

Chaotic 541

Chapter 541: Reentering Wake City

After Jian Chen and his group left Lore City, the Xiao family had all gathered within the halls of their clan compound in Huangge City. The head of the Xiao family sat in the topmost position while several dozen youths knelt down on the other side. If Jian Chen and Tie Ta were here, they would be able to confirm that these youths were the very same ones that tried to kidnap Qiu Yue from the village.

“A report for the lord. We’ve made a concise investigation, and these are the ones that offended the fourth master of the Changyang clan.” One of the bulkier looking men cupped his hands as he gave his report.

The head of the Xiao family, Xiao Yun, stared dangerously at the few men. His frosty eyes made the youths afraid to respond or even look up.

“Your forgiveness, my lord! Please forgive us! We didn’t know that they were men from the Changyang clan. We only knew that a female villager was rather pretty, and we wished to have her wed to the young master. We did all of this with the young master in mind!”

“My lord, please spare us! We won’t dare do such a thing again...”

“My lord, please give us one more chance, please forgive us this once...”

The youths all knew that they had invited disaster upon themselves. Thus they knelt down and wept for forgiveness.

Snorting, Xiao Yun replied, “Drag them out and break both their legs.”

“Yes!” The middle-aged men nearby replied. Then calling for several guards, they dragged out the youths to break their legs.

“Tie them up and prepare them as gifts. We shall head to that village to apologize.” Xiao Yun commanded. For the grand and mighty head of the Xiao family to personally come to apologize to a mountain village, showed just how importantly he viewed this matter.

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The Cross Mountains was the Tian Yuan Continent’s largest magical beast mountain range. It traversed across the entire continent, bisecting the continent in two. The mountain range took up a sizeable portion of land.

An endless amount of magical beasts existed within the Cross Mountains. A veritable paradise for magical beasts to congregate at, many of the Class 6 Magical Beasts on the continent lived there. Very few of them lived anywhere else. Furthermore, legend had it that within the depths of the mountains existed several Class 7 Magical Beasts. As a result, the Cross Mountains were designated a forbidden zone for humanity. Any human that tried to enter the Cross Mountains would never find their way back alive.

So, the very depths of the Cross Mountains have existed as a forbidden zone for thousands and thousands of years. Even Heaven Saint Masters were afraid of taking a single step into this land.

At this moment, within the depths of the Cross Mountains, stood a three meter tall middle-aged man. This man had a very stalwart in physique. The veins in his body glowed with a golden color. His copper-like muscles bulged as a sign of well-development, and the only clothes he wore was a single pair of shorts that stopped short of his knees.

Both of the man's hands drooped down as he stood with hesitation in this area. His eyes flickered with an uncertain light as if unsure of something. Right where he was standing was the common boundary between the abyss of the mountains and the outer world itself.

"The entire Cross Mountains have been searched already, but the Winged Tiger God cannot be found. Even Rum Guinness' presence has completely vanished. It appears that she has already brought the Winged Tiger God from Cross Mountains a long time ago and into the territory of man. If we wish to kill the Winged Tiger God, then we will have to step into that territory." The man muttered to himself with knotted eyebrows.

"Rum Guinness has already violated the treaty we have with mankind. Should I reveal this information and let the human experts deal with them?" The man thought for a moment before quickly shaking his head, "No, that won't do. This involves the ancient mythological Winged Tiger God. A matter like this is far too important to allow humanity to realize the problem. If they find out and find a way to tame the Winged Tiger God while it's still a cub, then it'll be a tremendous calamity for the entire magical beast race. It appears that we cannot allow the cub to remain in the human territory; we must kill it, but the moment I step into the human's territory..." At this the man's voice began to falter as his eyes began to reveal a deep shade of fear.

After a moment, another gleam that would cause anyone to shiver appeared in his eyes. As if he was finally determined, he growled, "The experts of humanity have all hidden themselves. As long as I am careful, they won't find me." With that, the man took a determined step forward across the boundary between the Cross Mountains and the outer world. His body began to glimmer and shake for a moment before shooting off at an inconceivable speed, finally blinking out of sight.

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Two days later in the stronghold of the Blue Wind Kingdom, a group of mercenaries could be seen slowly escorting a caravan of goods. Among the crowd were seven Class 3 Magical Beasts traveling at a leisurely pace. Sitting on top of these magical beasts were six males and a single female. Although they wore plain clothes, their presences were regal and unordinary by any sense of word. Even the people around them didn't dare get too close, and kept a healthy distance as if afraid of unknowingly offending someone of unusual power.

After two days worth of traveling, Jian Chen and his group had finally arrived at the Blue Wind Kingdom Kingdom. After entering the interior of the kingdom's territory, Jian Chen didn't stop. They continued on toward Wake City.

The Class 3 Magical Beasts continued to move at a rapid pace through the lands. They left behind a trail of dust that looked like a single dust dragon from far away.

By the end of the day when the moon had started to rise, Jian Chen's group finally arrived at Wake City. The horizon was already growing a dusky light with the last half of the sun nearly out of sight. The light that radiated from the sunset was enough to illuminate half of the sky.

There weren't many travelers moving to and from the gates of Wake City, so only several dozen weary soldiers were guarding the gates.

Jian Chen's group of travelers slowly made their way to the gated entrance of the city. Seeing the battleworn city walls, Jian Chen felt a complex emotion arise on his face as if reminiscing about something.

Wake City was a tiny Third Class City. In this place, Jian Chen had struggled with no small efforts to survive. His struggles had left deep impressions on him. Each step he took here seemed to link to yet another memory fragment in his mind.

Ming Dong stared curiously at the old-fashioned walls of Wake City before speaking up, "Jian Chen, your mercenary group is staying in this city?"

Jian Chen nodded "Once. But it has been a long time, I'm not quite sure if they're still in Wake City."

With that, Jian Chen and the others entered the city. Stopping a passerby, Jian Chen questioned, "Hello there brother, are the Flame Mercenaries still in Wake City?"

"What a strange question. The Flame Mercenaries have always been in Wake City. Where else would they be if not here?" The man stared strangely at Jian Chen.

Jian Chen was overjoyed to hear that, "Wonderful. I didn't think that the Flame Mercenaries would still be here. I was worried they would move to another location. Brother, do you happen to know where they're located at?"

"At the Kai family's compound in the southwest part of the city." The man replied.

"Many thanks!" Jian Chen clasped his hand together before urging his mount forward, bringing the other six to where he remembered the Kai family's location was.

At that moment, there were already a large group of sturdy-looking men gathered at the gates to the Kai family's home. Each one of them possessed a murderous air to them, totalling to over two hundred people.

Right in front of them were three middle-aged men and a single elder standing side by side in a single line in front of the gates. Standing behind these four was yet another large group of people with frosty glares of their own.

"One-armed Warrior, your Defiance Mercenaries are intolerable with your bullying. Although our Flame Mercenaries may not be as strong as we once were, that doesn't make us easy targets. Do you really think we'll stand for the annihilation of our group? We'll ensure that your Defiance Mercenaries lose just as much as you gain." The elder standing in front glared dangerously at the group in front of him.

Standing at the very front was a man with a single arm. Laughing, he spoke, "Flame Mercenaries, if this were the past, then your group would have the strength to go against my group. With how things stand

now, I, the one-armed warrior, really don't see you as a threat. If you don't want to die, then cooperate with us. Join with my Defiance Mercenaries and we won't treat you unfairly."

"Hmph. Hoping to annex the Flame Mercenaries into your Defiance Mercenaries is nothing more than the dreams of a madman. The brethren of the Flame Mercenaries are not cowards. We will not accept this." A middle-aged man spoke from in front of the gates.

"Qingfeng, I know that you are not cowards. You are a man in the truest sense of word and thus I respect you. However, your Flame Mercenaries cannot compare to my Defiance Mercenaries in battle, so why not join with us and help expand the Defiance Mercenaries? When we become the Blue Wind Kingdom's strongest mercenary group, I will award you all for your services. From here on out, endless glory and splendor will await us. What is there to disagree with, eh? It's not worth your life to squabble over this." The one-armed man laughed.

"Hmph, if not for the absence of the captain of our Flame Mercenaries, then your Defiance Mercenaries wouldn't even have the chance of going as you please in Wake City. You'd be thrown out before you'd start." Mo Tian gnashed his teeth.

"The captain of the Flame Mercenaries? Ah, you must be talking about Jian Chen. I've heard about him before; a single man who destroyed the Zhou Mercenaries and the Zhou clan by himself before also eliminating the Tianxiong clan in Wake City. Then, he even fought with a Class 5 Magical Beast with his skill. Tut tut, what a strength he has. Not bad, not bad at all; even I have no choice but to admire him." By this point, the one-armed man had a taunting look on his face as he continued to speak. "But what a shame; your captain isn't here. He went off to participate in the Gathering of the Mercenaries. Hmph, what a egotistical brat with no knowledge of the world. With just the small amount of fame he achieved in this small city, he thought he was undefeated in the world and joined the Gathering of the Mercenaries. He should have realized that area is a world that only Earth Saint Masters can survive in. Without that strength, just how could he participate in it. He most likely died in Mercenary City, so how could he even come back to Wake City!"

Chapter 542: Crisis of the Flame Mercenaries

The one-armed man's words caused the four men standing in front of the Kai family's gates to harden their expressions. Qing Feng had been the first to fire back, "One-armed Warrior, bite your tongue. Just how could the immensity of our captain's strength be explained by you?"

"Haha, true enough. I feel that this Jian Chen's strength is nothing more than hearsay. Whatever his true strength is, I have never seen it before. What I am sure is that he is still not yet at the strength of an Earth Saint Master. If he wasn't one before he went to Gathering of the Mercenaries, then he's certainly looking to die an early death. It's been a long time since the ending of that event anyways. If your captain Jian Chen was still alive, then why hasn't he returned?" The man sneered.

Seeing that no one could reply, the one-armed man continued on, "I bet you've all already reached an answer. You're just not willing to accept it. Then why don't I say it for you? Your captain died in Mercenary City. He will never come back here alive."

The man's words caused every single mercenary from the Flame Mercenaries to blanch, but they quickly schooled their emotions.

At this, the man could only shake his head in disappointment. He had originally planned on striking at their morale to influence them all over to his side. In the end it had been fruitless.

How would he know that the hundred member strong Flame Mercenaries were all previously the mercenaries under the command of the Great Saint Masters Qingfeng, Mo Tian, Duo Kang, Charcas, Seth, Kai Er, and Weiss. In their hearts, these seven men were the leaders that they would die for; men that they would continue to follow with unflinching conviction.

“One-armed Warrior, don’t bother wasting time with this scheme of yours. We will follow our captain to the death. You may as well give up; our Flame Mercenaries will never join your Defiance Mercenaries. If you still wish to continue with this thought of yours, then we may as well waste no time and get to fighting.” Kai Er spoke. Although they weren’t as strong as they once were in the past and were just below the Defiance Mercenaries in strength, the final outcome between the two would be disastrous.

The one-armed man’s face darkened as he bit his lip, “I’ve given you a chance, but you were unfortunate enough to not cherish it. If this is it, do not blame me for being ruthless now. Brothers, let us fight!” At his command, every single man behind him began to take out their Saint Weapons one by one.

“Brothers, let us fight!” Kai Er and the others called out, unwilling to lag behind. As soon as they spoke, several dozen men from within the Flame Mercenaries took out a bottle from their Space Belts and smashed it onto the ground. Soon, the courtyard was filled with a light-green smog of smoke after the bottles had been broken. The smog obscured the sight of everyone.

