seeing this, and he immediately closed his eyes, pretending to meditate.

The gray-haired elderly man didn't stay for very long, only making some brief small talk before departing, and Su Tongxiao accompanied him to the entrance of the side hall.

Right as he was about to depart, the gray-haired elderly man stuffed a storage pouch into Su Tongxiao's hands in a subtle manner, and Su Tongxiao stowed the storage pouch away without even looking at him.

As soon as the elderly man departed, a middle-aged man who also appeared to have been an inner sect elder made his way into the side hall.

The middle-aged man swept his spiritual sense over the pair of elders in the room, then automatically ignored Han Li as he cupped his fist toward Su Tongxiao with a wide smile. "I knew you'd be the one taking on this mission, Elder Su!"

"Welcome, Elder Fan," Su Tongxiao replied with a smile.

The middle-aged man didn't waste time with small talk at all before handing a storage pouch straight to Su Tongxiao.

As it turned out, this was far from the end of the visitors. It didn't take long before seven or eight groups of people had visited the side hall, and all of them had come to bribe Su Tongxiao before quickly departing.

It was clear to Han Li that these were all seniors of the disciples undertaking the trials, and these gifts had been bestowed upon Su Tongxiao so that he would look at the disciples that were connected to them.

However, Han Li was a completely unfamiliar figure to them, and he was only at the early-True Immortal Stage, so these gifts were naturally all presented to Su Tongxiao, who accepted them without any discretion.

Meanwhile, Han Li sat off to the side in silence this entire time, but internally, he was pondering what Dao Lord Yun had said to him through voice transmission right before her departure.

Dao Lord Yun had asked him to protect Bai Suyuan at all costs, and it seemed that she hadn't made the same request to Su Tongxiao, despite the fact that his cultivation base was superior, and that was rather peculiar in Han Li's eyes.

After waiting for a while without any more visitors, Su Tongxiao called out to Han Li, "It's about time, Brother Li. Let's set off."

Han Li opened his eyes and nodded in response. "Sure."

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Atop a massive mountain in the northern region of the Bell Toll Mountain Range was a huge bluestone hall.

This was the northernmost teleportation hall of the Blaze Dragon Dao.

Frosty winds that were carrying countless snowflakes were howling through the air outside the hall, and the temperature was much lower than it was elsewhere.

After emerging from the hall, Han Li and Su Tongxiao immediately flew toward the north without any delay.

After flying for close to an hour, the two of them began to slow down.

Tens of thousands of kilometers away, a giant flying boat was racing through the clouds.

"From here, all we have to do is follow along at a leisurely pace. By the way, if you and Bai Suyuan joined the sect at the same time, then it's only been less than a century since you came to our sect, right? What do you think of it?" Su Tongxiao asked as he turned to Han Li with a smile.

"The sect certainly has a vast wealth of cultivation arts and resources, but they're not exactly the most accessible to people like us," Han Li replied with a wry smile.

"Indeed, Brother Li. For itinerant elders like us with no powerful connections or backers in the sect, it's difficult to advance in our cultivation. The funds that we receive upon joining the sect are extremely meager, and we have to rely on ourselves for everything else.

"At this level, even mountains of gold and silver can be easily exhausted to make any progress. Otherwise, I wouldn't have only made this breakthrough after more than 100,000 years in the sect," Su Tongxiao said with a self-deprecating smile.

Han Li was rather taken aback to hear this. "We're supposed to have received funds upon joining the sect?"

"Yes, you were supposed to have received 500 top-grade spirit stones and three Immortal Origin Stones. May I ask who your guide was when you first joined the sect?" Su Tongxiao asked.

"It was Qi Liang," Han Li replied.

Su Tongxiao gave Han Li a meaningful look upon hearing this, but didn't say anything.

However, it was already very apparent what he was implying. Essentially, he was telling Han Li that this initial care package had been taken by Qi Liang.

Han Li feigned an enraged expression upon hearing this, but internally, he wasn't actually all that bothered by this.

This was most likely standard practice in the Blaze Dragon Dao, and he had always been a little wary about why Qi Liang had been so friendly to him, so he was actually rather relieved to have finally found an explanation.

Thinking back to all the bribes that Su Tongxiao had just accepted, Han Li was left feeling a little speechless.

It seemed that the rules were largely the same regardless of whether it was in the Mortal Realm, the Spirit Realm, or the Immortal Realm, and in many ways, these True Immortals were just like mortals.

All of a sudden, a thought seemed to have occurred to Su Tongxiao, and he asked, "By the way, do you still recall Deputy Dao Lord Xiong's failed sword refinement from some years ago?"

"Didn't Deputy Dao Lord Xiong warn us not to speak of this to anyone? I think it's best that we don't discuss this," Han Li said as his brows furrowed slightly.

"It's fine! The two of us are the only ones here anyway. Besides, even if we don't speak of this to anyone else, which elder in the inner sect doesn't know about what happened? It's already as open as an open secret can be," Su Tongxiao replied with a nonchalant smile.

Han Li merely smiled in response and didn't say anything.

"Apparently, in order to set up the sword array, Deputy Dao Lord Xiong borrowed a large sum of Immortal Origin Stones from Elder Mo Xie of the Immortal Origin Palace. He still hasn't repaid Elder Mo Xie, and a few days ago, Elder Mo Xie visited Deputy Dao Lord Xiong, demanding that he repaid his debt. The two of them almost got into a physical altercation over this, and it turned into quite an embarrassing spectacle..."

Su Tongxiao seemed to have been quite interested in the latest gossip in the sect, and he told Han Li about a bunch of different things.

Han Li didn't have much interest in engaging in the gossip, but there was nothing better to do anyway, so he intentionally guided the conversation to subjects that he was interested in hearing about. He had only joined the sect not long ago, and he had no intention of being swept up in any conflicts.

As a result, the two were chatting non-stop like a pair of good friends that hadn't met in many years.

As the giant flying boat continued to progress northward, the temperature was dropping further and further. Along the way, they even encountered several snowstorms. Han Li had been busy cultivating in seclusion all this time, so this was the first time that he had had an opportunity to appreciate the scenery of the snow-covered forest.

Close to a month passed by in the blink of an eye, and the flying boat that was carrying Bai Suyuan and the other inner court disciples finally drew to a halt in front of a mountain range that was situated northward of the Bell Toll Mountain Range.

This was the trial venue, the Profound Ice Mountain Range.

This was the third-largest branch of the Bell Toll Mountain Range, and it extended over a vast distance from south to north.

