

A Record 251

Chapter 251: Stalling for Time

While Han Li's trio was clinging on desperately for dear life, the balls of lightning in the sky seemed to have finally been exhausted.

They were initially elated to see this, but the three of them exchanged a glance, and each of them could see their own bewilderment mirrored in one another's eyes.

This was because as soon as these balls of azure lightning had appeared, the azure-armored giant had vanished into the thin air, but the fact that this azure domain still remained indicated that they were clearly not out of the woods yet.

Sure enough, before the three of them even had a chance to catch their breath, a series of azure vortexes of light suddenly appeared out of thin air.

Countless azure tree branches then flew out of the vortexes before crashing down from above.

They appeared to have been branches, but each of them was over 100 feet in length and comparable in size to entire trees, and they were raining down upon Han Li's trio with ferocious might.

Fortunately, during that brief period of respite, Han Li's trio had banded together in a triangular formation, with each person defending one side.

The cloud above Han Li's head had already been whittled down significantly, and it began to tremble violently in the face of the falling branches. The cloud was whittled down even further, but it was able to keep close to a third of the azure branches at bay.

Meanwhile, the sword array that was swirling around Qilin 9 was releasing streaks of sharp azure sword qi that shredded the oncoming branches.

Out of the trio, Qilin 17 was the one who was struggling the most. Having already sustained severe injuries and expended a great deal of immortal spiritual power, cracks were already beginning to appear in the barrier of yellow sand that he had summoned.

Just like with the balls of lightning, there seemed to be no end to the torrent of azure branches, and Han Li's trio was certainly not having a good time in the face of such a ferocious barrage, but thankfully, the triangular formation that they had adopted allowed them to hold their own for now.

"We can't keep this up forever. If I had known this was going to happen, I would've never taken on this mission. How am I even going to get out of this alive now that I've made an enemy out of the Immortal Palace?" Qilin 17 complained with a sullen expression.

There was a dark look on Qilin 9's face as well as he said, "It looks like we fell into a trap. The person who released this mission is most likely intentionally trying to stir up conflict between the Transient Guild and the Immortal Palace for whatever purpose."

"Let's try and figure out how we're going to get out of this alive before we think about those things, fellow daoists. I have a bad feeling about this situation," Han Li suddenly said.

Sure enough, Han Li's concerns were very much warranted.

As it turned out, all of the branches destroyed by Han Li's trio had disintegrated into specks of azure light that had burrowed into the earth down below, following which seedlings began to emerge from the soil. As more and more specks of azure light descended from above, the seedlings began to grow rapidly at a rate that was discernible even to the naked eye.

In a span of no more than a few seconds, the seedlings had grown into huge trees that were several hundred feet tall, and they were only continuing to grow even taller.

In the blink of an eye, Han Li's trio found themselves situated in a lush forest that was giving off an extremely potent wood-attribute aura.

"At this rate, we're going to be trapped here until we die! Fellow Daoist Qilin 9, you possess the most advanced cultivation base out of the three of us, do you have any way to get us out of here?" Qilin 17 asked with an uneasy expression.

"We may only be facing a Golden Immortal avatar, but its abilities are extremely formidable. Even I can only just barely hold on, and escaping would be near impossible. At this point, perhaps the only way to secure a slim chance at survival for ourselves would be to go against conventional wisdom," Qilin 9 replied.

"Go against conventional wisdom?" Qilin 17's eyes immediately lit up upon hearing this.

Han Li's expression remained unchanged, but he was also rather intrigued.

Just as Qilin 9 alluded to, the three of them had their powers severely restricted inside the azure domain, and it was next to impossible for them to escape in the face of this endless barrage of attacks.

Even if Han Li were to reveal his Mantra Treasured Axis and Azure Bamboo Cloudswarm Swords, he still wouldn't have been confident in his ability to escape, and revealing those two treasures would have far-reaching consequences, so he absolutely didn't want to use them unless his life was under threat.

Even though Qilin 9 was in the same situation, he was a late-True Immortal cultivator, and even now, he was still looking quite calm and composed, so he clearly still had some trump cards up his sleeve.

As these thoughts were running through Han Li's mind, Qilin 9 opened his mouth to release three objects of different colors, and they swelled rapidly to become a set of three giant flags. The flags were extremely antiquated in appearance with eight strange runes embroidered upon them, and aside from their colors, which were golden, silver, and black, the flags were identical to one another, so they clearly worked as a set.

A hint of surprise flashed through Han Li's eyes at the sight of the eight runes as they were very similar to the ones on the stone cauldron that he had obtained from the monkeys at the foot of the Crimson Dawn Peak, and he couldn't help but wonder if the two were connected in some way.

He had studied the stone cauldron on many occasions during these past years without making any useful discoveries, and he certainly wasn't expecting to find any leads on the matter here.

His expression remained unchanged, but his mind was racing.

"These flags are known as Triple Origin Great Millet Flags, and they can only be activated by three people at once. They're an extremely formidable defensive treasure, but the immortal spiritual power expenditure required to use them is far too immense for me to support on my own. My proposal of going against conventional wisdom involves using this treasure to focus solely on defending ourselves rather than trying to escape," Qilin 9 explained.

"If these flags are so taxing to use, then wouldn't we be completely trapped once we inevitably run out of immortal spiritual power?" Qilin 17 asked, sounding rather disappointed.

"According to my knowledge, there's generally a time limit on all avatars formed by talismans, so I'm presuming that what Fellow Daoist Qilin 9 is suggesting is that we defend ourselves until time runs out for the avatar, is that right?" Han Li asked.

"That is indeed what I'm suggesting, Fellow Daoist Wyrms 15," Qilin 9 replied with a nod.

"It seems like this set of Triple Origin Great Millet Flags are rather different from normal treasures. In particular, may I ask what's so special about the eight runes on them? We're in a dire situation right now, so please pardon me for being extra cautious, Fellow Daoist," Han Li said.

"These flags are indeed rather special, and I only came into possession of them by chance, but I've managed to figure out how to use them after over a century of experimentation. Time is of the essence here, so please familiarize yourselves with them as quickly as possible," Qilin 9 urged.

He made a hand seal as he spoke to expand his sword array slightly to keep close to half of the azure branches at bay, and at the same time, he raised his other hand to send two jade slips flying toward Han Li and Qilin 17.

Han Li caught the jade slip, and he speculated that Qilin 9 most likely knew more about those eight runes than he was letting on, but he wasn't willing to divulge this information.

He injected his spiritual sense into the jade slip in his hand to find that it contained a mantra for treasure refinement, and it was a rather special one that was very different from all of the other refinement methods that he knew.

Han Li quickly read through the contents of the jade slip while thinking back to the discoveries that he had made from studying that stone cauldron over the years, and as he did so, a sense of elation welled up in his heart.

If he weren't mistaken, then this refinement method should've been effective on that stone cauldron as well.

Shortly thereafter, the barrage of azure branches falling from the heavens abruptly ceased without any warning. At this point, all of the trees around them had already grown to around 2,000 to 3,000 feet tall, and their canopies had virtually obscured the entire sky.

"We don't have any time left! Please hurry!"

Qilin 9's brows were slightly furrowed as he immediately thrust the silver and black flags upon Han Li and Qilin 17.

Immediately thereafter, he raised a hand to release several incantation seals in succession, all of which vanished into the golden flag before him in a flash, following which specks of golden light appeared on its surface.

Han Li took a deep breath before casting a series of incantation seals himself into his silver flag.

The flag slowly rose up into the air as specks of silver light appeared on its surface, giving it a resplendent yet mysterious appearance.

Qilin 17 also closed his eyes as he made a series of hand seals, and the specks of black light appeared on his flag as it rose up into the air as well.

Right at this moment, a burst of spatial fluctuations erupted overhead, and the Gold Immortal avatar appeared, having already reverted back to the size of a normal adult human.

"I didn't think that a trio of lowly immortals like yourselves would be able to last this long, but it's time to put this to an end!"

The Golden Immortal avatar raised a hand as it spoke, and a ball of azure spiritual light with countless azure runes flashing within it instantly appeared, then vanished into one of the giant trees down below in a flash.

The tree was immediately uprooted as it rose up from the ground, and it began to radiate dazzling green light as it rapidly transformed, sprouting four thick limbs and an ugly head.

In the blink of an eye, the tree had transformed into a giant that was several thousand feet tall.

As soon as the giant took shape, it immediately raised an enormous fist and lashed out at Qilin 9's golden sword array.

A resounding boom rang out, and the entire azure space shuddered, as did the golden sword array, but it was able to remain intact.

As more streaks of azure spiritual light flew out of the Golden Immortal avatar's hand, around half of the trees down below instantly transformed into formidable giants, but the azure light radiating from the avatar's body also dimmed slightly as a result.

All of the tree giants swung their massive fists through the air, unleashing countless massive azure fist projections that hurtled toward Han Li's trio from all directions.

After withstanding several ferocious barrages of attacks, the black cloud and the screen of yellow sand had dimmed significantly and were appearing rather scattered, but they were still just barely clinging on.

The Golden Immortal avatar was beginning to run out of patience, and it opened its mouth to release a burst of azure light, which instantly enveloped all of the remaining trees down below.

All of those trees immediately began to glow with azure light as they rose up from the ground, but instead of instantly transforming into individual giants, they fused together to form a giant that was around 20,000 to 30,000 feet tall.

Green light was surging up and down its body incessantly, and as it raised an arm, all of the other tree giants around it exploded into balls of azure light that swept toward it before forming an azure wooden saber that was around the same length as the tree giant was tall.

There were countless green runes that were shimmering with a cold light engraved onto the blade of the saber.

Chapter 252: A Threat From a Golden Immortal

As soon as the tree giant took shape, it crouched down slightly before springing up into the sky, and all of the green runes on the wooden saber in its hand began to glow with dazzling radiance that illuminated the entire azure space.

In the next instant, the burst of azure light came crashing down with devastating might like a radiant waterfall.

Even before it fully descended upon Han Li's trio, a burst of terrifying power was already cascading down from the heavens, causing the black cloud and the barrier of yellow sand to tremble violently.

An earth-shattering boom rang out as the giant wooden saber came crashing down, and the black cloud, the barrier of yellow sand, and the golden sword array finally imploded amid an eruption of black, yellow, golden, and azure light.

At the same time, gusts of fierce wind were sent sweeping through the air in all directions, creating ripples that were visible even to the naked eye in the surrounding azure space.

However, the wooden saber didn't continue to come crashing down from above. Instead, it was repelled upward, and the tree giant stumbled back several steps in succession before steadying itself.

After the dust settled, Han Li's trio was revealed with a set of massive flag projections glowing radiantly above them while releasing vast spiritual power fluctuations.

The space around the flag projections was rippling, but the projections themselves remained completely resolute and steady, seemingly having withstood the attack from the tree giant with ease.

Even so, Han Li's trio didn't dare to get complacent, and they were continuing to cast incantation seals relentlessly into the flags before them.

All of a sudden, the three flag projections fused as one at Qilin 9's behest, forming a giant egg-shaped three-colored light barrier.

The outermost layer of the light barrier was golden in color, while the middle layer was black, and the innermost layer was silver.

Countless flag projections could be seen around the light barriers, giving off dazzling radiance while emitting a sharp screeching sound, and it seemed as if they were forming an independent space within the azure domain.

A dark look appeared on the Golden Immortal avatar's face upon seeing this, and it made a hand seal, upon which dazzling azure light erupted from the tree giant's body, and it strode forward before swinging its wooden saber viciously down onto the three-colored light barrier again.

The entire light barrier shuddered violently, and the spot that was struck caved in significantly.

However, the indentation was quickly mended amid a flash of three-colored light, repelling the wooden saber once again.

The tree giant swung its saber down over and over again, and with each strike, an indentation would appear on the three-colored light barrier, but it would always recover very quickly, and the light barrier was displaying no signs of breaking.

"This set of Triple Origin Great Millet Flags is truly extraordinary, Fellow Daoist Qilin 9! The aura of that avatar has already diminished significantly, so it must not be able to last much longer," Qilin 17 said in an ecstatic voice while recovering his immortal spiritual power using an Immortal Origin Stone.