The actions of these these man confused the surrounding Flame Mercenaries. Flabbergasted, they all looked around without any understanding of what was happening.

Noticing the commotion going on behind him, Qingfeng turned around only to discover the light-green smog of smoke gradually dispersing into the open air around them. Stunned for just a brief moment, Qingfeng immediately snapped back to focus with a cry, “Poison! Everyone hold your breath!”

“Hahaha, it’s too late for that.” The one-armed man laughed in an unrestrained manner from outside the courtyard.

“You...!” Mo Tian furiously glared at the man with a frightening expression. His eyes gleamed with a furious and unrestrained killing intent as he ground his teeth, “One-armed Warrior, I took you to be a man. To think that you’d actually use such a two-bit method; I’ve misjudged you.”

“Hahahaha, what method isn’t useful? Let me tell you, as long as a method brings you victory, then it is a good method! If you want to survive on the continent, then you can’t afford to be inflexible! Otherwise, you won’t survive for long.” The one-armed man laughed.

“Take an antidote, now! Kill the traitors in our ranks!” Kai Er whirled around to command the Flame Mercenaries.

Needless to say, the members of the Flame Mercenaries had already taken out several antidotes from their Space Belts. Administering them, they turned to face the traitors that had tried to poison them with infuriated glares and murderous auras.

After taking several steps forward, each one of the mercenaries had paused with a pained expression on their faces. Coughing, they all began to cough out blood from their mouths as the poison within them finally took effect.

Kai Er, Mo Tian, Qingfeng, and Charcas were startled by this sight, "What a strong poison!" One of them couldn't help but cry out.

Pleased with himself, the one-armed man smiled, "Of course! This is a poison I synthesized after paying a heavy price. It isn't any normal type of poison, it has two steps to it! The first step is to use a type of poisonous seed that'll hide itself within your body without detection. It'll slowly germinate and grow within your body bit by bit without any of you ever noticing. Then, after using a special method, the seed will begin to rapidly unfold and cause a tremendous amount of pain. This poisonous smoke was the trigger for the poison to activate within your body!"

"This smoke isn't anything special in terms of toxicity. It's only function is to activate the poison inside you since it doesn't require to be breathed in. As long as the body is in contact with it, then the poison will be triggered. Its effects are so strong that in four hours, you'll find yourself waking up by the Yellow Springs!" By now, the one-armed man was laughing out loud. "There's one more thing I forgot to tell you, the antidote to this poison can't be bought! So don't waste your time taking those antidotes won't help you here. At most, you'll alleviate some of the symptoms, but you won't be able to cure yourself of my poison."

"One-armed Warrior, so you've been planning this for all this time! A month ago, you must have had those traitors of ours plant the poison in our food!" Kai Er roared with fury. The poison in his body had already started to activate as blood started to leak from his mouth.

"Correct! But that can't be blamed on me. Who told you not to surrender the Flame Mercenaries to me? If you only just surrendered earlier, then this wouldn't have happened to you." The one-armed man laughed before taking out a palm-sized bottle. "You have four hours. Follow me and prosper, or defy me and die. You have a choice between life or death, and I have only a limited supply. Whoever comes first gets some. Otherwise, pity will be given for the ones that have none."

The entire Flame Mercenaries grew quiet now as the poison within their bodies continued to get worse. By this point, everyone's faces were deathly pale as blood streamed from their mouths.

"One-armed Warrior, don't even think you can persuade us with your two-bit methods! I, Mo Tian, will never let you live easily for this life of mine!" Mo Tian barked as he took out his Saint Weapon. Just as he took a single step forward, a coughing sound came from his mouth and blood erupted from it.

"If I may offer you some advice; don't try using your Saint Force. It'll only serve to increase the growth of the poison even more and accelerate your death." The man spoke with a smile. His eyes turned to the men behind Mo Tian, "Take use of the opportunity that the poison hasn't yet reached your hearts. If you wish to live, then hurry up and swear allegiance to my Defiance Mercenaries. Otherwise, the poison will reach your heart by nighttime. By that point, this antidote of mine will be useless to help you. I only have a limited quantity of this antidote, so choose quickly and don't regret the choice you make!"

After a moment, there were finally several mercenaries that didn't wish to die. One by one, they slowly walked out of the compound.

Watching those men leave their ranks, Kai Er and the others could only sigh to themselves. They couldn't blame them.

Soon, more and more mercenaries decided to live and serve the Defiance Mercenaries rather than die. In the end, only sixty or so men were left from the original hundred plus men.

The one-armed man glanced at Kai Er and the other three with a chuckle, "Kai Er, Qingfeng, Mo Tian, Charcas, what do you think? There's not many antidotes left, but if you choose to enter my Defiance Mercenaries now, I won't mistreat you."

"The might of the One-armed Warrior is far too inadequate for us four to join you." Mo Tian snarled in disdain.

Slowly taking up his giant sword, Charcas turned back to look at his sixty or so pale-faced brothers. Heroically, he spoke, "My brothers! I am proud of you all, for you are men among men, men born from steel itself! Death is not something to fear! If death is all that we face, then let us pick up our weapons and defend our honor. If we are to die, then we will die magnificently. If we are to die, then we will take with us a sacrifice. We will not let the Defiance Mercenaries walk away unharmed!"

Qingfeng raised up his long sword with a heroic aura, "Brothers! Let us fight side by side in this final battle!"

"For battle! For war! For glory!" The remaining members of the Flame Mercenaries roared out to the heavens one after another in response to Mo Tian and Qingfeng. Although they were all pale in the face and were bleeding blood from their mouths, their eyes remained unwavering and unafraid of death. They had already given up their fear of death.

At this sight, the one-armed man's face darkened. Snorting, he spoke, "If you wish to die, then I'll grant you all that favor! Kill them all!"

The group of men behind the one-armed man began to let loose a bestial and bloodthirsty amount of killing intent before charging toward the men in the compound.

Suddenly, a red glow of light exploded into view as a single flaming longsword came flying at tremendous speeds from the other end of the road. In an instant, it impacted the ground in front of the compound. With a tremendous explosion of energy, the men from Defiance Mercenaries were immediately reduced to a pitiful state.

Chapter 543: Return of the Captain

Caught off guard by the abrupt explosion, both the Defiance Mercenaries and the Flame Mercenaries, who were on the verge of war with one another, stopped dead in their tracks. No matter the side, everyone looked to the gates of the Kai family with shock.

Everyone could see from the origin of impact that there was a single two meter deep crater. The marbled road had been reduced to rubble with spiderweb-like cracks extending across the ground.

Seeing the two meter deep crater, the Flame and Defiance Mercenaries were deeply awed and stunned. Just what type of strength would one need to be able to cause damage to this extent? It was hard to believe or ascertain for sure, but even a battle skill used by a Great Saint Master wouldn't be able to

cause a comparable amount of destruction. This was after all marble of a very durable caliber. Not only was it hard and solid, it was unlike the soft and malleable dirt found outside in the wild.

The members of the Defiance Mercenaries and the men with Kai Er looked to the end of the street with hardened expressions. In their hearts they were all apprehensive. Everyone was well aware that the person capable of such destruction would most definitely be either a Great Saint Master with a battle skill or an individual at the Earth Saint Master realm. In either case, it was an individual that neither of the two groups could win against. Even more dangerous was the fact that no one knew whether this newcomer was friend or foe.

The colors of the sky were growing dimmer and dimmer as the shroud of night blanketed the earth. As a result, the Flame Mercenaries and the Defiance Mercenaries could only nervously wait as they listened to clapping sounds from the end of the street. Shortly afterward, seven magical beast mounts came into view along with their riders who were slowly advancing toward the two mercenary groups. Neither the Defiance Mercenaries or the Flame Mercenaries were able to make out the faces of the riders with full clarity because of the distance and the dampened vision due to the darkness of night.

Watching the seven mounts and riders slowly approach them, the representative of the Defiance Mercenaries took a hesitant step forward. Saluting them, he spoke, "This one is the captain of the Defiance Mercenaries, known as the One-armed Warrior. I pay my respects to you seniors."

The seven hadn't spoken at all and moved forward in silence at a slow pace. Coming from one end of the street to the other, they finally arrived at the gates to the Kai family. It was at this moment that the four men and the one-armed man could distinctly see the faces of the men. To the shock of everyone, aside from the two middle-aged men at the very sides, the rest of the travelers were all youths.

"I bet this group is a group of aristocratic children from some sort of wealthy family. That strike just now has to be from one of the two middle-aged men at the sides. If such a strong individual was assigned as their guards, then the rapport behind this group has to be extremely strong." The one-armed man conjectured to himself. Without neglecting his expressions, he continued to bow respectfully as he smiled enchantingly, "My lords must be traveling across this road. My sincere apologies, I shouldn't have blocked the roads at all; allow me to give way." With that, the man immediately ordered his mercenaries to move out of the way.

"My lords, this one is known as the One-armed Warrior; captain of the Defiance Mercenaries! Although our strengths are well beneath your eyes, there is very little that my mercenaries cannot accomplish in Wake City. Should my lords ever require assistance in the future, do call on us. My lords, the road is clear now, if you please!" The man saluted along with the other mercenaries with a rather cordial expression on his face.

At this current moment, the One-armed Warrior was completely focused on the riders on top of the magical beast mounts, and had completely disregarded the men behind him. Kai Er and the other three were at this moment staring at the face of Jian Chen in complete shock — some of them could barely believe their eyes at what they saw.

Despite the fact that Jian Chen had left Wake City two years ago, Kai Er and the others would recognize Jian Chen from anywhere. After participating in the Gathering of the Mercenaries, it had taken Jian Chen two years to return in their moment of peril. Such timing painted Jian Chen as a savior in their eyes.

The flames of hope had reignited within their eyes once more at this sight. It was almost as if the glorious dawn of victory could be seen instead of the initial dusk of defeat.

Seeing the ingratiating appearance of the one-armed man, Jian Chen couldn't help but find himself smiling from where he sat. This smile was not a happy smile, but a cold one. Shortly after, his eyes slowly made their way toward the gates of the Kai family where Kai Er and the others were. A furious killing intent gradually began to show in his eyes, so with a smile that did not quite make its way completely to his eyes, Jian Chen spoke, "The One-armed Warrior? I will remember that name."

There was absolutely no way that the one-armed man would know that this youth in front of him was actually the captain of the Flame Mercenaries, Jian Chen. He had only thought that he had coincidentally come across the young master of some sort of influential and aristocratic family, and had completely missed the implied meaning hidden in Jian Chen's words. As such, he had been overjoyed to hear Jian Chen and spoke up, "If I may inquire of milord's name. This will be a great honor to the One-armed Warrior. Milord, the path is clear now, I shall not take up any more of your valuable time. If my lord pleases."

A cold smile remained on Jian Chen's face, "One-armed Warrior, who says that I was passing by on this road? My destination is here in fact."

The man was startled into silence at these words.

The light in Jian Chen's eyes immediately frosted over as a tremendous amount of killing intent began to leak from his body and enshrouded the other man in it. "One-armed Warrior, do you know who I am?" Jian Chen asked with a demanding growl.

The one-armed man's face seemed to have aged by now. As a Great Saint Master, just how would he be able to withstand the killing intent of a Heaven Saint Master? Straight away, it felt as if he had been dropped into a bottomless abyss of ice that brought shivers and sweat to his entire body.