The trees here were extremely tall with dense canopies, and their leaves were all in needle form. These trees were extremely resistant to the cold and were one of the few types of plants that could grow in this mountain range, resembling a series of pointy white spires under the blankets of white snow.

At this point, Bai Suyuan and the other inner sect disciples had already gotten down from their flying boat on a spacious plot of land in the southern part of the mountain range.

Fang Yu stowed the flying boat away, then declared, "Alright, this is as far as I'll be taking you. All of you have a map of this place, and there are three paths that you can take into the mountain range. That will be up to your own discretion, all you have to do is complete your mission. I'll be waiting here in a month for your return."

After that, he flew onto the peak of a small mountain, then sat down with his legs crossed and his eyes closed, leaving the inner sect disciples to their own devices.

Before long, the two dozen or so disciples had gathered together in small groups.

There were several people gathered around each of Qi Huanyu and Tang Chuan, and it seemed that they had already made plans to travel together.

Meanwhile, Bai Suyuan and the other female cultivators had already split up to join their groups, and it was clear that they had also decided on this in advance.

That left Sun Ke and the other itinerant cultivators to gather together to form a third group.

Qi Huanyu took a glance at Bai Suyuan, who was inspecting the map on her own, and he immediately detached himself from the group to approach her.

"We've already selected the Snow Camel Mountain Route, Junior Martial Sister Bai. It's a relatively dangerous route, but it's closest to the center of the mountain range, where Dark Snow Bears are most active.

"On top of that, we should be reaping some additional rewards along the way. Why don't you come with us so we can all look after one another during the trial?" Qi Huanyu offered with a hopeful look in his eyes.

Chapter 227: Three Routes

"I've also considered the Snow Camel Mountain route, and even though it's quite short, it's several times more likely to encounter powerful demon beasts on this route than the other two routes, so it really is quite dangerous," Bai Suyuan said as her brows furrowed slightly.

"Rest assured, Junior Martial Sister Bai. With me by your side, you won't be in any danger!" Qi Huanyu hurriedly guaranteed as he gave himself a pat on the chest.

Before Bai Suyuan had a chance to reply, they were approached by Tang Chuan, who scoffed with a disdainful expression, "You sure like to make bold promises that you can't keep, Young Master Qi! You think you have what it takes to ensure Junior Martial Sister Bai's safety?"

"Don't say that, Senior Martial Brother Tang. Senior Martial Brother Qi is only looking out for me," Bai Suyuan said with a smile.

A hint of warmth instantly welled up in Qi Huanyu's heart upon hearing this, and he turned to Tang Chuan with a cold expression as he retorted, "What does this have to do with you? Leave us alone!"

Tang Chuan paid no heed to Qi Huanyu as he said, "Junior Martial Sister Bai, Junior Martial Brother Chen and I are planning to take the White Fox Valley route. The rewards reaped along the way won't be any lesser than the Snow Camel Mountain route, and it'll be a bit safer. Our ultimate goal is to hunt down Dark Snow Bears, so there's no need to take any unnecessary risks along the way. Why don't you come with us, Junior Martial Sister Bai?"

A hesitant look appeared on Bai Suyuan's face upon hearing this.

Qi Huanyu and Tang Chuan were just about to say something further when she suddenly decided, "I'll take the Pine Fruit Mountain route with Senior Martial Brother Sun Ke and the others."

Qi Huanyu and Tang Chuan both faltered slightly upon hearing this, and Sun Ke and the others were also quite taken aback by this decision.

The itinerant immortals accompanying Sun Ke were very pleased to see this. There weren't many female cultivators on this trip, and the vast majority of them had chosen to join Qi Huanyu or Tang Chuan's group on the flying boat, so it was naturally a massively pleasant surprise for them that the most beautiful female cultivator of the bunch had chosen to accompany them.

However, Sun Ke was not so pleased.

All he wanted was to be able to safely complete this trial, and he didn't want to get involved in these conflicts at all. However, seeing as Bai Suyuan had expressly chosen him, he couldn't just ignore her, so he had no choice but to turn in her direction.

At the same time, Qi Huanyu and Tang Chuan were also looking back at him with fiery contempt in their eyes, and both of them were considering whether they should change the route that they were taking so that they could accompany Bai Suyuan.

"With my lackluster abilities, I'll only be dragging you two down, so it's best for me to take the safest route. You are among the cream of the crop of all inner sect disciples, and I admire both of you greatly. I can't accompany either of you on this mission, but I'll be cheering for both of you. I'm sure one of you will be able to claim the top spot for this trial," Bai Suyuan said.

The egos of Qi Huanyu and Tang Chuan were greatly inflated by Bai Suyuan's glowing praise, and both of them gave up on the idea of changing routes.

Neither of them were looking at Sun Ke anymore, and they exchanged a vicious glare instead, then bade farewell to Bai Suyuan before leading their groups down the two most perilous paths.

Following their departure, Bai Suyuan approached Sun Ke with a bright smile and asked, "You're not opposed to me accompanying you, are you, Senior Martial Brother Sun?"

"Not at all!" Sun Ke replied with a polite smile, and all of the itinerant disciples eagerly welcomed her with open arms as they began to introduce themselves.

Meanwhile, Han Li and Su Tongxiao were hovering in mid-air above a snowy mountain close to 100 kilometers away. Both of them had concealed their auras, and in front of them was a thin screen of water that was depicting Bai Suyuan and the others.

"That Bai Suyuan really is something. The trial has barely started, and she's already managed to goad her two fiercest competitors into going down the most dangerous routes. Her strategy and manipulation are both top-notch," Su Tongxiao praised.

Han Li was already accustomed to Bai Suyuan's wiles, so he wasn't surprised by this at all, and he smiled as he replied, "I would say the foolishness of those two have played a bigger role in this."

"I agree, Brother Li. With such high expectations set on them by Bai Suyuan, those two will be sure to fight tooth and nail over the top spot for the trial," Su Tongxiao chuckled.

Han Li didn't want to dwell on this topic any longer, so he changed the subject. "By the way, I heard that Bai Suyuan has an ancestor who seemed to have been quite an important inner sect elder of our Blaze Dragon Dao. Do you know him, Brother Su?"

"The elder that you're referring to is Elder Bai Fengyi, who disappeared several thousand years ago. He's more familiar with Elder Qi Liang. I don't know him very well, but I did meet him a few times before his disappearance," Su Tongxiao replied with a nod.