Qilin 9 was also holding an Immortal Origin Stone, and a proud look appeared in his eyes upon hearing this, but he said in a cautious manner, "Don't get complacent. I'm sure the avatar has more tricks up his sleeve, so take this time to recover as much as possible."

Han Li was also absorbing immortal spiritual power from an Immortal Origin Stone, and all three of them had taken recovery pills to boot, but they were still struggling to keep up with the immortal spiritual power demands of the Triple Origin Great Millet Flags.

"Let's see how much longer you'll be able to last," the Golden Immortal avatar chuckled coldly as it switched to a different hand seal, then pointed a finger at the tree giant from afar.

The tree giant instantly stopped what it was doing, and its feet sank into the soil down below, following which it reverted back into an enormous tree amid a flash of blinding azure light.

Immediately thereafter, all of the leaves on the branches of the tree rapidly enlarged, following which a series of massive red flower buds emerged.

In the next instant, all of the red flower buds bloomed into vibrant flowers in unison.

The flowers then began to release flurries of red pollen-like particles that disintegrated into a cloud of red mist, which descended toward the three-colored light barrier at an astonishing speed. Upon reaching the three-colored light barrier, the red mist was able to bypass it with ease as if it didn't exist at all.

Han Li's trio were naturally extremely alarmed by this, and Han Li immediately released his spiritual sense to examine the cloud of red mist.

In the next instant, a drowsy sensation arose in his mind, and the circulation of immortal spiritual power in his body became a lot more sluggish.

However, in the next instant, his enormous spiritual sense jolted him out of his dazed state, and he immediately yelled, "Look out, this is a spiritual sense attack!"

At the same time, the nascent soul in his dantian made a hand seal with both hands, and a burst of cool and refreshing energy surged through his meridians, restoring his original rate of immortal spiritual power circulation.

Qilin 9 immediately issued an instruction upon hearing this, and Han Li and Qilin 17 instantly switched to a different set of hand seals accordingly.

All of a sudden, the middle black light barrier shuddered slightly before rising to the surface, and as a result, the silver light barrier shifted to the middle, while the golden light barrier became the innermost layer.

Following this transition, the light radiating from the three-colored light barrier became extremely gentle, while ripples began to surge over its surface.

This time, the three-colored light barrier was able to completely keep the cloud of red mist at bay.

However, the red mist that had already seeped into the light barrier had enveloped Han Li's trio, constantly lulling them into a state of drowsiness.

Han Li's eyes narrowed slightly as he activated his Spirit Refinement Technique while also summoning a small white jade bell that began to revolve on the spot above his head.

Bursts of cool energy surged through his mind, instantly dispelling the majority of the red mist's effects to minimize its influence.

Following Han Li's warning, Qilin 9 had also braced himself, slamming a palm down onto the top of his own head, upon which a small white lock flew out of his sleeve, releasing halos of white light that enveloped his body down below.

Immediately thereafter, a hint of clarity returned to his eyes.

As for Qilin 17, he had summoned a yellow silken scarf that was revolving around him to keep the red mist at bay.

Even though all three of them had ways to deal with the red mist, it was requiring additional immortal spiritual power expenditure on top of having to maintain the three-colored light barrier, and inside this azure domain, they were unable to draw upon the world's origin qi.

As a result, even though they were constantly using Immortal Origin Stones to replenish themselves, their faces had still turned extremely pale, and they weren't going to be able to last much longer at this rate.

Unbeknownst to them, the Golden Immortal avatar was astonished by the resilience that they had displayed up to this point.

It had thought that it would be able to easily take down this trio of pesky little rats, but that was not proving to be the case here, and it was becoming more and more frustrated by the second.

Bright azure light erupted out of the Golden Immortal avatar's eyes, and it made a strange hand seal with both hands as it declared in a furious voice, "I'm going to make you pay for what you did even if I have to make some heavy sacrifices myself!"

All of a sudden, all of the red flowers on the giant tree down below shuddered slightly in unison, following which they were enveloped by balls of azure flames that instantly spread over the entire tree while giving off extremely formidable law fluctuations.

As the tree was set alight by azure flames, the Golden Immortal avatar's body began to take on a transparent appearance.

Immediately thereafter, the massive tree shuddered violently before collapsing toward Han Li's trio with devastating might.

Even before it fully descended upon Han Li's trio, it was already giving off an indescribable sense of pressure that struck them with a sense of asphyxiation, and it was already too late to take evasive measures.

"Look out!" Qilin 9 yelled in an urgent voice as he expelled a mouthful of blood essence into the golden flag before him.

Countless specks of golden light instantly emerged from the flag to form a golden wall of light, and Han Li and Qilin 17 also immediately followed suit, injecting all of their remaining immortal spiritual power into the Triple Origin Great Millet Flags.

As a result, the other two flags released walls of silver and black light, respectively, following which Han Li summoned his Heavy Water True Axis to act as a shield.

At the same time, Qilin 9 and Qilin 17 also summoned a series of treasures that released layers of light barriers that enveloped the trio from all directions.

Before they had a chance to do anything else, the giant tree fell upon them with an earth-shattering boom, and Han Li's trio was inundated by an eruption of dazzling azure light.

The azure light then exploded violently, creating rifts that were visible even to the naked eye in the surrounding space, and it was as if the entire area were about to be torn apart.

Incredibly fierce gusts of azure wind swept through the air in all directions, and Han Li's trio were sent flying out of the explosion of azure light.

Their robes were in tatters, their faces were deathly pale, and their bodies were riddled with wounds, but all of them had ecstatic looks on their faces, having finally weathered the storm.

The azure light quickly faded to reveal the Golden Immortal avatar, but at this point, its body was already virtually completely transparent, and it appeared to have been on the verge of fading away.

"You may have gotten away this time, but remember my name, I am Gu Jie of the Northern Glacial Immortal Region. Once I come out of seclusion, I'll be sure to capture all three of you and torment you for the rest of eternity! Mark my words!"

The Golden Immortal avatar's body gradually faded away as its voice trailed off into silence.

The golden talisman re-emerged in the avatar's place, then erupted into flames before quickly being incinerated into ashes.

"It looks like we've finally managed to get out of this predicament, but there's going to be more trouble to come now that we've made an enemy out of a Golden Immortal from the Northern Glacial Immortal Region," Qilin 9 said in a grim voice.

"Considering how much trouble we had with this avatar, our chances of surviving against the actual Gu Jie would be slim to none," Qilin 17 sighed.

"There's no point in talking about that now. What's done has already been done, and we should clean up the battlefield here and leave this place as soon as possible," Han Li suggested, to which both Qilin 9 and Qilin 17 nodded in agreement.

Chapter 253: Trouble

Han Li flipped a hand over to produce a pill before swallowing it, and his complexion gradually began to improve.

The Heavy Water True Axis was hovering beside him, looking a little dim, clearly having suffered quite a bit of damage during the battle, so he was going to have to refine it when he got back to the Blaze Dragon Dao.

Meanwhile, Qilin 9 had already stowed away his Triple Origin Great Millet Flags, which had also lost some of their spiritual nature during that final clash against Gu Jie's avatar, much to Qilin 9's dismay.

Of course, Qilin 17 was the one who fared the worst of the three. Not only had he suffered severe injuries, the seal that was equivalent to his bonded treasure had also lost almost all of its spiritual nature from being eroded by the Golden Immortal avatar's law powers. However, he was already extremely fortunate to have been able to survive this ordeal and recover his treasure.

The three of them took a brief rest, then flew back into the valley.

Following the intense battle that had just taken place, the valley was already completely unrecognizable, and most of the surrounding mountains had been razed to the ground. The earth was riddled with countless craters of different sizes, some of which were so deep that molten lava could be seen at the bottom.

This mountain range was quite secluded, but the battle that had just taken place had caused a massive commotion, and some of the nearby cultivating powers had taken notice.

Over the course of the next few decades, many people traveled to this area to try their luck, but that was a story for another time.

Upon entering the valley, a thought suddenly seemed to have occurred to Qilin 9, and he said, "Oh, I almost forgot. Let me go and fetch the two treasures that were serving as the core of the array."

"In that case, I'll go retrieve the Lightning Restraining Wood. Can we count on you to take care of things in the valley, Fellow Daoist Qilin 17?" Han Li asked.

Qilin 17 naturally had no objections to this.

The three of them knew that it was best to leave this place as soon as possible, and they immediately sprang into action while supervising one another with their spiritual sense to ensure that no one played any tricks.

Han Li appeared outside the valley in a flash, then swept a sleeve through the air to send a streak of azure light flying into the ground.

A large hole was blown into the ground, inside of which was a length of golden wood that was taller than a grown man and around the same thickness as a human leg.

The length of wood was entirely golden in color with a series of lightning shaped growth rings visible on its cross section. Its surface was completely smooth and riddled with more golden lightning patterns that were giving off a strong lightning aura.

Even though it was a wooden material, the Lightning Restraining Wood more closely resembled some type of metal ore.

With a sweep of his sleeve, the length of Lightning Restraining Wood was drawn into his grasp, and he took a close glance at it.

According to a book that he had previously read, the Lightning Restraining Wood was a type of rare lightning-attribute spirit material that was extremely sturdy and was able to absorb the power of lightning, making it a top-notch material for refining lightning-attribute spirit treasures.

It was very difficult to grow this type of wood, so it was very rarely seen being sold anywhere, and Han Li certainly wasn't expecting to come across a batch of it here.

Han Li then flew over to another place and blasted the ground open with another burst of azure light to dig up a second length of Lightning Restraining Wood.

Before long, he had retrieved all 81 lengths of Lightning Restraining Wood that were buried around the valley, and as he returned to the valley, Qilin 9 and Qilin 17 were already there, with a pair of treasures hovering in front of the former.

One of the two treasures was an antiquated golden sword that was completely different from normal flying swords, possessing a far bulkier and heavier blade, upon which was engraved nine golden stars.

The other treasure was an antiquated square golden mirror with hollow edges. The surface of the mirror was rather murky and indistinct, and there was a fierce tiger engraved onto its back.

Clearly, these were the two treasures that had acted as the core of the array.

It was very apparent that this was a pair of very remarkable treasures, and the metal-attribute fluctuations that they gave off indicated that even if they weren't immortal treasures, they weren't far away from that level.

As for Qilin 17, he had dug up a storage bracelet in addition to that golden pill cauldron, both of which had once belonged to the white-haired elderly man.

This was quite a bountiful haul, but for some reason, both of them were standing in a solemn silence.

"Have you found something, fellow daoists?" Han Li asked as he landed beside the two of them.

"Take a look for yourself," Qilin 17 said in a neutral voice as he patted the golden pill cauldron.

Han Li immediately injected his spiritual sense into the pill cauldron, and even though the pill refinement process had already ceased, there was still a burst of scorching spiritual power that was slowly circulating inside, forming a resolute array that kept his spiritual sense at bay.

Han Li's brows furrowed slightly as he increased his spiritual sense output, allowing him to instantly bypass the array and see what was inside.

There was a thumb-sized purple pill hovering with the cauldron, and close to half of it had been charred black, clearly indicating a failed pill refinement.

With a flick of his wrist, Han Li sent several incantation seals flying into the cauldron, then slammed a hand down onto the cauldron's lid, following which a burst of azure light flashed over his palm.

A faint crack rang out from within the cauldron, and with a sweep of Han Li's sleeve, the lid of the cauldron was removed, and the purple pill inside flew out.

Qilin 9 raised an eyebrow ever so slightly upon seeing this, seemingly rather taken aback by the fact that Han Li was able to break open the restrictions on the cauldron so easily to retrieve the pill inside.

A grim look appeared on Han Li's face as he inspected the purple pill.

There was a purple lightning-shaped spirit pattern on the pill, but it was incomplete, with the charred section swallowing up the majority of the spirit pattern.

Furthermore, the purple lightning spirit pattern was giving off extremely faint law fluctuations.

"So he really was refining a dao pill," Han Li murmured to himself.