The one-armed man was completely pale with fright now. For the life of him, he had absolutely no idea just how or why the aristocratic young lord in front of him was targeting him with such a tremendous amount of killing intent. It left him speechless beyond belief and indescribably terrified. Neither did he know just when or how he had somehow offended the very same strong young lord.

"Milord, could I have offended you somehow in someplace? Might I inquire the specifics?" There was a trill to his voice now. Although he had no idea how strong Jian Chen was, the amount of killing intent targeted at him was enough to leave his heart in terror.

From his perch on top of the magical beast mount, Jian Chen towered over the one-armed man with a sneer. "One-armed Warrior, listen well. I am the one you said died in Mercenary City. I am the captain of the Flame Mercenaries. Jian. Chen!"

The pupils of the one-armed man instantaneously dilated at Jian Chen's speech. His face took on a drastic change as his eyes stared in disbelief at Jian Chen with absolute dread.

"What! Yo-you-you're, you're that Jian Chen!" The man was beside himself and his voice began to tremble.

When the four men at the gates heard Jian Chen's words, they let out a gasp of disbelief one after another, but the emotions in their eyes was of extreme joy.

"The captain! The captain has returned! Our captain has finally returned..."

"It's the captain! The captain has returned from the Gathering of the Mercenaries..."

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Kai Er and the three continued to cry out in emotional relief one after another while the dozens of mercenaries behind them began to reveal wide open grins on their faces. As deep in the abyss of death as they were, their hands had managed to fumble and grab onto a vine that would pull them to safety. In that darkness of death, the light of life could be seen now.

Having noticed the deathly pale faces of everyone, Jian Chen didn't waste any more time to banter. Glaring at the one-armed man, Jian Chen said, "One-armed Warrior, you are courageous to go against my Flame Mercenaries, I'll give you that."

The one-armed man's face was a mixture of pale-white and putrid-green from his fear and shock. Seeing the handsome but young face of Jian Chen and associating him with the tremendous explosion of power, caused his heart to be terrified.

"You're actually the very same Jian Chen as the captain of the Flame Mercenaries? Didn't you go off to participate in the Gathering of the Mercenaries? How did you make it out alive?" The man quavered.

Coldly laughing, Jian Chen replied, "Enough talk, bring out the antidote straight away!"

A gleam of light flashed through the one-armed man's eyes. Immediately thinking of a plan, he took out a white jade bottle from his Space Belt and held it tightly within his hands as he backed away. In several moments, he stood twenty meters away from Jian Chen with a panicked face. "Jian Chen, I only have this much antidote. If you don't believe me, I'll just smash it all here and now for you to never get the antidote to my poison."

Jian Chen smiled in contempt as he glared at the man. "Did you think you could negotiate with me?"

The one-armed man stared fearfully at Jian Chen and then the two middle-aged men Yun Zheng and Senior An. Realizing the strength of the opposition, the fear he had in his heart for these men had instantly skyrocketed. However, for the sake of a safe return, he didn't have a choice. Since he poisoned the men of the Flame Mercenaries, he knew there was no way that Jian Chen would let them go now.

"Jian Chen, if you want the antidote, fine. However, you must promise us that we will be granted a safe departure from here." The man cried out. Without waiting for Jian Chen to reply, he waved for his men and shouted, "Brothers, run away!"

Every single member of the Defiance Mercenaries immediately knew that they were the weaker party. Without hesitation, they all collected their Saint Weapons and ran off in all directions with reckless abandon.

"Leaving won't be as easy as you think." Jian Chen's face hardened. "Ming Dong, Dugu Feng, Yun Zheng, Senior An, stop them all! Kill anyone that tries to escape without mercy!"

“Haha, alright!” Ming Dong laughed out loud as he flew out from his saddle. Transforming into an azure light while in mid-air, he disappeared from sight. He reappeared a hundred meters away to cut off the other side of the road where the Defiance Mercenaries were trying to run away.

Dugu Feng, Yun Zheng, and Senior An had already realized the roles they would have to act out in this scene. They didn’t dare defy Jian Chen’s commands. Without hesitation, they flew into the air and followed Ming Dong’s route to stop the mercenaries from running off in any direction.

Startled, the one-armed man held the bottle high into the air and stared dangerously at Jian Chen. “Jian Chen, this synthesis of mine has only one antidote! Do you really want your entire Flame Mercenaries to die from deadly poison?!”

“You have no right to threaten me! Furthermore, you have no right to demand negotiations!” Jian Chen barked. With a single thought, he began to gather the boundless energy of the world to swirl around them in a frantic manner. The tide of energy began to swirl around the one-armed man, rendering him incapable of movements. With a extension of his arm and palm, Jian Chen forced the bottle in the man’s hand fly to his own.

Having witnessed the methods of a Heaven Saint Master struck no small amount of fear into the heart of a Great Saint Master like the One-armed Warrior.

On the other side, Ming Dong and the other three had completely blocked the exit of the Defiance Mercenaries. Within seconds, someone within the group had cried out.

“They’re only several men! We can take them on, charge!”

“That’s right! With just those four, we’re far more than them! If we all fight now, we can slaughter them!”

One after another, the mercenaries of the Defiance Mercenaries took out their Saint Weapons and charged straight at Ming Dong to strike him down.

“You’re acting recklessly here!” Ming Dong laughed. Before he could make a move, Dugu Feng made a motion to stop him. Expressionlessly, Dugu Feng said, “I alone will be enough to deal with them!”

Chapter 544: Punishment

Having said that, Dugu Feng immediately brought out a giant sword made of flames. After a violent jerk of his hand, a blaze of flames began to coil around the blade before an inferno ignited on it. A halo of light burst from the sword. It brought forth such a dazzling glow that the surrounding shadows were completely obliterated.

“Impossible, that’s the essence of fire!”

“It’s the essence of fire, he’s an Earth Saint Master!”

“Everyone run away! He’s an Earth Saint Master!”

At this display of strength, the smarter members of the Defiance Mercenaries quickly became pale in the face. The spurt of courage that had welled up in them earlier had instantly vanished just as quickly it came. Without any more courage to fight, they began to retreat in terror.

A gleam of light flashed in Dugu Feng's eyes as he twirled his giant sword in a violent motion. The light from the fire on his sword filled the sky. He then quickly brought forth another burst of flames, but this time he directed them down the streets with lightning speed.

"Bang!"

The street was washed with a plume of smoke, and the marble substance on them had crumbled as easily as tofu. A fissure about a third of a meter deep appeared in the street as a surge of Saint Force filled the area; forcing the entire street to tremble as if it was experiencing an earthquake.

Feeling the explosive might that came from a casual swing of Dugu Feng's sword, every member of the Defiance Mercenaries felt miserable beyond belief. At this moment, practically every person could only think about how terrifying an Earth Saint Master was.

Calmly recollecting his sword, Dugu Feng stared emotionlessly at the Defiance Mercenaries. "Whoever crosses this line, consider your life forfeit!" He spat.

The entire group of mercenaries was practically quaking with fear, for the fissure was barely in front of their feet. Everyone could only look at the line as if it represented death itself. Not a single person dared to cross it.

On the other side, the one-armed man could only stare at the red-robed Dugu Feng in shock. He had been thrown into silence by the scene in front of him. The man could hardly believe that the captain of the Flame Mercenaries was capable of commanding an Earth Saint Master to do his bidding.

In the small city that was Wake City, Great Saint Masters were already considered the epitome of strength. In the entire city, there would only be twenty of them at most. Earth Saint Masters would hardly find any worth by heading to such a small city in this area. In the case that one did arrive, then they would indisputably be the strongest expert around. In the scope of the entire city, none would be a match for them.

Now that the Flame Mercenaries had an Earth Saint Master leveled expert, just who in Wake City would dare go against them?

The Flame Mercenaries were astonished by Dugu Feng's strength as well, but soon their expressions were quickly filled with joy and their bodies began to shake with trepidation. If someone as strong as an Earth Saint Master listened to their captain, then wouldn't that mean that this person was one of their own?

Jian Chen tossed the bottle he had forcibly taken from the one-armed man's hand over to Kai Er, "Hurry up and take the antidote!"

"Yes, captain!" Kai Er enthusiastically responded. Twisting off the stopper to the bottle, they each poured a drop of the liquid into their mouths before they passed the bottle on.

There had been plenty of antidote within the bottle for everyone to have some. Even better, more than half of the bottle remained, contradicting the words that the One-armed Warrior had said earlier about there being a limited supply.

After administering the antidote, every poisoned mercenary soon felt the color return to their faces. Soon enough, the poison was flushed from their systems, and was no longer a threat to their lives.

Jian Chen leaped off his magical beast mount and walked up to Kai Er. "It seems that my return was in time to save your lives. A lot must have happened in these last two years. Why don't I see Duo Kang, Seth, and Weiss? Where have they gone?"

A grieved look appeared on Kai Er's face, "Captain, it was all because of our inabilities. The strong mercenary group you left us with is now reduced to these several dozen members. A year ago, Duo Kang, Seth, and Weiss came across an accident that marked their eternal departure from us. From the seven of us, only four remain."

Jian Chen could only sigh with regret at that. Those seven men had been the strongest men he had managed to bring under his control. At the same time, they served as the pillar of the Flame Mercenaries, so he had felt exceptional concern for the seven.

Suddenly, the whistling sound of air could be heard. The one-armed man took the opportunity to escape while Jian Chen reminisced with the Flame Mercenaries. With a sudden leap, he tried to bound over the rooftops in an attempt to get away.

Jian Chen's eyes narrowed in irritation, but he did not turn his body or head around. Instead, he pointed a finger behind him. A flash of Sword Qi came flying from his finger and flew through the air with unbelievable speed before coming into contact with the right arm of the One-armed Warrior.

"Ah!" The one-armed man let out a miserable shout. The only arm he had was bisected. It flopped to the floor while a stream of blood came flying out from his arm like a bloody rainstorm.

The One-armed Warrior fell from the sky to the ground in a sorry state of pain. He only had one arm to begin with, and that was the reason why he was known as the One-armed Warrior. For his remaining arm to be gone now, he was nothing more than a handicapped man.

Every single member of the Defiance Mercenaries felt horrified to see their leader crippled. One by one, they looked at Jian Chen with fearful eyes. The One-armed Warrior was the strongest within their Defiance Mercenaries. His defeat was an extreme blow to the Defiance Mercenaries as a whole.

Kai Er and the other three were once more floored by Jian Chen's strength since he had easily cut off and crippled the man's remaining arm. Their faces soon became ecstatic. If the Flame Mercenaries follow a strong figure such as Jian Chen as their captain, then their success would be immeasurable.

"The peerless miracle that our captain has given us has opened my eyes to the world." Mo Tian couldn't help but emotionally remake. His eyes were brimming with tears as he spoke; seeing Jian Chen's strength seemed to have given Mo Tian a glimpse of the glorious tomorrow of the Flame Mercenaries. Having such a strong captain lead the mercenaries would make it extremely hard for the group not to grow.

Jian Chen smiled and looked at the four and sixty members of the Flame Mercenaries with admiration. "You've done well as the pride of the Flame Mercenaries. In the future, I, Jian Chen, will waste no effort to help you grow." After experiencing such hardships, the remaining members of the Flame Mercenaries were without a doubt worth Jian Chen's respect and his investment to make them strong.

So, Jian Chen felt determined to not even bother training anyone else.

Jian Chen's words made Kai Er and the others extremely happy, "Many thanks to the captain for your guidance."

The previous members of the Flame Mercenaries who chose to live all felt regret appear on their faces. Seeing that there was no way to escape, they could only look back with gloomy and fearful expressions as members of the Defiance Mercenaries. Then looking back to the captain of the Flame Mercenaries, who had suddenly returned, the ones who chose life over death had immediately felt ashamed.

