

Disciples 171

Chapter 171: My Sincere Heart Shines as Brightly as the Sun and the Moon

Zhu Honggong gulped. He looked at the three huge characters that hung over the great hall's entrance, Evil Sky Pavilion.

It was the Evil Sky Pavilion that was feared and coveted by many!

Zhu Honggong could not remember how often he had dreamed of this place. Now that he was finally here, his feelings were conflicted.

They finally entered the hall.

Zhu Honggong moved faster now. He knew that his master hated those who dallied the most. He followed closely behind Mingshi Yin. They walked past two huge pillars and were now at the center of the great hall. He looked up...

A lively elder who did not seem to be all that old was seated at the high seat in the great hall. His eyes were deep and piercing.

Thud!

Zhu Honggong was so frightened by Lu Zhou's gaze that he fell to his knees immediately. He quickly kowtowed. "Greetings, master! May you live a long and prosperous life!"

Upon hearing this, Mingshi Yin felt his eyelids twitch. He felt as though he had met his match.

Lu Zhou stroked his beard and said, "You rascal."

"Master... I can explain. I didn't betray you! I had no choice but to leave! Please forgive me, master!" Zhu Honggong did not even dare to breathe loudly.

Duanmu Sheng, Mingshi Yin, Little Yuan'er, and Zhao Yue, who had just arrived, stared at Zhu Honggong.

Lu Zhou said, "You had no choice?"

"I was tricked by Seventh Senior Brother!"

"Why were you the only one who was tricked?" Lu Zhou's words were clearly meant for his other disciples as well. When he had first transmigrated over, apart from Little Yuan'er, Zhu Honggong was not his only disciple who was swayed.

Upon hearing this, Mingshi Yin looked at Zhu Honggong with an unnatural gaze.

Zhu Honggong said loudly, "My sincere heart shines as bright as the sun and the moon! Please judge me fairly, master!"

Lu Zhou placed his hands on his back as he walked toward Zhu Honggong.

At this moment, Zhu Honggong was trembling in fear. He lowered his head, afraid to meet Lu Zhou's eyes.

"Old Eighth... Don't you wish for me to die as soon as possible?"

Upon hearing this, Zhu Honggong trembled even harder. He kowtowed again and said, "I don't dare!"

Lu Zhou shook his head. He did not know what was going through Ji Tiandao's mind back then. He recruited so many outstanding disciples, but why was Old Eighth as cowardly as a mouse?

"In recent years, you've made quite a name for yourself with Old Seventh's help... The crimes you've committed were petty. The Evil Sky Pavilion will bear the responsibility for those crimes you've committed," Lu Zhou said with his hands on his back.

It was the truth. Even if Lu Zhou was unwilling, outsiders would still shift the blame of his nine disciples' deeds to the Evil Sky Pavilion. That was how the Evil Sky Pavilion got its bad reputation. Ji Tiandao was ranked first on the blacklist because of this as well.

"I've made a grave mistake!" Zhu Honggong genuinely admitted his wrongs.

"Ding! Disciplined Zhu Honggong. Reward: 100 merit points."

"What kind of plans are Old Seventh hatching these days?" Lu Zhou asked.

Since Si Wuya was Darknet's Sect Leader, why would he be stirring up a storm? Old Eighth and Si Wuya were close. Perhaps, Old Eighth might know something about it.

"Seventh Senior Brother has never spoken to me about these things. I honestly don't know. He... He has a closer relationship with Eldest and Second Senior Brother. They meet quite often to discuss major events under the heavens. I don't even understand the things they discussed," Zhu Honggong answered honestly.

"Why were you there at the Green Jade Altar the other day?" Lu Zhou asked again.

"Seventh Senior Brother said the Fiend Temple was going to join forces with the Righteous Sect... They intended to isolate the Darknet and the Nether Sect. Seventh Senior Brother would never let them do as they pleased."

Lu Zhou stared at Old Eighth. He knew each of his disciples well. Zhu Honggong's cultivation base was at the peak of the Divine Court realm. Naturally, this was due to his cultivation method being flawed.

Unlike his other disciples, Lu Zhou remembered Zhu Honggong cultivated the Nine Tribulations Thunderblast. He was lacking in the two last Tribulations that were also the crucial parts of his cultivation method. Old Eighth was fated to not be able to enter the Nascent Divinity Tribulation realm. Everyone said that Old Eighth's cultivation talent was poor, but no one knew it was due to his flawed cultivation method.

It was clear that the Evil Sky Pavilion disciples' were carefully picked from the masses.

Lu Zhou was taken aback by Old Eighth's loyalty that was at 5%.

This was different from Ye Tianxin. Ye Tianxin had harbored hatred toward him after she betrayed the pavilion. Although she no longer hated Lu Zhou, she was not regarded as a true disciple of the Evil Sky Pavilion yet.

However, Old Eighth had maintained a 5% loyalty all along. This meant that Old Eighth had been concerned about the Evil Sky Pavilion all along.

“Since you know you’re wrong... Your punishment is to stay in the Cave of Reflection for now,” Lu Zhou said with a wave of his arm.

Zhu Honggong was slightly stunned. He remembered what his Fourth Senior Brother had reminded him during their journey. He did not dare to be careless. He kowtowed again and said, “Master! This disciple knows he has committed a grave sin! Please punish me harshly!”

Everyone else was taken aback by this.

‘To think that there’s someone who’s not satisfied with a light sentence.’

The Cave of Reflection was not exactly the best place. It was extremely cold, the kind of cold that seeped into the bones. Even those with a cultivation base had to circulate their Primal Qi constantly to keep warm. The process of constantly circulating one’s Primal Qi was a long-term torture.

Apart from Ye Tianxin, Lu Zhou had never truly punished his disciples harshly.

“Master, Old Eighth has committed a grave sin. He should be punished harshly.”

“I agree. He should be punished harshly.”

“Eighth Senior Brother’s skin is thick. The Cave of Reflection is too easy for him! Master... why don’t you break his legs so that he won’t be able to run around in the future?” Little Yuan’er suggested.

‘Uh...’ Zhu Honggong felt like crying. ‘They said Little Junior Sister is naïve and pure of heart... Why don’t I get that vibe from her?’

Lu Zhou stroked his beard and said, “50 strokes of the plank, refurbish the Golden Court Mountain, and three years in the Cave of Reflection with your cultivation base sealed!”

“Huh?” Zhu Honggong was beginning to regret his words. He could endure the first two punishments with his thick skin, but to spend three years in the Cave of Reflection with his cultivation base sealed was harsh! He was worried that he would be frozen to an icicle!

“What? You have something to say about it?” Lu Zhou asked.

Zhu Honggong hastily bowed and said, “I accept my punishment!”

“Take him away.”

“Yes, master.”

Mingshi Yin walked up to Zhu Honggong, tapped his shoulder, and said, “Move!”

Zhu Honggong did not move.

“You dumb pig! Are you so frightened that you’ve lost the strength to walk?”

Mingshi Yin made a lifting gesture with his hand. A surge of energy covered Zhu Honggong and hoisted him up. He walked out of the great hall.

They arrived at the back of the mountain. At this moment, Zhu Honggong began to pant heavily. He said, "Master didn't beat me up? Master didn't beat me up! Senior Brother... Am I dreaming? Pinch me, quick..."

Mingshi Yin rolled his eyes and said, "Are you that afraid of being clobbered?"

"Of course, I am... Master's temper... No, I think master's temper is different from before."

"Count yourself lucky! I told you, if you begged for mercy the way I taught you, master won't punish you too harshly," Mingshi Yin said, feeling slightly pleased with himself. "For the sins you've committed, spending time in the Cave of Reflection with your cultivation base sealed is far too light a sentence."

"You're right, Fourth Senior Brother. Thank you for helping me avoid a heavy punishment. I shall forever remember this favor!" Zhu Honggong said.

While both of them were discussing the punishment that their master had meted out, Pan Zhong suddenly appeared with the Six Yang Technique in his hands. When he saw Zhu Honggong, he spoke in a sinister tone, "Mister Fourth, we have a newcomer?"

Chapter 172: A Newcomer Should Have a Newcomer's Resolve

Perhaps, it had been too uneventful on the Golden Court Mountain lately, and they were not allowed to leave the mountain freely, when Pan Zhong saw new blood, he was, naturally, curious.

Mingshi Yin merely nodded.

Pan Zhong walked up to Zhu Honggong and sized him up.

'He's chubby, and not very tall, either. He looks dumb. How adorable! He should be a pushover!'

"My name's Pan Zhong. What's your name, brother?" Pan Zhong said in a tone that indicated familiarity.

Zhu Honggong rolled his eyes. His temper was about to erupt...

Mingshi Yin promptly cleared his throat, and Zhu Honggong could only swallow his indignance.

Pan Zhong was not stupid as well. He was inwardly amazed that Mister Fourth was capable of suppressing this newcomer with a simple clearing of his throat. He nudged Zhu Honggong with his elbow and said, "Newcomer, Mister Fourth is actually a nice person, don't worry... From this day on, we're all brothers."

Zhu Honggong could not take this anymore and retorted scornfully, "Who's your brother?"

Pan Zhong said, "That's not the way to talk around here. You're lucky Mister Fourth here. If it were Mister Third or Miss Ninth, you'd wished you didn't say anything."

"..."

'Where did this lunatic come from? Look at him acting high and mighty as though he's my teacher.'

Mingshi Yin raised his hand and said, "Off to work."

Zhu Honggong replied obediently, "Oh." When he saw the Derived Moon Palace's female cultivators repairing the steps nearby, his mood turned for the better as he quickly ran over.

When Pan Zhong saw this, he said in a hushed tone, "Mister Fourth, this newcomer is something else. He seems like a hard worker."

"This isn't all he has to do... From this day on, he'll be spending his free time in the Cave of Reflection."

"The Cave of Reflection?" When Pan Zhong heard this, his heart raced. "It's not easy for the Evil Sky Pavilion to recruit a new member. Isn't the pavilion master worried about putting this newcomer off by doing this?"

"Don't worry... He won't be put off. Instead, he's grateful." Mingshi Yin left after he finished speaking.