"That's right. I took a closer look at his face earlier, and I recalled that this man is Ping Yaozi, a vastly renowned top-tier Earthly Pill Master of the Northern Glacial Immortal Region. However, he's a very secretive person, so very few people know what he looks like. I've heard that he's been trying to become a Heavenly Pill Master for a very long time, but I don't know if he's succeeded or not. If he has..."

Qilin 9's voice trailed off here as a wry smile appeared on his face.

Han Li's expression also darkened slightly upon hearing this.

Even the Blaze Dragon Dao, one of the top-ranking sects in the entire Northern Glacial Immortal Region, didn't have a single Heavenly Pill Master among its ranks, and that was a clear reflection of just how precious pill refinement masters of this lofty caliber were.

If Ping Yaozi really had already become a Heavenly Pill Master, then he would've possessed an unimaginably lofty status in the Northern Glacial Immortal Palace. Even if he had only been a top-tier Earthly Pill Master, this would've still been extremely heavy loss for the Northern Glacial Immortal Palace, and now, they had just killed him to complete a Transient Guild mission.

It was no wonder Gu Jie had sworn to hunt them down, and with that in mind, a chill instantly ran down Han Li's spine.

They had truly landed themselves in hot water this time...

"It's too late to regret our actions now. All of us have cultivated countless years to become True Immortals, and we all have some innocent blood on our hands. The pursuit of the Great Dao is an endeavor that goes against the natural order to begin with, so we should be accustomed to adversity on our path of cultivation. I, for one, certainly won't just accept my fate and resign myself to death," Qilin 9 declared.

"You're right, Fellow Daoist Qilin 9. The Northern Glacial Immortal Region is an extremely vast place, so as long as we make ample preparations, there's no guarantee that Gu Jie will be able to find us, even if he's a Golden Immortal. Time is of the essence, so let's split these things, then get out of here as soon as possible," Qilin 17 replied with a nod.

Han Li naturally had no objections to this, and thus, Qilin 17 emptied all of the content of the white-haired elderly man's storage bracelet onto the ground.

Most of his belongings were various types of spirit plants and ingredients, all of which were filled with abundant spiritual qi and instantly caught the attention of Han Li's trio.

Han Li's gaze immediately settled onto one of the spirit plants, which was as green as jade and slightly curved. It had tiny leaves that were pressed tightly against the stem of the spirit plant like scales, and this was none other than a Horned Dragon Herb, the main material for refining Spring Rain Pills.

Furthermore, there were around a dozen of these Horned Dragon Herbs on the ground, and they appeared to have all been above 50,000 years of age.

As for the other spirit plants and materials, Han Li only recognized less than half of them, but they were all premium ingredients and materials that weren't inferior to the Horned Dragon Herb.

Just these spirit plants and materials alone were already a massive haul, and in addition to them, there were also six or seven treasures, a pair of white jade vials, a purple jade box, and a small pile of what appeared to have been around 50 to 60 Immortal Origin Stones.

The treasures were all spirit treasures of a very high caliber, but they were far inferior to the pair of spirit treasures that had served as the core of the array.

The two white jade vials had restrictions placed upon them to keep out spiritual sense, so it was impossible to tell what they contained.

As for the purple jade box, there was a silver talisman plastered to its surface, and countless tadpole-like silver runes were roaming over its surface, giving off immense spiritual power fluctuations.

There were also several layers of spirit patterns engraved onto the box, releasing a silver light barrier that was also capable of keeping out spiritual sense.

Qilin 17 handed the storage bracelet to Qilin 9 for an examination, but Qilin 9 was staring at the treasures laid out before him in a completely transfixed manner, and only after hearing Qilin 17 call out to him did he return to his senses.

"My apologies, I was just surprised that Ping Yaozi had so many things in his possession," Qilin 9 said as he accepted the storage bracelet from Qilin 17.

Han Li's heart stirred slightly upon seeing this. It was only for an instant, but he had noticed a peculiar look flash through Qilin 9's eyes just now.

He turned his gaze to the treasures on the ground, only to find that they were all ordinary treasures that didn't appear to have been remarkable in any way.

However, beside those treasures was a rather strange-looking black badge that was giving off a faint black glow.

Qilin 17 also seemed to have noticed the badge, and he remarked, "That's a badge from the Ubiquitous Pavilion. Could it be that this Ping Yaozi is somehow tied to that place?"

Han Li's heart stirred slightly once again upon hearing this.

"Whether he had ties with the Ubiquitous Pavilion has nothing to do with us," Qilin 9 said as he handed the storage bracelet to Han Li after a brief examination.

Han Li injected his spiritual sense into the storage bracelet as nothing more than a formality ,and after verifying that it had indeed been completely emptied, he set it aside and turned his attention back to the spoils laid out on the ground.

Chapter 254: Fighting Over the Cauldron

"Have either of you thought about how we should split everything?" Qilin 17 asked as he licked his slightly dry lips.

"Let's take a look at what's in these jade vials and this jade box first," Qilin 9 said as he drew one of the white jade vials into his grasp before removing the stopper, and Han Li did the same with the other vial.

An identical fragrance wafted out of both of the vials, and after just a slight whiff, Han Li's trio were all struck by a sense of comfort and reinvigoration.

Each of the jade vials contained around a dozen yellow pills that were giving off a faint sheen.

Han Li didn't recognize these pills, but his pill refinement experience told him that this was most likely a type of pill for advancing one's cultivation base, and its effects were definitely more potent than those of the Origin Unifying Pill.

"These are Dawn Luster Pills!" Qilin 17 exclaimed with a hint of elation in his voice.

"I'm guessing Ping Yaozi prepared these for himself," Qilin 9 replied with a nod.

He set down the white jade vial in his hand as he spoke, then picked up the purple jade box, and after taking a close look at the silver talisman adhered to its surface, he released several incantation seals in succession, only for them to be repelled by a layer of silver light that suddenly appeared over the surface of the box.

Qilin 9's brows furrowed slightly upon seeing this, and after a brief moment of contemplation, he laid a hand down onto the jade box, then began to chant an incantation, following which golden light began to radiate from the palm of his hand.

Han Li and Qilin 17 exchanged a glance, and each of them could see their own curiosity mirrored in one another's eyes.

Generally speaking, the more tightly secured a container was, the more important its contents were.

Qilin 9 was clearly thinking the same thing, and it appears that he was planning to adopt some slightly more aggressive methods to try and break open the restriction on the jade box.

He began to chant an incantation, and a layer of dazzling silver light appeared over the jade box, keeping all of the golden light that was radiating from Qilin 9's hand at bay.

Qilin 9's brows became even more tightly furrowed upon seeing this, and the golden light radiating from his hand brightened even further, while golden runes also appeared within it.

In response, the silver light radiating from the jade box also brightened, and it was able to hold its own against the golden light.

Qilin 9's expression darkened slightly upon seeing this, and sweat was already beginning to roll down his cheeks from his forehead, but his hand remained firmly pressed against the jade box, while the golden light radiating from it became brighter and brighter.

However, the silver light glowing from the box was able to keep up, thwarting Qilin 9's efforts to bypass it.

A hint of surprise flashed through Han Li's eyes upon seeing this. It seemed that the restrictions placed on the jade box were so profound that even a late-True Immortal cultivator like Qilin 9 was powerless to break through them.

A short while later, the golden light radiating from Qilin 9's hand had already brightened to the point that it was almost too radiant to look at, and the silver seemed to have finally reached its limits, beginning to succumb to the golden light.

A hint of elation appeared on Qilin's 9's face upon seeing this, but his expression then suddenly changed as he hurriedly pulled his hand away.

The silver light on the jade box flashed a few times before returning to normal.

"Why did you stop, Fellow Daoist Qilin 9?" Qilin 17 asked.

It had appeared to him like Qilin 9 had stopped right as the silver light restriction was about to be overwhelmed.

"Whoever set up this restriction concealed a self-destruction restriction in its deepest part. If I hadn't stopped in time, this jade box and its contents would've all been destroyed," Qilin 9 explained, much to Qilin 17's dismay.

Ping Yaozi was already dead, so where were they supposed to find the method to open the box?

Han Li's brows also furrowed slightly upon seeing this.

"Judging from my past experience, it's not impossible to unravel this restriction, but I'll need ample time to study it and make preparations. At the moment, I'm powerless to do anything, but the two of you are free to give it a try," Qilin 9 said as he set the jade box back down.

A hint of intrigue appeared in Qilin 17's eyes as he picked up the box, and yellow light emerged from his hand to envelop the entire box.

A layer of silver light instantly appeared on the jade box to oppose the yellow light, and a solemn look appeared in Qilin 17's eyes as he cast a series of incantation seals toward the box.

The silver light radiating from the box instantly brightened further to keep the incantation seals at bay, and after about 15 minutes, Qilin 17 was already beginning to sweat as he made a rapid series of hand seals, releasing threads of yellow light that enveloped the jade box.

If one were to look closely, they would discover that the threads of yellow light were formed by countless yellow runes, and they were slowly suppressing the silver light on the jade box.

Qilin 9's eyes lit up upon seeing this, and Han Li also took an involuntary step forward.

Right at this moment, the silver runes on the jade box flashed, and they abruptly released a burst of light that snapped all of the threads of yellow light.

"What a ridiculous restriction!" Qilin 17 harrumphed coldly as he withdrew his hand, making no further attempts to undo the restriction on the jade box.

Qilin 9 heaved a faint sigh of disappointment upon seeing this, then turned to Han Li as he suggested, "Why don't you give it a try as well, Fellow Daoist Wyrn 15? Perhaps you'll have better luck than the two of us."

"Do be careful, Fellow Daoist. If you break what's inside, that'll count against your allocation of the spoils," Qilin 17 chuckled as he handed the jade box to Han Li.

"I'll give it a try, but seeing as neither of you were successful, I most likely won't be able to do anything, either," Han Li said as he accepted the jade box, then released a burst of azure light to envelop it.

He then made a string of hand seals, conjuring up threads of azure light that enveloped the jade box, only to be opposed by that same layer of silver light.

A short while later, the silver light on the jade box abruptly brightened, tearing all of the threads of azure light apart, and Han Li shook his head as he placed the jade box back onto the ground.

"I can't do anything about this restriction, either."

"In that case, let's not force it. We don't have much time, so let's discuss how we're going to split the rest of the treasures among ourselves," Qilin 9 said.

"You're the leader in this mission, Fellow Daoist Qilin 9. Do you have any suggestions on how we can split everything?" Han Li asked, and Qilin 17 also turned to Qilin 9.

"There are quite a few spirit plants, materials, pills, and Immortal Origin Stones, so we'll be able to split those evenly. What's difficult to allocate are this cauldron, these treasures, and that jade box," Qilin 9 said.

"That's a simple matter. There are three of us, so I suggest one of us gets the cauldron, another one gets the treasures, and the final one gets the jade box. What do you think?" Qilin 17 proposed.

"That's not a bad idea, but who's going to get what?" Qilin 9 asked.

"I've always been very interested in pill refinement, so how about I take the cauldron?" Qilin 17 asked.

"I also happen to have a keen interest in the art of pill refinement," Qilin 9 said as a meaningful smile appeared on his face, and Qilin 17's expression immediately darkened slightly upon hearing this.

Meanwhile, Han Li was standing off to the side in silence, contemplating how best to proceed.

There really wasn't a comparison to be made here. The golden cauldron was the most precious of all of the items here, being an immortal treasure, so of course everyone wanted it, regardless of whether they actually had any interest in pill refinement.

Han Li wanted to refine some pills in order to accelerate his cultivation in order to make a breakthrough as soon as possible, so he naturally wanted the cauldron as well.

However, at the moment, he was merely observing and didn't verbally express his intentions.

As he was sweeping his spiritual sense over the cauldron, he noticed that there seemed to have been something concealed within it, and this feeling was very similar to the one that he had gotten from that black saber previously in Fang Pan's protection.

Given that Gu Jie had bestowed that avatar talisman upon Ping Yaozi, it was very likely that the cauldron had been tampered with.

If coming into possession of this treasure would increase his chances of being tracked down by Gu Jie, then he definitely wouldn't take the risk, so he was very wary of trying to claim the cauldron for himself.