Earlier, they had chosen to live by leaving the Flame Mercenaries after being backed into a corner by the Defiance Mercenaries. They had previously thought they wouldn't need to fear for their lives, but who would have known that the situation would have taken such a drastic turnabout. The tides of victory that the Defiance Mercenaries had once held suddenly changed when the captain of the Flame Mercenaries reappeared to toss them into a hole. Whether they could leave or not would depend on the mood of the Flame Mercenaries. Therefore, the Flame Mercenaries who betrayed them felt incomparably embarrassed and ashamed by their actions to the point where they could hardly look into the eyes of the brothers they had once fought shoulder to shoulder with.

Jian Chen's eyes hovered over the group where the Defiance Mercenaries stood, but the Flame Mercenaries who had chosen to leave could only hang their heads in shame, unable to look at Jian Chen.

"I will leave judgement of the Defiance Mercenaries to you. Whether they die or live, it is up to you to decide." Jian Chen spoke calmly without looking at the ex-members of the Flame Mercenaries.

"The One-armed Warrior and his Defiance Mercenaries must be disposed of. Their hands are stained with the blood of our brothers. How could I not take revenge for my fallen brothers?" Mo Tian's teeth gnashed against each other as he spoke with a murderous fire in his eyes.

Hearing that, the Great Saint Masters of the Defiance Mercenaries grew startled. Giving each other a look, they immediately leaped to the sky. They leapt into every direction possible in order to escape.

They had killed many of the Flame Mercenaries before, so they knew that to stay behind was to await death without hope. As things were, they may as well try their best to escape for a chance at life.

Ming Dong mockingly laughed, "If I let you escape right under my nose, I'd have no face to hand over to my brothers." With that, Ming Dong and Dugu Feng immediately lashed out with their arms. They shot out several blades of Sword Qi that bisected all of the Great Saint Masters in half. Blood and body parts came raining down from the sky with their deaths.

Watching the strongest members of their group be easily killed by the individuals of the opposing side, the rest of the Defiance Mercenaries had gone ghostly white in terror of Dugu Feng and Ming Dong.

"Please spare us, captain Jian Chen! A thousand pardons! We will leave the Defiance Mercenaries for the Flame Mercenaries and work like oxen if need be! Please forgive us this once! I still have a wife and child to take care of back home!"

"Please forgive us, captain Jian Chen..."

Everyone from the Defiance Mercenaries knew where all the power lay now. Some of the ones unwilling to die began to kneel on the ground and kowtow repeatedly in desperation.

Qingfeng walked up to them step by step, "Our Flame Mercenaries will not kill every last one of you, but we won't just let you off so easily. Hand over your Space Belts and you may leave."

"We'll do it, we'll do it..."

Qingfeng's words were like the song of a gospel to the ears of the Defiance Mercenaries. As if they were granted amnesty, not a single one of them hesitated to relinquish their Space Belts. They obediently handed them over. Two Earth Saint Masters appearing caused their hearts to feel an unbelievable amount of pressure.

Just then, one of the members who previously chose to leave the Flame Mercenaries to live walked up to Qingfeng, "Boss, would it be possible for me to rejoin the Flame Mercenaries? You know that I have family at home unlike the rest of my carefree brothers. I can't die, and there was no other choice."

Qingfeng was quiet and turned to look at Jian Chen.

Jian Chen thought for a moment before waving his hand, "You may leave. As thanks for your service for once being a member of the Flame Mercenaries you need not hand over your things, just leave."

The Defiance Mercenaries had all given their Space Belts before being able to leave from this place in peace. True to their words, the Flame Mercenaries did not kill everyone without reason. However, the traitors that had poisoned them were tied up.

Chapter 545: The Direction of Development

The ex-members that had poisoned the Flame Mercenaries had been bought out by the Defiance Mercenaries a long time ago, and were thus not spared by Kai Er. Their heads were cut off, and their corpses were tossed into the wilderness outside of Wake City for the beasts to feast on.

With everything done and taken care of, the group cleaned up the area around the Kai family's compound before heading straight on in. Within the halls, Jian Chen sat at the very top where the head of the compound would normally sit. At his side was Ming Dong and the five others along with Kai Er and his three companions from the Flame Mercenaries.

"Kai Er, Qingfeng, Mo Tian, and Charcas, what has happened since my departure those years ago? Why has the Flame Mercenaries fallen into such a miserable state?" Jian Chen stared at the four in question.

"Captain, it was all because of our inability. Not only were we unable to expand the Flame Mercenaries, we also let it fall into such a desolate state. If not for the captain coming over to help us, then our Flame Mercenaries may not have survived beyond today." Kai Er spoke in shame.

"Describe what happened to me in detail. Allow me to understand just what occurred in the past." Jian Chen spoke.

Kai Er gave a look to the other three for a moment before summoning up his courage. "Captain, allow me to say it. When you first left, we followed your orders on doing our best to expand the Flame Mercenaries' strength. At that time our strength was enough to make us undefeatable in Wake City, so

our very first step was to reorganize the structure of Wake City and reclaim all the power that had been lost to us.”

“Our plan was performed without a hitch when we were first implementing it. We were trying to bring many of the other clans and powers under our command along with several of the weaker mercenary groups. Thus, the Flame Mercenaries attained another level of power, but there were some factions within Wake City that were unwilling to join with our Flame Mercenaries. Forming an alliance, they began to contend against our Flame Mercenaries. This coalition of theirs was filled with several of the stronger families and mercenaries within the city, making their strength no less than our own. For some time, we battled secretly with them in the shadows of the city receiving damage on both sides. Half a year later it was discovered that the cub of a Class 5 Magical Beast was found. The news was leaked and had made its way to the ears of the enemy alliance. This time, our Flame Mercenaries and that alliance were embroiled in an all out war because of the cub. Both of our sides ended up inflicting a tremendous amount of damage. In the end, our Flame Mercenaries managed to win over the enemy alliance. Alas, Weiss and Seth were both casualties of the war!”

Upon hearing of a Class 5 Magical Beast cub, Jian Chen’s eyes gained a strange light to them. “This cub belongs to the Golden Tiger King doesn’t it.”

“Correct. That cub was indeed the Golden Tiger King’s cub. It was unable to attack because of its adolescence. Hence, our Flame Mercenaries were able to obtain it. But unfortunately...” Kai Er’s voice began to falter at this point as pain and grief filled his face.

“But what?” Jian Chen’s eyes continued to stare down at Kai Er with the same strange light. There was an unforgivable and unforgettable hatred etched between this Golden Tiger King’s cub and Jian Chen. It was because of this cub that the original captain Kendall was killed and the rest of the members beside him had been buried in the mountain range.

“Ai. It was because of our carelessness that the cub was stolen at night by a secret assailant. Duo Kang gave chase, but he ended up being beheaded. Taking a look at the wreckage later, we were able to ascertain that the assailant that took the cub was in possession of a battle skill.” Qingfeng sighed with regret etched on his face.

“It was all because of my negligence.” Mo Tian regretfully spoke. The anguish on his face could hardly be contained as if he blame himself over Duo Kang’s death.

Jian Chen’s face hardened as he questioned, “Did you manage to find out just who it was that took the cub away?”

“Not a single piece of information was found. That assailant didn’t leave behind any clues for us to find. The cub was never found in Wake City ever again.” Charcas shook his head.

Jian Chen’s eyebrows rose as he began to think to himself.

Meanwhile, Kai Er continued to speak, “After that, our forces were weakened against the might of the alliance. Now stuck at a deadlock, we were very surprised to hear that the alliance had begun to suffer from internal strife. Beginning to fight one another, it led to us witnessing the entire alliance crumble and wither away into ash.”

“We tried to take advantage of the chaos to subdue the rest of the straggling factions, but what we didn’t expect was that another party would come in like the storm and beat us to it. They were the Defiance Mercenaries. Not even a few days later, the leader of the Defiance Mercenaries, the One-armed Warrior, had even come to us and ordered us to swear allegiance to his mercenaries. After our refusal, the Defiance Mercenaries began to act as a foil to our own. There was some sort of unusual connection between city lord and the One-armed Warrior, so they were looked after with special consideration by the city lord. As a result, the Defiance Mercenaries began to explode in development; along the way, our mercenaries came into conflict with theirs several times to end up with what you witnessed today.”

Jian Chen hummed to himself after listening to the entire conversation, “I didn’t think that so much would happen in a short two years. Things have gotten far more complicated than I thought, but this cannot be blamed on you.”

Qingfeng hesitated for a moment before opening his mouth once more, “Captain, there is still one more thing to report.”

“Say it!” Jian Chen spoke.

“Captain, after Weiss’ death, Weiss’ son took over the Dohre clan and withdrew from our Flame Mercenaries. Now that captain has returned, should we have the Dohre clan rejoin us?” Qingfeng asked.

Giving it some consideration, Jian Chen spoke, “No matter what is said, Weiss is a man who died for our Flame Mercenaries and merits a spot as a minister for outstanding service. I will go to his clan tomorrow. It’s getting late now, and you should all go rest. Now that I’ve returned, the Flame Mercenaries’ development will not be stopped. Tomorrow morning, I will have several important announcements for everyone.”

Kai Er and the other three left the hall so that Jian Chen and his group of seven were the only ones left.

“Jian Chen, so this is your mercenary group? There’s only four Great Saint Masters and an unremarkable amount of strength, but that isn’t important. With our strengths, it won’t take long for us to transform the Flame Mercenaries into the strongest mercenary group in the Blue Wind Kingdom.” Ming Dong spoke.

“En, that is my plan as well. So, in light of this, does anyone have any favorable plans we may try?” Jian Chen asked.

“Simple, we must build up our army. As long as you announce the fact that there are seven Earth Saint Masters, I am sure many mercenaries would be willing to join us.” Ming Dong suggested.

“While that is a decent plan, it will only bring forth the people with hidden agendas. We cannot find everyone, and it won’t be long in the future that another repeat of today’s events happen again. In my eyes, we should make our soldiers an elite squad, but in a controllable number. An elite squad of a hundred can defeat a mob of a thousand civilians.” Dugu Feng spoke.

“Oh, that’s not bad. Dugu Feng’s suggestion has some merit to it. Why don’t we just spend some time and blood in training these soldiers into becoming the elite soldiers we want?” Ming Dong asked.

“Training them to become elite soldiers is a must. These soldiers are ones that I find suitable in both my mind and in reality, but it isn’t enough. My goal is that in the future, the Flame Mercenaries will become the strongest on the Tian Yuan Continent. It will take a very long time, but this cannot be done slowly. I must move fast, move swiftly.” Jian Chen said.

“Then I have a suggestion, everyone please consult about this as you see fit.” You Yue finally spoke up from her long-seated silence. “Jian Chen, if you wish to develop the Flame Mercenaries as quick as possible, then there is really only one path for you to go. You must go to the stronger cities and subdue all of the stronger mercenary groups under your control. With your strength, as long as you don’t come across any Heaven Saint Masters, you will meet no obstruction.”

“If we do that, then even if they swear allegiance to us on the surface, who knows what they just might do in secret. The things that happened today should be a lesson.” Senior An spoke.