Pan Zhong was baffled by Mingshi Yin's words. He decided not to cultivate his Six Yang Technique for the time being and observe Zhu Honggong instead.

Zhu Honggong worked hard and did everything he was supposed to. He took up all the laborious jobs as well. Even after half a day had passed, there was not a word of complaint that left Zhu Honggong's mouth. When the sun was setting, Zhu Honggong finally sat down to rest.

Pan Zhong walked over and gave him a thumbs-up before he said, "Brother, you're amazing."

"What do you mean?"

"A newcomer should have a newcomer's resolve... I really admire you."

"This is nothing..." Zhu Honggong said, feeling pleased with himself.

Pan Zhong sighed and said, "When I first climbed this mountain, I didn't have your resolve, and I suffered greatly for it."

"Suffered?"

"Yes..." Pan Zhong looked around and lowered his voice. "Brother, the Evil Sky Pavilion's disciples are all eccentric characters. You'll bring trouble upon yourself if you're not careful enough."

Zhu Honggong frowned. He gave Pan Zhong an appraising look before he said in confusion, "Eccentric characters?"

"You've seen it for yourself. For example, the Evil Sky Pavilion's fourth disciple, Mingshi Yin. He looks like a gentle person, but he's actually cold and heartless... Mister Third, Duanmu Sheng, is better. At least he doesn't put on a mask, but he adheres strictly to his own principles... Also, the Evil Sky Pavilion's youngest disciple, Little Yuan'er. Don't be fooled by her petite and cute appearance. That girl has aberrant mood swings and a short fuse. You should stay away from her," Pan Zhong said solemnly.

When Pan Zhong mentioned Little Yuan'er, Zhu Honggong was stunned. Indeed. Little Yuan'er did behave fiercely in the great hall earlier.

Zhu Honggong looked at Pan Zhong, who looked like a gossip monger, and asked curiously, "Have you heard of the Evil King?"

‘The Evil King?’ An expression of disapproval appeared on Pan Zhong’s face as he said, “The Evil Sky Pavilion doesn’t think much of him. The Evil King is but a title used to scare others. He’s only in the Divine Court realm, he might not even best me in a fight... Are you alright? You don’t look so good.”

Zhu Honggong was more than uncomfortable. Flames of fury were burning in the depths of his eyes.

A cough could be heard at this moment. Mingshi Yin had appeared in the vicinity without them noticing.

When he coughed, Zhu Honggong’s flames of fury were immediately extinguished.

When Pan Zhong saw this, he nodded inwardly. ‘A newcomer should have a newcomer’s resolve.’

Mingshi Yin said, “Pan Zhong.”

“Anything, Mister Fourth?”

“Seal his cultivation base. He’ll be sent to the Cave of Reflection to repent,” Mingshi Yin said.

When Pan Zhong heard this, he was stunned. He asked, baffled, “Mister Fourth, he’s only a newcomer. Aren’t you being too harsh on him?”

“Just do it.”

“Understood.” Pan Zhong had no choice but to walk up to Zhu Honggong. He whispered, “I’m sorry for this, brother. This might sting.”

Zhu Honggong did not seem to be bothered by it.

This gained Zhu Honggong Pan Zhong’s approval. ‘This newcomer’s resolve is somewhat extraordinary.’ Soon enough, he completely sealed Zhu Honggong’s cultivation base.

Zhu Honggong turned to face Pan Zhong. He patted his shoulder and said, “Wait for me...”

“There’s no need to be so polite. We’re on the same side,” Pan Zhong said.

Zhu Honggong stood up and walked toward the Cave of Reflection with Mingshi Yin.

At this moment, a figure dressed in black robes flew in the air and shouted from above, “Eighth Senior Brother!”

‘Eighth Senior Brother?’ Pan Zhong turned to look. He saw the Evil Sky Pavilion’s ninth disciple, Little Yuan’er. She stood with her hands on her waist as she looked down on them

Zhu Honggong stopped in his tracks. He turned and said with a smile, “Little Junior Sister!”

‘Little Junior Sister?’

Little Yuan’er said, “Master has ordered me to administer the beatings... Have you forgotten that, Fourth Senior Brother?”

“ ... ”

“ ... ”

If Pan Zhong did not understand the underlying meaning of this conversation, he would have lived in vain all this time. His eyelids twitched, and he felt his throat grow dry.

Mingshi Yin shook his head helplessly and said, "Old Eighth... Don't blame me for this. Don't worry, I'll try to be as merciful as I can."

Zhu Honggong wanted to cry when he looked at his Little Junior Sister.

Mingshi Yin held Zhu Honggong in place as a series of beatings were carried out.

Wails that resembled squeals resounded throughout the Evil Sky Pavilion that day.

Pan Zhong had to look away. His heart was shaking from this. 'This is what you meant by being merciful? It seems like you're giving it your all!'

...

"Ding! Punished the eighth disciple, Zhu Honggong. Reward: 100 merit points."

...

The beating ended.

Mingshi Yin was pleased. He waved his hand and brought Zhu Honggong to the Cave of Reflection.

"Brother Pan?" Zhou Jifeng walked over from afar with his sword on his back.

"Brother Pan, what's wrong? You look sick. Are you sick?" Zhou Jifeng walked up to Pan Zhong.

Pan Zhong's eyes were wide as he mumbled, "I... I think I'm in trouble..."

...

Meanwhile, in the hidden chamber of the Evil Sky Pavilion.

Lu Zhou went into his Heavenly Writing's comprehension state for a while. After he was done, he felt invigorated and opened his eyes.

At the same time, he heard the notification for the reward from punishing Zhu Honggong.

He looked at the merit points on the system dashboard gain...

'I'm still more than 1,000 points short from being able to afford the Seven Star Soul avatar.'

"Master... Hua Wudao requests an audience." Little Yuan'er's voice rang from outside.

"Alright." Lu Zhou rose to his feet slowly and exited the hidden chamber, making his way to the great hall.

Hua Wudao was standing respectfully in the great hall. After a short wait, he saw Lu Zhou walking slowly toward him.

"Greetings, Pavilion Master." Hua Wudao bowed and saluted.

"Have you thought things through?"

Hua Wudao nodded. "I have."

"Very well."

"I'm merely curious. With all its treasures, why does the Evil Sky Pavilion need the sable magnolia?" Hua Wudao was puzzled.

Chapter 173: Seven-leaf Hua Wudao, Nine Scripts Six Compatible Seal

"To open up a person's sea of Qi," Lu Zhou answered honestly.

Lu Zhou's honesty took Hua Wudao slightly aback.

Hua Wudao sighed and shook his head. "To tell you the truth, the Yun Sect only has one sable magnolia. We'll need at least two magnolias to open up a person's sea of Qi. Sable magnolias are extremely rare. There are not more than five in Great Yan. It won't be enough with just one."

No matter whose sea of Qi had to be opened, they would need at least two sable magnolias.

"That's why... I need two."

"..."

Lu Zhou's words were direct and frank.

"This is extremely important. I've sent word to the Yun Sect's elders. They will discuss this soon," Hua Wudao said.

Lu Zhou nodded and said, "Tell the Yun Sect that my patience has its limits. I will have the sable magnolias no matter what."

When Hua Wudao heard this, he bowed and said, "I'll mediate as best I can. I'll return to you with an answer within a month."

"Alright."

A month was an acceptable duration for Lu Zhou.

Lu Zhou's strength and cultivation base were relatively weak. If he did not have to earn merit points, he would have stayed on Golden Court Mountain and not leave. Recovering his cultivation base was his greatest priority.

If it had been Ji Tiandao, he would not have waited for a single day, let alone a month. Lu Zhou was different. He was not lacking in time.

...

A month passed by in a blink of an eye.

During the entire month, Lu Zhou spent his time disciplining his disciples and comprehending the Heavenly Writing. His accumulated merit points finally breached the 15,000 mark.

Within the great hall, Lu Zhou stared at his merit points on the system dashboard. He muttered hesitantly, "Should I buy an avatar or attempt lucky draws?"

If he attempted the lucky draws, there would be risks. If he purchased an avatar, he would spend all the merit points he had painstakingly saved. It made him feel insecure to not have any merit points at all.

After considering it for some time, Lu Zhou shook his head. He decided to make a decision after he earned more merit points. After all, he could buy the avatar at any time, and he was not experiencing any obstacles in his cultivation.

At this moment, Hua Wudao and Mingshi Yin walked into the great hall.

“Greetings, Pavilion Master.”

“Greetings, master.”

Lu Zhou’s gaze fell on Mingshi Yin and Hua Wudao. Hua Wudao’s cultivation base was in the Nascent Divinity Tribulation realm. Although he tried his best to conceal his aura, he could not fool Lu Zhou. When he recalled that Hua Wudao had gained the ninth script under Whizard’s influence the other day, he asked, “Did you have a breakthrough?”

Hua Wudao was shocked. His eyes widened as he looked at Lu Zhou who was seated up high incredulously. He had been tending to his injuries every day throughout the past month. After battling the Ten Shamans, he fought Sword Saint Luo Shisan for a long time as well. Under Whizard’s auspicious Qi, the knot he had been suppressing for 20 years had been undone while his injuries healed. However, no one should know that he had sprouted another leaf. If he concealed his cultivation base, he should appear to be a Three or Four-leaf cultivator. He did not expect Lu Zhou to see through him so easily. How could he not feel shocked?

When Mingshi Yin, Duanmu Sheng, and Little Yuan’er heard this, expressions of shock appeared on their faces as well.

“Congratulations, Elder Hua!”

“Congratulations, Elder Hua!”

Duanmu Sheng was slightly envious. Nevertheless, he respected an expert like Hua Wudao. He cupped his fists and said, “Congratulations, Elder Hua.”

Hua Wudao waved his hands and said, “Thank you all for your kind words... If it weren’t for Whizard’s magic, I wouldn’t have been able to undo this knot that had been in my heart for 20 years. At the end of the day, I’d still have to thank the pavilion master for this. Pavilion Master, thank you.” When he finished speaking, he kneeled respectfully.

Nobody stopped him.