Having said that, perhaps Qilin 17 wouldn't have noticed anything with his mid-True Immortal Stage cultivation base and spiritual sense, but as a late-True Immortal cultivator, was it really possible that Qilin 9 had also failed to notice that something was amiss?

Qilin 17 forced a smile onto his own face as he turned to Han Li and said, "I've been stuck at the mid-True Immortal Stage for many years and desperately need this cauldron for pill refinement purposes. If you two are willing to give me the cauldron, I can give up a third of my allocation of the rest of the treasures."

"In that case..."

Han Li was just about to say something when Qilin 9 interjected, "Truth be told, I've already been searching for a suitable pill cauldron for the past several centuries. If you two can give me the cauldron, I'm willing to give up on two thirds of my allocation of everything else."

Han Li's eyes lit up slightly upon hearing this, seemingly tempted by this proposition.

Qilin 17 took a glance at the cauldron, then gritted his teeth as he decided, "Alright, in that case, all I want is this cauldron, and I'm willing to give up on everything else. Is that enough?"

Qilin 9 considered this proposition for a moment, then smiled as he said, "If you're this insistent on claiming the cauldron, then it would be unbecoming of me to pursue it any further. What say you, Fellow Daoist Wyrn 15?"

"I can see that Fellow Daoist Qilin 17 is very earnest in his proposal, so I'm also willing to hand over the cauldron to him. If the cauldron had been unearthed while you were unconscious, perhaps you would've been able to wake up a bit earlier," Han Li said with a faint smile.

"Thank you, fellow daoists."

Qilin 17 could hear the mockery in Han Li's words, and was just about to flare up with rage, but decided against it after recalling the power that Han Li had displayed during the recently concluded battle.

Thus, he immediately swept a sleeve through the air, releasing a burst of yellow light to stow the cauldron away.

He then winced slightly at the sight of all of the precious materials and ingredients on the ground before looking away with a pained expression.

"Which one would you like out of these treasures and this jade box, Fellow Daoist Wyrms 15?" Qilin asked.

"I lost two sets of flying swords during the battle just now, so I'd like to claim these treasures to replace them," Han Li replied.

"Aren't you cultivating water-attribute laws at the moment, Fellow Daoist Wyrms 15? All of these are metal-attribute treasures, so they're not very suitable for you. In contrast, I just so happen to be using a metal-attribute cultivation art. Speaking of the jade box, given the power restrictions placed upon it, it must contain something extremely precious, so how about you take it instead, Fellow Daoist Wyrms 15?" Qilin 9 proposed with a smile.

"Perhaps so, but the restrictions on the box are extremely troublesome to deal with, and if I'm not careful, the contents of the box could be easily destroyed. Out of the three of us, I think you're the one with the highest hopes of successfully opening the box, so I'll settle for those treasures instead," Han Li replied.

Chapter 255: Lying Low

"I beg to differ, Fellow Daoist Wyrn 15. If it wasn't for you, the three of us may still not even have entered this valley yet, and that's a clear indication of how proficient you are at bypassing restrictions. If you can't open this box, then my chances of success are even slimmer. Surely you wouldn't force this thing onto me, would you?" Qilin 9 asked with a meaningful look in his eyes.

Han Li refused to budge, shaking his head in response. "You're far too kind, Fellow Daoist. I know what I'm capable of, and if I had to give a number, I would say my chances of opening this box are less than 10%. Given your cultivation base and status in the Transient Guild, you must have a large social circle, and surely there are experts in restrictions among your friends and acquaintances."

Qilin 9 was silent for a moment, then seemed to have arrived at some type of decision as he said, "You just want a few of these spirit treasures to make up for the losses you suffered earlier, right? How about this? Aside from this jade box and that failed pill, we can split everything else 60:40 in your favor. Surely that's sufficient compensation for you."

Han Li's brows furrowed slightly upon hearing this, but after some contemplation, he said, "I suppose I can accept that, but I'll have to go a step further. Among those materials and ingredients, those Horned Dragon Herbs and those lengths of Lightning Restraining Wood are particularly useful to me, so would you be able to hand them over to me? I can allow you to pick out items of equal value out of the rest of the things here as compensation."

"That's not a problem at all! You have my thanks, Fellow Daoist."

Qilin 9 cupped his fist toward Han Li in a salute upon hearing this, then swept a sleeve through the air to release a burst of golden light, claiming all of the treasures on the ground.

He didn't actually care much for the rest of the treasures, but the nine star golden sword and the antiquated golden mirror that had served as the cores of the array were extremely pure metal-attribute spirit treasures that were very compatible with his cultivation arts. All he had to do was refine them for 1,000 years, and they would become no less powerful than immortal treasures, and that was why he was so insistent on acquiring them.

Han Li also swept a sleeve through the air, releasing a burst of azure light that claimed the purple jade box and the failed dao pill.

The two of them then turned their attention to the spirit plants, materials, and Immortal Origin Stones on the ground, and it didn't take long before they split everything among themselves.

With that, the distribution of spoils was complete, and Qilin 9 flicked a finger through the air to release a ball of fire, which incinerated Ping Yaozi's remains into ashes, then said, "Alright, time is of the essence, so let's get out of this place."

Han Li's brows were slightly furrowed as he heaved an internal sigh, but didn't say anything.

The three of them quickly flew out of the valley as three streaks of light, and several months later, they emerged from the teleportation hall on Smoke Tomb Island.

"The mission didn't quite progress as planned, but thankfully, we were able to survive the ordeal. This is the reward for the mission. With this, we can go our separate ways."

Qilin 9 pulled out a pair of storage pouches as he spoke, then handed them to Han Li and Qilin 17.

Han Li examined the contents of the storage pouch briefly with his spiritual sense, then gave a slight nod before stowing it away.

"I still have some matters to attend to, so I'll be taking my leave now."

Qilin 17 also stowed his storage pouch away, then cupped his fist in a parting salute and flew away into the distance as a streak of yellow light.

"Fellow Daoist Qilin 9, now that I think about it, the reward for this mission doesn't match its difficulty. Back when you were accepting this mission, surely you would've detected that something was amiss, right?" Han Li asked.

"What are you trying to say, Fellow Daoist Wyrms 15?" Qilin 9 asked as he raised an eyebrow.

"I'm assuming the actual reward for this mission is far greater than what you've revealed to us, right? In any case, I'll also be taking my leave," Han Li said in a meaningful voice, then flew away into the distance as a streak of azure light.

"Hmph, of course I wouldn't have taken on such a perilous mission without a reward of corresponding value! I didn't think that an itinerant cultivator with such terrible aptitude would have so many tricks up his sleeve. It appears I've misevaluated him," Qilin murmured to himself as he watched Han Li fly away into the distance, then vanished on the spot with a flash of golden light.

Meanwhile, Han Li was flying through the air with the purple jade box and the failed dao pill in his hands, and there was a faint smile on his face.

The refinement for the dao pill had failed, but it would still be a useful resource to be studied and examined.

As for the jade box, the restrictions on it appeared to have been quite profound, but in reality, during that earlier attempt to bypass the restrictions, Han Li had already thought of a way to break through them. Otherwise, there was no way that he would've agreed to take it.

Of course, he couldn't reveal this in the presence of Qilin 9 and Qilin 17. Otherwise, not only would that cause unnecessary trouble for himself, it would reduce his share of the spoils as well.

He was very curious about the contents of the box. Ping Yao was either a Heavenly Pill Master or very close to it, and such a prized possession of his had to have been extremely valuable.

With that in mind, a hint of excitement welled up in his heart, and he was itching to get back to his cave abode and unravel this mystery.

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Several months later, in the Bell Toll Mountain Range.

Inside the main hall of the cave abode on the Crimson Dawn Peak, Han Li was seated on a taishi chair, holding a green teacup in his hand.

Meng Yungui and the others were quickly gathering before him, and after they had all arrived and paid their respects to him, Meng Yungui strode forward as he reported, "Elder Li, Sun Buzheng is currently at an important juncture in his seclusion, so he can't be present, but everyone else is here."

Han Li took a glance at his nine servants, all of whom had made significant progress in their cultivation since they had come here. Among them, the two with the highest cultivation bases were Meng Yungui and Sun Buzheng, but Meng Qianqian was the one who had been making the fastest progress.

At this moment, she was standing next to Meng Yungui, looking at Han Li with admiration glowing in her large and sparkling eyes.

"I'm going to have to leave the sect for a while soon, and I summoned all of you here today because I have some instructions to pass down," Han Li said.

Meng Yungui was rather taken aback to hear this, but he still cupped his fist in a salute as he prompted, "Please go ahead, Elder Li."

"Following my departure, the Crimson Dawn Peak will be temporarily closed to all visitors. During this time, all of you should also stay on the mountain unless it's absolutely necessary for you to leave. Just stay in your cave abodes and cultivate, and look after the spirit plants in the fields. As for cultivation resources, I'll give some to Yungui, so you won't have to worry about running out. Alright, you can all go now," Han Li said, then waved a hand to dismiss everyone.

"Yes, Elder Li," everyone replied in a respectful manner, then turned and departed from the hall.

Meng Yungui was waiting to be given the cultivation resources by Meng Yungui, so he naturally didn't leave, and after a brief moment of hesitation, Meng Qianqian turned to depart as well.

"Qianqian, you stay behind as well," Han Li suddenly instructed.

Meng Qianqian was ecstatic to hear this, and she stopped in her tracks before turning around and making her way over to her brother's side.

Han Li flipped a hand over to produce a blue storage pouch, which he tossed at Meng Yungui as he said, "I'm going to be away for quite a long time, but these pills should be enough to support everyone's cultivation needs. Just hand them out every once in a while. Also, there are some Origin Stabilization Pills in there, and you can give them to Sun Buzheng once he comes out of seclusion for him to consolidate his cultivation base."

Meng Yungui hurriedly caught the storage pouch as he nodded in response. "Yes, Elder Li."

"Alright, you can go now," Han Li instructed.

Meng Yungui took a glance at his sister with a slightly puzzled look in his eyes, but still did as he was told and departed from the hall.

"I went to take a look at the egg a few days ago, and I can tell you've been looking after it quite well. It still hasn't hatched yet, but even I was surprised by the abundant vitality within it," Han Li praised with a smile.

"Please forgive me for failing to hatch the egg even after so long," Meng Qianqian apologized as she lowered her head slightly.

"That's a matter that's mostly up to fate anyway, so there's no need to be overly critical of yourself. Just make sure to keep looking after the egg," Han Li said.

"Rest assured, Elder Li, I'll be sure to do my best," Meng Qianqian replied as she gave a firm nod.

Han Li smiled as he produced a small white jade vial that he tossed at her, and he said, "I obtained this vial of Fire Essence Pills during one of my earlier outings, and you're at a stage where you're ready to take it. It'll be very beneficial for your cultivation."

"Thank you, Elder Li," Meng Qianqian said with a wide smile as she hurriedly caught the vial.

"Alright, you can go as well," Han Li said with a dismissive wave of his hand.

However, Meng Qianqian remained standing on the spot with a rather hesitant look in her eyes.

"Is there something else you need to speak to me about?" Han Li asked.

"It's not been very long at all since you last left, yet you're leaving again, and you're closing the mountain to the outside... I'm just a little worried. Did something happen?" Meng Qianqian asked in a hesitant voice.

"What could possibly happen to a True Immortal like me, you silly girl?" Han Li chuckled.

"I see, it looks like I was just overly sensitive."

Meng Qianqian was very relieved to hear Han Li's response, and she promptly departed from the hall.

Following her departure, Han Li's smile immediately faded as a grim look appeared on his face.

He had brushed off her concerns, but in reality, her assumption hadn't been far from the truth.

It had only been three days since he returned to the sect, but close to a year had already passed since he left the Infernal Frost Continent.

Not only had Gu Jie's avatar identified them to be members of the Transient Guild, at the very end, it had also revealed to them that he was an elder of the Northern Glacial Immortal Palace, and that was certainly not good news for Han Li.

He had a feeling that staying in the sect at this time was not a wise move, so he had taken on a mission that required him to be far away from the sect so that he could lie low for a while.

With that in mind, he rose to his feet and exited the cave abode, then began flying down toward the foot of the Crimson Dawn Peak.