“That isn’t something we should worry about. In the face of absolute power, any machinations become as threatening as a paper tiger. The men with brains will see the strength of our group and know what they ought to do. To follow us would be to further their paths and reach a new height. If they stay within the mercenary group for long enough, they will become to come to love and cherish the group. Just like a civilian that lives in a kingdom, they will come to love the kingdom and cherish it as their family.” The princess spoke. “Moreover, Jian Chen is a Heaven Saint Master and a very strong one at that. The amount of individuals like him in any single kingdom is known to be scarce no matter where you are. To have a Heaven Saint Master as your patron is something every single person hopes for. To have a Heaven Saint Master as their patron is to have their statuses elevated even if they themselves are not strong. Needless to say they will not fear some other force swallowing their power whole. Thus, they have no reason to decline joining us.”

Everyone had fallen silent after You Yue gave her piece. They all knew that she had only spoken words of pure logic. Truly, in the face of absolute power, any machination or secret plots were nothing more than paper tigers. No matter how big the wave, there would be no internal strife within the group as long as their captain remained upright.

Jian Chen sat in silence as well as he processed her words. Taking notes of the detailed plan of You Yue, Jian Chen finally smiled and nodded his head, “That isn’t bad at all. Let us work as such.”

Having her own plan be approved by Jian Chen caused You Yue’s face to reveal a delightful smile. “However there is one thing to be cautious about. When using force to make them submit, do not remove all forms of power from their previous leaders; otherwise, even if they submit, their anger for you will never be forgotten. Their mercenary groups were after all founded on hard work as well. If all of your hard work was so easily dismissed and taken away by someone else, I doubt there is a single person in the world that would accept such a slap in the face.”

Chapter 546: Increase of Strength

“That is only natural. You Yue, your plan is quite impressive. The Flame Mercenaries will use this method from now on to become the strongest in the shortest amount of time possible.” Jian Chen laughed with a happy smile on his face. Then as if thinking of something else, the smile receded from his face, “However before we can develop the group, I still have several things that I need to take care of. Well, we will adjourn here for now. Everyone should go rest, we will continue this talk tomorrow.”

Kai Er had long since had his family prepare the most fanciful of rooms for Jian Chen and his entourage to rest in. Aside from the servants of the Kai family tidying up the broken bits and pieces of the courtyard and gates, only the sounds of the night could be heard.

While Jian Chen and his group slept, news of the events that had transpired within the courtyards of the Kai family quickly made their way around the city. It didn't take long for the news to reach its way back to the mansion of the city lord.

Within the mansion, the city lord Yun Li could be seen sitting by his table with a cup of tea in hand. If it were any other time, then the lord would have long since retired to his bed for the night, but today was different. He knew that tonight would be the night that the Defiance Mercenaries would clash with the Flame Mercenaries. After tonight, there would no longer be a Flame Mercenaries in Wake City, only the Defiance Mercenaries.

Just then, a black-robed man came scurrying into the room and kneeled on the ground. "A report for the city lord. The captain of the Flame Mercenaries has returned. The Defiance Mercenaries have been killed, and the leader, the One-armed Warrior, has been crippled and captured by them. The remaining Great Saint Masters were all beheaded in their attempt to escape while the remaining members forfeited their Space Belts in order to live and escape in peace."

"What!? Their captain who hasn't returned in two years has actually come back? And he's captured the One-armed Warrior as well you say?" Yun Li was astonished — he didn't expect this outcome at all.

"Yes, my lord. As of now, all of the Great Saint Masters of the Defiance Mercenaries have been wholly slaughtered. Their mercenary group is no more." The informant relayed.

Yun Li's face paled by several shades of white for a moment before he slowly calmed himself. With a wave of his hand, he commanded, "You may leave!"

"Your subordinate will withdraw for now!" The informant immediately disappeared into the palace halls.

After the informant left, Yun Li's face hardened in worry as his eyebrows knit together. With a slow sigh, he murmured to himself, "Who would have imagined that Jian Chen would actually return at this moment. Truly, the machinations of man are superseded by those of the Heavens..."

The Blue Wind Kingdom was millions of kilometers away from Mercenary City. In just travel time alone, it would take roughly half a year to get from one to the other. That was the reason why no news had made its way from there yet, so the city lord would naturally not know about the events that transpired in Mercenary City.

Early the next morning, all sixty or so members of the Flame Mercenaries gathered in the Kai family's courtyard. They stood tall and proudly with their eyes gleaming with brightness. In front of them, Jian Chen, Ming Dong, Dugu Feng, Yun Zheng, Senior An, Tie Ta, and You Yue stood carefree.

Jian Chen's eyes wandered over the group of people in front of him before he worked up an impassioned expression to make a speech. "From today on, our Flame Mercenaries will begin our climb in earnest! Our next goal is to become the strongest mercenary group within the Blue Wind Kingdom as soon as possible, and then the strongest mercenary group within the area. As of now, I will be serious and make an announcement."

Pausing briefly to take in a deep breath, Jian Chen pointed at Ming Dong, "This is Ming Dong, and from now on, he will be the vice-captain of our Flame Mercenaries. His power will be just below mine, but higher than everyone else's. Does anyone have any objections?"

"There are none! We welcome our new vice-captain!" Kai Er had been the first to express his approval. Ming Dong may be as young as his son, but after witnessing how Ming Dong had so easily killed the experts of the Defiance Mercenaries last night, he was well convinced of his strength. An Earth Saint Master was one that they could hardly afford to invite, so how could they refuse?

"There are no objections! We welcome our new vice-captain, Ming Dong!"

"Welcome to the new vice-captain!"

One by one, the members of the Flame Mercenaries began to cheer and welcome Ming Dong with jubilant expressions.

Continuing on, Jian Chen said, "This is Dugu Feng. His strength has been made clear to everyone I presume. As an expert of the Earth Saint Master level, he will be given a position as an elder within our Flame Mercenaries."

This time, Jian Chen's statement of Dugu Feng's strength had caused every single member to feel exuberant with happiness. Right now, their loyalty to the Flame Mercenaries in their hearts grew so deep that should the need arise, they would lay their lives down for it. The Flame Mercenaries were even more important than their own families. With the addition of two Earth Saint Masters to their group, just how could they not be happy?

The faces of Kai Er, Qingfeng, Mo Tian, and Charcas in particular were essentially streaming with tears. It was clear to them that the days of suffering for the Flame Mercenaries were finally over. What they would now welcome would be the dawn of a glorious tomorrow.

Jian Chen's heartstrings began to tug as he looked at the excited faces of everyone. When he saw the deep expressions on their faces, Jian Chen knew that these men were the true pillars of the Flame Mercenaries. Despite their strengths not being that great, these members were true and faithful to the Flame Mercenaries.

Jian Chen took in a deep breath to school his emotions before continuing with his speech, "These three are Yun Zheng, Senior An, and Tie Ta. Yun Zheng and Senior An are both Earth Saint Masters as well. They will serve as the law keepers for our mercenaries."

Upon hearing that both Yun Zheng and Senior An were Earth Saint Masters, the Flame Mercenaries exploded into a rambunctious cheer. Their emotions flooded their faces at an unprecedented speed.

The excitement continued for some time before Jian Chen held up his palm to calm the crowd. "Tie Ta is a Great Saint Master, but he will hold the same position of power as Kai Er, Qingfeng, Mo Tian, and Charcas. Henceforth, the mercenaries here today will be the core of the Flame Mercenaries. Everything you might need for your cultivation such as funding, living expenses, or anything else required by you mercenaries will be handled by the entirety of the group. The monster cores required for your cultivation will be provided for your strength to be increased." By now, Jian Chen possessed a mountain of monster cores and a surplus of wealth that could rival an entire nation. To provide for these sixty or

so men whose strengths were at the Great Saint Master would be nothing more than a single hair from nine cows.

Furthermore, these men had experienced a trail of fire to prove their loyalty. Hence, they were worth Jian Chen's time to nurture and train.

Jian Chen's words caused the entire mercenary group to fly into another frenzy once more. Why did they become mercenaries? Was it not to hunt the monster cores from the magical beasts to cultivate? Was it not for exchanging these cores for money to cover their living expenses? With Jian Chen now handling the expenditures for both monster cores and their costs of living, all of their worries in life practically alleviated. They could dedicate the rest of their time and energy to cultivating. No more would they have to fight with others for monster cores. This alone brought them no small amount of elation.

This tremendous windfall was so sudden that many of the men thought that they had fallen into a dream. The events that were happening in front of them simply couldn't be real. They had to be an illusion!

Jian Chen took out a white jade bottle from his Space Ring, "This is an unbelievable heavenly resource that money cannot buy in this world. Its name is the Hundred Grass Wine. It has the ability to increase your strength, so I will grant you all a drop." Jian Chen unstopped the bottle and allowed a drop of the green liquid to slowly pour out one at a time. Once it was in the air it floated up beside Jian Chen.

After having poured out the rest of the bottle and using his mind to float them in the air, Jian Chen had the droplets delivered to the sixty members, Kai Er, and the other three.

Everyone could only stare blankly at the floating green droplets. Jian Chen's method of delivery had surprised them. For a bizarre sight like this was something they had never seen before.

Seeing the stunned looks on everyone's faces, Jian Chen revealed a faint smile, "Hurry and drink it. If exposed too long to the outside world, its potency will decrease!"

As if shaken from their stupor, every single mercenary immediately opened their mouths to swallow the liquid. A surge of boundless energy began to fill the entirety of their being as soon as the green liquid entered their stomachs. It caused the members to feel greatly shocked. Some of them even fell to the ground in a seated position so they could fully dedicate themselves to digesting the raw energy coursing through their bodies.

The thousands of years old Hundred Grass Wine was something that had the greatest benefit on an individual of the Heaven Saint Master level. Jian Chen himself had used the Hundred Grass Wine to increase the power of his mind. In Kargath Academy, it had even been enough to force Khafir through the bottleneck he had been stuck at for many years. From this, it could be seen that the potency of the Hundred Grass Wine was extremely effective. Despite this, Jian Chen was still willing to let each member have a drop of the wine. The Great Saints or Saint Masters strength would substantially increase after receiving such a boundless amount of energy packed in this drop of wine.

An hour later, Qingfeng, Kai Er, Mo Tian, and Charcas were the first four to reawaken. The four Great Saint Master's eyes flew open and a brilliant light could be seen in them.

“I’ve actually reached the pinnacle of a Great Saint Master. There is just one more step needed for me to become an Earth Saint Master!” The look of shock on Kai Er’s face could hardly be repressed as he spoke with excitement.

“I too have gone from a middle Great Saint Master to a peak Great Saint Master!” Qingfeng spoke passionately. After drinking a drop of the Hundred Grass Wine, the four of them had all reached the very peak stage of a Great Saint Master. From there, it was only a short step away from becoming an Earth Saint Master.

Chapter 547: Imparting a Battle Skill

After the four of them had woken up, several of the Flame Mercenaries awoke as well. Sensing that their strengths had improved by a substantial amount, expressions of joy filled their faces. These men were originally middle Saint Masters or high Saint Masters. Now, practically a dozen of them had broken through to become a Great Saint Master after they finished off the Hundred Grass Wine.

A candle’s worth of time later, the last few dozen people finally woke up. When they felt how much their strength had increased, they were so happy that they couldn’t help but let out cries of joy.

Everyone in the Flame Mercenaries was ecstatic by this point. Every single Great Saint had become a Saint Master. Not a single one was below a Saint Master in strength, and even the ones who were originally middle Saint Masters had become Great Saint Masters. The men who were low Great Saint Masters were now high Great Saint Masters.

Not even two hours into the meeting and the strength of the entire Flame Mercenaries had skipped several steps. Even if Jian Chen wasn’t here, their new strength would be more than enough to rule a small city like Wake City. Even the city lord would not be able to gather an equivalent amount of strength.