"Do you know what happened to Elder Bai?" Han Li asked as an intrigued look appeared on his face.

"There are all types of theories about what happened to him going around in the sect. Some say that he perished while carrying out a mission for the sect, others say that he was killed by certain sworn enemies of his.

"If you ask me, I think he went somewhere to go into seclusion in order to make a breakthrough to the Golden Immortal Stage. Also, according to some obscure sources in the sect, the Origin Soul Lamp left behind by Elder Bai in the sect has never been snuffed out," Su Tongxiao replied.

It seemed to Han Li that there was more to this matter than met the eye, but he didn't ponder the subject any further.

Meanwhile, Bai Suyuan and the others were gradually vanishing out of sight on the screen of water, and Su Tongxiao erased the screen with a sweep of his sleeve as he said, "Let's go, Brother Li. We have to catch up."

Han Li nodded in response, and as opposed to flying beyond this point, they descended into the forest and began to follow Bai Suyuan and the others on foot while keeping tabs on the three groups with their spiritual sense.

After following the disciples for a while, Han Li's brows furrowed slightly as if he had detected something, but his expression then quickly returned to normal.

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Sun Ke's group consisted of six disciples, and they were flying at a low altitude deeper into the Profound Ice Mountain Range over a mountain path with a rather gentle slope.

The area appeared to have been quite peaceful, but there were many demon beasts in the mountain range that were very proficient at concealing themselves in the snow. Hence, anyone who dared to fly along recklessly at a high altitude could easily end up falling prey to those lurking demon beasts.

It seemed that everyone had already been assigned roles in advance, and Sun Ke had been tasked with leading the way.

At this moment, there was a jade bowl treasure hovering above his head, and rays of white light were shining down from the bowl, enveloping his entire body. At the same time, there were four glittering and translucent azure flying daggers slowly revolving around him.

This still didn't seem to have put him at ease, and he was also holding a small yellow shield with a surface that was as smooth as a mirror in his hand.

Behind him, the other four male cultivators had all adopted protective measures as well and were scouring their surroundings with wary expressions.

Bai Suyuan was bringing up the rear with a white jade bracelet in her hand, forming a white halo around her. At the same time, she had also put on a white veil garment that was giving off specks of silver light.

The group was flying ahead in a slow and cautious manner, and they didn't encounter any danger aside from some sneak attacks from a few reckless demon beasts, all of which were easily dealt with.

As they ventured deeper and deeper into the mountain range, the air temperature also plummeted further and further.

A bone-chilling aura was rising up from beneath the earth, and gusts of frosty wind were also sweeping through the air. Even with the Spatial Tempering Stage cultivation bases of Sun Ke and the others, they were beginning to shiver from the cold. Bai Suyuan was still able to ward off the cold relatively well, but everyone else was clearly beginning to struggle.

All of them activated their cultivation arts to keep themselves insulated, but the temperature continued to plummet, and they were beginning to sorely regret not preparing any treasures that enhanced their resistance to cold conditions.

After all, constantly using their cultivation arts to ward off the cold was very taxing on their magic power, which was detrimental to the battles to come, but they had no choice in the matter.

Right at this moment, Sun Ke suddenly stopped in his tracks, then turned around and produced an intricate red wine flagon as he said, "I have some spirit wine here that's brewed using fire-attribute spirit ingredients and can help ward off the cold. Please have some if you'd like."

Everyone exchanged a few hesitant glances upon hearing this.

Meanwhile, Sun Ke flipped a hand over to produce a cup, which he filled with the spirit wine from the flagon.

The wine had a bright red hue, and it was giving off a fiery red glow. It was as if the wine were burning, and the surrounding air temperature was significantly elevated in its presence.

At the same time, a peculiar fragrance was spreading through the air, and even Bai Suyuan's eyes lit up slightly as she was struck by the urge to give the wine a taste.

One of the young men in the group seemed to have been an avid wine enthusiast as well, and he immediately praised, "This is certainly a fine wine!"

"Do you drink as well, Brother Lin? Please give this a taste if you don't mind. It'll be very helpful for warding off the cold," Sun Ke said as he offered the young man his cup.

"Don't mind if I do!" The young man eagerly accepted the cup before downing its contents in one go.

The wine flowed down into his belly, leaving a scorching trail in its wake, then transformed into a burst of fiery heat that enveloped all of his internal organs.

The burst of heat then split up into several bursts that flowed to all parts of his body as if they had a mind of their own, and he was left feeling extremely light and airy, as if he were about to drift away with the wind.

His entire body stiffened as if he had been struck by lightning, following which an intoxicated look appeared on his face, and it took a long while before he returned to his senses, upon which he praised once again, "This wine is exceptional! May I ask its name, Brother Sun?"

"This wine is called Fire Drop Wine," Sun Ke replied with a smile.

"A fitting name for an exceptional wine! I was fortunate enough to have tasted one of the top 10 immortal brews, the Green Pear Immortal Wine, and I'd say its flavor is slightly lacking compared with this Fire Drop Wine," the young man said in an excited manner.

Not only was this wine extremely delectable, just as Sun Ke said, it was very effective in warding off the cold.

At this moment, his entire body felt as if it were being basked under the warm glow of the sun, and a hint of redness had appeared on his cheeks, while all of the biting chill in his body had been expelled.

The other three male cultivators had no further reservations upon seeing this, and each of them had a cup of the spirit wine as well, following which elated looks appeared on their faces.

They weren't avid drinkers, so they didn't care about the taste of the wine, but they were very pleased with its effects.

Furthermore, the warmth released by the Fire Drop Wine was lingering in their bodies and didn't appear as if it were going to dissipate anytime soon. Hence, they wouldn't have to continue to use their cultivation arts to keep themselves insulated.

"The warmth released by the Fire Drop Wine will linger for around half a day before slowly fading. You should have a cup as well, Junior Martial Sister Bai," Sun Ke said with a smile.

"Thank you, Senior Martial Brother Sun," Bai Suyuan replied with a nod.

Chapter 228: Disparity

"How much more of this Fire Drop Wine do you have, Junior Martial Brother Sun?" the first young man to have drunk the wine asked, and everyone turned to Sun Ke upon hearing this question.

One cup of wine could keep them warm for half a day, and there were six people in the group. They were going to have to stay in the Profound Ice Mountain Range for close to a month, so this one flagon of wine most likely wasn't going to be enough.

