

Disciples 371

Chapter 371 Insights on Death

Lu Zhou stroked his beard and nodded as he looked at Yun Tianluo expressionlessly. "Are you ready?" "For what?"

"Death, of course..." Lu Zhou's words were blunt and calm.

Yun Tianluo looked at Lu Zhou with his eyes that had seen many, many years passed. The longer he looked at Lu Zhou, the more he felt something was amiss. He finally asked, "Aren't you, Brother Ji?"

They were both old men who had one foot in their graves. Perhaps, it was not appropriate for them to speak of death in such a facetious manner. However, as Yun Tianluo thought more about it, he felt that it was precisely because they were at this point in their lives that they could speak about death in such a way.

Lu Zhou shook his head without saying anything Yun Tianluo laughed drily. He seemed slightly melancholic. He wanted to point out again that Lu Zhou's great limit was coming sooner compared to him. In the end, he asked, "Surely, you're not here just to have a chat, Brother Ji?"

Lu Zhou nodded. "To tell you the truth, I've come so that I can ask for your insight and experience when you attempted to attain the Nine-leaf stage."

Yun Tianluo regarded Lu Zhou with a complicated gaze. He did not know why Lu Zhou would suddenly ask about this. After all, he could not compare to Ji Tiandao in this aspect. Everyone in the world knew about the might of the Evil Sky Pavilion's Master. They knew he had long stood at the threshold of the Nine-leaf stage. Finally, he said with a sigh, "... If it weren't impossible, I believe you'd be the first to attain the Nine-leaf stage, Brother

Ji."

"That might not be the case," Lu Zhou said calmly.

"Why do you say that?" "There's bound to be someone who's more skilled than we are. Nobody can guarantee that there are no experts who decide to hide themselves from the world." Lu Zhou paused. Then, he added with a light tone, "Besides, who said that it's impossible?"

Yun Tianluo was taken aback.

A warm smile appeared on Lu Zhou's weathered face.

The truth was often still and intangible, which confuses the mind. Although it was not understandable, it does not stop one from seeking it.

"A conversation with you trumps poring over books for ten years, Brother Ji. I'm enlightened." Yun Tianluo waved his hand. The shield barrier that Leng Luo set up before was dispersed. He looked behind him and said, "Bring me my chess set." The Luo Sect's master, Feng Yizhi, bowed and said, "At once."

A short while later, an exquisite chess set was brought over.

Feng Yizhi placed the chess set reverently on the stone table and stood beside Yun Tianluo.

Yun Tianluo said, "Brother Ji, since my cultivation base is limited, why don't we have a showdown in a game of chess?"

Lu Zhou stroked his beard as he looked at the chess set. In his memories, Ji Tiandao's chess skills were great. However, Lu Zhou merely knew about the game of Go in his past life. Moreover, he never actually played it. How was he supposed to have a match? After appraising the chess set briefly, it seemed that it was different from ordinary chess sets.

There were 19 horizontal and vertical lines. There were also shallow and thin Formation veins carved onto the chessboard.

"Looks like your cultivation base has deteriorated considerably," Lu Zhou said.

It was inevitable for a cultivator to lose his cultivation base when his great limit was near. It was quite impossible for Yun Tianluo to best Lu Zhou in a contest of cultivation bases. Yun Tianluo nodded. "I thought that you'd suffer the same fate... I'm surprised to see you're doing far better than I've expected."

They were not fools. Both of them had lived for nearly a millennium. Yun Tianluo could see that Lu Zhou was full of vigor. Once a person had enough experience, knowledge, they would have a keen eye for observation.

"Shall we?" Yun Tianluo picked a black stone.

"Aren't we going to decide who picks which color, and who goes first?" Lu Zhou glanced at the stones.

"You're older than me, Brother Ji. Surely, you won't mind?" As Yun Tianluo spoke, he placed the stone on the upper-left corner.

Along the intersecting Formation veins, golden energy flowed and shone. The Formation veins on the chessboard were activated by the stone.

Lu Zhou understood. There was something else behind the chessboard.

The power flowed along the Formation veins.

At this moment, Lu Zhou picked a white stone and placed it on the lower-right corner.

Thud!

The stones sat across each other.

The holy land shone at this moment.

The disciples of the Three Sects backed away. They looked around at the changes in their surroundings with shocked expressions on their faces.

"Good." Yun Tianluo offered his compliments.

Another stone was placed.

Energy surged.

With this move, countless energy blades circled above the holy land.

Lu Zhou's expression was calm. He understood what was going on. This chessboard was the key to activating the barrier's Formation. Open and close. Chess skills were not needed here. The important thing was for him to figure out how to break the Formation.

Lu Zhou focused on the Formation veins on the chessboard. He ignored the 19 lines completely. Energy shrouded the Formation veins. The energy seemed similar to the energy blades that appeared above the holy land. "The chessboard is the world." Lu Zhou placed a stone.

Tap!

Another stone was placed.

The energy blades in the skies seemed to be swept away by a huge hand.

Yun Tianluo placed another stone.

The Formation shone brightly. Several energy blades spun and shot toward Lu Zhou in a neat formation.

"Get back." Leng Luo, Pan Litian, and Little Yuan'er retreated to the edge of the holy land.

The Luo Sect Master, Feng Yizhi, leaped away from them and landed among the crowd.

Everyone was looking at the energy blades with shocked expressions...

Boom! Boom! Boom!

When Lu Zhou placed his stone, more energy blades burst forth in the holy land.

Their energy blades collided. After some time, the energy blades suddenly faded into thin air.

Yun Tianluo suddenly opened his cloudy eyes. He looked at Lu Zhou and made some noise out of shock. "Hm?"

Lu Zhou held a stone between two fingers. He was focused on the Formation veins on the chessboard.

Yun Tianluo felt as if the pent-up frustration in his chest had been dispersed as realization dawned on him. "I see..."

"What do you mean?" Lu Zhou did not look up.

"The lack of moves is the best move. No stones are better than having them... I'm impressed that you aren't influenced by the lines under the circumstances, Brother Ji," Yun Tianluo replied.

Lu Zhou was still looking at the Formation veins on the chessboard. 'It's not that I'm disregarding the lines. I don't even know how to play.'

Yun Tianluo smiled faintly. He picked a stone and placed it on the chessboard.

Tap!

Another soft sound rang in the air.

This time, Yun Tianluo placed it at the center of the board. The Formation's veins suddenly connected with the 19 lines.