In the Evil Sky Pavilion, Lu Zhou had every right to be thanked in this way by him. Perhaps, it was due to the length of time Lu Zhou had spent here after his transmigration, he had gotten used to being the Evil Sky Pavilion Master. For this reason, he was not flustered nor uncomfortable by Hua Wudao’s display of gratitude. He remained calm.

“Stand up and speak.” Lu Zhou waved his arm calmly.

Hua Wudao stood up.

“Seven-leaf?” Lu Zhou asked.

The Eye of Truth merely revealed his realm. He could only gauge the number of leaves from his aura. Since he was certain that Hua Wudao had sprouted another leaf, he wanted to confirm it right now.

Hua Wudao nodded. His eyes suddenly brightened. “Hundred Tribulations Insight!”

A Hundred Tribulations Insight avatar that was seven feet tall appeared behind Hua Wudao. A spinning, seven-leaf Golden Lotus blossomed under its feet.

“Six Compatible Seal!”

Hua Wudao lowered himself into a stance. The Yin Yang trigram appeared under his feet. With its black and white halves, the Taiji Eight Trigrams was dazzlingly bright.

Shortly after, Heaven, Earth, Life, Death, Water, Fire, Being, Non-being, Separation...

The nine scripts rose and revolved around Hua Wudao.

The Nine Scripts Six Compatible Seal!

Mingshi Yin and Little Yuan’er were awestruck by this.

Duanmu Sheng, however, seemed excited. He was clearly itching to leap forward and spar with Hua Wudao at this moment. His grip on the Overlord Spear tightened.

“Third Senior Brother, you’ve been left in the dust...” Mingshi Yin said with a smile.

“Although Elder Hua has gained his seventh leaf, one day, I’ll be sure to break this Six Compatible Seal,” Duanmu Sheng said confidently.

“Don’t forget, you have the Overlord Spear with you, but Elder Hua has none.”

“...” Talk about hitting where it hurts! Duanmu Sheng glared at Mingshi Yin. “Since the difference in strength between Elder Hua and I is so wide, I’ll have to trouble you to be my sparring partner for the following month, Fourth Junior Brother.”

“Uh...” Mingshi Yin merely wanted to tease Duanmu Sheng. Who knew his mouth would bring calamity upon him? He was truly speechless.

Hua Wudao shook his head and said, “Although Duanmu Sheng only has two leaves, he’s capable of going up against Four and even Five-leaf opponents. He’s far more talented than I am. Youth is wealth as they say. I’ve only managed to gain another leaf after 20 years... I think Duanmu Sheng will surpass me in a few years. There’s no need to doubt that.” Who knew if his words were just flattery? However, it was definitely pleasing to the ears.

Upon hearing this, Duanmu Sheng had a proud expression etched on his face.

“Elder Hua, I didn’t expect you to think so highly of Duanmu Sheng.” Lu Zhou was surprised. In his opinion, among his disciples, Duanmu Sheng was the least talented and had the worst insight. He had attributed Duanmu Sheng’s huge improvement to being freed from Ji Tiandao’s suppression.

It had to be mentioned that Mingshi Yin had entered the Nascent Divinity Tribulation realm a long time ago. Lu Zhou suspected the rascal, Mingshi Yin, was concealing his strength on purpose again. Perhaps, he had already sprouted two or three leaves.

Hua Wudao nodded. "I frequently spar with Duanmu Sheng. His fighting style is tough and enduring. His attacks are forceful and decisive. I've never met such an opponent before."

Duanmu Sheng was starting to feel embarrassed by all the compliments. He cupped his fists and said, "You're too kind, Elder Hua."

When she saw everyone's cultivation base making steady progress, Little Yuan'er pouted. She felt slightly annoyed. However, without a sea of Qi, she could not enter the Nascent Divinity Tribulation realm.

Against a Nascent Divinity Tribulation realm cultivator, the Divine Court realm and below were as insignificant as ants. Regardless of how powerful she was as a Divine Court realm cultivator, she could never defeat a Nascent Divinity Tribulation realm cultivator. To a certain extent, the Nascent Divinity Tribulation realm was the true beginning of one's cultivation path.

Lu Zhou stroked his beard and said, "Back to the main topic."

Hua Wudao waved his hand. His Hundred Tribulations Insight and Six Compatible Seal disappeared.

Fortunately, Hua Wudao did not request for a sparring session right there and then. Lu Zhou was not sure if he was supposed to use a Thunderblast Card under those circumstances. It would be a great loss if he accidentally killed this powerful subordinate of his.

Hua Wudao said, "The Yun Sect has written back yesterday. They are willing to exchange the sable magnolia for Ding Fanqiu."

Chapter 174: The Sword Devil's Principles

Lu Zhou nodded in satisfaction. At least the people of Yun Sect were tactful.

At this moment, Hua Wudao added, "However... They have an additional condition."

"What is it?"

"Ding Fanqiu isn't enough... They're demanding for a heaven-grade weapon," Hua Wudao's voice seemed to falter as he said this. It felt as though he was speaking on the Yun Sect's behalf.

This was the Evil Sky Pavilion after all. Nobody could guarantee that the pavilion master would not be angered when he heard this.

Lu Zhou's expression appeared calm. It was impossible for his wizened face to show as many expressions as the younger generation after all.

Mingshi Yin said, "Their greed knows no end. The Evil Sky Pavilion is graceful enough to strike a deal with them, and they dare to demand a heaven-grade weapon? Do you know how precious heaven-grade weapons are?"

Clearly, the Yun Sect felt that Ding Fanqiu's worth was too low. That was why they came up with a second demand. Although Ding Fanqiu was a Five-leaf elite, in their eyes, Ding Fanqiu was not worth a sable magnolia.

"I know how precious heaven-grade weapons are. In fact, I don't recommend trading with them," Hua Wudao said, seemingly out of character.

Mingshi Yin was also surprised by this. He said, "You're no longer worried about Ding Fanqiu?"

"Although I do feel guilty about this, I know my place," Hua Wudao replied.

"Master, this is related to Little Junior Sister's future. It would be appropriate for you to make the decision," Mingshi Yin said as he looked at Lu Zhou.

Little Yuan'er remained silent, but an expectant look could be seen in her eyes.

Lu Zhou's disciples knew he owned many weapons. There was a rumor that Ji Tiandao had a fortuitous encounter and managed to obtain many treasures and weapons. This was how he had raised his villainous disciples into becoming so terrifying.

The Yun Sect knew about the rumors, therefore, they wanted to use this chance to obtain a weapon. Moreover, they could also improve their relationship with the Evil Sky Pavilion at the same time. Even if the Evil Sky Pavilion were to refuse, at worst, the status quo would remain the same. It would not affect the Yun Sect much. It had to be said that the Yun Sect had planned this out well.

Lu Zhou said, "I have many weapons...But that doesn't mean I'll give them away easily."

Hua Wudao was not surprised. He cupped his fists and said, "I'll inform the Yun Sect about this as soon as possible."

"Since the Yun Sect is unwilling to surrender the sable magnolia... I'll personally go there and retrieve it myself," Lu Zhou said.

"..." Hua Wudao stiffened when he heard Lu Zhou's words.

Based on the situation, if Lu Zhou intended to go to the Yun Sect to retrieve the sable magnolia from the Yun Sect, there was no doubt that Hua Wudao would be the one to lead them there. How could he do something like this? He would die of shame!

"You're dismissed." Lu Zhou said with finality.

Hua Wudao cupped his fists and remained silent.

However, Mingshi Yin chimed in, "Master, this is a great idea... To be honest, I haven't gone robbing in a long time. If this goes on, my ranking on the blacklist will surely drop!"

"Impudent!" Lu Zhou raised his voice.

Mingshi Yin trembled in fright. He fell to his knees immediately and said, "I've misspoken!" His mouth had landed him in trouble again.

Little Yuan'er said, "Master, I no longer want the sable magnolia. I don't believe that I must rely on it to open up my sea of Qi."

Lu Zhou turned to look at Xiao Yuan'er and said, "Are you sure?"

"Of course," Little Yuan'er said with a smile, "After all, I have you to protect me, master."

"Little girl..." Lu Zhou's expression was stern as he said, "You have exceptional talents. It's a shame if you can't enter the Nascent Divinity Tribulation realm... The sable magnolia is a Heaven and Earth Treasure that can help you open your sea of Qi. You're growing up, and I can't protect you forever." Naturally, he could not say he was weak and he would need her protection, could he?

Little Yuan'er was moved upon hearing these words. She said with a pout, "You won't die so soon, master..."

"..."

Little Yuan'er clearly meant well, but somehow, her words sounded wrong.

...

Meanwhile, on the sword altar in Yun Sect.

The Yun Sect had eight holy altars of cultivation. The sword altar was the least populated. This was because the sword altar belonged to a single person; the Sword Saint, Luo Shisan.

The Yun Sect initially had seven holy altars. The general workers, outer disciples, inner disciples, and the backbone of the sect were arranged to go to the altars.

However, the sword altar was the only place that was specially built for Luo Shisan.

Luo Shisan was dedicated to attaining great heights with his sword techniques. He also accepted a handful of disciples. Apart from the disciples who looked after the sword altar and the disciples from the other altars who came here as apprentices, there was nobody else.

At this moment, black smoke rose from a huge incense cauldron in the center of the sword altar.

"It's been almost a month since master has gone into cultivation in seclusion. His injuries should be healed by now."

"Hua Wudao didn't wound the master. Master's merely trying to recover his cultivation base."

"He could've recovered his cultivation base in seven days. Why would he need to stay in seclusion for so long? I have many things about sword techniques that I'd like to ask him."

"The master has said that someone will come and spar with him. He wants to be in peak condition when that time comes."

"Who is it? The master seems quite wary."

"If the opponent is really that powerful, all we have to do is move back to the main altar."

"The master said that we can't always run away when the going gets tough."

The disciples were discussing this intently. They did not notice a green-clad man walking in the air toward them.

The green-robed swordsman easily passed through the layers of barriers and wards. He finally came to a halt and hovered above the sword altar.

“Who’s that?” A disciple who saw the green-robed swordsman was frightened out of his wits.

The other disciples drew their swords at the swordsman as though he was a powerful enemy.

Their opponent was far stronger than they could ever imagine since he was capable of breezing through the barriers and wards and appearing without anyone noticing.