"Rest assured, everyone, I still have a few jars left, so we'll definitely have enough to weather this trial," Sun Ke replied with a smile, and everyone was quite relieved to hear this.

"You have my thanks, Senior Martial Brother Sun. If you need help with anything in the future, feel free to call on me," a tall young man in the group said in an earnest manner, and everyone else nodded in agreement.

"You're all far too kind. All of us come from the same sect, so it's only right that we help out one another," Sun Ke replied in a calm manner, but internally, he was quite pleased with this reaction.

He had only been in the Blaze Dragon Dao for a short time, so he was eager to make connections, and some spirit wine was certainly a fine price to pay for this purpose.

Meanwhile, several thousand kilometers away, a hint of elation flashed through Han Li's eyes, but it was then quickly replaced by a contemplative expression.

At some point, Su Tongxiao had already vanished without a trace.

Sun Ke and the others continued onward without any delay, and shortly thereafter, they encountered their first real battle since entering the mountain range.

It was a group of snow foxes with powers that ranged between the Nascent Soul Stage and the Deity Transformation Stage, and there were around 40 to 50 of them. They had come rushing out from either side of the mountain range while howling in unison, presenting an intimidating sight to behold.

Everyone in Sun Ke's group was quite powerful in their own right, and thanks to Sun Ke's wine, they had all developed a sense of camaraderie, so they were able to quickly get into a battle formation.

The three cultivators in the group with the highest cultivation bases, namely Bai Suyuan, Sun Ke, and another young man were situated at the very forefront, and the three of them summoned a crescent-shaped flying sword, four flying daggers, and a purplish-golden staff, respectively.

The flying sword transformed into a streak of silver swordlight that was over 1,000 feet in length in a flash, then came slashing down from above.

Meanwhile, the purplish-golden staff released several hundred purple staff projections amid a flash of bright light, all of which hurtled through the air with astonishing power.

As for the four azure flying daggers, they were glowing bright in unison as they expanded to dozens of times their original size, swooping downward as a set of giant azure blades, each of which was several hundred feet in length.

The skulk of snow foxes were instantly sent flying back by the barrage of attacks, and the dozen or so Deity Transformation Stage snow foxes were killed on the spot, instantly halting the momentum of their charge.

In the next instant, the three disciples behind Sun Ke's trio sprang into action as well, and a flurry of attacks were sent raining down upon the snow foxes

Bursts of dull rumbling rang out alongside flashes of light of different colors.

A few moments later, all of the light subsided, and the skulk of snow foxes had already been reduced to sets of dismembered bodies, while a large area had been stained red with their blood.

Han Li gave a slight nod as he observed the group in action from afar.

These disciples had decent reactions. In particular, Bai Suyuan and Sun Ke had endured some life-and-death situations outside of the sect, so they were naturally more capable in situations like these than the other disciples who had grown up their entire lives in the sect.

As a major sect in the Northern Glacial Immortal Region, the Blaze Dragon Dao possessed a cultivation environment that was unimaginable to those in the outside world. It had all of the resources and treasures that these disciples could ever want for, thereby allowing them to progress rapidly in their cultivation, but there were downsides to this as well.

For the sake of the development of these core disciples, the higher-ups of the sect had spared no effort.

Sun Ke and the others only took a short while to regroup before they continued onward.

Meanwhile, the other two groups had also been attacked by demon beasts.

On the Snow Camel Mountain route, Qi Huanyu and the others encountered a flock of vicious snow birds with vulture-like heads, but excessively large beaks, out of which they were able to shoot a relentless barrage of white ice arrows.

There were over 100 of these birds in total, and around half of them possessed Deity Transformation Stage power.

A volley of white ice arrows descended out of the sky, interspersed with a bone-chilling aura, and the occasional bird came swooping down from above as well.

Qi Huanyu's group was quite large, and all of them were carrying extremely powerful treasures, but none of them had any experience when it came to life-and-death battles.

Hence, the violent killing intent displayed by the flock of birds and the relentless storm of attacks caught them completely off guard, and they were looking a little panicked.

All of them were standing in a circle with their backs facing one another to form a ring-shaped protective barrier that warded off the oncoming attacks.

Qi Huanyu's face was slightly pale, and he yelled, "Don't panic! These are just some Deity Transformation Stage demon beasts! Everyone, listen to me. Half of you continue to support the barrier, while the other half retaliates!"

He was the leader of the group, and his instructions instilled within everyone a sense of confidence as they immediately began to carry out his orders.

Before long, bursts of dazzling light were erupting into the air to strike at the white birds in the sky.

The disciples were feeling very intimidated, so their attacks were quite feeble, but thanks to the massive cultivation base advantage they had, they were able to strike down the birds one after another.

Around 15 minutes later, the battle finally drew to a conclusion.

Most of the birds had been slain, while the rest had fled the battle.

Qi Huanyu and the others were uninjured. They looked at the bird carcasses around them as they inhaled the bloody scent in the air, and even though their faces were quite pale, they were gradually regaining their composure.

"I can't believe a bunch of mere Deity Transformation Stage demon beasts had all of you in such a panic! You should be ashamed of yourselves! You saw what happened just now. As long as we maintain our composure, these demon beasts are no match for us!" Qi Huanyu yelled in an attempt to raise morale.

Everyone immediately nodded in response.

Qi Huanyu was just about to say something further when a more experienced individual in the group stepped forward and cautioned, "Young Master Qi, the scent of blood here is too strong, so we should leave this place as soon as possible."

Qi Huanyu faltered slightly upon hearing this, then immediately understood the reasoning behind the advice, and he instructed everyone to continue onward.

Meanwhile, Su Tongxiao appeared in the air above amid a burst of spatial fluctuations, then shook his head in dismay before vanishing from the spot.

The situation was much the same over on the White Fox Valley route. Tang Chuan's group didn't have much practical battle experience, either, and they also erupted into a blind panic in the face of the ferocious demon beasts that they were attacked by.

However, thanks to their cultivation base advantage and powerful treasures, they were able to weather the storm, then composed themselves before defeating the enemy without suffering any casualties.

The three groups of disciples continued onward, and seven or eight days passed by in the blink of an eye as all of the disciples ventured deeper into the Profound Ice Mountain Range.

The demon beasts that they encountered along the way were becoming more and more powerful, and some Spatial Tempering Stage demon beasts had begun to appear.

After several battles, Qi Huanyu and the others had become far more proficient in battle than before, but they were still struggling in the face of demon beasts of a similar level of power to themselves.