A blindingly bright light shone on the holy land, obscuring everyone's sight.

Lu Zhou cocked an eyebrow and looked up. A slight frown could be seen on his face.

Yun Tianluo seemed to have disappeared. In his place was a peculiar sight... A young man was swiftly growing. His joy, anger, sadness, happiness, tough times, and good times played out before Lu Zhou's eyes. The young man was cultivating painstakingly.

This was...

Yun Tianluo's consciousness!

Lu Zhou had once guessed that his lost memories had been sealed inside the crystal through similar methods. He had confirmed this from Yu Shangrong.

Did Yun Tianluo attach his consciousness to the chessboard while he attempted the Nine-leaf stage?

The scene changed. The sun and moon crossed the skies. Night and day alternated.

Yun Tianluo sat in a world filled with energy.

Lu Zhou saw vast amounts of power gathering in Yun Tianluo's dantian's sea of Qi.

"The power of a peak Eight-leaf elite." Lu Zhou could sense how mighty this power was.

It was expanding and growing at an extreme speed.

Was this the process of attempting the Nine-leaf stage? "Hm?" Lu Zhou saw that the Golden Lotus under Yun Tianluo behaved like a vortex that secretly absorbed the power. Only a Hundred Tribulations Insight avatar could produce a Golden Lotus. The Golden Lotus was like the roots of a tree which provided power for the leaves to grow. However, at the moment, the Golden Lotus was absorbing power. Yun Tianluo did not seem to notice this. Lu Zhou had difficulty believing this. He wondered, 'Is this the reason his cultivation base deteriorated?'

Whizz!

The power dispersed. The Golden Lotus vanished. The surroundings returned to their original state.

Yun Tianluo held a black stone between his fingers and his arm was suspended above the chessboard.

Lu Zhou was in the same posture. They looked into each other's eyes.

Chapter 372 Twenty Years in a Blink of an Eye

Lu Zhou did not place his stone onto the chessboard. Instead, he looked at Yun Tianluo who sat opposite him. His eyes seemed devoid of emotion.

It was quiet and still

The disciples of the Three Sects only saw that the two old men were having a game of chess. When the energy blades in the skies vanished, they saw them maintaining their strange posture for a long time.

This continued for a very long time.

They saw Yun Tianluo's index and middle fingers starting to tremble. The black stone between his fingers slipped out of his grip and fell onto the chessboard.

Clack!

The Formation veins on the chessboard dimmed. The golden radiance faded as well.

The stones on the chessboard seemed to be eroded by the wind. The 19 lines were still clearly visible, but the Formation veins had vanished.

"Patriarch!"

When Feng Zhi, the Sect Master of Luo Sect, saw this, he was so anxious that he wanted to rush to his patriarch's side.

Yun Tianluo said tonelessly, "Nan Gongwei."

"Yes, patriarch?"

"Deal with anyone who dares approach us with the heaviest punishment of the Three Sects," Yun Tianluo said.

Nan Gongwei was taken aback. He was confused. Nevertheless, he bowed and said, "As you command."

Nan Gongwei planted himself in front of the old men.

The disciples of the Three Sects and Elder Yu could only stop in their tracks. They sighed and shook their heads.

Yun Tianluo looked at Lu Zhou and said, "I've lost." He shook his head lightly. His mental state seemed to have deteriorated compared to before. "I had two reasons for having a game of chess with you... First, it was to spar with you, Brother Ji. However, you weren't affected by the 19 lines at all. Second, I hope I'd be able to see what's sealed in the chessboard. There are many things that I can't remember clearly anymore... I'm not sure if I was any help to you, Brother Ji." He seemed to be mocking himself. "Play your piece, then."

Lu Zhou looked at Yun Tianluo with a calm expression and said, "I've already seen what you're trying to show me. Is there a need to continue this game?"

"It's only right to accept a loss in a game of chess... 30 years... Gone in the placement of a stone," Yun Tianluo said. To be more precise, he had sealed his memories regarding his attempts to attain the Nine-leaf stage in the chessboard. Finally, he decided to unseal it with a game of chess. The price of unsealing the memories was... his life.

Lu Zhou could guess as much when he saw Yun Tianluo's obvious exhaustion. "Regardless of where I place my stone, are you certain you're willing to pay the price?" Lu Zhou asked as he studied Yun Tianluo.

“My defeat is certain. Whether you place the stone or not, the outcome is the same.” There was a pleading look in his eyes as he met Lu Zhou’s gaze. “I might have a chance at living if you play the piece.” Lu Zhou shook his head. ‘He’s as foolish as Gong Yuandu.’

However, the difference was Gong Yuandu was actively seeking death while Yun Tianluo wanted to live. ‘Only a person who’s willing to pay 30 years of their life have the right to overcome the chessboard... What a foolish setting.’

Lu Zhou looked at the eroded chessboard. He brought his arm down slowly.

Just when Yun Tianluo thought that Lu Zhou would place the stone on the appropriate spot, Lu Zhou moved to the left and placed the white stone in between four black stones.

Tap!

Yun Tianluo was taken aback.

There was a gust of energy before the chessboard dissolved.

There was a flash of light on the veins of the holy land under their feet. Then, everything went quiet.

Yun Tianluo leaned backward.

Nan Gognwei was baffled. He asked in a hoarse voice, “Patriarch... why?”

Yun Tianluo did not answer him. He looked at Lu Zhou and said, “Thank you for being merciful, Brother Ji.”

“This way, you’ll lose less... 30 years... I left ten years for you to live,” Lu Zhou replied. He could clearly sense that much of Yun Tianluo’s life had been taken away by the veins of the chessboard.

For the disciples of the Three Sects, merely half a day had passed. However, for Yun Tianluo, 20 years had gone by in just a blink of an eye.

“I didn’t expect you to make this move, Brother Ji...” Yun Tianluo was slightly moved. He could not understand why Ji Tiandao, who was older than himself, would give up on a stone like that.

After a moment’s silence, Yun Tianluo looked at Lu Zhou and said, “Can you tell me what you saw, Brother Ji?”

Lu Zhou sighed and said, “I’m not entirely sure.”

Yun Tianluo nodded. “There aren’t many capable of reaching the peak Eight-leaf stage to begin with. It’s true that nothing can be confirmed with my experience alone. Since you’ve tried it, Brother Ji, do you have any recollections or insight?”

“I can’t recall them clearly,” Lu Zhou answered frankly.