The green-robed swordsman spoke gently, “There’s no need to be flustered, everyone. I have an appointment with the Sword Saint. Can you announce my arrival to him?”

The disciples sighed with relief. Fortunately, this green-robed swordsman was not an enemy.

Sword Saint Luo Shisan had been famous for a long time. It was not surprising his friend was such an elite.

“Oh, you’re a friend of our master! Please wait for a moment, senior. I’ll inform my master now.”

“Thank you.”

The disciple ran to the place where Luo Shisan was cultivating in seclusion. A surge of powerful Primal Qi blasted the door away! Several energy blades shot out from within.

Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!

The energy blades flew to the sword altar and rose into the air toward the horizons.

“Uh...” The disciples were flustered.

The energy blades were targeted at the green-robed swordsman.

Bam! Bam! Bam!

The green-robed swordsman seemed to be taking this easily. A wall of energy appeared before him, keeping the energy blades at bay. In just a blink of an eye, the energy blades vanished into thin air.

Sword Saint Luo Shisan stepped out of the room and flew into the air with his hands on his back.

“Master!”

“Master!”

The disciples greeted him.

Luo Shisan ignored them. He rose all the way up to a spot a few dozens of meters away from the green-robed swordsman before he came to a halt. “You’ve come.”

As the green-robed swordsman looked at Luo Shishan, who was slightly old but unmistakably an elite, a faint satisfied smile could be seen on his face. "... The current you are acceptable. This will be interesting."

"I thought that you'd be too afraid to come... Although there aren't many Yun Sect cultivators in the sword altar, this isn't a place any scoundrel can easily trespass upon. Aren't you worried that I might have laid a trap for you?"

"I'll just have to kill you another time, is all."

Luo Shisan nodded and said, "I've been in the cultivation world for a long time. I don't have to stoop so low. I'm different from the likes of you who's from the Fiend Path after all. If there's a fight, I would fight fairly."

"That's good."

Luo Shishan did not dare to let his guard down against this seemingly casual green-robed swordsman. He cupped his fists respectfully and declared with a loud voice, "The Yun Sect's sword altar's First Seat, Luo Shisan, is here to fight as promised!"

"Yu Shangrong." The green-robed swordsman smiled and cupped his fists perfunctorily.

Chapter 175: Return, Enter Three Souls

When he spoke his name, his voice was soft and light. However, it resounded in the sword altar.

The disciples on the sword altar were under the impression that their master and the green-robed swordsman were exchanging greetings. However, when they heard the green-robed swordman's name, it was as though they had been struck by a bolt of lightning as they stood rooted to their spots.

Yu Shangrong was a name that was capable of taking away one's courage.

Yu Shangrong, the Evil Sky Pavilion's second disciple. A skilled swordsman who loved to challenge various elites. He was also a renowned villain who would kill another person over the slightest disagreement. He was given the moniker Sword Devil.

The disciples did not expect this polite and humble swordsman to be the infamous second disciple of the Evil Sky Pavilion, Yu Shangrong.

The young juniors used to hear stories about the villains. They were under the impression that all the villains looked menacing and evil. They thought they would be able to recognize the villains if they ever met one. This green-robed swordsman... Who would have known he was the Sword Devil?

One of the disciples finally reacted and said in a hushed tone, "Send word to the main altar. Tell the elder to come and kill the Sword Devil!"

However, he had barely finished speaking when Luo Shishan waved his arm and sent a palm seal over.

Smack!

It hit the disciple mercilessly on the cheek. He did a flip in the air before he fell limply to the ground. His face was red and swollen.

Silence descended on the sword altar.

Luo Shisan said indifferently, "I said I wanted a fair fight."

Yu Shangrong merely maintained the faint smile on his face. Nary a ripple could be seen in his eyes. He had never taken notice of small fries.

"Whenever you're ready." Luo Shisan gestured with his right hand with his palm facing upward.

There was a flash from the incense cauldron in the center of the sword altar. A sword gleamed and flew into Luo Shisan's hand. It was a peak earth-grade weapon.

Yu Shangrong remained indifferent. The sword was not worthy of his attention after all.

Luo Shisan could sense Yu Shagnrong's disregard, and he was, naturally, offended. He waved his arms.

The sword suddenly split into ten! The ten swords were wrapped in dense energies as they resonated in the air.

The disciples on the sword altar seemed excited when they saw this. All of them felt privileged to be able to witness a fight between their master and the Sword Devil.

This was different from Thirteen Swords. The energy blades were merely formed by condensed Primal Qi. These ten swords, however, had swords serving as conduits. They were much more powerful than the Thirteen Swords. The importance of a weapon was once again made clear.

Everyone was staring at the ten swords.

Sword Saint Luo Shisan scoffed. The ten swords followed his command as they shot toward Yu Shangrong's face in random movements.

The surge of energy formed a strong wind, lifting Yu Shangrong's hair.

At this moment, Yu Shangrong still wore a gentle smile on his face. He looked at Luo Shisan with his arms crossed.

The ten swords buzzed and were instantly upon him.

Bzzt!

A powerful surge of Primal Qi formed a wall that blocked the ten swords.

Yu Shangrong was still hovering in his original spot with his arms crossed.

The long red sword on his back was waiting for his instructions silently. However, Yu Shangrong did not seem to have the intention to attack.

Luo Shisan said in a deep voice, "You're too careless!"

The ten swords split again. There were now 20 swords!

Luo Shisan could control 13 energy blades at best, but with a weapon, he could increase the number of blades he could control.

The 20 swords stabbed against the wall with an earth-shattering force.

Bam! Bam! Bam!

Yu Shangrong was still unmoved. He stood there calmly, as steady as a mountain.

The energy that wrapped around the ten swords merged and formed a turbulent flow above the sword altar.

Unfortunately, regardless of how Luo Shishan attacked, Yu Shangrong dealt with Luo Shishan's attacks calmly and easily.

The energy blades increased in number around Luo Shisan. They were now densely packed together and looked like a wave of swords.

In a battle of swords, the factor that determined the outcome of the battle usually depended on one's ability to control energy blades. In other words, it was the ability to condense Primal Qi into energy.

For opponents with similar strength, the amount of their Primal Qi was the manifestation of the profoundness of their cultivation base in a battle of attrition.

Naturally, the main objective was extremely simple. Regardless of how flashy an attack might seem; the goal was to defeat and kill the opponent.

Finally, Yu Shangrong's wall of energy was being pushed back by Luo Shishan's vigorous and relentless attacks.

Even so, Yu Shangrong was still standing with his arms crossed and did not retaliate.

To an expert who bore the title of Sword Saint, this was a humiliation.

Luo Shisan rose higher and joined his palms together. He recalled his ten swords, and they merged into one. With his palms joined and raised, the sword hovered above him.

At the same time, the Primal Qi in the surroundings were quickly pulled in and wrapped around the sword.

"It's master's ultimate skill!" The eyes of the disciples on the sword altar widened.

This was the sword skill the Sword Saint was famous for; the Sword Heart Gehenna.

As the name suggested, it was a skill that formed a huge enclosure where energy converged with the weapon at the center. The gathered energy would ricochet about erratically and all the enemies within the space would be attacked by the energy blades. It was a powerful multiple-target skill. However, its true destructive power would only be shown when the energy blades converged like reversed spikes into a massive energy blade. This skill seemed like it could split the heavens and the earth.

"Hundred Tribulations Insight!"

Bzzt.

An avatar materialized. The resonance of Primal Qi resounded across the sword altar.

Luo Shisan's disciples were greatly moved by this scene. They were beside themselves with excitement.

The Seven-leaf Golden Lotus spun rapidly. How would Yu Shangrong deal with this now that Luo Shisan had the support of his intimidating avatar?

Everyone's attention shifted toward Yu Shangrong.

Yu Shangrong raised his head slightly. He looked at the massive energy blade formed by the Sword Heart Gehenna.

Luo Shisan spoke in a deep voice, "I hope you'll be a worthy opponent." He brought his hands down in a slashing movement.

The Sword Heart Gehenna slashed toward Yu Shangrong as well. It moved so quickly that it seemed to be upon its target in just a blink of an eye!

Yu Shangrong's seemed to vanish suddenly, leaving afterimages behind.

It seemed like Luo Shisan's ultimate skill, the Sword Heart Gehenna, had missed!

"Hm?" Luo Shisan frowned slightly. "A diversionary tactic?" He did not expect Yu Shangrong had cultivated his diversionary tactic to this extent while cultivating his sword skills as well.

When the gale stirred up by Sword Heart Gehenna died down, visibility was restored.

Yu Shangrong was still hovering in his original spot with his arms crossed and a smile on his face. He stared at Luo Shisan.

"What happened?" The disciples were shaken.

"Impossible!"

"How did he do that?"

Luo Shisan was curious as well. However, he was much calmer than his disciples. He looked at Yu Shangrong and asked, "Are you planning on staying like that forever?"

Yu Shangrong had a gentle and faint smile on his face as he stood facing the wind. "If I make a move, you won't stand a chance."

"How arrogant!"

"You misunderstand me."

"Hm?"

"If you understand me, you'd know I was being humble..."

"..." Enough was enough. Luo Shisan moved swiftly, he left afterimages everywhere! With the enhancement from his Hundred Tribulations Insight avatar, his movements were as quick as lightning. This move greatly resembled the Dao Invisibility Technique.

At the same time, energy blades were taking form around the afterimages before they charged toward Yu Shangrong.

Yu Shangrong nodded with a faint smile on his face. He seemed pleased by this.

The instant the energy wall before Yu Shangrong shattered, he raised his right arm and brandished his sword swiftly!

Left, middle, right.

Three figures flickered in the air.

It was as if there were overlapping images.

Return. Enter Three Souls.

His scarlet Longevity Sword suddenly burst forth with a flash of blinding light that enveloped his surroundings.

The space rippled like a wave.

Luo Shisan merely heard a buzzing noise in his ears. His eyes could not catch up with the movements at all.

Chapter 176: Exception

Ever since Yu Shangrong had left the Evil Sky Pavilion, he had challenged countless elites from various backgrounds with his sword and had never lost a single match.