On the Snow Camel Mountain Route, Qi Huanyu and his group had been surrounded by around a dozen giant ice praying mantises.

These praying mantises were entirely white in color with frosty patterns all over their bodies, and their mouths were split up into four mandibles. Their eyes were large and protruded outward, giving them a fearsome appearance, and their thick and strong front limbs resembled a pair of giant blades that were giving off bone-chilling auras.

Every single one of these demon beasts possessed early-Spatial Tempering Stage power, and they were extremely fast, dashing around Qi Huanyu's group while unleashing a ferocious barrage of attacks, leaving trails of afterimages in their wake.

Just like before, Qi Huanyu and the others had formed a circle, conjuring up a ring-shaped protective barrier that encompassed everyone within it.

However, these praying mantises were far more powerful than the birds from before, and they were able to unleash powerful projections with their blade-like front limbs.

These projections were imbued with ferocious power, causing the ring-shaped light barrier to tremble incessantly.

Qi Huanyu and the others were forced to inject all of their magic power into their protective treasures to maintain the light barrier, so they were completely unable to retaliate.

The praying mantises were letting loose bloodthirsty screeches as they swung their front limbs through their air relentlessly, seemingly only growing more vigorous and powerful as time went on.

The ring-shaped light barrier wasn't just a single cohesive barrier. Instead, it was jointly formed by everyone's protective treasures, and some of the more fragile parts of the barrier were close to giving out.

A tall and thin young man turned to Qi Huanyu with a panicked expression as he asked, "What do we do, Young Master Qi? These things are all at the Spatial Tempering Stage, and there are too many of them for us to deal with!"

The young man was a direct descendant to a True Immortal Stage elder of the Blaze Dragon Dao, and he had been cultivating his entire life in the sect, progressing smoothly to the Spatial Tempering Stage thanks to an endless supply of pills. As a result, he had next to no battle experience.

He had made some improvements in this regard over the course of the trial thus far, but his heart was still shuddering with fear at the sight of these terrifying praying mantises.

Everyone else in the group was in much the same mental state as the young man, and they couldn't help but wonder if they were going to die here, a thought that only made them even more panicked and fearful.

All of a sudden, a loud crack rang out, and a light barrier conjured up by a white handkerchief treasure was destroyed, creating an opening in the overall light barrier.

A bright projection flew straight through the opening, and an agonized howl rang out as blood splattered through the air.

A disciple near the opening had been sent flying with a large gash sliced into his arm, but thankfully, he was wearing a suit of armor of quite a high caliber, so he had managed to escape severe injury.

Bright purple light erupted from Qi Huanyu's glabella as he swept an arm through the air, releasing a purple wheel treasure that conjured up a purple vortex to fill the opening.

"There's no need to fear! There are True Immortal cultivators protecting us in secret during the trial, and they'll take care of all unforeseen mishaps for us. These praying mantises are beyond what we can deal with, so I'm sure one of them will intervene soon!" Qi Huanyu yelled.

Everyone else was ecstatic to hear this.

"I've heard about this before, and I was rather skeptical, but it must be true if Young Master Qi says so!"

"There are only 10 of us, yet we're facing close to 20 of these praying mantises. This is definitely beyond the scope of the trial, so why has there still not been an intervention?"

Su Tongxiao was hovering high up in the sky as a blurry shadow, and he shook his head with a forlorn sigh while flicking a finger through the air.

Streaks of invisible sword qi instantly came hurtling down from above, piercing through the bodies of most of the praying mantises.

All of the praying mantises that were struck instantly exploded silently into piles of dust that were scattered by the wind.

All of this had taken place in the blink of an eye, and Su Tongxiao vanished once again immediately thereafter.

It didn't take long before Qi Huanyu and the others noticed that most of the praying mantises had disappeared, thereby significantly alleviating the pressure on them.

"How come there are suddenly so much fewer praying mantises?" someone asked with a puzzled expression.

"They were obviously killed by someone! There really is someone protecting us in secret!" someone else exclaimed with an ecstatic expression.

Qi Huanyu was also quite relieved to see this, and a triumphant smile appeared on his face as he yelled, "These filthy beasts must pay the price for attacking us! Don't let any of them get away!"

Everyone else immediately answered his call, then began retaliating against the remaining praying mantises with renewed vigor.

A short while later, all of the praying mantises were slain with the exception of two of them, which had managed to get away.

The front limbs of these praying mantises were filled with abundant spiritual power and were outstanding tool refinement materials even for Spatial Tempering cultivators, so these front limbs were immediately severed before being stowed away by several of the disciples.

"Let's go!"

Qi Huanyu flew up into the air and led the way forward.

Now that it was confirmed that there was indeed someone protecting them in secret, he was instilled with a great deal of confidence and began to continue onward at a faster pace than before.

Chapter 229: Trapped

Not long after Qi Huanyu and his group defeated the praying mantises, Tang Chuan's group found themselves locked in battle against a nest of white ice scorpions deep in the White Fox Valley.

There were around 20 to 30 of these scorpions, and all of them were quite powerful. Tang Chuan and the others were already in a dire situation, but all of a sudden, the few Spatial Tempering Stage scorpions in the nest somehow vanished without a trace.

Tang Chuan and the others were ecstatic, and they immediately retaliated, quickly slaying all of the ice scorpions before continuing onward.

Meanwhile, Su Tongxiao lingered for a moment in the air above them before vanishing yet again.

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Several thin silver threads came flying down, whistling through the air before plunging into a white ice python's body to inflict a massive wound.

The Spatial Tempering Stage ice python let loose an agonized cry before plummeting to the ground. Blood was gushing out of its body as it spasmed a few times before falling completely still.

The thin silver threads came flying back before coming together to form a silver flying sword that returned to Bai Suyuan's side.

Sun Ke and the others were standing around Bai Suyuan in a circle to form a protective barrier, and outside the barrier were around a dozen more Spatial Tempering Stage giant pythons that were attacking them relentlessly.

Each of Sun Ke and the others had to deal with more than two of these giant pythons on their own on average, and they were definitely on the back foot, but they were still able to hold their own for now.

After slaying that python, Bai Suyuan didn't stop for even a single moment as she pointed a finger forward, and the silver flying sword shot forth through the air once again, split up into dozens of silver sword threads that formed a lotus flower shape as it hurtled toward one of the pythons that Sun Ke was locked in battle against.

Sun Ke was ecstatic to see this, and he hurriedly assisted her with his four azure flying daggers.