“A thousand thanks for the captain’s charity!” The mercenaries all bowed down with a grand shout. Each one of them was especially happy.

Jian Chen smiled, “Although you’ve all grown stronger, your battle strength still needs to be trained, so you can become accustomed to your new strength. I will give you all a hundred purple coins each. Go and purchase the necessities to live in the wilderness. Tomorrow morning, we will head to the Magical Beast Mountain Range and train. You will only be able to return if you can kill three Class 4 Magical Beasts by yourself without help. Kai Er, Mo Tian, Qingfeng, and Charcas, you four will form a group and follow them. You will listen to my requests as well before you four may leave.”

Jian Chen’s words made every single mercenary grow serious. To fight a magical beast on par with them was a very tall order to fulfill. It would normally take about two or three men to kill a magical beast of their strength because their fortitude, muscles, and build outclassed a human. Only the strongest of men would be able to go head-to-head with them, and very few would be able to prevail against one.

When Jian Chen decreed that they all had to kill three of them by themselves, they felt that this would be a mission that they would never be able to accomplish or come back alive.

“Captain, as of now, killing a single Class 4 Magical Beast is hard enough, but for us to kill three of them, isn’t that too much to ask?” Charcas asked.

Jian Chen shook his head, "It isn't difficult at all. As a Saint, I hunted Class 2 Magical Beasts. As a Great Saint, I hunted Class 3 Magical Beasts. Then as a Saint Master, I fought Class 4 Magical Beasts. If I can do it, then everyone will be able to do the same. This trip to the mountain range is a training trip to increase your battle strength. Remember that when you gain the strength to fight enemies of your own level, then your battle experience, skill, and speed will increase dramatically. Those three points are most critical, so remember them when you go."

Pausing for a moment, Jian Chen stared seriously at everyone. "I still have something to give to everyone when we arrive at the Magical Beast Mountain Range. It'll lend a hand in improving your strength, do you all understand now?"

Jian Chen fished out a bag of purple coins from his Space Ring and began to give everyone a hundred purple coins to buy equipment with. Although it wouldn't need such a large sum for such things, these mercenaries still had families they needed to provide for.

While Jian Chen had handed them all a very serious and worrisome mission, the mercenaries couldn't help but smile when they saw the shimmering glint of the hundred purple coins.

A single purple coin was worth a hundred gold coins. A few purple coins was more than enough for an entire family to live half a generation of luxury. Therefore, a sum like this was more than enough to spend on an entire lifetime.

After receiving the sum of money, each of the mercenaries departed from the Kai family's courtyards with happy faces. They were headed to the nearby markets.

"Kai Er, Qingfeng, Mo Tian, Charcas, come with me!" Jian Chen called for the four to follow him to his own personal room.

Kai Er and the others followed close behind until they got to his room. As soon as they arrived, Jian Chen placed a single tattered but simple book on top of the table.

Handing the books over to the four, Jian Chen explained, "There is a total of eight battle skills in here — six Human-Tier Battle Skills and two Earth-Tier Battle Skills. You may take this and learn from it."

Kai Er and the other three began to shake at the mention of 'battle skill'. The book in front of them made their blood boil in excitement, and Jian Chen's explanation brought them such shock that their bodies nearly began to spasm.

Charcas' face was completely red as he spoke with a quavering voice. "Captain, is... is... is this true? Are these really six Human-Tier Battle Skills and two Earth-Tier Battle Skills? And you're... you're really giving them to us?"

A battle skill was an extremely precious treasure on the continent. It was far more valuable than cultivation methods, and even thousands and thousands of gold wouldn't be able to buy one. Even the lowest tier of Human-Tier Battle Skills was extremely pricy so that any mercenary would hardly be able to afford one. Only the strongest individuals or the most influential ones would be able to obtain such battle skills.

Earth-Tier Battle Skills were even more priceless, especially to Earth Saint Masters. Only a small portion of them possessed an Earth-Tier Battle Skill, but Jian Chen had given them a present that contained two. This was a windfall that made the four of them wild with joy.

Laughing at how excited they were, Jian Chen smiled, "It is as you say. You are the senior figures of the Flame Mercenaries. With all the years of suffering you four have undergone for the sake of the development of the Flame Mercenaries, I, Jian Chen, will definitely do my best to train you four in thanks for your loyalty. These eight battle skills are yours to learn. Pass them onto the rest of the mercenaries after you're done. Those who are not yet Great Saint Masters are only permitted to learn the Human-Tier Battle Skills, the Earth-Tier Battle Skills are not something they are capable of learning yet. The Great Saint Masters are free to learn them if they wish."

"Captain, for all your efforts in helping to train us, we will make sure that we won't disappoint you! For the rest of our lives, we will follow you anywhere, to death even with unflinching loyalty!" Kai Er and the other three gratefully bowed.

Smiling at the four, Jian Chen had them rise back to their feet. "Work hard, you four. I will not treat any one of my brothers unfairly. When you become Earth Saint Masters, then I will impart a Heaven-Tier Battle Skill to you."

Again, the four of them began to tremble violently as they became slack-jawed. The words 'Heaven-Tier Battle Skill' were even louder than a clap of thunder to their ears and could make anyone lose their train of thought in a second. For a while, they remained blank before finally returning to awareness.

In their eyes, a Heaven-Tier Battle Skill was a paramount of a treasure. Very few Heaven Saint Masters possessed them, and not a single one of the Heaven Saint Masters in the Blue Wind Kingdom possessed such a battle skill. With Jian Chen suddenly telling them that they would receive a Heaven-Tier Battle Skill when even the Heaven Saint Masters of the Blue Wind Kingdom did not own one, they could hardly believe their ears.

A very long time later, Charcas was the first to snap back to awareness. Shocked, he looked to Jian Chen and asked, "Captain, do you... do you really have a Heaven-Tier Battle Skill!?"

Smiling and nodding, Jian Chen replied, "Correct. I have a Heaven-Tier Battle Skill and not just one either." By now, Jian Chen did not need to hide the fact that he possessed Heaven-Tier Battle Skills. With his strength, he was more than strong enough to protect them from Heaven Saint Masters at the very least. Not a single person would dare to try to start trouble with him.

Charcas continued to stare blankly at Jian Chen with his mouth wide open. The entirety of what he heard just now was far too unbelievable.

Just then, Jian Chen looked away for a moment with a smile, "An acquaintance has stopped by. Let us go greet him!"

Walking out of the room, Jian Chen was followed by Kai Er and the others with wooden expressions. They were clearly still processing what they had heard back in the room.

Walking into the courtyards, Jian Chen saw the rather regal-looking city lord Yun Li smiling and chatting with Ming Dong.

The moment Jian Chen stepped into the courtyard, Yun Li had discovered him from the corner of his eyes. Immediately smiling to welcome him, Yun Li said, "Aiya, brother Jian Chen! You've finally returned. I heard you participated in the Gathering of the Mercenaries two years ago. I felt quite concerned for a good while, afraid that my dear brother Jian Chen would come into danger. But seeing you now, I can see that my concerns were unfounded. How young and promising you are, and how powerful! Even if it's danger, you are able to turn it into fortune! Seeing how healthy and impressive you are, I can only assume that you've made quite the achievement for yourself in the Gathering of the Mercenaries!"

Cupping his hands, Jian Chen smiled, "The city lord certainly has been worried. The Gathering of the Mercenaries has given me a new lease on life. With good fortune, I was able to survive and prosper."

Chapter 548: To the Ruler of the City

The city ruler Yun Li was very shocked to hear what Jian Chen said. Originally he had thought that Jian Chen didn't even make it to Mercenary City. Very few Great Saint Masters were likely to survive to join the Gathering of the Mercenaries. Not only did Jian Chen say he had participated, he survived.

"What a fortunate kid!" Yun Li thought to himself, but the emotions on his face did not betray his thoughts as he continued to smile. "Hahaha, that is only proof of your strength. If you were able to make the journey to Mercenary City, then you must have benefitted greatly from the experience."

"There was indeed bountiful experience gained, but it's not worth mentioning." Jian Chen courteously replied.

As Yun Li continued to chat happily with Jian Chen, his eyes began to observe Kai Er and the other three every so often. According to his senses, he was more than capable enough to see the massive transformation the four of them had undergone. Startled, he thought to himself, "Peak Great Saint Masters! They're that strong? But how? They were barely middle Great Saint Masters before Jian Chen came back. What prompted this sudden breakthrough? How did they become as strong as me so quickly?"

He tried not to think about Kai Er and the other three. Instead, he tried to talk to Jian Chen about more important topics before leaving in a hurry.

After Yun Li left, Qingfeng sneered. "That Yun Li is an unsavory character. He helped the Defiance Mercenaries grow in secret before, does he think we don't know that?"

"That's right, at the time of the collapse of the alliance, the One-armed Warrior had just arrived in Wake City with some of his followers. If it weren't for Yun Li helping them, the One-armed Warrior wouldn't have so easily gained strength." Charcas spoke venomously with clear signs of hostility between him and Yun Li.

Jian Chen's eyes flashed with an icy light for a moment as he listened, but without another word more, he turned to Kai Er, "Let us go to the Dohre clan."

The Dohre clan once possessed some name to it in Wake City as one of the major powers before. When their previous head of the family Weiss left the world, the Dohre family was left with his son as the acting head. When they left the Flame Mercenaries, their power in the city had taken a huge loss in strength and authority since Weiss had been their only Great Saint Master.

Riding the Class 3 Magical Beast mounts, Jian Chen and the six others arrived in front of the gates where the Dohre family resided. The four mercenaries had led the way. The Dohre family no longer displayed the same glorious splendor they had in the past. The ancient-looking doors were closed shut and leaves were scattered everywhere. Even guards weren't seen anywhere, making the area look rather desolate and abandoned.

A moment after Kai Er knocked upon the ancient-looking doors, they began to open to reveal a white-haired elder. Clearly recognizing Kai Er, the elder immediately gave a smile and greeted him, "So it was you, lord Kai Er. Come in, come in please." Hurriedly opening the door, the elder began to welcome him inside.

"Hurry up and call out Weiji. Tell him the captain of the Flame Mercenaries has returned."

"The captain of the Flame Mercenaries!" Stunned, the elder looked at the men riding the magical beasts outside the doors and snapped back to awareness. "Ye-yes! I will go retrieve the lord!" Having said that, the elder stumbled back into the interior of the compound.

Pushing open the doors the rest of the way, Kai Er said to Jian Chen, "Captain, please come in!"

Dismounting from his mount, Jian Chen strolled into the compound.

At that moment, the newly informed Weiji came hurrying on over along with two females. The acting head of the Dohre clan, Weiji, was also the only son of Weiss.

"Weiji pays his respects to the captain!" Weiji was no stranger to Jian Chen and immediately bowed to him.

"This one pays her respects to the captain!" The middle-aged woman followed Weiji's example and bowed down to Jian Chen with panic. Only the child that looked several years old continued to stare at Jian Chen with wide open eyes.

Jian Chen's gaze softened as he looked at Weiji. Smiling, he said, "Weiji, this must be your wife and child!"

"Yes, captain! This is my wife and child!" Weiji was nervous in his response to Jian Chen. When his father had passed away from battle, he had taken the initiative to leave the Flame Mercenaries. Now that the captain had returned and had personally come to visit, Weiji was more than nervous and afraid that Jian Chen came to condemn them.