Perhaps, all cultivators would face this eventually. When their powers were at their peaks, nobody could clearly see the changes in their Golden Lotus. Even so, Lu Zhou managed to get a good glimpse of what happened as a bystander. Who would have guessed that things would turn out this way? Lu Zhou had no intention of telling another soul about what he saw.

Yun Tianluo nodded. He was looking more lifeless by the second. The loss of 20 years, naturally, took a toll on his condition.

“Patriarch!”

This time, even Nangong Wei, the Sect Leader of the Tian Sect Master, could no longer restrain himself. He was the first to rush over and support Yun Tianluo.

Yun Tianluo frowned and shouted, “Who gave you permission to come here?”

Lu Zhou raised a hand. “It’s alright.” At the very least, these people had a conscience.

When Nan Gongwei supported Yun Tianluo, a shocked expression appeared on his face as he said, “Patriarch... your lifespan?!” He was frightened to the core when he sensed the lifespan that had drained out of Yun Tianluo. He shifted his gaze onto the stone table in front of himself. The eroded chessboard looked different now.

“Senior Ji... Why do you have to be so overbearing?” Nan Gongwei could not understand why Lu Zhou insisted on unsealing the chessboard. The price of 20 years might be nothing for other cultivators, but it was extremely precious for Yun Tianluo. Lu Zhou stood up slowly. He placed one hand on his back and stroked his beard with the other. He ignored Nan Gongwei.

Yun Tianluo’s condition was deteriorating. He lifted his hand slowly and grabbed Nan Gongwei’s arm. He said, “Don’t be rude.”

“Patriarch, but it’s come to this!”

Suddenly, the radiance of a sword shot toward them from the skies above the holy land.

Energy blades filled the skies.

A figure was faintly discernible among the energy blades.

“I want my junior brother’s life back!”

The disciples of the Three Sects inhaled deeply.

They stared at the sword path elite who began his attack with a grand technique. “The First Seat of the Yun Sect’s sword altar, Sword Saint Luo Shisan!” someone exclaimed.

Sword Saint Luo Shisan! Surrounded by thousands upon thousands of energy blades, he dove toward the holy land with the swords. He was flying parallel with the ground. With the sword in his hand, he aimed for Lu Zhou’s face. Was he really going to attack the Evil Sky Pavilion’s master here in the middle of the holy land? His sword slashed in the air as he attacked with all his might.

“Master!” Little Yuan’er and Mingshi Yin exclaimed in unison.

Leng Luo and Pan Litian frowned as well.

What they did not expect was, Lu Zhou remained unmoving with one hand still resting on his back as he stroked his beard.

Swoosh!

The thousands of energy blades converged with the sword in Luo Shisan's hand as he aimed for Lu Zhou's forehead.

To gain the power to silence everything, to maintain and manifest samadhi. Like light and shadow, permeating everywhere while staying still in samadhi.

This was the Heavenly Writing's power of muting

Lu Zhou raised his right arm. Faint blue energy swirled around his fingers.

Smack!

Lu Zhou's expression remained apathetic as he caught Luo Shisan's blade between his index and middle fingers. The thousands upon thousands of energy blades dispersed at once.

Everyone else was shocked. How was this possible? Lu Zhou twisted his fingers.

Bam!

The sword snapped!

With fluid motions, Lu Zhou struck Luo Shisan's chest with his palm. Lu Zhou stood on the holy land. Blue energy was channeled into the ground. A blooming Blue Lotus could be faintly seen.

Luo Shisan seemed to have lost his ability to think. He forgot all about attacking.

The palm seal landed!

There was another bang, and Luo Shisan reeled back before he fell to the ground.

Thump!

He crashed headfirst onto the ground like a wild dog eating poop. His broken sword fell from the skies. Both halves landed before him.

Chapter 373 Quit While You're Ahead

The Luo Sect's ten holy lands rose into the clouds. The roar of the mountain winds could easily disturb meditating cultivators. The smooth and round barrier was the best way to block out the noises.

Usually, the first holy land was quiet since there were not many people there. However, at this moment, the silence was eerie.

The disciples of the Three Sects held their breaths. They regarded Sword Saint Luo Shisan, who was repelled by the Evil Sky Pavilion's Master with a single palm strike, with incredulity. This was an elite of the sword altar, one of the eight altars of the Yun Sect. He was the one whom the others called the Sword Saint, Luo Shisan.

Luo Shisan was not dead. He merely felt as if he had been hit by a sledgehammer in the chest. He felt that his innards were injured. It was an understatement to say he was in agony. He tried his best to suppress his surging blood essence. A grand Nascent Divinity Tribulation realm elite like himself was sprawled on the ground, finding it difficult to even sit up.

Nobody went up to help him, shocked by Lu Zhou's precise and unbelievably strong palm strike. This was the same for the elders, sect masters, and Yun Tianluo himself.

Even Leng Luo and Pan Litian, who stood at a close distance behind Lu Zhou, were confused. How did Lu Zhou manage to unleash such a powerful palm strike?

There was a brief moment of silence.

Finally, Luo Shisan could no longer suppress his surging blood essence. His face flushed from the effort. With a muffled grunt, he spat out a mouthful of blood.

"Senior Luo!"

"Elder Luo!"

The Yun Sect disciples cried out in worry.

The other Yun Sect's elders regarded the Evil Sky Pavilion's Master fearfully. A single palm strike was all it took to defeat the sword altar's First Seat. Just how skilled and powerful was the old villain? The earth-grade sword was as fragile as paper faced with Lu Zhou.

Yun Tianluo rose to his feet. He pushed Feng Yizhi, who had been supporting him, away. He pointed at Luo Shisan and said, "Are you trying to rebel?"

Luo Shisan acted as if someone had just doused him with a pail of cold water. His hatred instantly vanished. "Patriarch?"

"Who gave you the guts to try and assassinate my distinguished guest?" Yun Tianluo questioned.

Lu Zhou stroked his beard and spoke indifferently, "You want to avenge the Sword Freak Luo Changqing?" "Yes," Luo Shisan replied unhesitatingly.

"If it weren't for Yun Tianluo, I would've taken your life with that single strike," Lu Zhou said honestly.

The catching of the sword and the palm strike had used up one-third of Lu Zhou's ordinary power. Naturally, he could have used more than half of his capacity to kill Luo Shisan. However, he did not do that.