At this point, 10 days had already passed in the trial, and they were well and truly deep in the Profound Ice Mountain Range. The demon beasts that they were encountering were becoming more and more powerful, and on this day, they had been surrounded by around a dozen of these mid-Spatial Tempering Stage python beasts.

The six of them had immediately formed a circular defensive array, and as the most powerful one among them, Bai Suyuan was protected at the center of the array so she could retaliate against the enemy.

She certainly didn't disappoint, unleashing secret techniques one after another, displaying immense combat prowess in the face of the giant pythons.

Time slowly passed by, and the tide of the battle was beginning to turn in their favor.

The dozens of sword threads pierced through a giant python's body, and they hadn't struck a vital region, but they did temporarily stop it cold in its tracks.

Immediately thereafter, a massive purplish-golden staff projection came crashing down viciously onto its head, splitting its head into multiple chunks as blood and intracranial fluids splattered in all directions.

All of a sudden, a white python let loose a strange roar before fleeing into the distance, and the remaining python beasts immediately followed along, vanishing into the distant sky in the blink of an eye.

Bai Suyuan and the others didn't set off in pursuit. All of them had expended a great deal of magic power during the course of the battle, and they immediately pulled out some pills and spirit stones to aid in their recovery.

Meanwhile, Han Li was concealed high up in the sky as a blurry shadow within a cloud, and he gave a slight nod of approval.

He hadn't had to intervene even once during this entire trial.

Bai Suyuan and the others were all quite commendable in their tactical acumen and mental fortitude. The strategy that they had employed in the battle just now was a little unrefined, but considering their cultivation bases, they had already done extremely well.

After resting for a short while, Bai Suyuan and the others continued onward, and Han Li followed along.

However, in the next instant, his expression changed slightly as he turned to a certain direction, and Su Tongxiao appeared there amid a burst of spatial fluctuations.

"Weren't you busy protecting the other two groups, Brother Su?" Han Li asked with a smile.

"I've already mostly cleared out the other two routes. This is turning out to be a lot more exhausting than I bargained for! The two groups of disciples have improved quite a bit, so I'm sure they'll be fine on their own now. These disciples all possess exceptional aptitude, but they're sorely lacking in practical battle experience," Su Tongxiao sighed.

"They've grown up their entire lives in the sect under the protection of the elders, so it's no surprise that they don't have much experience in battle," Han Li said.

In his eyes, someone who hadn't experienced life-and-death battles wouldn't be of much use at all in perilous situations, even if they possessed a lofty cultivation base.

"It's not that difficult for them to accumulate battle experience. There's an Illusory Nightmare Pagoda in the sect that's available exclusively to direct disciples to help them improve in this regard," Su Tongxiao said.

Han Li was rather taken aback to hear this. "I didn't know there was such a place in the sect."

"There are many interesting places in the sect. You'll learn about all of them in due time, Brother Li," Su Tongxiao said with a smile.

Han Li nodded in response, then suddenly raised his head, and Su Tongxiao's brows also furrowed slightly at the exact same moment.

A Body Integration Stage demon beast was quickly approaching Qi Huanyu's group.

"I didn't think that a Body Integration Stage demon beast would appear so soon," Su Tongxiao mused.

Han Li's eyes narrowed slightly as the corners of his lips curved upward by a minute degree as he said, "It must've been attracted by the blood and carcasses of all of the demon beasts that you slew to clear out the two routes."

"Perhaps," Su Tongxiao replied before preparing to depart.

Qi Huanyu's group couldn't even deal with a bunch of Spatial Tempering Stage demon beasts, so they certainly didn't stand any chance against a Body Integration Stage foe. Hence, he had to keep a close eye on them as a safety precaution.

Right at this moment, his expression changed slightly as he cast his gaze toward Tang Chuan's direction.

As it turned out, another Body Integration Stage demon beasts had appeared there. It was a giant bird that was flying extremely fast, and it was rapidly closing in on Tang Chuan's group.

"There are two Body Integration Stage demon beasts at once!" Su Tongxiao exclaimed with a hint of urgency in his eyes.

The three routes were quite far away from one another, so if he were to go to one route, then he wouldn't be in time to go to the other.

"Brother Li, can I trouble you to take care of the demon beast on Tang Chuan's route? I would be extremely grateful to you if you could do so," Su Tongxiao said as he turned to Han Li.

A reluctant look appeared on Han Li's face as he cast his gaze forward, and after a brief hesitation, he replied, "Alright, I suppose I could do that."

"You have my thanks, Brother Li," Su Tongxiao said, then immediately flew away into the distance.

Han Li took a glance at Su Tongxiao's departing figure, and after a brief moment of contemplation, he also vanished from the spot.

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Meanwhile, Tang Chuan's group of eight was continuing onward, and according to the map, they weren't far away from their destination.

Over 70% of the demon beasts on their route had been wiped out by Su Tongxiao in advance, so they were naturally able to make very smooth progress.

Tang Chuan was well aware that one of the True Immortal Stage elders that was protecting them in secret had to have been responsible for this sharp decline in demon beast numbers.

Now that he no longer had to worry about his own safety, claiming the top spot in the trial became his new top priority.

With that in mind, Tang Chuan turned and yelled to everyone in his group, "Let's speed up a little more!"

He had to track down and kill a Dark Snow Bear as soon as quickly as possible. As for whether this group of eight would be capable of slaying a Dark Snow Bear, that wasn't something that he was concerned about at all.

There was no way that the True Immortal Stage elder would allow him to be killed by the Dark Snow Bear, so they would have to intervene at some point.

With that in mind, Tang Chuan was brimming with confidence as he sped up even further.

Right at this moment, a sharp screech rang out from afar.

The sound was coming from somewhere very far away, but it was extremely sharp and piercing, causing his eardrums to throb with sharp pain. As a result, he was forced to slow down involuntarily.

The other disciples in the group were all of inferior cultivation base to Tang Chuan, and they couldn't help but let loose pained cries as they clapped their hands over their ears.

"What's that?" Tang Chuan murmured to himself with a fearful expression.

A black dot had appeared in the distant sky to his left, and it was rapidly approaching them, quickly coming into view and revealing itself to be a terrifying demon beast.

It was a terrifying wyrm-like demon beast that was several thousand feet in size. There was a pair of large wings on its back, and every single feather on those wings resembled a sharp sword. Its long tail was riddled with huge bone spikes, and at the end of the tail was a scorpion-like hooked pincer that was glowing with faint blue light, clearly indicating that it was tipped with lethal poison.