Whether it was Chen Wenjie, one of the three Sword Freaks, or a Six and Seven-leaf elite of the Noble Path, all his opponents died under his sword. For this reason, he rose to fifth place on the blacklist. If he was not a lone wolf and preferred to be free, he would have risen higher on the blacklist.

Nobody knew how profound Yu Shangrong's cultivation base was. Rumor had it that his cultivation base was on par with the Evil Sky Pavilion's first disciple, Yu Zhenghai.

The two of them had joined the Evil Sky Pavilion early on and became Ji Tiandao's prized students. They inherited Ji Tiandao's mantle and were rumored to have surpassed their master.

Yu Shangrong shot to fame after the battle at Great Yan's provisional capital in Upper Prime City.

This skill, Return, Enter Three Souls was the sword skill he was famous for.

The abstract and the real overlapped as he moved swiftly.

Luo Shisan's vision began to blur. He felt as though he was in a dream. Alas, the environment created by Luo Shisan's Sword Heart Gehenna had created the best condition for his opponent to unleash his skill.

If an elite did not make a move, everything would be fine. However, once an elite made a move, the outcome would be apparent.

Luo Shisan's eyes widened. He instinctively recalled his Hundred Tribulations Insight avatar and retreated as far as he could.

However, three figures suddenly approached him from the left, right, and center.

The scarlet sword gleamed as it cut through the massive energy blade and continued on its momentum...

The three figures joined as one.

When the massive energy blade was sliced open by the scarlet sword...

Bam!

The peak earth-grade weapon was broken into two by the Longevity Sword!

Yu Shangrong's right arm was straight as he thrust the sword forward in just a flash. At the same time, the fragments of the energy blade froze in the air like glass before shattering.

The sounds of the battle stopped abruptly.

The duration of the battle was barely enough for a pot of tea to cool down. The outcome of the battle was clear.

The disciples on the sword altar held their breaths. Time seemed to stand still at this moment. The disciples seemed to be having difficulty keeping up with the pace of the battle. They shifted their gazes toward their master, Sword Saint Luo Shisan.

Luo Shisan's eyes widened as he stared at the scarlet sword before him. The tip of the sword was on his forehead. However, it did not pierce him.

Such was Yu Shangrong's control over the sword. It was so precise. With just the slightest force, he could take Sword Saint Luo Shisan's life away.

As for why Yu Shangrong did not do that, no one knew why.

Luo Shisan looked at the smiling Yu Shangrong in fear. 'The difference between our strength is too great...' He did not understand this, and he could not understand. They were in completely different leagues.

The great Sword Saint Luo Shisan could not even withstand a single blow from the Sword Devil... If the world were to know about this, how would they rank his strength?

A saint was addressed as such because he or she had abilities that surpassed that of ordinary people.

Under Great Yan's skies, those who bore the title of a saint were, without exception, grandmasters in their own right...

Sword Saint was the highest praise Luo Shisan could receive with his sword skills.

Even his eldest brother, Luo Changqing, one of the three Sword Freaks, was not given this honor.

And yet, the Sword Saint was defeated by the Sword Devil with just a single move. This was a huge mental blow to Luo Shisan. How was he supposed to live with this?

After a long silence, Luo Shisan finally asked, "Why aren't you killing me?"

Everybody knew about Sword Devil's principles. He would kill those he had said he would kill. It did not matter where his target was, he would pursue them to the end of the earth. However, this time he did not stain his sword with blood.

Yu Shangrong loosened his grip. The Longevity Sword rose higher into the air and returned to its scabbard.

"If I had followed through, you would've been another soul who lost its life under my blade, but..." Yu Shangrong's tone was gentle and soft as he said. "I'll make an exception and spare your life."

'Exception?' Luo Shisan did not understand what Yu Shangrong meant.

The disciples on the altar were dumbstruck. The master whom they had respected the most was defeated with a single move. How could they not feel shocked? They sat limply on the ground as their knees gave way.

Due to the distance, all they could see was Yu Shangrong hovering before their master with his arms crossed as though they were two friends having a conversation. They could not hear what was being said.

Luo Shisan asked in confusion, "What then?"

"You have two choices," Yu Shangrong said. "One, exchange your life for a sable magnolia. Two, you have the right to reject the first option, and I'll kill you in three days. I always respect my opponents' choices."

"..."

Yu Shangrong's words sounded reasonable, but Luo Shisan could not help but feel something was wrong with it. He frowned slightly. "Sable magnolias are precious items. Even those with their dantian's sea of Qi destroyed can restore it with this item. What need does the great Sword Devil have for it?"

Yu Shangrong's cultivation base and strength had been proven.

Luo Shisan felt that Yu Shangrong merely wanted the sable magnolia as a precautionary measure so that he could use it to save his own life if he was injured while fighting against a powerful opponent.

Yu Shangrong smiled and said, "You've misunderstood."

"Oh?"

"I have a Little Junior Sister. Her name's Ci Yuan'er. She's pure, innocent, and gentle toward others. The sable magnolia is for her." Yu Shangrong turned to look in the direction of the Evil Sky Pavilion.

The sun's rays penetrated the rising mist and the sea of clouds. They were refracted into a rainbow-colored light that shone on Yu Shangrong's slender and straight back.

'Little Junior Sister? Ci Yuan'er? Gentle?'

"There's something that I don't understand," Luo Shisan said.

"Please say it." Yu Shangrong's tone remained gentle.

“Since you’ve left the Evil Sky Pavilion, you’re no longer one of its disciples. Why’re you still helping her?”

“Help?” Yu Shangrong shook his head slightly and said with a faint smile, “Luo Shisan, what does it have to do with you whether I help her or not?”

Luo Shisan was stunned. He could not come up with a response. ‘True. Who am I to dictate what he should or shouldn’t do?’ Moreover, he had lost to him.

“We don’t know each other, and yet, from this battle, I can tell you’re not a person who commits heinous crimes for no reason. Why do you choose to be a great villain who’s scorned by everyone?” Luo Shisan was puzzled.

Yu Shangrong’s expression remained calm as he asked, “Are you trying to convert me?”

“Uh...” Luo Shisan felt awkward.

“I remember the last person who said such words to me was Kong Ming,” Yu Shangrong said.

‘Kong Ming? The Temple of Great Emptiness’s Kong Ming!’ Luo Shisan was shocked. It was said that the Temple of Great Emptiness’s Kong Ming had died under the hands of the Evil Sky Pavilion’s fifth disciple, Zhao Yue. He did not expect that the true perpetrator was the Sword Devil, Yu Shangrong.

However, that made sense. Kong Ming was an elite of the Temple of Great Emptiness. Zhao Yue would never be able to kill Kong Ming with her strength and cultivation base.

However, those were no longer important... No matter who the killer was, the world had put the blame on the Evil Sky Pavilion.

Yu Shangrong continued, “Do not follow in Kong Ming’s footsteps...”

Luo Shisan wanted to say something but thought better of it. Could he convert this man? If the Temple of Great Emptiness’s Kong Ming had tried to convert him and failed, he was certain that his words would not have any effect on Yu Shangrong.

Luo Shisan looked at the man before himself. He found it hard to imagine that he was the Sword Devil.

Yu Shangrong walked away on air with his arms crossed at a pace that was neither fast nor slow. “I’ve always stood by my principles and have never made an exception. Since I’m making one now, you should cherish it.”

Chapter 177: Submit or Be Clobbered

“Farewell.” Yu Shangrong turned to glance at the disciples on the sword altar and nodded at them perfunctorily with a faint smile on his face. His body flashed away, and in just a blink of an eye, he was already 100 feet away. In the next second, he passed through the altar’s barriers and vanished.

Luo Shisan felt the pressure lift from his shoulders. He quickly descended. As soon as he descended, he staggered slightly

“Master!” Two of Luo Shisan’s disciples ran up to him to support him.

Luo Shisan calmed himself down before saying, "Notify the elders that I've changed my mind... Ding Fanqiu is a core disciple of the Yun Sect. The sable magnolia is but an object. A man's life is worth much more. Agree to the exchange."

"Understood."

...

In a pavilion among the mountains that was several miles away from the sword altar.

Si Wuya looked in the direction of the sword altar and said with a smile, "Second Senior Brother, you made an exception for Little Junior Sister. What a surprise!"

Yu Shangrong leaned on one of the pavilion's posts and said, "Little Junior Sister has extraordinary talents. It'd be a waste if she couldn't open her sea of Qi... Rules are made by humans, and the decision of men trumps the heavens'."

"I heard that the Yun Sect has refused to trade its sable magnolia with the Evil Sky Pavilion... Now that you've added oil to the fire, Second Senior Brother, there will be two kinds of outcomes..." Si Wuya said confidently, "One, the Yun Sect will be driven into a corner and start a fight with the Evil Sky Pavilion. Two, the Yun Sect will submit and agree to the exchange. Second Senior Brother, aren't you worried the Yun Sect will choose the first option?"

"Old Seventh, I know that you're intelligent... You should understand the most basic reason in this world," Yu Shangrong said with a smile.

"Do enlighten me, Second Senior Brother."

"If they're unwilling to submit... Just clobber them." Yu Shangrong shook his head after he said this. "However, I don't really like to resort to violence."

When Si Wuya heard this, he cupped his fists and said, "One statement from you is better than ten years' worth of studies, Second Senior Brother."

"Keep an eye on the Yun Sect for me..." Yu Shangrong said.

"Don't worry, Second Senior Brother."

"I'll have to trouble you then."

"You're being too polite, Senior Brother." Si Wuya bowed and cupped his fists. When he looked up, Yu Shangrong's words were still ringing in his ears, but Yu Shangrong's figure had vanished. He said with a smile, "I hope that Little Junior Sister is truly as innocent and pure as my senior brothers think. Otherwise, their efforts would be wasted."

...

The next day, in the Evil Sky Pavilion's great hall.

The disciples stood in a line on each side.

Lu Zhou was still thinking of a way to negotiate with the Yun Sect and obtain the sable magnolia.

The Yun Sect's eight altars were full of experts.

The current Evil Sky Pavilion was not what it once was. If it had its first and second disciples, it would be unstoppable no matter where they went in Great Yan.