Yun Tianluo had exchanged 20 years of his own life to show him his memories of attempting to attain the Nine-leaf stage. It was the least he could do to repay Yun Tianluo. "How could my brother die in vain?" Luo Shisan said, seemingly mad.

A scornful laugh rang from the cloud-splitting chariot. "What a joke! Luo Changqing tried to assassinate my Second Senior Brother while my Second Senior Brother was injured. Do you expect us to stay idle and let you try and kill us?"

'Assassinate?' Luo Shisan looked up at the flying chariot.

The one who had spoken was the Evil Sky Pavilion's fourth disciple, Mingshi Yin. After hearing Duan Xing's exaggerated version of the story, he clearly knew what happened.

Mingshi Yin enunciated each word clearly as he said, "The Yun Sect has sent more than ten Divine Court realm cultivators in a bid to kill my master Bluesun Mountain. Tell me, how do you think we should settle the scores? Moreover, your sixth elder, Ding Fangqiu, impersonated my master and committed crimes near Measure Heaven River in my master's name. Seriously, tell me how we should settle the scores?" Mingshi Yin continued on his tirade. "You call yourself the Sword Saint of the Yun Sect, a member of the Noble Path. Yet, you behaved as if you do not know what honor, propriety, justice, and integrity mean. If I were you, I'd prioritize justice over my family and kill Luo Changqing first. Perhaps, I would have a modicum of respect for you. As of now... you're worse than pond scum..."

Mingshi Yin's words were exactly the thoughts in Lu Zhou's mind. He was very satisfied with his fourth disciple's words.

Luo Shisan blushed.

The others wondered if it was caused by indignance or the lingering effects of the palm strike.

Yun Tianluo usually cultivated in seclusion. It had been a long time since he cared about such matters. Otherwise, he would not have stood by and done nothing when the Three Sects split and went rogue.

Yun Tianluo swept his gaze across the three sect masters. "Is this true?"

The Yun Sect Master, Yun Wuji, kneeled. He lowered his head and said, "Uh... Patriarch, I can explain this. About Ding Fangqiu, I've already sent our special envoy, Li Yundao, to apologize to the Evil Sky Pavilion, and we offered a sable magnolia as compensation. That score has been settled. As for attacking the senior and assassinating the Evil Sky Pavilion's Mister Second, the Yun Sect admits to this crime and has no one to blame!"

Mingshi Yin smiled and said, "That's more like it... However, I have to correct you... My master killed Luo Changqing out of self-preservation. At the end of the day, you're the ones who were wrong. Logically, the Yun Sect should be apologizing to my master."

The disciples of the Three Sects looked up at the cloud-splitting chariot at the same time. His words sounded strange... Yet, there was no flaw in his logic. It was like a brigand who tried to butcher someone with a saber but was killed himself. Who could he blame?

Mingshi Yin's words left Luo Shisan fumbling for a retort. However, it was not over yet...

"Luo Shisan, you're the only person whom my Second Senior Brother spared. With your understanding of my Second Senior Brother, do you think that he would do something so despicable?"

Luo Shisan was left speechless again. Although he did not have many encounters with Yu Shangrong, he was certain that Yu Shangrong was not a mean and petty man. On the other hand, it was likely that his junior brother, Luo Changqing, committed those acts. He knew his junior brother well. His junior brother had no qualms about resorting to despicable means as long as he could achieve his goals.

Yun Tianluo nodded slowly. He had basically understood the series of events. His eyes darkened as he said, "Yun Wuji."

"Patriarch?"

"Come here..." Yun Tianluo seemed a bit stiff and unnatural. It was as though he felt suffocated in his chest.

Yun Wuji did not know what the patriarch wanted, but he still obediently did as he was told.

Yun Tianluo suddenly raised his hand and struck Yun Wuji across the cheek. There was no mercy in this strike. It was even supported by a weak surge of energy.

Smack!

The sound was loud and forceful. The slap was firm. The side of Yun Wuji's face swelled immediately.

"Go," Yun Tianluo said, "Kowtow to Brother Ji and apologize." Yun Wuji was stunned.

Mingshi Yin was amused by this display. He wondered, 'That slap must be all the patriarch of the Three Sects is capable of now that his cultivation base had deteriorated so much.'

Lu Zhou sighed slightly. At Yun Tianluo's age, he no longer served as a powerful deterrent. The Three Sects were already separated and operated independently. This reminded Lu Zhou of Ji Tiandao or his current self. At their age, all they could do was slap people across the face. In the end, he said, "There's no need for that."

"Hm?"

"I've always been reasonable. On account of Yun Tianluo, I won't hold this against the Yun Sect... However, if you do this again..." Lu Zhou trailed off, leaving the rest of the unsaid words to the other people's imagination.

This made the Yun Sect's people tremble.

Lu Zhou mused, 'It's better to quit while you're ahead in these situations. It won't do any good to have a complete fallout.' Besides, if kneeling and apologizing were useful, why would the fist be needed? Moreover, it would help improve his cultivation base in any way. What he did not expect was for Yun Tianluo to be moved by this gesture. Yun Tianluo bowed and said, "I thank you on behalf of the Three Sects, Brother Ji."

Lu Zhou waved his sleeve and spoke without a change in his expression, "It's nothing." After he said this, Lu Zhou turned around and walked in the air toward the cloud-splitting chariot.

Nobody stopped him. Nobody even dared to breathe loudly.

The intimidating pressure of the Old Age Pavilion's members was enough to make the Three Sects freeze.

Lu Zhou returned to the flying chariot.

Mingshi Yin began his flattery. "That was amazing, master!"

The Luo Sect's Lu Ping went onboard the flying chariot as well. He said, "I'll send everyone off!"

"???"

Chapter 374 The World as Your Chessboard

The others were speechless. It seemed like Lu Ping was disregarding the Luo Sect. However, they were not in the position to comment. After bringing in so many bosses, it was only right for Lu Ping to see them off. They could not exactly charge ahead and fight to the death.

Hua Wudao was the last one to leave the holy land. He did not say much. He merely cupped his fists at everyone else before rising into the air.

Yun Tianluo cupped his fists and said, "Brother Ji, we shall meet again."

"We shall meet again."

The two bosses looked at each other from a distance.

At this moment, Lu Ping replaced Mingshi Yin and manned the helm in his stead. The cloud-splitting chariot passed through the barriers via another route. Eventually, the cloud-splitting chariot vanished in the horizons.

The disciples of the Three Sects felt relieved.