Chapter 256: Meddling

It didn't take long before he appeared in the cave where the underground fire vein was situated.

The air in the entire cave was still filled with a scorching aura, and molten lava was tumbling incessantly within the underground lake of lava. Occasionally, a bubble on the surface of the lake of lava would pop, producing a sound akin to a rumbling thunderclap.

The array that he had set up was still hovering above the lake, but all of the array flags had become devoid of luster, indicating that the array had been defunct for some time, and the fiery red cocoon at the center of the array was also nowhere to be seen.

Han Li immediately attempted to contact the Essence Fire Raven through their spiritual connection, and a clear cry instantly rang out from within the lake.

Immediately thereafter, the surface of the lake began to bulge, following which a silver figure sprang out before hurtling directly at Han Li at an extraordinary speed while giving off a scorching aura.

The silver figure flew straight into Han Li, sending a burst of burning pain surging across his chest.

Before he had a chance to reach out, the silver figure transformed into a tiny humanoid figure that was no more than two feet tall, and it rapidly flew in a circle around him in an agile fashion.

Much to Han Li's elation, he discovered that the silver figure was formed by none other than the Essence Fire Raven, and in this form, it resembled a child that was around five to six years of age.

Not only had its aura completely surpassed its peak back when it was in the Spirit Realm, even its eyes, which were formed by flames, were sparkling with intelligence, clearly indicating that it had made significant progress, and it would most likely keep making rapid progress if it were to continue cultivating here.

The tiny silver figure danced around Han Li for a while, then suddenly transformed into a fire ball before rising up and descending onto the palm of Han Li's hand, where it reverted back into the form of a small child.

Han Li gently patted the tiny silver figure's head, and it seemed to have been relishing his touch, narrowing its eyes in contentment as it rubbed its head against his hand.

"This place has clearly done wonders for you, but I have to leave for some time, and I don't know when I'll be able to return, so I'll have to take you with me," Han Li said, and it was unclear whether he was talking to himself or explaining the situation to the Essence Fire Raven.

To his surprise, the Essence Fire Raven seemed to have understood him, and it let loose an elated cry as it transformed into a fiery silver bird that flew straight upward.

After that, it circled around in the air before swooping back down and vanishing into Han Li's body in a flash, ready to follow him wherever he went.

A faint smile appeared on Han Li's face upon seeing this, and he withdrew the array and erased all signs that he had ever been here before turning to depart.

After leaving the cave, he traveled to the Gourd Peak rather than returning to his cave abode.

Having obtained so many Horned Dragon Herbs from Ping Yaozi's storage bracelet, it was time to begin attempting to refine Spring Rain Pills, and seeing as he was going to leave the sect, he had to purchase the recipe for the Spring Rain Pill prior to his departure.

Only when it was late into the night did he return to his cave abode without alerting anyone, and he gathered all of the spirit medicines from his garden that had reached sufficient maturity, then also retrieved the strange stone cauldron that had been offered to him by the monkey king before leaving the Blaze Dragon Dao.

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Half a year later.

A streak of azure light came tumbling out of the sky above a massive mountain in the northern region of the Ancient Cloud Continent, and it crashed heavily into the mountain summit, causing half of the mountain to collapse violently.

After the dust settled, a middle-aged man with a cold expression was revealed standing on the collapsed mountain summit, wearing a suit of antiquated azure armor with golden patterns on its surface. The suit of armor wasn't giving off much of a glow, but it had an extremely solid and sturdy appearance.

The man was none other than Gu Jie!

Beneath his left boot was a portly man wearing an outer sect elder's robe of the Blaze Dragon Dao ,and blood was pouring down from the corner of his mouth as he desperately implored, "Please spare me, Senior! I honestly have no idea who you're looking for..."

However, Gu Jie's patience had run out, and he pointed a finger straight at the portly man's glabella.

A thread of azure light shot out of his fingertip before vanishing into the portly man's head, and the man gave a muffled groan before immediately losing consciousness.

Moments later, Gu Jie withdrew his finger, then gave a cold harrumph as he slammed a palm down onto the portly man's head, causing it to instantly explode like a watermelon.

As a result, a golden nascent soul was revealed with its entire body ensnared within a mass of azure threads. The golden light radiating from the nascent soul's body gradually dimmed until it completely faded, upon which the nascent soul disintegrated into nothingness.

Gu Jie remained standing on the spot with a contemplative expression, seemingly pondering something.

Moments later, he swept a hand through the air, and seven or eight blue masks appeared in the air before him.

He reached out toward the portly man's remains, and an azure horse mask flew out of his body to join the other masks that were hovering in mid-air.

"I've finally managed to dig up something useful. It looks like they are indeed in the Blaze Dragon Dao," Gu Jie murmured to himself as he inspected the mask, then reached out to make a grabbing motion with one hand, and the mask that was hovering before him was instantly crushed into powder.

Immediately thereafter, he vanished from the spot amid a flash of azure light.

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Several months later, in a secluded valley in the eastern part of the Bell Toll Mountain Range.

At the entrance of the valley was a massive trench that was 100 feet wide, and it extended all the way to the end of the valley.

All of the snow and ice in the trench had melted away to reveal the rocky black surface underneath, and there were even many patches of moss and short weeds growing on the rocks.

On a cliff in the deepest part of the valley was a thin figure that had been bound tightly to the rock face behind them by a massive of azure vines.

A dark red line of blood ran all the way down from his head to his torso, and his body would've most likely split apart had it not been for the vines keeping the two halves together.

The man's face was very unremarkable, but he had a pair of tiny rat-like eyes that were quite memorable.

At this moment, Gu Jie was hovering in front of him, holding a shimmering golden nascent soul in his hand, and the nascent soul was struggling with all its might to escape, but to no avail.

"Who are the people who killed Ping Yaozi with you on that day, and where are they now?" Gu Jie asked.

"Even if... you're a Golden Immortal Stage elder of the Immortal Palace... you have no right... to barge into the Blaze Dragon Dao... Our dao lords won't let you get away with this..."

The nascent soul's voice was filled with horror and was cutting off intermittently, but it was still hoping to intimidate Gu Jie by bringing up the Blaze Dragon Dao.

"I know that there's a restriction in your nascent soul that makes it impossible for me to perform soul search technique by force, but I'm sure you've heard of a nascent planting technique, right? I have some top quality Dark Water Soil here, and if I plant your nascent soul into it... Oh, I'm really looking forward to seeing what'll happen," Gu Jie chuckled coldly.

The golden nascent soul shuddered in horror upon hearing this.

A nascent planting technique was a restorative technique used to nurture damaged nascent souls by planting them in spirit soil, but if a nascent soul were to be planted in contaminated oil, then it would become an extremely horrific torture method.

Once a nascent soul was planted into contaminated soil, it would constantly be subjected to the most excruciating pain imaginable until it eventually became a part of the soil. This process would take countless years to complete, and it was completely irreversible, robbing the owner of the nascent soul of any chance of reincarnation.

The nascent soul remained silent, and a cold smile appeared on Gu Jie's face as he said, "Looks like you're determined to test my patience."

He then flipped a hand over to produce an incense burner that was holding any sticks of incense. Instead, it was filled with a type of black soil that resembled fat, and it was giving off a foul odor that should've been unique to decaying bodies.

The golden nascent soul was even more horrified upon seeing this, and it hurriedly yelled, "I'll talk! Those two are..."

In reality, he didn't know who Qilin 9 and Wyrms 15 actually were, but in the face of Gu Jie's threats and absolute power, he had no choice but to tell Gu Jie everything that he knew, as well as his guesses on the identities of Qilin 9 and Wyrms 15.

After hearing what the nascent soul had to say, a sinister smile appeared on Gu Jie's face as he abruptly tightened his grip and crushed the nascent soul into nothingness.

He then made a beckoning motion with his other hand, and Qilin 17's storage bracelet flew into his grasp.

After taking a moment to refine the storage bracelet, he swept a hand through the air, and a golden pill cauldron and an azure rat mask instantly appeared before him.

Gu Jie raised a hand to stroke the golden cauldron, and a series of concealment runes instantly appeared on its surface, releasing an azure glow while giving off a burst of peculiar fluctuations.

"I'm impressed that he was able to conceal most of the mark I left on this cauldron. No wonder I could only track down the cauldron to the Ancient Cloud Continent, but couldn't verify its exact location beyond that," Gu Jie mused as he raised an eyebrow.

After that, he stowed the cauldron, the mask, and the storage bracelet away before flying deeper into the Blaze Dragon Dao.

Close to a month later, an azure figure was flying through the air above a vast snowland near the central region of the Blaze Dragon Dao.

Behind it was a massive white snow lotus flower that was traveling at even higher speed, and it was steadily closing in on the azure figure.

Reclined within the snow lotus flower was a voluptuous woman in a pristine white dress.

She was wearing a crimson fox mask that covered her face, leaving everything to the beholder's imagination, as well as giving her an aura of mystery.

On the glabella of the mask was inscribed the number "3" in the form of a peculiar rune.

The gap between the azure figure and the snow lotus flower was steadily closing, and all of a sudden, both of them drew to a halt while they were still separated by several thousand feet.

The woman in white continued to recline in her snow lotus flower with her head resting on the palm of her hand, and she was holding a white flower in her other hand as she cast a seductive gaze toward Gu Jie.

"I don't want to fight you, but that's not because I fear you! I'd advise you not to test my patience!" Gu Jie declared in a cold voice as he cast his gaze toward the woman in the snow lotus flower.

"It's not like I'm a tigress that's going to eat you, so of course you have no reason to fear me. However, as an elder of the Northern Glacial Immortal Palace, you've barged into our Blaze Dragon Dao and gone on a killing spree without any explanation. Could it be that you think that our Blaze Dragon Dao fears your Immortal Palace?" the woman asked.

"You're wearing a Transient Guild mask right now, yet you keep bringing up the Blaze Dragon Dao. Aren't you meddling in business that has nothing to do with you? Do you not have anything better to do with your time?" Gu Jie chuckled coldly.

"Truth be told, I have been feeling quite bored lately, and you just so happened to appear at this juncture," the woman sighed.

Her voice was as pleasant as a warm spring breeze, and there was also a seductive quality to it that struck Gu Jie's mind with a numbing sensation.

Chapter 257: Returning a Favor

"How dare you try to bewitch me!" Gu Jie yelled in a thunderous voice that instantly drowned out the woman's laughter.

With a flick of his wrist, a burst of spatial fluctuations erupted in front of him, and an azure flying sword shot out of thin air, hurtling directly toward the woman.

The woman didn't appear to have done anything in response, but the snow lotus flower beneath her suddenly began to glow with dazzling radiance, and a pristine flower petal rose up in front of her like a shield.

A sharp clang rang out as the tip of the azure flying sword pierced about an inch into the flower petal, but it was unable to progress any further than that.

Gu Jie made a hand seal and began to chant an incantation upon seeing this, and the runes on the azure flying sword suddenly lit up, while a tiny speck of azure light the size of a grain of rice emerged the tip of the flying sword, giving off a strong wood-attribute aura.

As the speck of azure light appeared, the entire flower petal began to turn from a pristine white color to a glowing jade-like color, and all of a sudden, the speck of azure light brightened drastically, following which a translucent azure thread shot out from within.

The azure thread was as thin as a strand of hair and appeared to have been extremely fragile, but it was astonishingly fast and instantly pierced through the flower petal before hurtling into the flower itself.

The masked woman's expression stiffened slightly upon seeing this, and she swept the white flower in her hand toward the azure thread.

A pair of dull thuds rang out as the azure thread pierced through two layers of flower petals before dissipating into nothingness, while two of the white petals of the flower that the woman was holding turned black before wilting away and detaching themselves from the flower.

"Don't you know you have to be gentle with women?"

The masked woman gently stroked the white flower with a displeased expression, then rose to her feet and flicked a finger toward the tip of the azure flying sword that had pierced into the snow lotus flower petal.

The azure flying sword instantly shuddered violently as if it had been dealt a heavy blow, then flew back through the air before landing in Gu Jie's grasp.