Currently, Hua Wudao was its strongest member. Fan Xiuwen was still recuperating. Ye Tianxin was reforming her dantian's sea of Qi, and she did not even count as an Evil Sky Pavilion's disciple. Zhao Yue had only recovered half of her cultivation base, and she had yet to enter the Nascent Divinity Tribulation realm. Therefore, it would not be wise to deal with the Yun Sect using force.

'How about stealing?' The unrealistic idea surfaced in Lu Zhou's mind.

At this moment, a voice rang from outside.

"Elder Hua is here."

Outside the great hall, Hua Wudao seemed to be filled with vigor. There even seemed to be a spring in his step when he walked in. He cupped his fists at Lu Zhou. "Pavilion Master, the Yun Sect has written back... They've agreed to trade their sable magnolia for Ding Fanqiu. Their special envoy is heading here as we speak," he said.

Lu Zhou's heart fluttered slightly. However, his wizened face looked calm as he said, "They've changed their mind?"

"Well..." Hua Wudao did not know why the Yun Sect suddenly changed its mind. He was once from the Yun Sect so he knew how difficult it was for the seven altars to reach a consensus. It was reasonable for the Yun Sect to refuse the Evil Sky Pavilion's demand for a sable magnolia. Their sudden change was truly a surprise.

However, that was not important. Since they agreed to make the exchange, it was for the best.

"Pavilion Master, since the Yun Sect has agreed to the terms, why don't we seize this opportunity to improve our relationships... Although the Evil Sky Pavilion is powerful, it has too many enemies. When you... In the future, Pavilion Master..." Hua Wudao paused. He wanted to mention the ten-years limit, but he felt that it would be inappropriate. He continued, "Having another ally is always better than another foe."

Lu Zhou glanced at him. "Elder Hua, it's good that you have such sentiments... However, the Evil Sky Pavilion has no need for such an ally," he said indifferently.

"In the future..."

"We'll leave tomorrow's troubles for tomorrow," Lu Zhou sounded confident as he said, "I have time on my hands."

Hua Wudao no longer dared to say anything else. Perhaps, he was still new to the Evil Sky Pavilion. His style was not compatible with the Evil Sky Pavilion's style yet. However, there was no rushing these things. He decided to take it slowly. At the very least, he could accept the way things were done in the Evil Sky Pavilion up until now.

“Pavilion Master, even if the Yun Sect is willing to trade their sable magnolia... One magnolia is still not enough to open up a person’s sea of Qi,” Hua Wudao pointed out.

Lu Zhou nodded and said, “Do you know how many sable magnolias there are?”

Hua Wudao said, “From what I know, there are five. There’s one in the Yun Sect, the second one is in the hands of the Duanlin branch southwest of Great Yan, the third one is in Rongbei, the fourth one is in the Heaven Choice Temple, and the fifth one... Well, I don’t know where it is.”

Hua Wudao’s words were in line with Lu Zhou’s knowledge.

Lu Zhou stroked his beard and said, “In your opinion, from whom should I obtain the second magnolia from?”

“The Duanlin branch is far away in the southwest... Rongbei is beyond Great Yan, so... only the Heaven Choice Temple is left,” Hua Wudao said, “The Heaven Choice Temple is on good terms with the Temple of Great Emptiness. They’re both Buddhist temples... The Buddhist temples never involved themselves in the conflicts between the Noble and Fiend Paths. If they’re open to negotiations, we can try to negotiate with them.”

Hua Wudao’s words seemed reasonable enough.

At this moment, Mingshi Yin, who had remained silent at the side for a long time, said, “Master, I have a plan.”

“What is it?”

“Old Eighth has always been on good terms with the Heaven Choice Temple... We can send him to negotiate with them,” Mingshi Yi said.

“Good terms?”

“After Old Eighth has left the Evil Sky Pavilion, he has made great effort to get onto the Heaven Choice Temple’s good books in order to obtain a method to save his own life. The zen tunic he’s wearing is from the Heaven Choice Temple,” Mingshi Yin said.

“Bring him here,” Lu Zhou said.

“Yes, master.” Mingshi Yin eagerly ran to fetch Zhu Honggong.

In no time at all, Mingshi Yin was leading a puzzled Zhu Honggong into the great hall.

Zhu Honggong had lost some weight over the past month. When he returned to the great hall, he still felt nervous. He was behaving even worse than a newcomer. His eyes kept darting around everywhere. He fell to his knees and said reverently, “Greetings, master! May you live to see a thousand autumns and ten thousand generations. May you live forever and ever!”

Mingshi Yin frowned. ‘This pig is really stealing my spotlight!’

Lu Zhou said, “Old Eighth, since you were tricked into committing your sins, I’m now giving you a chance to redeem yourself.”

When Zhu Honggong heard this, he was overjoyed. He said, "I'm willing to redeem myself. I won't even frown if I have to climb a mountain of blades, plunge into a sea of fire, or walk with knives on my sides!"

"Very good," Lu Zhou said, "I hereby choose you to bring back the sable magnolia from the Heaven Choice Temple.

Zhu Honggong was puzzled. 'Heaven Choice Temple?' He was momentarily stunned. A bitter expression appeared on his face, but he did not dare to oppose his master.

When Lu Zhou saw the reluctance on Zhu Honggong's face, he asked, "What? You're unwilling?"

"No, no, no... I'm willing! I'll surely return with the sable magnolia!" Zhu Honggong pulled a long face and spoke with zero sincerity.

Mingshi Yin said with a smile, "Hurry up then. It shouldn't be a problem for you, judging by your relationship with them. Believe me, we won't put you in harm's way. Remember, you're only there to negotiate. Send word to us if anything happens..."

"I'll head out right away." Zhu Honggong nodded and bowed. He walked backward out of the great hall.

Lu Zhou looked at him leaving until he was out of sight before saying, "When will the Yun Sect's special envoy arrive?"

"In six hours."

Chapter 178: An Exorbitant Price

Zhu Honggong descended the mountain as soon as he received his order. Although he was reluctant to visit the Heaven Choice Temple, he did not dare to defy his master's orders. He had no choice but to agree to it. Moreover, this was a good chance for him to redeem himself. As he walked, he began to think of how he would negotiate with the Heaven Choice Temple.

While Zhu Honggong was lost in thoughts, Pan Zhong suddenly appeared out of nowhere with an ingratiating smile on his face. "Mi-mister Eighth?"

"Who is it?"

"It's me, Pan Zhong." Pan Zhong appeared before Zhu Honggong.

When he saw Pan Zhong, Zhu Honggong said irritably, "Get lost. I'm not done with you for what happened the other day."

"Please... Mister Eighth. I'm sure you won't hold this against me since you're magnanimous beyond measure. From a single glance, I can tell that you're different from the others, Mister Eighth. There's no way that you'd hold a grudge just because of a few words..." Pan Zhong said.

"Save your flattery! I won't fall for it!" Zhu Honggong said.

"Mister Eighth, you've wrongly accused me. If speaking the truth is considered as flattery, am I supposed to lie to you whenever I see you?" Pan Zhong said.

"That's more like it. Say it, what's on your mind?"

Pan Zhong said with a smile, "Mister Fourth has said that he would put in a good word or two for you to the pavilion master. All you have to do is to head to the Heaven Choice Temple. Mister Fourth will hold the fort in the Evil Sky Pavilion."

Zhu Honggong sighed and said, "Fourth Senior Brother is the only one who treats me well..."

"Of course."

"Get out of my way. Don't you think I'll forgive you just because you said a few nice words to me."

"Of course..."

Zhu Honggong walked onto higher ground and glanced at Pan Zhong. "When I was cultivating in the Evil Sky Pavilion, there was no place for people like you," he said haughtily. With a tap of his feet, he propelled himself forward.

Swoosh!

Upon seeing this, one might think Zhu Honggong was about to unleash an impressive movement skill. However, he took a nosedive and fell.

Crash!

Zhu Honggong fell down the slopes, his squeals resounded throughout the mountain.

Pan Zhong covered his face with his hand. 'Drat. I've forgotten what I was supposed to do. I'm supposed to unseal Mister Eighth's cultivation base.'

...

Six hours later.

The great hall in the Evil Sky Pavilion.

"Pavilion Master, the Yun Sect's special envoy, Li Yundao, requests an audience."

"Let him in."

Li Yundao slowly made his way into the great hall while being escorted by the Derived Moon Palace's female cultivators.

It was inevitable for those who visited the Evil Sky Pavilion to appear nervous and curious at the same time. Li Yundao was also worried the villains might do something to him. He appeared ill-at-ease. He walked into the great hall with a flustered expression and stiff movements.

Li Yundao did not dare to meet Lu Zhou's eyes. Instead, he bowed and said, "Li Yundao of the Yun Sect greets Old Senior Ji."

"You may take a seat." Lu Zhou waved his arm.

Li Yundao bowed again. "Thank you for your kindness, Old Senior Ji." He sat down with stiff movements before he finally looked at the greatest villain under the heavens. He was shocked when he saw Lu Zhou's appearance, his heart skipped a beat. Everyone had been saying Ji Tiandao had less than ten

years to live, but he seemed hale and hearty. He even had some dark hair. There was no sign at all that his time was almost up.

When Li Yundao shifted his attention to Hua Wudao, an expression of disappointment could be seen on his face as he looked at Hua Wudao from the corners of his eyes. A great elder of the Yun Sect had truly joined the Fiend Path. How sad and lamentable!

“Old Senior Ji, as instructed by the Sect Master of Yun Sect, I’m here to offer up the sable magnolia.” He produced a brown brocade box in his hand. He resembled a eunuch from the palace at this moment. However, before he could even get close, Mingshi Yin snatched the brocade box away from him and presented it to Lu Zhou respectfully.

Lu Zhou waved his arm gently and the brocade box opened...

“Ding! Obtained item: Sable magnolia x1. A Heaven and Earth Treasure. Can be used for cultivation, healing, and opening a sea of Qi.”

Lu Zhou was slightly disappointed that there was no merit points reward. He nodded in satisfaction and said frankly, “I like people who keep their words... Bring Ding Fanqiu here.”

“Understood.”