The patriarch, Yun Tianluo, shook his head with a sigh. "Nan Gongwei, Yun Wuji, Feng Yizhi..."

The sect masters were startled. They hastily went up to their patriarch and fell to their knees.

The other disciples dared not say anything. They merely stood at the side respectfully.

"Are my words... meaningless now?" Yun Tianluo asked.

"Never, patriarch!" Nan Gongwei said.

"Do you know what was sealed within that chessboard?" Yun Tianluo's voice was gentle now.

The three of them shook their heads.

Yun Tianluo looked at the three of them and could not help but shake his head.

"I don't know." Nan Gongwei had been watching while the two of them were having the match. He saw the energy blades in the skies and the brightness of the veins on the ground. He merely felt that it was an exchange of ordinary skills. He did not think that it was anything special. Yun Tianluo shook his head again. He looked at the three sect masters and sighed heavily. "This is the reason why I'm not passing the chessboard to you. The thing that's sealed within is my secret of attempting the Nine-leaf stage."

"Patriarch!" Nan Gongwei, Yun Wuji, and Feng Yizhi cried out in unison and shuddered. They prostrated themselves and kowtowed. To think that their patriarch had given such an important thing to an outsider instead of the Three Sects. Imagine the thoughts in these three individuals' minds.

"Why?" Nan Gongwei rose to his feet abruptly with a complicated gaze.

"Because... you lot aren't worthy!"

Yun Tianluo waved his sleeve and turned around. He looked energetic, as though he had a surge of strength before his death.

Yun Tianluo said, "Throughout the years that I've cultivated in seclusion, I've been thinking about what went wrong... I considered everything that I could think of and even sealed my memories. After fussing over it for a millennium, I suddenly understood something in a blink of an eye..." He paused slightly before continuing, "Difficult questions should be solved by intelligent men."

Many cultivators disliked revealing their own insights and experiences of breakthroughs to the others. Many a time, the cultivation notes of grand cultivators would be more precious than high-tier cultivation methods.

However, Yun Tianluo had been enlightened. It was extremely simple. Since he could achieve the breakthrough, why should he hoard his knowledge instead of giving it to someone who might have a chance?

'It was like what Brother Ji said. Who says that everything is absolute? There has to be a way. There was nothing impossible!' This was the reason he chose to have the match with Lu Zhou. It was not complicated at all. In fact, it was simple.

If he had given the chessboard to the three sect masters, he would not be giving them a great gift; he would only be granting them a quick death!

"Patriarch, is that why you chose to have the match with the Evil Sky Pavilion?" Nan Gongwei asked, puzzled.

"That's right." Yun Tianluo turned around slowly and said, "Do you know why I told you to kowtow and apologize to Brother Ji?"

The three of them shook their heads again.

This time, even the Sword Saint Luo Shisan who had a sour expression and was sitting nearby looked in their directions.

Yun Tianluo continued, "I have a feeling... Perhaps, he'll find a way to attain the Nine-leaf stage."

When he said this.

The entire holy land fell silent.

Everyone looked at their patriarch, Yun Tianluo, with a shocked expression on their faces. If anyone else had said this, no one would take it seriously. In fact, they would even ridicule the person. However, the person who said such words was Yun Tianluo, the Patriarch of the Three Sects.

"How's that possible?" Nan Gongwei asked incredulously. "Brother Ji is older than I am... However, when we had a match earlier, I could see an endless source of energy from him. This shouldn't be possible for someone whose great limit is approaching."

Waves of fear rose in the hearts of the three sect masters. They were reminded of how the Sword Saint Luo Shisan, who launched an attack with a force that could shock the heavens and the earth and made gods and devils cry, was easily defeated by a single move from the Evil Sky Pavilion's Master. This... Was this something that someone whose great limit was approaching was capable of?

"You were in the wrong. Even if you're right, you still have to swallow your pride!" Yun Tianluo said before he turned around and walked to the edge of the holy land.

The three of them were perplexed.

The other disciples said in unison, "Rest well, patriarch!"

The cloud-splitting chariot passed through dozens of barriers. It left the 20 peaks behind and was out of the sea of clouds that obscured their sights.

Little Yuan'er scratched her head. She was thinking about what Mingshi Yin said earlier. She asked, "Master... if Fourth Senior Brother has a point, why didn't we wipe out the Yun Sect?"

Lu Ping stumbled, he nearly lost his footing.

The cloud-splitting chariot jolted slightly.

"I'm sorry..." Lu Ping wanted to slap himself. 'Why did I volunteer to send these bosses off? Did my brain go on a holiday? However, if I had stayed back, those dumb Luo Sect's elders would certainly blame me for this incident. It's not too bad to leave and listen to the bosses' golden words.'

Little Yuan'er suddenly added, "Take this man at the helm, for example... Shouldn't he be chopped into tiny pieces?"

The flying chariot jolted again. Lu Zhou stroked his beard as he looked out at the sea of clouds.

"The little girl has indeed matured compared to before. At the very least, she understood Mingshi Yin's words.' If she understood the words, it meant her principles were right.

Without waiting for a reply from Lu Zhou, Mingshi Yin said with a smile, "Little Junior Sister, that's the Three Sects' territory... There are dozens of barriers and many elites. There's no need to have a complete fallout with them. What must be said, must be said... Otherwise, if words of this go out, everyone might think that the Evil Sky Pavilion is just a big pushover."

"Oh."

"Also, we must consider Yun Tianluo's pride. The heavens and the earth had been transformed into the chessboard on which they pitched their skills against each other. He spent 20 years of his life to answer master's question. We're a reasonable bunch, aren't we?" Mingshi Yin said.

Little Yuan'er nodded like a chick pecking on grains. "I get it now... Thank you, master." Mingshi Yin scratched his head. 'Shouldn't it be 'Thank you, senior brother'?'

Lu Ping was puzzled. 'Aren't the bosses supposed to be discussing the Nine-leaf stage or the great limit? Why are they talking about these things instead?'

"Ding! Instructing Ci Yuan'er. Reward: 100 merit points." Lu Zhou turned to look. He nodded slightly. At this moment, Lu Ping pointed to a black area below the flying chariot and said, "Something's not right."

Mingshi Yin swiftly leaped to the edge of the flying chariot. He peered over the edge. After he had taken a look, he said, "Master, there's a huge area with withering greeneries."

Lu Zhou stood up with his hands on his back as he walked up to the side and looked down.