Furthermore, the immense aura that the giant beast was giving off indicated that it possessed Body Integration Stage power.

"It's a Body Integration Stage demon beast!"

Tang Chuan immediately fled back in retreat as quickly as he could while frantically looking around, as if he were searching for something.

The fearsome beast didn't give them any time to react as it let loose a thunderous roar, releasing powerful soundwaves that created ripples that were visible even to the naked eye.

Tang Chuan and the others didn't even have a chance to summon any treasures before the soundwaves swept over them, causing them to bleed out of all of their orifices as the blood and magic power in their bodies churned violently.

With a flap of its wings, the giant beast conjured up numerous thick blue ice spikes before sending them flying through the air, hurtling directly toward Tang Chuan and the other disciples.

In this dire situation, an azure figure appeared out of nowhere in front of the eight disciples, then extended a finger forward.

Bursts of dazzling azure light were released from the figure's fingertip, instantly forming a massive light barrier in front of the eight disciples.

The soundwaves were instantly kept out, while the ice spikes shattered upon making contact with the light barrier.

The giant beast stopped cold in its tracks as it stared at the figure that had just appeared before it, and upon sensing the azure figure's enormous aura, it immediately fled into the distance with a panicked look in its eyes.

Meanwhile, the azure figure abruptly vanished from the spot, then appeared directly above the giant beast's head in the next instant.

With a casual flick of his finger, a streak of azure light shot forth before plunging into the giant beast's head.

The giant beast's entire body instantly stiffened, following which its massive head exploded violently.

Immediately thereafter, a series of black balls flew out of the beast's head, and it flew rapidly toward the azure figure with black light flashing erratically over their surfaces.

The azure figure was just about to fly back in retreat upon seeing this when the black balls abruptly exploded into dazzling balls of black light, which connected together to form an enormous black array, within which countless black runes were surging incessantly.

Traces of law powers were emanating from the array, and the air surrounding the array instantly became as hard as iron and steel, trapping the azure figure inside.

"What just happened?"

Tang Chuan and the other disciples were completely dumbfounded by what they were witnessing.

Meanwhile, on the Snow Camel Mountain route.

Qi Huanyu and five other disciples were hiding behind a small mountain with horrified expressions. Most of them were bearing severe injuries, indicating that they had just endured a fierce battle.

In the air beside them were four tiny figures, each of which was roughly two inches tall. They appeared to have been the nascent souls of the other four disciples in the group, all of which had presumably had their physical bodies destroyed.

At this moment, everyone was staring at a giant black array several thousand feet in front of the mountain.

On the ground beneath the array laid the carcass of a giant demon beast, while Su Tongxiao was trapped within the array, struggling with all his might to break free.

However, the black array was clearly no ordinary array, and it was extremely resolute, able to contain even a mid-True Immortal cultivator like Su Tongxiao.

Chapter 230: Wasting Time

Meanwhile.

Sun Ke's group of six had already arrived deep in Pine Fruit Mountain.

Their route was the safest of the three routes, so the demon beasts that they had encountered hadn't been all that powerful, and thanks to the camaraderie that they had built, it had been a relatively smooth journey thus far.

At this moment, Bai Suyuan was flying beside Sun Ke, and her gaze was roaming over the vast snowland as she said, "Senior Martial Brother, according to the map, we'll reach the area where the Snow Dove Beasts are active in about 1,000 more kilometers."

"Those beasts are said to be quite docile, but their power is nothing to be scoffed at, and there have been precedents of such beasts actively attacking cultivators, so we'll have to be careful," Sun Ke said.

As soon as his voice trailed off, Bai Suyuan suddenly stopped in her tracks, then cast a wary gaze toward a forest that was several thousand feet up ahead.

Sun Ke immediately stopped as well, then raised a hand to indicate for everyone else to do the same.

The other four disciples in the group had already split up and summoned their respective treasures.

"I didn't think a bunch of kids like you would be able to detect my presence."

A hoarse voice rang out as a tall and imposing white-robed elderly man slowly rose up into the air from within the forest up ahead.

Bai Suyuan was feeling rather alarmed, but she still put on a respectful demeanor as she asked, "May I ask who you are and why you're hiding here, Senior?"

She was unable to detect the elderly man's cultivation base, and there was no way that she would've been able to sense his presence had it not been for the fact that she was carrying a special treasure. Furthermore, the manner in which he was sneaking around clearly indicated that he didn't harbor any good intentions.

The same thoughts had clearly occurred to Sun Ke and the others as well, and they exchanged a few glances, seemingly trying to decide on how to proceed.

"You don't need to know who I am, Bai Suyuan. What a pretty little flower you are. The Moonlight Immortal Physique truly lives up to its reputation. Come with me, and don't try to put up any futile resistance," the elderly man said.

Bai Suyuan's expression remained unchanged, but her heart clenched up slightly as she warned, "Stay away! The elders of our sect are in the nearby vicinity!"

A mocking sneer appeared on the elderly man's face as he jeered, "Quit trying to bluff me, little girl. The elders arranged to protect all of you in secret have already been diverted away by me, so no one's coming to save you. Now then, are you going to do things the easy way or the hard way?"

Sun Ke and the others were quite alarmed to hear this.

They didn't have any powerful backers in the sect, but seeing as they had managed to secure the right to participate in the trial, all of them naturally had their own information sources, so they were aware that there were going to be inner sect elders protecting them in secret during the trial.

This was like a safety net that instilled within them a sense of reassurance, but now that these elders had apparently been diverted elsewhere, they were naturally feeling a little fearful.

"I've never met you before, so why do you insist that I come with you, Senior?" Bai Suyuan asked.

Instead of answering Bai Suyuan's question, the elderly man smiled and said, "You've always wanted to know what happened to the patriarch of your Bai Clan, right? If you come with me, I'll tell you where he is."

"You know our clan's patriarch?" Bai Suyuan hurriedly asked.

"Of course I'm familiar with Elder Bai Fengyi," the elderly man replied in a casual voice.

A hint of hesitation appeared on Bai Suyuan's face, and even with all her wiles and cunning, she was at a slight loss for what to do.

"Don't listen to him, Junior Martial Sister Bai! He's just saying that to lure you into surrendering yourself over to him!" Sun Ke hurriedly cautioned.

"You're right! If you really do know our clan's patriarch, then show me a token of his!" Bai Suyuan said.