Soon enough, Zhou Jifeng brought Ding Fanqiu into the hall.

After his cultivation base was sealed, Ding Fanqiu had been imprisoned. He never saw daylight nor the blue skies. Hence, he now appeared like a madman with his disheveled hair and emaciated body.

Li Yundao glanced at him. Then, he cupped his fists and said, “Thank you.”

“Send our guest off.”

“...” Li Yundao was slightly taken aback. He had traveled far, and yet, he was being sent away before his seat even turned warm? He hastily stood up and said, “Old Senior Ji, I have something to say.”

“What is it?” Lu Zhou asked, puzzled.

“Senior Sword Devil has defeated the sword altar’s First Seat, Senior Luo, a few days ago... Senior Luo has a message he wants me to convey to you... If there’s a chance, he’d like to spar with Senior Sword Devil again.” Li Yundao bowed.

“Yu Shangrong went to the sword altar?”

“Did you not know about this, Old Senior Ji?” Li Yundao was shocked.

Lu Zhou pondered the implications of these words. ‘No wonder the Yun Sect suddenly changed their mind. Yu Shangrong was pressuring them!’

When he remembered the things that Yu Shangrong did in the past, Lu Zhou muttered, “That rascal.”

Li Yundao hastily said, “Senior Sword Devil’s sword skills are amazing. His Return Enter Three Souls earned endless praises from Senior Sword Saint...”

Mingshi Yin cursed, “Get lost.”

“Uh...”

‘How dare you praise a traitor before my master? Are you out of your f*cking mind?’

Mingshi Yin shouted again, “Off with you! Take Ding Fanqiu and scram!”

“I will, I will...” Li Yundao took Ding Fanqiu by the arm and fled from the great hall. At the same time, he cursed the sword altar under his breath. Politeness meant nothing to the villains. They could never be offended.

Li Yundao left with Ding Fanqiu.

Lu Zhou shifted his gaze to the sable magnolia inside the box and said, “To think that this tiny sable magnolia has such potent properties.” Even by looking at it alone, it was clear that the sable magnolia was a potent herb.

“Master, can this sable magnolia really open up my sea of Qi?” Little Yuan’er regarded the sable magnolia curiously.

Mingshi Yin said with a smile, “The sable magnolia is a Heaven and Earth Treasure... You can even be pulled back from death’s door by eating this, let alone opening up your sea of Qi.”

When Little Yuan’er heard this, she was overjoyed. She fell to her knees and said, “Thank you, master!”

Loyalty +2%.

Lu Zhou glanced at the number. Little Yuan’er’s loyalty was over 85%. She was the most loyal of all his disciples.

Lu Zhou stroked his beard as he nodded and said, “My treatment of you has not been in vain.”

“I won’t let you down, master.”

At this moment, Pan Zhong hurried into the great hall. He bowed and said, “Pavilion Master, there’s a letter from the Heaven Choice Temple.”

“Bring it to me.”

Pan Zhong presented the letter from the Heaven Choice Temple to Lu Zhou reverently.

Lu Zhou opened it and scanned its contents.

“How audacious!”

Smack!

Lu Zhou threw the letter onto the table. The letter slipped off the table.

Mingshi Yin waved his arm and a wave of energy brought the letter to him.

When Mingshi Yin finished reading it, he said indignantly, “The Heaven Choice Temple is demanding an exorbitant price! They want three heaven-grade weapons and Eighth Junior Brother to return the zen tunic!”

“Didn’t you say he’s on good terms with the Heaven Choice Temple?” Hua Wudao asked, puzzled.

“Perhaps, that pighead is hiding something.” Mingshi Yin scratched his head and looked at Lu Zhou.

“Master... Old Eighth is now held captive. The Heaven Choice Temple is clearly looking down on the Evil Sky Pavilion.”

Chapter 179: No Choice

Hua Wudao was confused. He cupped his fists and said, “Where did the Heaven Choice Temple get their confidence from to challenge the Evil Sky Pavilion?”

“Perhaps, they’re stupid and foolish,” Mingshi Yin replied.

The Heaven Choice Temple could not be compared to the Temple of Great Emptiness. This was especially true in recent years. There had not been a Buddhist grandmaster from the Heaven Choice Temple at all. They merely had a handful of Nascent Divinity Tribulation realm elites and were short of new blood. They were not in the same league as the Temple of Great Emptiness at all. As one of the four great Buddhist temples, the current Heaven Choice Temple was only a pale remnant of its glorious self. Moreover, the temple was showing signs of becoming a subsidiary temple of the Temple of Great Emptiness.

For this reason, Mingshi Yin could not understand why they were so confident as well. All he could think of was that they were stupid and foolish.

“Master, I’m willing to accompany Third Senior Brother to the Heaven Choice Temple and wipe out the bald donkeys there. We’ll show them that the Evil Sky Pavilion is not to be trifled with,” Mingshi Yin said indignantly.

Hua Wudao was speechless.

Duanmu Sheng brandished his Overlord Spear and said, “Eighth Junior Brother went there on orders, and he represents the Evil Sky Pavilion. Now that he’s in trouble, I can’t possibly sit back and do nothing as his senior brother. I’m willing to accompany Fourth Junior Brother there to grind the bald donkeys’ bones into dust!”

Hua Wudao was even more speechless.

Zhao Yue bowed slightly, “I know that I’ve committed sins in the past. However, I’m willing to redeem myself with this mission and fight alongside my two senior brothers. I swear to wipe out the Heaven Choice Temple to vent your anger, master!”

Hua Wudao was confused. He cupped his fists and asked, “Where did the Heaven Choice Temple get their confidence from to challenge the Evil Sky Pavilion?”

“Perhaps, they’re stupid and foolish,” Mingshi Yin said.

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Hua Wudao was speechless again.

Little Yuan'er was toying with her hair. She seemed to be at a loss.

Hua Wudao did not know what Lu Zhou was thinking at this moment. He was baffled by their reactions. It was on this day that he felt that the Evil Sky Pavilion was behaving like the Evil Sky Pavilion.

Although Hua Wudao did not distinguish between the Noble and Fiend Paths, he was not someone who would kill on a whim. Was it not too violent for them to want to wipe someone else out at the slightest provocation?

Hua Wudao looked at Lu Zhou.

Lu Zhou was slightly speechless as well. He might have rubbed off on his disciples lately, but under these circumstances, it seemed more appropriate for him to act like the old Ji Tiandao.

However, since it was the Heaven Choice Temple's choice, there was no helping this.

"The Heaven Choice Temple and the Temple of Great Emptiness are of the same line. The Temple of Great Emptiness's Kong Yuan has been cultivating in seclusion for a long time now. It's said that he's achieved a breakthrough long ago... If they join forces, you might not be able to come back from this," Lu Zhou said.

Mingshi Yin and Duanmu Sheng exchanged glances.

"Master, we're not afraid of death."

"I concur!"

"I concur!"

Duanmu Sheng and Zhao Yue chimed in.

Lu Zhou stroked his beard and said, "In that case... I'll visit the Heaven Choice Temple as well."

"Master, you're coming as well?" Mingshi Yin was shocked. He immediately started to flatter his master. "With master there, those bald donkeys will be killed with a single palm strike." If he did not flatter his master while Old Eighth was absent, he would not have a chance in the future.

Lu Zhou only looked at Mingshi Yin indifferently. At this moment, he noticed there was a new mission on the system dashboard. The objective was to retrieve the sable magnolia, and the reward was 1,500 merit points. If he could get his hands on the sable magnolia, he would be able to purchase the Seven Star Soul avatar.

It had been a few months since Lu Zhou transmigrated here. He reckoned that even Ji Tiandao could not have made progress as quickly as he did; from Basic Taiji to Seven Star Soul.

For this reason, Lu Zhou was determined to obtain the sable magnolia.

...

Early the next morning.

The Evil Sky Pavilions cloud-splitting chariot was prepared.

Mingshi Yin, Duanmu Sheng, Zhao Yue, and Little Yuan'er were waiting for their master.

"Elder Hua, you're advanced in age, and your legs aren't what they used to be. You should remain in the Evil Sy Pavilion and rest," Lu Zhou said to Hua Wudao. Then, he turned around and boarded the flying chariot.

Hua Wudao's wizened face was etched with a shocked expression. He felt like something was amiss. 'Indeed, I'm old, but I think you're older, Pavilion Master...' He cupped his fists and said, "I'll wait for your good news, Pavilion Master."

Mingshi Yin nudged Duanmu Sheng and said, "Third Senior Brother... Do you know that there are many benefits to manning the helm?"

"Hm?"

"Manning the helm is a good way to hone the harmonization of your Primal Qi. When steering the flying chariot, its speed and rumbling are controlled by the person at the helm. If you keep at it long enough, it's good training for your endurance. Besides, the view at the helm is the best," Mingshi Yin said.

"It's that great?"

"Of course... I'd never lie to you, Third Senior Brother. Eldest Senior Brother didn't become as powerful as he is now without a reason. He did not man the helm for ten years for nothing," Mingshi Yin said.

"That makes sense." Duanmu Sheng nodded and patted Mingshi Yin's shoulder. With a serious and sincere tone, he said, "Junior Brother, your cultivation base is weaker. I'll leave these benefits for you."

Mingshi Yin was speechless. Was this what it felt like to carry a heavy boulder and to drop it on one's own foot?

Apart from the four disciples, more than ten female cultivators boarded the flying chariot as well.

An hour later.

The flying chariot arrived at the southwest area of Great Yan's Jing Province at meteoric speed.

Mingshi Yin maintained steady control over the flying chariot. It sailed smoothly throughout the journey.

"Master, we're already at Clear Source Mountain. The Heaven Choice Temple is at the peak."

"Slow down."

"Aye, aye..." Mingshi Yin turned to look at the others. "Third Senior Brother, Little Junior Sister, how do you find my helming of the flying chariot?" He sounded pleased with himself.

Little Yuan'er gave him a thumbs-up and said, "Fourth Senior Brother, your helming is perfect! You're a master at this!"

"Your knack for this is amazing, Junior Brother. You managed to keep the flying chariot this steady on your second try," Duanmu Sheng praised.