Leng Luo, Pan Litian, and Hua Wudao peered over the edge as well.

The trees on the mountain had withered... The landscape seemed devoid of life.

“Slow down.”

“At once.” The flying chariot slowed down. It lowered its altitude as well. It flew slowly among the withered trees.

Chapter 375 The Evil Extermination Plan

The cloud-splitting chariot continued forward at a uniform speed. It was like a canoe in the water. The long tail that usually trailed behind it disappeared as well.

Lu Ping was the youngest elder of the Luo Sect. Although he was more skilled in refining and forging weapons, steering the flying chariot was not an issue for him. Aside from the withered trees and plants, everything seemed normal.

After observing the land, it seemed like withered greeneries occurred in patches.

Lu Ping flashed a smile that he felt showed his determination to serve the bosses well. He looked behind. After observing them for some time, he noticed that the youngest disciple seemed to be the purest and easiest to talk to. Hence, he brightened his smile even more and asked softly, “M-miss Ninth, what do you think of my chariot flying skill?”

Little Yuan’er rolled her eyes at him and said, “It’s mediocre.” If this were in the past, she would have slapped Lu Ping instantly if he had asked her such a question. However, after listening to Mingshi Yin’s words, she felt that he had a point. Therefore, she gave Lu Ping a perfunctory answer.

“Huh? Mediocre?” Lu Ping scratched his head. “That can’t be. The flying chariot had only jolted twice. Everything else went smoothly. Why is she giving me such a low rating?” “You’re a far cry compared to my Fourth Senior Brother,” Little Yuan’er said.

Lu Ping glanced at Mingshi Yin who was standing beside him. He wondered inwardly, ‘Good gracious, even the Evil Sky Pavilion’s Mister Fourth is tasked with manning the helm? Looks like this is honorable labor!’

Mingshi Yin observed the withered area below. He said, “Master, the withered area seems to thin up ahead.”

Lu Zhou stroked his beard and nodded.

At this moment, Leng Luo, who was also observing this with his hands on his back as he stood beside Lu Zhou said, “This looks fishy... Did someone do this?”

Pan Litian remembered the scenery he saw in the Black Forest. He remembered that everything had withered after the great fire ran its course. “I suspect that someone is trying to go against the will of the heavens and borrow some years.”

The bosses were finally discussing a high-end topic. Lu Ping immediately perked his ears up. He listened to their conversation carefully and seriously.

Lu Zhou said, "Many have tried to borrow life from the heavens throughout history. None of them ended well."

Throughout the history of the cultivation world, many cultivators came up with various methods to extend their lives... These individuals did not have the fortune to attain the Eight-leaf cultivation base, and yet, they experienced the ill effects of the Eight-leaf stage.

"Master, shall I go down and investigate?" Mingshi Yin asked.

"No need." Lu Zhou looked in the direction of the Evil Sky Pavilion and said, "Let's return to the Evil Sky Pavilion for now."

The Nether Sect's branch in Yi Province.

Yu Zhenghai pointed at the western side of the map and said, "Yi Province is mostly under the Nether Sect's control. Wei Zhuoyan's men are weak... Yi Zhou will belong to the Nether Sect in less than a month."

Si Wuya said, "Wei Zhuoyan was ordered to quell the disturbance, but it's a shame that he's not the real commander-in-chief of the three armies. However, we must be careful about Li Jingyi..."

"You have a point, junior brother. This Li Jingyi has made her move twice... She's skilled, indeed," Yu Zhenghai said.

"There's nothing to worry about Wei Zhuoyan's troops... but..." Si Wuya pointed at Lou Lan.

"The Other Tribes?" Yu Zhenghai frowned slightly.

"If Lou Lan manages to sneak in while Yi Province is in turmoil, we'll be fighting on two fronts," Si Wuya said.

Yu Zhenghai nodded, "In that case, we'll assign some men to guard..." He trailed off suddenly. When he thought about fighting on two fronts, he suddenly asked, "Any news from the Evil Sky Pavilion?"

Si Wuya said, "Initially, the Noble Path was looking for an opportunity to launch their new evil extermination plan after the barrier's disappearance..."

Yu Zhenghai smiled mockingly. "New evil extermination plan? They want to kill master?"

Si Wuya nodded lightly and said, "However, Second Senior Brother's relationship with master seems to have taken a turn for the better. They've made up."

When Yu Zhenghai heard this, he frowned deeply as he sat down.

With Yu Shangrong's return to the Evil Sky Pavilion, the Noble Path would not dare to make any rash moves.

Smack!

Yu Zhenghai suddenly slammed his fist onto the table before himself, cracking it. He snorted and said, "I shouldn't have shown him mercy... I've said early on that Second Junior Brother has a personality problem. Do you believe me now?"

'Uh...' Si Wuya was slightly taken aback. 'What does this have to do with me?' Then, he said, "Second Senior Brother has made a hit list. It contains the names of the people who attacked Golden Court Mountain back then. Anyone whose name is on the list will have their souls reaped by the sword."

Yu Zhenghai said disapprovingly, "He's bound to lose with that attitude of his... Does he think that nothing in the world can touch him just because he's at the Eight-leaf stage?"

If there had been no such thing as Formations, barriers, or pills, the Nether Sect would have conquered every sect in the world and unified them.

For instance, Yu Zhenghai had studied the Ten Terminal Formation in the Divine Capital for many years and had yet to find a way around

"Eldest Senior Brother... It's better to deal with the present for now. When we've taken Yi Province, I suggest... that we continue northward and conquer Liang Province as well," Si Wuya said.

Upon hearing this, Yu Zhenghai was delighted. He said, "Sure!" He walked up and gave Si Wuya's shoulder a heavy pat as he said, "I don't have to worry about not being able to conquer the world with you by my side, junior brother."

The Mausoleum of Swords.

Inside the pitch-black Sword Mausoleum, the only source of light was a round opening above, through which a weak beam of the sunlight streamed in.

Two black figures stood outside the Seven Terminal Formation. They looked at the Sword Formation, which was operating perfectly.

"Are you sure... this will help me reach the Nine-leaf stage?" one of the black figures asked as he looked at the corpses strewn about the Sword Formation.

The other black figure replied in a raspy voice after he chuckled, "Do you think the Nine-leaf stage is as common as white rice? Do you think it's something that can be obtained by everyone? Nay, it's not quite possible to attain the Nine-leaf stage, but... you can win against an Eight-leaf opponent."