A cold look appeared on the elderly man's face upon hearing this. "I've tried to be nice, but seeing as you insist on testing my patience, you'll have to bear the consequences! I can't afford to waste any more time here!"

As soon as his voice trailed off, he abruptly raised a hand, then thrust it forward with his fingers spread apart. A shimmering golden bead instantly shot forth through the air, reaching within 200 feet of Bai Suyuan in the blink of an eye.

In the next instant, dazzling golden light erupted from the bead, and it transformed into a large golden net that descended upon her.

Bai Suyuan immediately shot back in retreat as quickly as she could, but there was simply far too massive a power disparity between the two, and she was unable to evade the attack even though she had reacted right away.

As for Sun Ke and the others, there was no time for them to do anything, and they could only look on helplessly as the golden net began to close in on Bai Suyuan.

Right at this moment, a burst of azure light appeared in the air without any warning, immediately following which a figure emerged in front of Bai Suyuan before sweeping a hand through the air.

A ball of black liquid instantly surged forth, crashing heavily into the golden net.

As soon as the two made contact with one another, the golden net instantly plummeted toward the ground as if something incredibly heavy were weighing down upon it.

"What? How could this be?" the elderly man exclaimed with a surprised expression.

"Elder Li!"

After taking a moment to steady herself, Bai Suyuan was both surprised and elated to find that she had been saved by a familiar figure.

Indeed, the one standing between her and the elderly man was none other than Han Li.

Instead of turning to look at Bai Suyuan, Han Li's gaze remained firmly fixed on the elderly man as he said, "You've already wasted more than enough time here. Also, I've been nearby this entire time, so why are you saying that I left? If these disciples report me to the sect for neglecting my duties, then I'll have merit points deducted."

"Now wonder that figure had an identical aura to yours, but it felt like something wasn't quite right with it. In any case, is a mere early-True Immortal cultivator like yourself going to stand against me?" the elderly man chuckled coldly.

As soon as his voice trailed off, he raised a hand to summon a set of seven flying swords, which circled around in the air for a moment before forming a sword array that flew directly toward Han Li.

The runes on the flying swords were glowing brightly as they released bursts of white flames, making the flying swords resemble a massive fire raven with its wings spread open.

Han Li raised both hands in response, and a torrent of heavy water gushed forth, transforming into a black flood dragon that was around 10 feet in length in mid-air before hurtling directly toward the white fire raven.

A string of loud explosions rang out as countless specks of white flames were sent flying in all directions, instantly melting the snow on the ground into water vapor wherever they landed.

The snow on around a dozen of the nearby pine trees quickly melted away, following which the trees themselves erupted into flames as well.

A peculiar look appeared in Sun Ke's eyes at the sight of Han Li, and he approached Bai Suyuan before asking, "Who is this elder, Junior Martial Sister Bai?"

Bai Suyuan's attention was entirely focused on the battle unfolding before her eyes, so she failed to notice the peculiar look on Sun Ke's face as she replied, "He's an inner sect elder by the name of Li Feiyu."

Sun Ke was naturally astonished to hear this.

This Elder Li shared the same name as the man that he had met on the Seafaring Lightning Boat, and most importantly, their auras were very similar.

However, the cultivation base of this Li Feiyu was worlds apart from that of the Li Feiyu from the Seafaring Lightning Boat, and Sun Ke couldn't help but wonder if they were actually the same person.

Right at this moment, the elderly man let loose a loud roar, and the white fire raven formed by his flying swords spread its wings as it pounced at Han Li's black wyrm, forcing the latter back into retreat.

Han Li made a hand seal while chanting an incantation upon seeing this, and a black disk that was around a foot in size with countless fine and complex spirit patterns on its surface suddenly appeared behind him.

The disk was giving off a powerful aura of water laws, and it was none other than this Heavy Water True Axis.

All of a sudden, the Heavy Water True Axis began to rapidly revolve at Han Li's behest before flying rapidly toward the white fire raven.

As it approached the fire raven, the Water Dao Runes on the Heavy Water True Axis began to glow with dazzling blue light, while the water law aura emanating from it became even more potent.

The elderly man's expression changed slightly upon seeing this, and with a flick of his wrist, he sent a shimmering golden talisman flying through the air, and the talisman vanished into the fire raven's body right before it was about to clash with the Heavy Water True Axis.

A resounding boom rang out as the golden talisman transformed the white fire raven into a ball of scorching white light before clashing against the Heavy Water True Axis.

Tremendous shockwaves erupted in all directions from the epicenter of the clash, and half of the shockwaves were scorching hot, while the other half were cool and refreshing, but both were extremely destructive and destroyed all of the trees in their path.

Sun Ke and the others hurriedly fled back in retreat, quickly fleeing to several thousand feet away.

A string of loud clangs rang out as the Heavy Water True Axis revolved furiously on the spot as it clashed against the ball of scorching white light, and it seemed that the two had come to an impasse.

Han Li swept a sleeve through the air upon seeing this, and the heavy water wyrm that had been forced back into retreat earlier rose up into the air once again before hurtling toward the ball of white light.

A dull thump rang out, and the heavy water wyrm was sliced apart by the sharp sword intent emanating from the seven flying swords as soon as it plunged into the ball of white light.

A vast expanse of black heavy water erupted in all directions, but immediately thereafter, the Heavy Water True Axis suddenly began to glow brightly while releasing a burst of peculiar suction force.

All of the nearby heavy water was instantly sucked into the axis as a result, making the Heavy Water True Axis even heavier than before.

Thanks to its increased weight, it was revolving with greater momentum, and the ball of white light was slowly forced back into retreat.

The elderly man's view was obstructed by the ball of light, so he hadn't yet noticed that something was amiss. He had thought that Han Li had injected more magic power into his Heavy Water True Axis, so he hurriedly responded by injecting more magic power into his ball of white light as well.

Meanwhile, with another sweep of his sleeve, an even larger heavy water wyrm was sent flying through the air, but this time, instead of flying into the ball of white light, it plunged straight into the Heavy Water True Axis.

A dull thump rang out, and the heavy water wyrm instantly vanished into the axis without a trace.

Radiant black light erupted from the Heavy Water True Axis, and it expanded by about an inch diameter while becoming even heavier.

All of a sudden, the elderly man felt a burst of mountainous force hurtling toward him, and it was so heavy that he was struck by a sense of asphyxiation.

He hurriedly made a hand seal to support the ball of white light so that it wouldn't be instantly destroyed, and at the same time, he opened his mouth to release a tiny golden wooden puppet.