As soon as Gu Jie closed his hand around the hilt of the flying sword, he was instantly struck by an itchy sensation in the palm of his hand, and he looked down to find that the hilt of the flying sword was covered in some type of pink powder.

Before he had a chance to let go of the sword, countless vibrant and colorful butterflies suddenly flew out of the pink powder, quickly enveloping his entire body.

Gu Jie's brows furrowed slightly upon seeing this, and bright azure light erupted from all of the patterns on his suit of armor. A series of slender azure vines instantly emerged from his armor before spreading in all directions, swallowing up all of the butterflies and eradicating all of them in the blink of an eye.

However, he then discovered to his surprise that the masked woman and the white snow lotus flower were both nowhere to be seen, and even their auras had completely vanished.

He quickly swung around to inspect his surroundings, only to find that there was nothing around him, and even the snowland down below had disappeared.

"An illusion like this won't be enough to trap me!" Gu Jie scoffed, then closed his eyes and began to chant an incantation.

As he did so, a glimmer of azure light appeared in his hand, and all of the patterns on his suit of armor and the flying sword in his grasp lit up in unison, releasing a burst of dazzling green radiance.

Moments later, his eyes sprang open, and he gripped onto his sword with both hands before swinging it down in a forceful motion.

Seven massive azure sword projections, each of which was over 10,000 feet tall, appeared behind him in a flash, then came crashing down like falling mountains.

A string of resounding booms rang out in the air as the seven sword projections came crashing down one after another, causing the entire space to tremble violently.

However, after the tremors finally subsided, his surroundings remained completely empty, and nothing had changed.

Gu Jie's expression finally changed slightly upon seeing this, and only now did he come to realize that he seemed to have been situated in a space of absolute nothingness.

Right at this moment, the masked woman's voice rang out in the surrounding space. "I don't think there's a need for us to continue our battle any further beyond this point, Fellow Daoist Gu. How about we sit down and have a chat now?"

"What do you want to talk about?" Gu Jie asked.

"I've already gathered some information about the situation, and it seems like the people you're looking for were only carrying out a mission for the Transient Guild, so they haven't done anything wrong," the masked woman said.

"That's preposterous! They killed a True Immortal cultivator of our Immortal Palace who was extremely likely to become a Heavenly Pill Master, yet you say that they did nothing wrong? In that case, am I not also well within my rights to seek vengeance for Ping Yaozi?" Gu Jie countered in an enraged voice.

"It's true that you're not at fault, either, except they only killed a single member of your Immortal Palace, yet you've already killed far more than just one member of the Blaze Dragon Dao. Am I correct in saying that?" the masked woman asked.

"How could those people possibly compare with Ping Yaozi?" Gu Jie scoffed.

"That's your perspective on this matter. From my perspective, you've already gone too far, and it's time that you stopped," the masked woman replied in a calm voice.

"I'm not going to stop pursuing this matter until the other two perpetrators are also dead!" Gu Jie harrumphed coldly.

A cold look finally appeared on the masked woman's face upon hearing this, and she said, "I'm only willing to negotiate with you as you're a member of the Northern Glacial Immortal Palace. If you continue to be so rude and unreasonable, then even if I can't kill you here, I can at least seal 12 of your immortal acupoints and severely suppress your power.

"The Immortal Palace isn't going to declare war on both the Blaze Dragon Dao and the Transient Guild at once over a Golden Immortal like yourself. Otherwise, you wouldn't have come here alone."

Gu Jie finally fell silent upon hearing this.

"I can turn a blind eye to the people that you've killed up to this point as long as you don't go any further than this. If you know what's good for you, then you'd leave the Ancient Cloud Continent right away."

The masked woman's voice grew fainter and fainter, and all of a sudden, a burst of light appeared above Gu Jie, following which several massive flower petals opened up to release him from the space that he was trapped in.

Immediately thereafter, the giant white snow lotus flower vanished on the spot amid a flash of white light.

Gu Jie remained hovering in mid-air for a while with a contemplative look on his face, then finally flew away toward the north as a streak of azure light.

Half a day later, on a nameless mountain range in the Blaze Dragon Dao.

Inside the belly of the mountain was a large circular altar, around which stood eight black stone pillars. There was a lit brazier on each of the stone pillars, within which some type of oil was burning, giving off a crimson glow that illuminated the entire surrounding space.

A tall and broad figure in a black cloak with an azure deer mask on his face was pacing back and forth on the altar while rubbing his hands together, appearing to be quite anxious and agitated.

It was none other than Qilin 9.

He had already heard about all of the Transient Guild members that had been killed within the territory of the Blaze Dragon Dao, and through his sources in the guild, he had deduced that the Golden Immortal Stage elder of the Northern Glacial Immortal Palace was responsible for all the killings.

He had originally planned to find an excuse to leave the sect and travel to some secluded region, only returning to the sect after making a breakthrough to the Golden Immortal Stage, but right as he was about to set off, he received a message from a high-ranking member of the Transient Guild, instructing him to remain within this mountain in the Bell Toll Mountain Range for his own safety, and to await further news.

However, close to a year had already passed by with not a single update, and he was starting to grow quite concerned.

Right at this moment, a burst of white light appeared at the center of the altar, and a white snow lotus flower appeared before blooming to reveal a woman in a white dress.

"Dao Lord Yun... I mean, Senior Qilin 3," Qilin 9 hurriedly greeted.

"The matter concerning Gu Jie has already been settled, but I'd advise you not to set foot on the Infernal Frost Continent for the next 1,000 years," the woman declared in an indifferent voice.

"Thank you, Senior Qilin 3," Qilin 9 hurriedly said in a respectful voice as he extended a deep bow.

"I've repaid you for the favor that I owe you, and I won't intervene even if you get yourself into any further trouble from now on, so do try to be more prudent in your future decision-making," the woman said, then vanished from the spot amid a flash of white light.

Qilin 9 could only extend a parting bow with a wry smile on his face.

After that, he removed his deer mask, and his body abruptly shrank down into a short and stocky man wearing a lavish golden robe. It was none other than Xiong Shan.

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To the east of the Ancient Cloud Continent was a deep blue sea that hadn't frozen solid.

Within this region of the sea was a ring-shaped coral island, beneath which was a trench that was over 100,000 feet deep.

At the bottom of the trench was a gray stone monument that was over 100 feet tall, and it was riddled with holes of different depths and sizes from the erosion of the surrounding seawater. Furthermore, it was covered in a layer of black seaweed, making it appear identical from the average rock on the seabed.

As it turned out, this gray stone monument was actually the entrance of a secret area under the jurisdiction of the Blaze Dragon Dao.

On a white stone plaza hovering in the air above a lush mountain within the secret area was Han Li, who was peering into the distance with his hands resting on the railing in front of him.

He could see a series of tall mountains that were covered in lush undergrowth, all of which were suspended in mid-air. The bases of the mountains were completely disconnected from the ground, and there were only countless lush green vines trailing down from the mountains into the gray mist below.

This secret area was filled with thousands of these floating mountains, and the entire area was filled with abundant world's origin qi. All of the mountains were laden with all types of premium spirit medicines, including ones that were ingredients required to refine various types of earthly pills.

Beneath these floating mountains was a bottomless mist-filled canyon, within which resided many strange humanoid creatures with grayish-white skin.

There were no books or records that assigned any names to these creatures, so those in the Blaze Dragon Dao referred to them as "white ghosts".

Under normal circumstances, these white ghosts wouldn't leave the canyon to venture onto the floating mountains, but once every few years, the mist within the canyon would spill over and rise up toward the floating mountains up above without any warning.

Whenever this happened, a large number of white ghosts would come rushing out of the canyon before climbing onto the floating mountains to devour the spirit plants growing upon them, and whenever any cultivators tried to stop them, battles would ensue.

These white ghosts weren't all that formidable individually, but their numbers were vast, and they had no regard for their own safety, so neither the cultivators nor the white ghosts had been able to gain the upper hand during the large-scale conflicts that had arisen between the two parties throughout history.

In order to keep these white ghosts at bay once and for all, a dao lord of the Blaze Dragon Dao who was proficient in the art of arrays had set up powerful restrictions on the bases of the floating mountains that were able to keep the rising mist at bay, thereby preventing the white ghost invasions altogether.

However, people soon noticed that without the mist rising up from the canyon once every few years, the number of spirit plants on the floating mountains steadily declined year after year, to the point that some of the more prized species of spirit plants went extinct altogether.

Only then did the cultivators of the Blaze Dragon Dao come to realize that this secret area contained a unique symbiotic ecosystem, and that it was not to be tampered with without consequences.

After that, the dao lord removed the restrictions, and an order was also released prohibiting members of the Blaze Dragon Dao from engaging the white ghosts in battle unless they appeared on the floating mountains in areas that weren't encompassed within the mist.

Furthermore, in order to prevent unforeseen mishaps, there was a large number of Spatial Tempering Stage disciples and puppets stationed in the secret area, and at least one True Immortal Stage elder was also required to be present in the secret area at all times.

Han Li was currently serving as the True Immortal Stage elder overseeing proceedings in this secret area.

Chapter 258: Opening the Box

Han Li was looking out at the unique scenery of the secret area with a rather absentminded expression, and it was clear that his mind was elsewhere.

He had already been here for over a month, and during that time, he had determined that the only way to enter and exit this place was through that sole entrance. Hence, he had set up some restrictions at the entrance and also left a wisp of his spiritual sense behind so that he would be alerted in advance if Gu Jie were to ever come after him in this secret area.

Of course, the fact that there was only a single entrance and exit meant that it was also rather troublesome for him to escape this place.

In order to resolve this issue, Han Li had made a trip to the southern end of the Ancient Cloud Continent before coming here, and there, he had carved out a cave on a secluded cliff face near the Thunderstorm Sea.

Inside the cave, he had used nine lengths of Lightning Restraining Wood to set up a stable lightning array that could facilitate ultra long-distance teleportation, and he had also left a spiritual mark there.

As a result, whenever he used his lightning array for teleportation, he would be able to instantly teleport himself to that cave thanks to the spiritual mark that he had left there.

Even if Gu Jie really were to track him down to this place, he would be able to instantly teleport himself to the cave before fleeing into the Thunderstorm Sea, and there was a very good chance that he would be able to escape.

However, due to the fact that the lightning array was constantly active, it was constantly using up the power of lightning within the lengths of Lightning Restraining Wood, so it would only be able to last no more than a century before going defunct.

"I've done everything that I can, so there's no point in worrying about things outside of my control," Han Li murmured to himself, then turned and made his way toward the cave abode on the other side of the plaza.

After returning to the secret chamber in the cave abode, Han Li sat down with his legs crossed, then flipped a hand over to produce two thin sheets of yellow paper, which he began examining closely.

The two sheets of paper contained the recipes for the Origin Unifying Pill and the Spring Rain Pill.

In order to advance his own cultivation base as quickly as possible, he would have to refine large batches of earthly pills to enhance his progress.

At this point, he had already become quite skilled at refining Origin Unifying Pills, achieving a far higher success rate than before. He had never refined any Spring Rain Pills, but he was confident that it wouldn't have been very difficult thanks to his Mantra Treasured Axis.

He also had a decent supply of ingredients required to refine these two types of pills, but in order to plan for the future, he had still planted most of his spirit medicine seeds in the private spirit medicine garden in his cave abode.

He knew that even though he had obtained two earthly pill recipes, his body would eventually begin to develop tolerance if he were to repeatedly consume the same types of pills, and once that happened, the pills would no longer be as efficacious as before.

Hence, he required a more diverse range of earthly pill recipes.

For this purpose, he had released a mission in the Transient Guild, expressing a desire to exchange resources for earthly pill recipes, but pill recipes of this caliber were extremely rare and precious, and he hadn't been able to secure any further recipes through that avenue.

All of a sudden, he flipped a hand over to produce a purple jade box, the very same one that had once belonged to Ping Yaozi.

The fact that the box had been so closely guarded by someone who was close to becoming a Heavenly Pill Master indicated that whatever was inside had to have been extremely precious, and there was a chance that it contained Ping Yaozi's collection of pill recipes.

He swept his gaze over the patterns on the surface of the purple box, then flipped a hand over to summon around a dozen black flags, each of which was only around an inch in size. The flags were made from a black metallic material with many complex patterns engraved onto them.