"Ba Ma, if you can't do it, don't simply make empty promises! You gave me your word!"

"Zhang Yuanshan... You're on Yu Shangrong's list. You have no choice! If you're having second thoughts, you can leave now!" Ba Ma said domineeringly.

The person next to Ba Ma was none other than Zhang Yuanshan, the Sect Master of the Righteous Sect.

After the Righteous Sect was wiped out, Zhang Yuanshan had nowhere to go. He did not have many connections to begin with, and now, he was the target of public scorn. When he found out that he was on Yu Shangrong's hit list, he lost his appetite and could not sleep at night. When he saw many powerful cultivators being slain by the elusive Sword Devil, Yu Shangrong, he had fallen into despair.

"Fine." Zhang Yuanshan said contemptuously as he glared at Ba Ma.

"I've spent my whole life studying this... I've gathered life energy with witchcraft. We're on the same boat, you and I. Believe me!" Ba Ma said confidently.

"What am I doing here, then?" Zhang Yuanshan had difficulty understanding this. Ba Ma said nothing. He raised his hand slowly. Streaks of purple energy amassed within the Seven Terminal Formation. The Sword Formation in the air did not seem to react to this.

"This is the point of greatest Yang. An expert must've cultivated here. Alas, I couldn't find him. However..." With a sudden change of tone, he pointed at a corpse inside the Seven Terminal Formation and said, "That will do."

"A corpse?" Zhang Yuanshan was baffled.

Creak! Creak!

The corpse moved.

"Puppeteering Technique!" Zhang Yuanshan was shocked.

"He was a Buddhist elite..." Ba Ma sensed the corpse's condition.

"What are you going to do?" Zhang Yuanshan asked.

Ba Ma looked at Zhang Yuanshan and said, "I'll use up all the life energy to boost your power. Remember, you only have two to three chances."

A look of contempt flashed past Zhang Yuanshan's eyes as he nodded.

Chapter 376 The Guardian, Ye Tianxin

Shortly after, purple gas shrouded Ba Ma's palms. He looked up. "Divination." His voice resounded in the Mausoleum of Swords.

The Sword Formation in the skies began shaking

"Praise." Ba Ma made weird sounding notes from his mouth. When the notes were strung together, there seemed to be a gust of wind entering through the opening from where the light streamed in.

The Witchcraft Formation Circles appeared around the edges of the Seven Terminal Formation. Energy began amassing.

Zhang Yuanshan was excited to see this. He could feel the gathering of energy. He felt as if he could see the power that allegedly surpassed that of an Eight-leaf stage elite.

Outside the Mausoleum of Swords.

The rising purple gas moved toward the surroundings on the ground. The purple gas would leave withered trees, plants, and grass in its wake.

Meanwhile, in another location, a similar body of purple gas was gathering the local energy as well.

Similarly, the trees withered in its wake.

At the side of a lake dozens of miles away from Golden Court Mountain, a white garment, white dress, and a white cloak was neatly folded on the grass. From the nearby forest, a purple circle was spreading as it gathered the life energy from its surroundings.

The trees withered. The flowers and grass withered as well. The birds scattered.

Some of the flying creatures disregarded the danger and landed on the purple circle. The purple circle seemed to have grown tentacles that caught the animals. The animals were reduced to a pile of bones in an instant.

Blurb! Blurb! Blurb!

Bubbles rose to the surface of the lake.

At this moment...

Splash!

A column of water shot into the air. Energy wrapped around it and the moisture evaporated instantly.

A figure appeared. Her hair fell like a waterfall, and her skin was as fair as snow. When she opened her eyes, her clothes on the bank of the lake flew toward her. With a turn of her wonderful body, the column of water fell back into the lake.

Her true appearance was shown. She looked as though she had cut herself off from secular affairs. She almost seemed like an immortal who had descended from the heavens.

Ye Tianxin looked at the strands of hair on her shoulder. Under the light of the sun, her dark hair glistened. She frowned when she saw there were a few wet spots on her white garment. She utilized her Primal Qi to dry her robes again. She sighed. "I have to work harder."

Ye Tianxin walked in the air toward the shore. When she was halfway there, she sensed the abnormality in the air. "Hm?" She moved quickly. She was now flying above the treetops as she surveyed her surroundings.

The scattered trees had withered. They looked jarring "Witchcraft? A grand shaman?" Ye Tianxin had spent most of her time outside. When she founded the Derived Moon Palace previously, she had studied witchcraft as well. How could she not be shocked when she saw this? She flew toward the nearby forest, picking up pace. She flew further and further away from Golden Court Mountain until she vanished from sight.

After flying for dozens of miles, she still saw withered trees. There was no longer any need to investigate this. Her instinct told her something was fishy.

Ye Tianxin continued to fly upward until she was high enough before she expended her energy. She looked in the direction of the Evil Sky Pavilion.

It was too far away. Even during the brightest of days, she could only make out the blurry outline of Golden Court Mountain. She never knew what was happening there. She surveyed her surroundings again before she dove and landed next to a vanishing purple circle. She flipped her fair palm. The Amorous Hoop that was bright appeared as it spun.

Swoosh!

Her Amorous Hoop circled around her before it shot past the area above the purple circle and returned to her grasp. "A puppet?"

There were no corpses inside the purple circle. Hence, there was no puppet to be controlled. Ye Tianxin could tell that the grand shaman was not around. She was impressed that the witchcraft cultivator could pull off such powerful and spontaneous witchcraft circles.

After muttering to herself for some time, Ye Tianxin rose into the air again. She hovered in midair. "Someone's there."

Ye Tianxin saw a tightly packed flying formation in the distance. She could not help but feel shocked. She did not retreat. Instead, she flew toward the group.

It was a square formation formed by dozens of monks flying in the air. There was a huge body of energy carrying them along as they flew.

Ye Tianxin did not go closer. She never had good impressions about monks.

Just when she was about to leave with her grand technique, a monk projected his voice. "Female benefactor, please stay."

Ye Tianxin frowned slightly as she asked, "What's the matter?"

"Please don't misunderstand me, benefactor. My Buddhist title is Xu Jing. I'm the abbot of the Heaven Choice Temple. I'm merely passing by," Xu Jing said through voice projection.

"Xu Jing of the Heaven Choice Temple?"

"You know me, benefactor?" The Buddhist Master, Xu Jing, was slightly surprised.

Naturally, Ye Tianxin would not tell him the reason. Instead, she said, "I have something else to attend to. Forgive me for leaving."