Amicably, Jian Chen smiled at Weiji, "Weiji, please relax. I came here today for a social visit only. No matter what is said, your Dohre family was once members of the Flame Mercenaries. Your father died for our Flame Mercenaries, his services and achievements will never be forgotten to us!"

Weiji could only sigh in relief having heard those words. At the mention of his deceased father, his eyes began to tear up.

"Weiji. When I wasn't here in the past, the Flame Mercenaries suffered greatly. Now that I've returned, the Flame Mercenaries will not stop its development. Will you be willing to rejoin the Flame Mercenaries? The achievements your father worked hard to achieve for us will be remembered by me as if you had done the same. I will do my best to help make you grow stronger." Jian Chen continued.

Weiji hesitated for a moment. Looking at his wife and child, he shook his head. "Captain, I truly wish to apologize, but this one has no ambitions for greatness or power. I only wish to protect the remaining pieces of stability and giving peace to my family instead of spending me time around the continent. I have no desire to throw away my life for a struggle that could claim it at any moment."

Jian Chen let out a sigh. "That is fine too. If you wish to live in peace and stability, then I won't force you out of it. Your father dedicated his entire being to my mercenary group, and even sacrificed his life for it. Even with his departure, I will remember his achievements and reward you for them in his place." Jian Chen retrieved several Space Belts he had prepared beforehand from his Space Ring and handed them over to Weiji, "Inside these are a few coins and monster cores. In place of your father, I will give them to you. Take them, and I hope that in the future I can count on your assistance once more."

Misty-eyed and emotionally affected, Weiji's hand trembled as it accepted the Space Belts handed to him by Jian Chen. When he had learned that the captain had returned, Weiji feared that he would be tortured by the group, and had been nervous as a result. It had been beyond his wildest dreams that Jian Chen did not blame him or rebuke him, and had instead handed him a present of money and monster cores.

"Ma... many thanks to the captain for his charity!" Weiji exclaimed.

Smiling, Jian Chen replied, "Although your father has left, it should be my responsibility to look after his offspring. In the case that your Dohre clan comes across any trouble, then seek out the Flame Mercenaries. On that note, I will bid you farewell from here!" With that said, Jian Chen turned around to leave, and got on his Class 3 Magical Beast mount.

Traveling on top of his mount in no hurry, Jian Chen felt the snowy-white tiger cub still sleeping in content against his chest as it digested the resources in its body.

Jian Chen slowly rubbed the furry head of the tiger cub sleeping against his chest. With the large amount of heavenly resources the tiger cub had been fed, the cub had grown exponentially stronger, and had already reached the same level as a Class 4 Magical Beast.

Ming Dong, Kai Er, and the others followed Jian Chen from behind. They had learned of the tiger cub Jian Chen had a long time ago, but everyone had thought that Jian Chen was merely raising it to be a cute pet; therefore, they paid it no attention.

"Kai Er, you received a Class 5 Magical Beast cub, just who in the world stole it?" Jian Chen suddenly asked.

Kai Er hesitated for a moment, prompting Qingfeng to speak up for him, "We had many of our men fan out and search the city, but we never found any clues of who might have committed such an act. The same evening the cub was stolen, we had our men watch the city gates. If any person had been seen carrying a cub out of the city, we would have been notified. Even several days later, not a single piece of information was reported to us. No news of the one responsible was reported, so we all figured that the Class 5 Magical Beast cub had already been snuck out of the city, escaping into any possible direction."

"The Golden Tiger King's cub carries an unforgettable story with our Flame Mercenaries." Jian Chen sighed as he thought back to the past and what had transpired back then.

Confused by the look of Jian Chen, Kai Er asked, "Captain, what type of relationship is there between the cub and our mercenary group?"

"Hatred!" Jian Chen stated with his eyes closed.

Kai Er and the other three still remained confused. Although they had joined the group for a decent amount of time, they were still unclear of what had happened to the group in the past.

"Captain, just what in the world happened with the tiger cub to cause such hatred?" Qingfeng asked curiously, but no answer had been given to him.

Having received no response, the group of four had taken note that Jian Chen was unwilling to respond to them. Thus, they could only obediently close their mouths without any further questions.

Suddenly, Jian Chen's eyes flew open as he began to radiate a tremendous amount of killing intent. "Come, let us head to the city lord's mansion!" He growled.

Chapter 549: Culprit of Stealing Away the Cub (One)

Jian Chen's face grew progressively darker and more malicious as he whirled into a different direction. He then lead the group toward the city lord's mansion.

The group was confused by Jian Chen's sudden transformation. None of them were able to tell just what could happen to make Jian Chen act as such.

Despite their befuddlement, the look on Jian Chen's face was enough to make them silent and follow from behind.

The mansion of the city lord was located at the center of Wake City, so Jian Chen rode his magical beast mount through the streets to his destination much to the curious but envious eyes of every spectator around. In the small city that was Wake City, a Class 3 Magical Beast mount was an extremely rare sight to behold and could hardly be seen at all. Seven of them appearing at once was a very eye-catching sight for every person on the streets. It called for many mercenaries to begin to talk to themselves.

"Look at those youths riding on top of the magical beast mounts, and look at their rich-looking clothes! These men have to be the young children of some sort of powerful family."

"Look! Look how pretty that female in the middle is, she's practically a fairy! I swear on my wretched life that she has to be the most beautiful woman I've ever seen. I can barely even breath!"

"Eh? Aren't those four the heads of the Flame Mercenaries standing right behind them? Strange, why do they look like they're servants for that group?"

"I've heard that the captain of the Flame Mercenaries came back out of the blue last night. Could the men on top of the magical beast mounts be related to the captain?"

"I've heard that the captain is very strong, especially at his age. Wouldn't that person leading the front up there be him?"

“I think I heard someone say earlier today that the One-armed Warrior of the Defiance Mercenaries was crippled by the captain. All of the remaining experts of the Defiance Mercenaries were killed and the group was dissolved. I wonder if that rumor is true...”

As Jian Chen and his group traversed the streets, everyone turned to look and chatter among themselves about this phenomenon in front of them. However, Jian Chen turned a deaf ear to their words and didn't bother to pay attention to them at all.

Soon, the group arrived at the city lord's mansion where Kai Er immediately strode forward to negotiate with the guards at the gates. “The captain of the Flame Mercenaries has come to pay a visit. Please notify the city lord!”

The Flame Mercenaries were very well known throughout Wake City, so when the guard heard that the captain had come to pay a visit, he didn't dare to neglect his duties. He immediately went off to report to the city lord.

When Yun Li had received news that Jian Chen was here, he immediately threw whatever item he had down and went out to receive him. After several words of greeting, Jian Chen and Yun Li both walked into the greater halls.

“Brother Jian Chen, I didn't think that you would come to the mansion in person. What an honor it is to receive you in my home.” Yun Li laughed with happiness.

The dark expression on Jian Chen's face was nowhere to be seen since his arrival. Smiling in reply, he said, “When you visit a temple, you visit with a reason. Here I am today with the hope that the city lord will be able to help me with something.”

“Hahahaha, brother Jian Chen, you are far too polite. Whatever it is you need assistance with, I will do my best to assist. There is no need for this politeness.” Yun Li laughed.

Pausing for a moment, Jian Chen replied, “City lord, my Flame Mercenaries were once in possession of a Class 5 Magical Beast cub before, but it was unfortunately stolen from a thief one night. Not only did he kill a senior figure of my group, the Flame Mercenaries had spent a tremendous amount of time and energy to find the culprit to no avail. This, this one hopes that the city lord will help assist our Flame Mercenaries to bring this assassin to light!”

“That'll be no problem at all! Rest assured, brother Jian Chen. I will dispatch my men straight away to search the city to help find this assailant to bring them to justice.” Yun Li waved his hand without hesitation to help coordinate with Jian Chen.

“Then I'll be troubling you with this task.” Jian Chen cupped his hands with a smile.

Yun Li laughed, “It'll be no trouble. It's a small matter to me. Brother Jian Chen, I am twenty or so years older than you. If you don't mind, please just think of me as your brother. In the future, should you ever have any need for this older brother, please allow me to help you.”

Kai Er, Qingfeng, Mo Tian, and Charcas snorted to themselves in secret as they gave disdainful glares at Yun Li behind Jian Chen's back.

They didn't know what level of strength Jian Chen was now, but if Jian Chen was capable of being able to give out a Heaven Tier Battle Skill, then his strength definitely couldn't be belittled. Seated at such a high level of power, a small city ruler like Yun Li was in a completely different field of influence than Jian Chen.

"City lord, let us talk about that after we find the culprit responsible. With that assailant being the one responsible for killing a senior figure of the Flame Mercenaries, I swear on my name of Jian Chen that I won't let them go unpunished. Right now I only wish to dedicate myself to finding that man." Jian Chen's words were tantamount to a refusal of what Yun Li had asked.

Yun Li had remained unruffled despite the refusal Jian Chen handed out. "If brother Jian Chen wishes to find that assailant, then your older brother will naturally help you. As long as it is within Wake City, there is nothing your older brother cannot resolve." He smiled. Waving for several of his soldiers, Yun Li commanded them with a serious expression, "Go and notify commander Duo Li. Have him lead a detachment of troops through the city and check the experts hidden throughout the city."

"This servant will do as instructed!" The soldier replied before retreating.

"One moment!" Jian Chen suddenly called out. "City lord, there is no need for such an inconvenient way of searching for the culprit. That unknown expert has most likely changed his face so we wouldn't know what to look for. However, there is a definite method to find them. The Class 5 Magical Beast cub is still with them, so we just need to focus our efforts on finding the cub. This way our goal will be much easier."

"That's right, absolutely right!" Yun Li completely agreed. "As expected from the intelligent Jian Chen! What quick-witted thinking. This way, our troubles will be lessened. After stealing a Class 5 Magical Beast, there would be no way that the culprit would let it escape his control so easily. As long as we find the Class 5 Magical Beast cub, then we will find the culprit with it."

"It is as the city lord says. As long as we find the cub, we will find the assailant that dared strike at my Flame Mercenaries and kill a senior figure. Furthermore, the city lord's information network is quite effective, would you happen to have information of what happened with the cub in the few days after it was stolen from my Flame Mercenaries?" Jian Chen's eyes attentively stared down Yun Li as he questioned.

Yun Li's expression remained unchanged. Letting out a sigh, he replied, "Brother Jian Chen, you overestimate your older brother's spy network. It isn't able to delve too deeply into anything, and for something like the Class 5 Magical Beast cub, this older brother knows nothing about it. Perhaps the thief has already left Wake City?"

"Left Wake City, is that true?" Jian Chen muttered with a glint of ice flashing through his eyes.

"Everyone, with me!" Without informing Yun Li, Jian Chen began to leave the halls.

Yun Li's face faltered slightly after seeing the retreating back of Jian Chen. Quickly recovering, he chased after him with cordial urging, "Brother Jian Chen, why leave so soon? Come and sit for a while. Your older brother will have some of my men prepare a feast to welcome your victorious return from Mercenary City."

“Who said I was leaving? I only wished to turn around. Lord Yun Li, if you don’t mind, please accompany us!” Jian Chen spoke, but this time, his voice was considerably more frigid than before.

“Haha, then allow your older brother to be your guide around here. The flower garden is this way, why not take a seat there?” Yun Li began to pull Jian Chen’s arm in the direction of the flower garden.

Jian Chen shook his arm to force away Yun Li’s palm. “Who said I wished to go to the flower garden? Lord Yun Li, you should follow us quietly.” Jian Chen didn’t even spare him a glance as he spoke to him with an even colder tone. He walked to the second story of the building.