Han Li planted these metal flags in a circle into the stone ground, then raised a finger and began inscribing lines onto the ground in between the flags.

Before long, a tiny yet complex array had taken shape on the ground.

Han Li set the purple jade box down onto the center of the array, then made a hand seal as he began to chant an incantation.

As he did so, all of the patterns on the black flags and the array engraved into the ground lit up in unison.

A burst of dazzling light then erupted out of the array at Han Li's behest to swallow up the entire purple jade box, and the silver talisman that was adhered tightly to the box suddenly erupted into flames.

The flames illuminated all of the patterns engraved onto the surface of the box, giving it a glittering and translucent appearance, as if it were a gorgeous piece of purple crystal. However, Han Li didn't get a chance to appreciate its beauty as the box had suddenly began to tremble violently, and the patterns on its surface were glowing brighter and brighter, looking as if they were about to crack open.

Han Li's brows furrowed slightly upon seeing this, and he immediately activated his Brightsight Spirit Eyes.

In doing so, he discovered that there were secret runes engraved onto the interior of the box, and all of these runes had lit up, initiating a self-destruct sequence to destroy the jade box and its contents.

There were two layers of restrictions placed upon the jade box, and if one were to only remove the silver talisman, the secret runes on the inside of the box would be activated to destroy everything.

In this tense situation, Han Li immediately summoned his Mantra Treasured Axis, and it appeared behind him in the form of a golden wheel that was around a foot in size, slowly revolving in mid-air.

The Mantra Treasured Axis began to revolve faster at his behest, and it released countless golden ripples that spread through the air in all directions, instantly encompassing the entire surrounding area in a radius of 100 feet.

All of a sudden, everything in the secret chamber aside from Han Li himself was slowed down.

The runes within the purple jade box had been flashing so quickly that it had appeared as if they had been glowing continuously this entire time, and only now that they had been slowed down did Han Li discover that they were actually flashing.

He immediately made a rapid string of hand seals before quickly rearranging the black flags with both hands, creating a brand new miniature array in the blink of an eye.

After that, the new array began to radiate dazzling light at his behest, and a burst of black light shot out of the black flags like miniature arrows before hurtling into the box.

Inside the jade box, the light glowing from the concealed runes faded, and the flame that was burning outside the box also gradually shrank down.

By the time the flame was completely snuffed out, the patterns on the box had also fallen dark, and the box opened up on its own with a faint crack.

Han Li withdrew the Mantra Treasured Axis back into his own body, then reached out to make a grabbing motion, drawing the purple jade box into his grasp.

He had already set up a high-level restrictive array outside the secret chamber, so he wasn't concerned that the jade box would contain some type of secret mechanism that would expose his current location.

He peered into the box to find that it was completely empty with the exception of a stack of thin golden pages laying at the bottom.

Han Li released his spiritual sense to verify that there weren't any spiritual marks planted on the pages, and only then did he pick them up for a closer examination.

The words "Growth Bearing Pill" were inscribed on the top sheet of paper in ancient text, and below that was the recipe and refinement method for the pill.

An elated look appeared on Han Li's face upon seeing this. Just as he expected, the box contained Ping Yaozi's collection of pill recipes.

After briefly reading through the first page in the stack, he flipped through a dozen or so of the pages that came after the first one, and to his elation, he discovered that most of them were earthly pill recipes. Including the recipe for the Growth Bearing Pill, there were as many as seven earthly pill recipes.

However, this made sense to him after he considered the fact that Ping Yaozi already possessed the ability to refine dao pills prior to his demise.

With these seven earthly pill recipes in addition to the recipes for the Origin Unifying Pill and the Spring Rain Pill, he wasn't going to have to dedicate any time and energy to searching for more earthly pill recipes anytime soon.

According to the description of the pill enclosed in the recipe, Han Li was able to confirm beyond a reasonable doubt that the vial of yellow pills he had obtained from Ping Yaozi earlier was a vial of Growth Bearing Pills.

These pills seemed to have been of a higher caliber than Spring Rain Pills, and of course, the spirit medicines used for their refinement were all extremely precious.

Thankfully, this secret area of floating mountains was a natural treasure trove of spirit medicines, so he could source many of the ingredients here, and given his status, the sect definitely wasn't going to come after him if he only collected a batch of spirit medicines that were no more than 100 years of age.

After that, he would just have to nurture those spirit medicines to the correct age with the spirit liquid from the Heaven Controlling Vial, and he could purchase any ingredients that he couldn't find with Immortal Origin Stones.

Han Li suppressed the elation in his heart as he picked up the jade box, and he was just about to put all of the pill recipes back into the box when he suddenly noticed that something didn't seem to have been quite right with the bottom of the box.

He flipped a hand over to produce a dagger that was as thin as a willow leaf, then plunged it into the edge of the jade box before gently prying it upward.

A faint crack rang out, and a purple jade board that was as smooth as a mirror was pried up from the bottom of the box.

The jade board wasn't much thicker than a sheet of paper, and Han Li picked it up before carefully examining it.

With the light of the flames in the secret chamber, he could see that the jade board was riddled with countless extremely thin runes that were interconnected to form an extremely complex design.

Han Li released his spiritual sense to encompass the jade board, and as soon as his spiritual sense came into contact with the board, a layer of golden light instantly rose up from all of the patterns on its surface, releasing a series of golden runes that repelled his spiritual sense.

After a few more attempts, he was still unable to make any progress, so he could only give up on this endeavor for now.

It wasn't that he couldn't forcibly bypass the golden light barrier with his spiritual sense. Instead, he simply didn't want to risk breaking the jade board as he had a feeling that it was something quite precious.

In the end, he could only place the jade board back into the box along with the pill recipes before stowing the box away again.

After that, he swept a sleeve through the air, and a gray stone cauldron appeared in front of him amid a flash of light before landing on the ground with a dull thud.

Chapter 259: Busy at Work

The stone cauldron was the same one that he had obtained from the monkey king, and the monkey wine inside had already been removed, but due to the fact that the monkey wine had been in there for a long time, it was still giving off a faint wine aroma.

Han Li took a deep breath, then quickly made a string of strange hand seals.

Bursts of azure light flew out of his palms in succession before landing upon the stone cauldron, and the eight large runes engraved onto its surface instantly began to glow with silver light.

It worked!

Han Li was ecstatic to see this.

Sure enough, the treasure refinement method that he had obtained from Qilin 9 was effective on this cauldron.

More incantation seals continued to fly out of his hands as he began to chant and incantation, and the light radiating from the runes on the stone cauldron became brighter and brighter.

A string of faint cracks rang out from the cauldron, and a series of patterns similar to the veins of the a leaf appeared on its surface before also radiating dazzling silver light.

Chunks of stone slid off the cauldron amid the silver light before crashing to the ground, and as a result, the cauldron rapidly shrank in size, reduced to only around half its original size before too long.

By the time all of the silver light faded, the original stone cauldron had been replaced by a silver pill cauldron with complex patterns engraved onto its surface. Those eight runes were still present, but they had become even more beautiful and intricate than before.

Refining pills in a cauldron like this must have many benefits.

After taking a moment to observe the material and the aura of the cauldron, he discovered that it wasn't inferior to Ping Yaozi's golden cauldron in the slightest.

All of a sudden, a fiery silver figure that was no more than two feet tall flew out of his body amid a flash of silver light, and it jumped onto the ground before immediately having its attention drawn to the pill cauldron before it. It took a few glances at the cauldron, then looked back at Han Li before circling around the cauldron.

A faint smile appeared on Han Li's face as he issued an instruction to the silver figure, and it immediately jumped into the lid of the cauldron. Immediately thereafter, its round cheeks began to bulge, and a massive burst of fire that was completely disproportionate to its own body came surging out of its mouth.

The silver flame swept through the air in an arc, then flew under the cauldron and immediately began to burn fiercely.

As this happened, a wave of scorching heat spread through the entire secret chamber.

A short while later, all of the spirit patterns on the silver cauldron lit up, and it gradually took on a crimson hue, while the cauldron itself also rose up into the air while swaying slightly from side to side.

The tiny silver figure seated on the lid of the cauldron seemed to have been greatly intrigued by this, and it scooted over to the edge of the cauldron's lid, swaying with the cauldron while its little legs were dangling over the edge of the lid.

With a sweep of his sleeve, Han Li summoned a batch of around a dozen spirit medicines, including a Blaze Tuber Herb.

He then rubbed his hands together momentarily, and all of the spirit medicines were instantly reduced to medicinal powder.

Immediately thereafter, he brought two of his fingers together before raising them up, and the cauldron of the lid beneath the tiny silver figure instantly flew up into the air at his behest.

The medicinal powder that was suspended in mid-air was drawn into the cauldron by a burst of invisible force, following which the lid of the cauldron also fell into place with an audible click.

Immediately thereafter, the eight runes on the silver cauldron lit up one after another.

The silver flame beneath the cauldron seemed to have been restricted by some type of invisible force, causing it to twist and swirl, becoming a miniature fiery tornado that enveloped the entire cauldron.

The fiery silver figure seated on the cauldron's lid instantly transformed into a silver fire raven as it flew into the fiery tornado to become one with it.

The fiery tornado abruptly shuddered, and the heat radiating from it increased by several fold.

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

At this rate, it was going to take far less time to refine this batch of pills, but the success rate was still yet to be seen.

Time slowly passed by, and Han Li was occasionally using his Mantra Treasured Axis for assistance during the pill refinement process. The cauldron was radiating rainbow light, but no medicinal aroma had begun to waft out of the cauldron up to this point.

Around 16 hours later, the rainbow light glowing from the cauldron suddenly faded, and the cauldron reverted back to its original silver color, except some parts were red-hot.

The silver flame swept back before converging to reform a fiery silver figure, which flew out from under the cauldron before landing on Han Li's shoulder.

A loud clang rang out as the silver cauldron landed back on the ground.

Han Li's brows were slightly furrowed as he approached the cauldron, then gently swept a sleeve toward it.

The lid of the silver cauldron was removed, and an extremely rich medicinal aroma instantly wafted out to fill the entire secret chamber.

Han Li peered into the cauldron to find 16 golden pills laying inside, and they were still giving off faint wisps of white mist from the residual heat that they retained.

This is incredible! Not only has this cauldron significantly shortened the time required to refine these pills, it's also produced a far larger batch than usual!

Han Li suppressed his elation as he stored the pills into a jade vial, then swept a sleeve through the air to summon another batch of ingredients to refine some more pills.

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Several months later, the silver flames within the secret chamber faded, and a silver fire raven flew out from under the cauldron. It transformed into a fiery silver figure that landed on the ground, then skipped over to Han Li before climbing up onto his shoulder along his robes.

There was a slightly weary look on Han Li's face as he turned to the fiery silver figure with a smile, then made his way over to the silver cauldron.

The lid of the cauldron flew off at his behest, and a rich medicinal aroma was instantly released.

Han Li made a grabbing motion to pull out the pills in the cauldron for an examination, and he discovered that they had a bright green hue and each of them was around the same size as a longan.

"Not bad! 11 pills is already a lot more than I would normally be able to refine in one batch," he remarked to himself as he flipped a hand over to store the pills into a white jade vial.

A thought then suddenly occurred to him, and he sat down with his legs crossed before flipping a hand over to produce his Transient Guild mask, which he promptly put on.

A massive array was projected onto the wall of the secret chamber amid a flash of azure light, and Han Li began to carefully inspect the missions column on the left side of the array.

After a long while, he withdrew his gaze before removing his mask, and a grim look appeared on his face as he heaved a faint sigh.

He had noticed that all of the missions released by Qilin 17 had disappeared. Barring the extremely slim chance that all of the missions had been withdrawn or completed, something had to have happened to him or his Transient Guild mask.

Han Li took a moment to check the spiritual marks that he had left at the entrance of this secret area and the cliff near the Thunderstorm Sea, and both of them were still intact.

Around a dozen years passed by in the blink of an eye.

He had spent half of this time refining pills, and he had also derived many crystals containing the laws of time using the Heaven Controlling Vial.