Lu Zhou stroked his beard and glanced at Mingshi Yin. He said, "In that case, you'll be the permanent helmsman from now on..."

Mingshi Yin was rendered speechless.

...

Meanwhile.

At the Mountain Gate Hall of Heaven Choice Temple in Clear Source Mountain.

“Master! The Evil Sky Pavilion’s flying chariot is here!”

It was as though a rock had stirred up a thousand waves!

Wearing a kasaya with a staff in hand, the Heaven Choice Temple’s abbot lowered his prayer beads and stopped chanting the sutras. “Inform the disciples to greet our special guests.”

“Understood.”

Soon after, the bell on the mountain tolled and resounded across Clear Source Mountain.

Dong! Dong! Dong!

The sounds gathered the Heaven Choice Temple’s disciples outside the Hall of Great Strength.

Some of them wielded rods, and some of them came empty-handed. All of them wore monk robes.

A few monks in kasayas sauntered over.

The disciples looked up and exclaimed in wonder at the sight of the cloud-splitting chariot that was slowly making its way over toward them.

The Heaven Choice Temple did not possess such things.

At this moment, the abbot, Grandmaster Xu Jing, appeared on the steps of the Hall of Great Strength.

“Master!”

“Abbot!”

“Senior Brother Abbot!”

The monks were of different statuses, hence, they addressed the abbot differently, but they all greeted him in unison.

Xu Jing looked up and said, “Just as I expected.”

“Master, the Evil Sky Pavilion seems hostile... What do we do now?”

Xu Jing’s gaze swept across the four individuals before him and said, “Our visitor is the greatest villain in the world. Aside from Xu Sheng, Xu Fan, and Xu Hai, the others are to stay silent.”

The disciples nodded.

The cloud-splitting chariot was descending. The dense energy that flowed around the flying chariot amazed the disciples of the temple.

Without waiting for the flying chariot to stop completely, Xu Jing raised an arm and projected his voice with soundwaves, "Heaven Choice Temple's abbot, Xu Jing, welcomes you, dear benefactors." His voice was rich and penetrating. It reached the top of the flying chariot.

Mingshi Yin frowned and said, "Master, these bald donkeys are utter hypocrites! How dare they make fun of the Evil Sky Pavilion like that?" He felt the hypocrisy they were displaying now after kidnapping his Eighth Junior Brother and demanding an exorbitant price was nothing but a blatant taunt.

"I had no choice but to do this."

Chapter 180: I Have Always Been Reasonable

Mingshi Yin had to man the helm. This meant he had access to the best vantage point on the flying chariot. Looking down from his position at the helm, he could see the heaven worship platform and the plaza around it being filled by the Heaven Choice Temple's rod-wielding monks.

They waited there with serious expressions on their faces. Their eyes seemed to be on fire. They appeared ready to fight to the death.

Mingshi Yin did not curse at them. He turned and said, "Master, I suspect that they've laid a trap for us somewhere. Should we land on another spot?"

With their strength and cultivation bases, it would not be a problem for them to leave on their own even if there was a trap. However, the cloud-splitting chariot was precious to them, and it would be a shame if it was damaged.

Lu Zhou walked up to the edge of the flying chariot and looked down with his hands on his back. He swept his eyes across the heaven worship platform and over the rod-wielding monks on the plaza. After that, he said, "Xu Jing, it has been a while."

Xu Jing looked up at Lu Zhou who was standing proudly on the flying chariot. A look of shock flashed past his eyes as he said, "I thought the Evil Sky Pavilion Master would find this shoddy temple beneath him to visit... You have indeed graced us with your presence, old benefactor."

"Land," Lu Zhou ordered calmly.

"Yes, master." Mingshi Yin brought the cloud-splitting chariot lower and landed on the heaven worship platform. He had intentionally picked this spot. The heaven worship platform was always used to worship the heavens by the Heaven Choice Temple. This was an act of defiance against them.

The Heaven Choice Temple's disciples were young and full of vigor. They were, naturally, provoked by this display, eager to run up to the flying chariot for a fight.

However, before they could make a move, they were reprimanded by the four seniors whose name bore the character 'Xu'.

The young disciples were too inexperienced. Moreover, the Heaven Choice Temple had never intervened in the conflicts between the Noble and Fiend Paths. Many of the disciples knew next to nothing about this greatest villain in the cultivation world.

The young were fearless, but they should still understand their opponents before recklessly making a move. There was no difference in being reckless and rushing to one's death.

The flying chariot landed stably.

Lu Zhou led the others out of the flying chariot.

Contrary to their expectations, the monks of the Heaven Choice Temple did not come charging at them.

The monks stood in neat ranks.

Xu Jing walked up to the heaven worship platform. He straightened his palm and said, "Amitabha Buddha. Welcome to our humble temple, benefactors."

Xu Jing's attitude puzzled the others. They could not tell what he was playing at.

Lu Zhou did not seem bothered. He walked up to Xu Jing with his hands on his back. When he was a few meters before Xu Jing, he glanced at Xu Jing.

Xu Jing said again. "I had no choice. We truly have no other option than to hold the benefactor hostage... Please let us adjourn to the Hall of Great Strength. We'll speak at length there."

"Bald donkey... you'll release my Eighth Junior Brother right now! You even have the gall to demand three heaven-grade weapons... Who gave you this courage?" Mingshi Yin cursed.

"..." Xu Jing was clearly discomfited. "If I didn't say that, I wouldn't have been able to provoke the Evil Sky Pavilion."

"You did it deliberately?"

"Dear benefactors, this way, please..." Xu Jing stepped aside.

The other disciples followed suit.

"The Hall of Great Strength isn't some kind of imprisoning entrapment, right?" Mingshi Yin mused as he stared at the Hall of Great Strength in the distance. His suspicion was not unfounded. After experiencing several grand battles, many cultivators had mastered shackling techniques such as Formations.

The barriers of the Green Jade Altar or Golden Court Mountain could never be shattered by ordinary cultivators.

There was also the Grand Witchcraft Formation at Measure Heaven River and the Grand Predecessor Formation in Tangzi Town.

It was also possible for there to be a Grand Formation under the Hall of Great Strength since it was an important site of the Heaven Choice Temple.

Xu Jing said, "You've misunderstood me, dear benefactors... Even if there's a restricting trap there, it would have to be activated by powerful cultivators. The Heaven Choice Temple would never be able to use such a powerful Formation, not with its current strength. Moreover, everyone knows about the Evil Sky Pavilion's strength. Even if I'm dumb, I'd never strike a rock with an egg."

Mingshi Yin looked at Xu Jing and said, "In that case, you mean you lured my master over for another matter?"

"Yes."

Lu Zhou stroked his beard and nodded as he said, "I hope that's the case."

"This way." Xu Jing made an inviting gesture.

Lu Zhou and the others followed Xu Jing into the Hall of Great Strength.

The other rod-wielding monks waited outside.

Only a few core disciples were left within the Hall of Great Strength.

Xu Jing took his seat and called out, "Men."

"Master."

"Bring the benefactor here."

"Understood."

In no time at all, Zhu Honggong was brought toward them by two monks.

Zhu Honggong felt aggrieved. His hands and feet were tightly bound.

The monks loosened the bonds at the entrance of the hall.

"I had no choice but to resort to this... Please forgive me, Benefactor Ji. I'll take responsibility for this offense."

Zhu Honggong heard these words just as he entered the hall. He swept his eyes across the hall and saw Lu Zhou looking stately as he sat surrounded by his disciples.

"Master, you're finally here! I've been tortured and beaten up by this old bald donkey. I'm now heavily injured... It was a hellish experience. Master, you must seek justice for me!" Zhu Honggong fell to his knees before Lu Zhou as he spoke. His face was covered in tears and snot.

Mingshi Yin was speechless. 'What a f*cking actor!'

Xu Jing seemed taken aback by this. He looked at Zhu Honggong and said, "I'm the abbot of the Heaven Choice Temple. This is a place with Buddhist values. I would never act violently against you, benefactor."

"You're still trying to argue! I'm suffering from internal injuries. Don't you think I know my body well?" Zhu Honggong looked up and glared at Xu Jing.

Zhu Honggong knew Ji Tiandao all too well. He was the patriarch of revenge.

"Stand up and speak," Lu Zhou said.

"Uh..."

"If what you said is true, I'll seek justice for you."

“Yes, master...” Zhu Honggong suddenly felt that it was worth it to return to the Evil Sky Pavilion.

Xu Jing was speechless. However, due to his status and position, he felt that it was inappropriate for him to defend himself. He said, “Kindly judge this matter wisely, Benefactor Ji.”

“Let’s talk business...” Lu Zhou paused and changed his tone, “If you can’t give me a reasonable explanation, the Heaven Choice Temple will surely pay the price.”

Fine beads of sweat appeared on Xu Jing’s forehead. However, he spoke calmly, “I know you want the sable magnolia, Benefactor Ji... We can hand it over to the Evil Sky Pavilion.”

Upon hearing this, the anger of the Evil Sky Pavilion’s disciples abated, and they nodded.

‘That’s more like it.’ Lu Zhou did not expect Xu Jing to be this generous. ‘In that case, why would they beat around the bush and come up with these tricks?’

“I have always been reasonable. I can let bygones be bygones about you imprisoning Zhu Honggong.” No matter how Lu Zhou looked at it, Old Eighth’s mistreatment was worth it in exchange for the sable magnolia.

Zhu Honggong was baffled. ‘Didn’t master say he’s going to seek justice for me?’

Xu Jing straightened his palm and said, “It’s fortunate for me that you’re highly principled, old benefactor... That aside, I do have one request.”

Mingshi Yin cursed, “Bald donkey, I knew you were up to no good! It’s useless for you to tell us your request. The Evil Sky Pavilion won’t agree to it!”

Xu Jing suddenly rose to his feet and walked up to Lu Zhou. Then, he said respectfully, “Indeed, I have not thought things through on my end in regard to this incident... Apart from the sable magnolia, the Heaven Choice Temple will drop the matter regarding the zen tunic.”

Zhu Honggong hastily lowered his head and pulled his clothes tighter to himself.

“I’m curious,” said Lu Zhou. “What is it that made the Heaven Choice Temple bow and bend the knee?”