Troubled by the sudden change in the tone of Jian Chen’s words, Yun Li was further shocked to realize just where Jian Chen was walking. Hurriedly running after him, Yun Li said, “Brother Jian Chen, that is my resting room. Why are you going there?”

This time, Jian Chen did not pay attention to Yun Li. Yun Li had originally wanted to stop Jian Chen from walking into his personal chamber, but how could Jian Chen be stopped by someone like him?

The smile that had been on Yun Li’s face had finally disappeared now that he was exasperated with Jian Chen’s actions. Staring hard at Jian Chen, he said with a low voice, “Jian Chen, just what are you doing? Explain your actions.”

“You’ll find out in a moment.” Jian Chen laughed. They had by now reached his resting rooms. Jian Chen then kicked down the door to walk in.

Blanching, Yun Li immediately strode forward to stop Jian Chen, “Jian Chen! What is the meaning of this!? This is the home of the city lord, for what reason could you have to act as you please here!?”

A cold sneer appeared on Jian Chen’s face as he stretched out his arm. With a single swipe, the energy of the world quickly gathered in his palm, and slammed into the ground before Yun Li could react.

A single explosion could be heard as the entire building creaked from the boom. Dust flew into the air and obstructed everyone’s vision.

Following a gust of wind that blew away the dust in the air, everyone could see the entire room without trouble. In the ground at the center of the room, there was a pitch-dark hole leading down.

Seeing this entrance, Yun Li’s face seemed to be stricken with fear, and his body went slack.

Jian Chen’s icy stare made its way to Yun Li before snorting, “Kai Er, Qingfeng, Charcas, Mo Tian. You four go in!”

“Yes!” The four replied before leaping into the cellar below.

Several moments later, the four reappeared from the hole with extremely serious expressions. In Qingfeng’s hand was a cubic meter cage where a little cub with golden fur, not even half a meter long, could be seen. From within its cage, the cub’s eyes roamed timidly over everyone while it cowered in a corner.

Chapter 550: Culprit of Stealing the Young Cub (Two)

Yun Li's face became extremely white at the sight. Now that things had gotten to where they were, he knew that there was no longer any possible way he could get out of this situation. Even the most perfect lie would be unable to trick them, and Jian Chen was no idiot.

Kai Er and the other three's faces were thunderous as they furiously glared at Yun Li. In their eyes, their rage could not be hidden.

"So, the mysterious assailant that snuck into our Flame Mercenaries to steal away the cub and kill Duo Kang was you! I never would have imagined that the man we had desperately searched for all this time would be you." Mo Tian snarled as he glared at Yun Li as if he was a bloodthirsty animal that wanted nothing more than to skin his scalp, devour his flesh, and drink his blood.

Practically lifeless where he stood, Yun Li found no words to say. Although he wanted to avoid this subject entirely, Yun Li couldn't find the words to quibble to avoid trouble, especially when he thought about the words he had spoken to Jian Chen earlier before the Class 5 Magical Beast cub came back to bite him.

Jian Chen had been right to say that the culprit would be with the cub. As long as the cub was found, then the culprit would be found as well.

"I never would have imagined that it would be you who stole the Class 5 Magical Beast cub, Yun Li. To think that you were the one that killed Duo Kang, how stupid we were! We should have realized it was you earlier. Throughout Wake City, the person most likely to have a battle skill while also being the biggest unknown to us would be the ruler of the city! How repulsive, how utterly repulsive! We never suspected it was you from the very beginning!" Kai Er was furious as well. His face filled with a furious murderous intent.

Qingfeng looked to Jian Chen, and said to him with indignation, "Captain, now that Duo Kang's killer has been found, we cannot let him go! Duo Kang would never rest in peace if we did. We cannot let his death go unavenged!"

Qingfeng's words had caused a fluctuation in Yun Li's face and a light had begun to twinkle in his eyes.

Nodding, Jian Chen stared straight at Yun Li, "Yun Li, do you have anything to say for yourself?"

Knowing in his heart that there was no way to spin things in a way to justify himself, Yun Li had decided to hide nothing from them. "Correct. The one who infiltrated your Flame Mercenaries that night was me. The one who stole the Class 5 Magical Beast cub was also me, and Duo Kang died by my hands as well. But no matter the case, I, Yun Li, am the the lord of Wake City and an official of the Blue Wind Kingdom. Should you harm an official of the Blue Wind Kingdom, then you will be challenging the authority of the kingdom as enemies! The kingdom as a whole will not sit idly by the side should you harm me."

Yun Li's words made Jian Chen's eyes twinkle with an icy light, and a sneer appeared on the edge of his lips. Kai Er and the others narrowed their eyes with concern. The Blue Wind Kingdom was a huge beast they had no chance of provoking, so the words of Yun Li had frightened them.

"You value the Blue Wind Kingdom far too much to use them to hide behind in front of me. How ridiculous you are!" Jian Chen laughed with a disdainful expression.

Yun Li started at that. He had thought that Jian Chen would be at least intimidated by the very mention of the Blue Wind Kingdom. The way Jian Chen saw as nothing more than an insect made him feel like there was absolutely nothing he could do to help himself now.

“Jian Chen, does your Flame Mercenaries truly desire to become enemies with the Blue Wind Kingdom!” Yun Li sternly barked. Despite his voice, his heart felt uneasy when Yun Li thought about the fuzzy details of Jian Chen’s background. Jian Chen was truly a mysterious individual in his eyes. At the very least, he knew that Jian Chen was the captain of the Flame Mercenaries, but he lacked every other piece of information about him. Seeing the skill and the atmosphere Jian Chen carried with him, Yun Li had no doubts that Jian Chen was not some sort of savage or uncultured villager.

“The Blue Wind Kingdom? They have no right to stand as an enemy to me. Kai Er, tie up our esteemed lord and escort him out!” Jian Chen commanded.

“Yes!” Hearing their captain utterly reject the Blue Wind Kingdom as something not worth noticing, the four of them stomached their fear and hurried to capture Yun Li per Jian Chen’s orders.

“I’d like to see you try. I am a lord and bureaucrat of the Blue Wind Kingdom!” Yun Li exploded with rage. Unafraid of the group in front of him, his hand took out his sword in preparation to do battle.

“Capture him!” Jian Chen commanded.

Without hesitation, the group took out their own Saint Weapons and began to charge at Yun Li.

A strange light appeared in Yun Li’s eyes. Not running up to fight with Kai Er and the others, his sword flew back to strike the wall, creating a hole. Leaping out of it, he opened his mouth to cry out, “Assassins! The Flame Mercenaries are rebelling! Soldiers, come eliminate them!”

Yun Li’s voice was so great that not only did the soldiers within the mansion hear him, even the soldiers stationed out on the streets could hear his command loud and clear.

Every single soldier from within the mansion immediately mobilized into action. Even the ones outside began to pile in from the streets to join in. Those bystanders outside felt stunned by what they had heard. They immediately began to talk among each other.

“Did I hear that right? Are the Flame Mercenaries rebelling...?”

“The Flame Mercenaries are the strongest group of mercenaries within Wake City, what reason do they have for a rebellion?”

“I heard that the captain came back last night. Has he gone errant in the head?”

“In the magical beast invasion two years ago, the captain of the Flame Mercenaries was one of the greatest contributors to the city. Why would he rebel?”

Yun Li’s words had caused a tremendous explosion of conversations in the streets. No matter if it was a civilian, merchant, or mercenary that heard him, none of them could understand him.

Within a span of several seconds, over three hundred soldiers were jampacked around the area so tightly that even water couldn’t escape. Under the protection of several soldiers, Yun Li could be seen coldly smiling at Jian Chen.

Even after being surrounded by these three hundred men, Jian Chen and the other had remained unmoved. Their expression were calm, especially those of Ming Dong, Dugu Feng, Yun Zheng, and Senior An. When they saw the soldiers, they seemed as if they were staring at nothing itself.

“My esteemed lord, it goes without saying that you are childish. Do you really think this small amount of soldiers will be able to force us into submission?” Ming Dong mockingly snorted at Yun Li.

“I do! How could they not? Don’t forget that I have the hundred thousand soldiers of Wake City under my command. Rebels you lot are, rebels I say! From today henceforth, the Blue Wind Kingdom will shelter your Flame Mercenaries no more.” Yun Li knew that there was no way Jian Chen would forgive him, so he had thrown caution to the wind as he committed to this final gambit in the form of the hundred thousand soldiers he had. Killing the soldiers in charge of defending the city was different than killing a civilian or even a merchant. This was tantamount to an act of war against the Blue Wind Kingdom itself and would warrant further punishment.

According to his own thoughts, if the Flame Mercenaries were captured and tried for a sin as grave as rebellion and conspiracy, even the figures behind the mercenaries would be useless.

“Conspiracy and intent to rebel? My esteemed lord, do you take our heads for hats?” Ming Dong merrily laughed. “Do you think this would scare us?”

“Hmph, a group of insurgents that remains unchanging even when death is at hand. Soldiers! Kill them all!” Yun Li barked out a decisive order.

Without hesitation, the three hundred soldiers charged straight at the group in front of them.

Laughing, Ming Dong’s body immediately flashed away as an azure light that flew through the crowd and toward Yun Li. Before Yun Li could even react, both of Ming Dong’s palms had flown out several times to send the soldiers near Yun Li flying, and with another stretch of his right hand, Ming Dong clasped onto Yun Li’s throat.

Ming Dong had been so fast that Yun Li couldn’t even see what had just transpired. A choking sensation swelled up within Yun Li’s throat as terror flooded his senses once he realized that his throat was held tightly by the enemy.

At the same time, Yun Zheng, Senior An, and Dugu Feng let their Saint Force wrap their palms before they shot, with a wave of energy, at the surrounding soldiers, sending some flying. Plenty of them were knocked so hard that blood flew out from their mouths from the damage they received.

As Earth Saint Masters, there was no need to waste so much energy on these soldiers who were far weaker than them.

Completely terror-stricken, Yun Li could hardly believe his eyes. There was no way he would have imagined that Ming Dong would possess such a tremendous amount of power.

“Brothers, I’ve captured the lord. What shall we do with him, kill or cripple?” Ming Dong asked Jian Chen.

Yun Li’s face paled when he heard Ming Dong, but because of the tight hold on his throat, he couldn’t even say anything in response.

“There’s no need to deal with him that quickly. Tie him up and carry him out.” Jian Chen replied.

“Fine, but let’s take some precautions, let’s rough him up a bit to make sure he loses his will to fight.” With that, Ming Dong slapped his palm into Yun Li’s chest.

“Pah!” A mouthful of blood immediately sprayed out of Yun Li’s mouth after having been injured by Ming Dong.

Shortly afterward, Kai Er and the others had found some iron chains to tie up Yun Li. His arms were chained behind his back with the chains looping around his neck. Then, under the eyes of all the soldiers there, Yun Li the lord and ruler of Wake City was taken from the mansion without obstruction.

“The Flame Mercenaries have gone rogue and captured the lord. Go, notify commander Duo Li immediately!” One of the soldiers cried out for another to go run for the commander.

Kai Er and the others kept a close watch on the injured Yun Li as they followed Jian Chen from the mansion. The cage with the Class 5 Magical Beast cub had remained with them. Right behind the group, all of the soldiers followed with anxious looks. They had originally planned on blocking Jian Chen from leaving, but when they thought about how terrifying Dugu Feng and the others were, their fear caused their hearts to tremble, overriding their courage to fight.