On this day, several dozen young men and women dressed in Blaze Dragon Dao disciple robes converged from directions, landing on the plaza in front of the entrance of Han Li's cave abode.

Han Li was standing before them, and his gaze roamed over them as he called out a few names.

"Hu Zhen, Luo Tang, Xin Sui..."

The young men and women who had had their names called immediately stepped forward before cupping their fists toward Han Li in a collective salute.

All of them were at the pinnacle of the Spatial Tempering Stage, and they were the most formidable ones among the disciples stationed in this secret area.

"I'm going into seclusion for a while, so I'll be counting on you to take care of all of the affairs in the secret area. There's no need to report to me unless something important or urgent arises," Han Li instructed.

"Yes, Elder Li," the disciples answered in unison.

"I'll be leaving a secret talisman with you. If you encounter a situation that you can't handle on your own, just inject your spiritual power into the talisman, and it'll fly into my cave abode to notify me," Han Li said.

The disciples gave an affirmative response once again.

A dark-skinned young man stepped forward to accept the secret talisman with both hands as he said, "Rest assured, Elder Li, we'll be sure to perform our duties diligently."

Han Li nodded in response as he waved a dismissive hand and said, "Alright, you can all go now."

Everyone extended a collective parting salute, then flew away as streaks of light.

Close to a day later, the mountain that Han Li was situated on began to shudder, and pillars of azure light rose up into the heavens, then converged in the sky to form a massive azure light barrier that encompassed the entire mountain.

Inside a newly carved out giant cave on the mountain, there was a fire pit in the stone wall to the left, and on the stone table next to the fire pit were seven or eight different types of spirit materials.

The most eye-catching ones among them were around a dozen chunks of dark golden metal the size of human heads, and a fist-sized white rock with many flower-petal-like patterns on its surface.

These were none other than the Dendrobium Gold Essence and the Jade Gleam Cloud Stone.

Han Li was standing beside the fire pit, and he drew the Jade Gleam Cloud Stone into his grasp, gently massaging it to feel its warm and smooth texture.

During the time that he had spent in this secret area, he had been refining pills while keeping up with news from the Blaze Dragon Dao, and according to his sources, it appeared that Gu Jie was no longer situated near the Blaze Dragon Dao.

Hopefully, he was forced away by a certain Golden Immortal of the sect.

Even so, Han Li still didn't dare to underestimate the wrath of a Golden Immortal, so he didn't let down his guard.

At this point, he had already refined quite a large number of pills, and he was planning to begin consuming these pills and resuming his cultivation soon.

However, prior to that, he had to refine his Azure Bamboo Cloudswarm Swords again.

He pointed a finger forward, and a joyful cry rang out within his body as the Essence Fire Raven flew out of his fingertip before hurtling into the fire pit, setting it alight.

A scorching silver flame instantly appeared within the fire pit.

Chapter 260: Sword Refinement

Han Li gently extended a hand forward, and the Jade Gleam Cloud Stone sitting on the palm of his hand slowly flew into the silver flame, enveloped within a burst of immortal spiritual power.

The silver flame immediately swallowed up the Jade Gleam Cloud Stone and began to burn it.

Time slowly passed by, but the white stone was still maintaining its original form, displaying no changes at all.

Han Li remained unfazed as he made a hand seal while chanting an incantation, and rings of crimson light suddenly appeared around the fire pit, following which a series of antiquated-looking runes began to emerge.

Following the emergence of those runes, the silver flames within the fire pit instantly rose up, and it became enveloped by a layer of crimson light. There wasn't much change to its heat, but it was giving off a type of peculiar fluctuations that were finally bringing about a slight change in the Jade Gleam Cloud Stone.

A sizzling sound rang out as the stone gradually began to melt within the silver flames, producing drops of waxy white liquid that hovered within the fire.

An extremely strong sandalwood aroma instantly filled the entire secret chamber.

Han Li immediately withdrew his outstretched hand upon seeing this, and the Jade Gleam Cloud Stone, which had already completely liquefied at this point, was instantly pulled out of the fire by his immortal spiritual power.

He then reached out with his other hand, which was holding a black stone vial with fiery red patterns all over its surface, and he used the vial to store the liquefied Jade Gleam Cloud Stone.

As soon as the white liquid flowed into the vial, a circle of runes instantly lit up on its surface, and the entire vial turned scorching hot, like a red-hot piece of metal.

A layer of azure light appeared over Han Li's hand, and he sealed the opening of the vial before setting it down onto the stone table beside him.

After that, he swept a sleeve through the air, and a chunk of Dendrobium Gold Essence rose up before landing in the fire pit.

This time, he made no hand seals to manipulate the array in the fire pit. Instead, he made his way over to a stone platform at the center of the cave that was around half a foot tall, and he sat down with his legs crossed, allowing the silver flame to melt the chunk of metal on its own.

All of the patterns on the surface of the chunk of Dendrobium Gold Essence began to give off a golden glow within the scorching flame, but it displayed no signs of melting.

Han Li only took a brief glance at it before closing his eyes to rest.

Seven days and seven nights later.

The silver flame was still raging within the fire pit, and at this point, the chunk of Dendrobium Gold Essence had already turned a crimson color. It was like a chunk of melting ice, and drops of molten golden liquid were dripping down from it.

Beneath it was a black stone vial that was twice as large as the one from before, and it was catching all of the drops of molten golden liquid.

Only after another entire day had passed by did the chunk of Dendrobium Gold Essence completely melt into liquid.

Han Li opened his eyes and strode forward to retrieve the black stone vial, then sent another chunk of Dendrobium Gold Essence flying into the fire pit.

Three months later.

Inside the cave, Han Li was standing beside the fire pit, holding a book with a beasthide cover in one hand. He was reading the book with a look of concentration on his face while scribbling something into the air with the index finger of his other hand.

Several thousand yellow pages were strewn across the stone platform beside him, and there was a series of extremely strange-looking patterns inscribed onto every single one of them.

The patterns on the sheets of paper near the bottom were extremely thick and chaotic, but the closer to the top one looked, the more slender and orderly the patterns they would find.

The patterns on the four sheets of paper at the top were already extremely intricate, resembling four large circular flowers.

The only part of the stone platform that wasn't laden with sheets of paper was its upper left corner, and there were around a dozen vials of different sizes placed there, containing all of the spirit liquids required for the upcoming sword refinement.

Aside from the time that he spent on refining those spirit liquids, Han Li had spent all of the rest of his time on studying the smelting sword refinement technique recorded in the book that he was holding, as well as practicing the accompanying array patterns.

Even though he had already made several thousand attempts, he was still not satisfied with the patterns that he was currently able to inscribe. He couldn't shake the feeling that there was something missing, and that was why he had refrained from commencing the refinement process this entire time.

Moments later, Han Li set down the book and closed his eyes, seemingly having fallen into deep thought. He remained standing still on the spot while tracing his right index and middle fingers through the air, as if he were still visualizing the patterns.

After a long while, his eyes suddenly sprang open as if he had been struck by a spark of inspiration, and he quickly made his way over to the fire pit.

A layer of golden scales appeared over his hand amid a flash of golden light, instantly covering his outstretched index and middle fingers.

After that, he crouched down beside the fire pit, plunging his fingers straight down into one of the rocks that had been used to construct the fire pit.

He then closed his eyes and rid himself of all unnecessary thoughts, immersing himself entirely in the vision of the patterns that he wanted to inscribe as his fingers began to carve through the rock.

Initially, his fingers were moving extremely slowly, taking a long time just to move a single inch. However, he then gradually sped up, and in the end, his fingers were virtually flying as he completed a set of patterns in a smooth and flowing manner.

The pattern was completely identical to the ones on the top four sheets of paper, except it was several times larger, extending all the way down from the stone platform, with the majority of it stretching onto the ground below.

After carving out this first set of patterns, Han Li took a moment to rest, then exhaled as he made his way over to the right side and repeated the same process.

Some time later, he rose to his feet as he slowly opened his eyes to find that another set of patterns had been completed. The two sets of patterns were in different positions, but were somehow connected, as if they were a single entity.

Han Li gave a pleased nod upon seeing this, and he rubbed his hands together, upon which the Essence Fire Raven flew out of his body before transforming into a silver flame that began burning within the fire pit.

The entire cave was filled with waves of scorching heat, and Han Li swept a sleeve through the air to release a string of azure light.

The azure light then faded to reveal his 72 Azure Bamboo Cloudswarm Swords, all of which were hovering in the air before him while giving off an azure glow.

With another sweep of his sleeve, all of the Azure Bamboo Cloudswarm Swords were sent flying into the fire pit.

The silver flame within the fire pit instantly rose up to engulf the Azure Bamboo Cloudswarm Swords, following which Han Li sat down with his legs crossed and began to chant an incantation while making a strange hand seal.

As his incantation continued, the array around the fire pit began to buzz audibly, and four pillars of golden light rose diagonally upward to meet at the center of the fire pit, forming a golden light barrier that encompassed both the Azure Bamboo Cloudswarm Swords and the Essence Fire Raven.

Moments later, Han Li spread his fingers open, then raised both hands slightly, and the sound of stoppers being pulled out of vials rang out as all of the spirit liquid within the dozen or so vials flowed out before surging into the golden light barrier.

Through the golden light barrier, Han Li could clearly see the molten Dendrobium Gold Essence splitting up on its own before completely enveloping every single one of the Azure Bamboo Cloudswarm Swords.

Immediately thereafter, all of the other types of spirit liquid also split themselves up into 72 parts before fusing into the molten Dendrobium Gold Essence on the surface of the Azure Bamboo Cloudswarm Swords.

Han Li closed his eyes again upon seeing this, then released his spiritual sense into the golden light barrier.

The light barrier shuddered slightly, and it instantly transformed into a five-colored light barrier.

At the same time, the 72 Azure Bamboo Cloudswarm Swords also began to glow brightly with five-colored light, giving them a dazzling and spectacular appearance.

Two hours passed by before Han Li opened his eyes once again, and he opened his mouth to release a burst of nascent flames. The nascent flames passed through the five-colored light barrier without any impediment before fusing with the silver flames inside.

The two types of flames instantly combined before rising up as a pillar of fire that enveloped all of the Azure Bamboo Cloudswarm Swords, and all of a sudden, around a dozen of the flying swords suddenly began to struggle with all their might, releasing their sword qi as they frantically darted away in all directions.

Han Li instantly increased his spiritual sense output upon seeing this, establishing close contact with all of the flying swords at once to immediately quell the unrest.

I didn't think there would still be some stubborn sword essence that hasn't been completely refined. They were certainly concealing themselves very well...

Despite this unforeseen turn of events, Han Li felt himself to be quite fortunate.

Thankfully, the sword essence had reared its head now. If he had lost control of his Azure Bamboo Cloudswarm Swords during a battle instead, then the consequences would've been catastrophic.

The sword essence that was still yet to be refined surged out of the flying swords within the scorching flames, then quickly disintegrated.

However, instead of being lost, the spiritual power that it was converted into was reabsorbed by the flying swords.

Even so, Han Li still didn't let his guard down, continuing to control the combination of the silver flame and his nascent flame to refine the 72 flying swords. Over time, the rainbow coloration of the flying swords gradually began to fade.

49 days later, the flying swords in the fire pit beneath the golden light barrier had turned as white and translucent as ice, looking almost completely transparent.

Compared with before, the blades of all of the flying swords had elongated by about an inch and also become much wider.

Han Li was inspecting these rather unfamiliar Azure Bamboo Cloudswarm Swords in an expressionless manner, and he swept a sleeve through the air once again.

The stopper of the final black vial on the stone platform flew out at his behest, and the white spirit liquid inside emerged before surging into the golden light barrier and splitting up into 72 parts, each of which dripped onto one of the flying swords, producing a sound much like that of spring rain falling onto the parched earth.

All of the flying sword shuddered in unison, following which all of the spirit patterns on their surfaces lit up, and countless arcs of golden lightning sprang forth, intertwining to form a miniature forest of lightning that was crackling incessantly.

If it weren't for the presence of the golden light barrier, the arcs of golden lightning would've most likely spilled out and destroyed the entire cave.