"Benefactor... May I know how far Golden Court Mountain is from here?" Xu Jing asked again.

Ye Tianxin found this hilarious. 'You'll see Golden Court Mountain if you continue along this path for a while longer. Why do you even have to ask?' If she did not know about the Heaven Choice Temple, she would have left a long time ago.

"I don't know," Ye Tianxin replied curtly before she flew away.

"Benefactor... please stay..."

Whizz!

A Six-leaf Hundred Tribulations Insight avatar materialized in the air.

Xu Jing and the monks behind him were instantly stunned. They were utterly shocked by this.

"This..."

“Abbot, we keep running into Six-leaf cultivators like they’re very common here. Shall we head back instead?”

“I don’t think the Evil Sky Pavilion needs us.”

The monks looked tense.

They knew that the Evil Sky Pavilion was powerful and full of elites. Naturally, their opponents were elites as well. However, it was really a blow to their self-confidence when they bumped into Six-leaf cultivators along the way. Xu Jing frowned and said in a deep voice, “Benefactor Ji has helped the Heaven Choice Temple before. We should return the favor ten-fold. If you’re afraid, you can choose to leave the Heaven Choice Temple right now.”

“We dare not! We’ve made a mistake!” the monks said in unison.

Xu Jing looked at the surroundings and said, “Golden Court Mountain’s barrier has vanished for some time now. This is the moment when they need help the most... Being cowardly is unacceptable in the Buddhist Sects!”

“We’ll remember your teaching!”

“Also... Don’t even try to remind me about the difference between the Noble and Fiend Paths!” When Xu Jing said this, his energy rippled out.

“Understood,” the disciples spoke in unison, “Amitabha.”

Half a day later. Inside the great hall of the Evil Sky Pavilion.

Lu Zhou looked at his remaining points on the dashboard...

Merit points: 3,700

He could afford to purchase one Deadly Strike Card with this amount.

Perhaps, he possessed the Heavenly Writing’s extraordinary power so recently, the value of the Deadly Strike Card had dropped in his eyes.

Naturally, if he faced an opponent whom he could not deal with, the Deadly Strike Card was still his best choice. During those situations, he would not have the luxury to consider the economic balance of the action.

“Ding! Killed a target. Reward: 1,500 merit points.”

When Lu Zhou heard the notification, he stroked his beard and nodded. He muttered to himself, “I think this disciple is too used to being free. He doesn’t even write back.”

He did not know where Yu Shangrong was at the moment. However, when he considered the fact that Yu Shangrong had a profound cultivation base, he decided to let him be. He was putting him to good use by having him gathering merit points outside the mountain. After all, it would be a waste to keep him here when there were the few elders and himself looking after things.

At this moment, Mingshi Yin walked in. "Master, the monks of the Heaven Choice Temple seeks an audience."

Chapter 377 The Nine-leaf Method (Part One)

Lu Zhou looked at Mingshi Yin. He asked in confusion, "What are the monks from the Heaven Choice Temple doing here in Golden Court Mountain?" He remembered that when the Four Divine Monks died, the Heaven Choice Temple had no choice but to leave their temple to prevent themselves from being the target of revenge. Then, nobody knew where they moved to.

Besides, Lu Zhou never had the intention to look for them in the first place. After the incident with the Temple of Great Emptiness, the Heaven Choice Temple had lost its former glory. The Buddhist Master, Xu Jing, was the only elite left. He had no choice but to lead his disciples as they moved and lived in seclusion.

Mingshi Yin shook his head and said, "I don't know, master."

At this moment, Zhu Honggong, Old Eighth, waved his boxing gloves about as he appeared at the entrance to the great hall. He was about to kneel and greet Lu Zhou when Mingshi Yin frowned and said, "Old Eighth, enough of your shenanigans. Get in here right now!"

Zhu Honggong chuckled sheepishly before he ran in. "Greetings, master."

"What's the matter?" Zhu Honggong bowed and said, "Zhou Jifeng told me that some people from the Heaven Choice Temple are here. I merely came to have a look."

Lu Zhou said, "What does the arrival of the people from the Heaven Choice Temple have to do with you?"

Zhu Honggong instinctively pressed a hand to his chest.

Upon seeing this, Mingshi Yin smiled knowingly. "You're worried that they're here for your zen tunic?"

Zhu Honggong was slightly embarrassed at being seen through.

Mingshi Yin said, "Do you even know where you are? Even if you give them the courage of ten lions, they won't dare to touch you." "You have a point, Fourth Senior Brother."

At this exact moment, Pan Zhong brought Buddhist Master Xu Jing and the other monks into the great hall.

Xu Jing straightened a palm. The dozens of monks behind him joined their palms together as well as they bowed.

"Amitabha. Greetings, dear benefactors."

Lu Zhou looked at the other monks and said, "One doesn't visit a temple without a cause. What business do you have here in the Evil Sky Pavilion?"

Xu Jing said, "To return a favor." His reply was short and simple.

Zhu Honggong scratched his head. "Return a favor?"

Abbot Xu Jing spoke slowly, "Amitabha... I pray that I may share my good fortunes with everyone, keep them from harm, and repent from our sins in this life and in our past lives..."

"Hold up, hold up..." Mingshi Yin waved his hand irritably and said, "Spare us from your drivel. I'll take it that you're really here to return the favor."

Buddhist Master Xu Jing stopped chanting the sutra.

Lu Zhou stroked his beard and nodded. 'I don't understand it as well.'

Xu Jing did not find this awkward at all. He said, "I heard that Golden Court Mountain's barrier has vanished for a long time now. Knowing the ten great sects, they will surely launch an attack soon. Although the Heaven Choice Temple is a far cry from the Temple of Great Emptiness, we're not an ungrateful bunch."

Mingshi Yin said mockingly, "I've never met people like you before. I wonder if I'm dreaming." As he said this, he pretended to pinch himself.

Xu Jing repeated his words. "The Heaven Choice Temple has recruited 1,000 new disciples... They will be here as soon as I summon them." He was speaking with a righteous expression, and he did not seem to be joking.

Mingshi Yin's smile vanished, and he looked at his master. He decided that it was best to leave this matter to his master.

Lu Zhou looked at the monks present as he said, "I know that you mean well, and I appreciate it... However, Golden Court Mountain is in no danger. Please return tomorrow."

Xu Jing was taken aback. He did not expect to be completely rejected.

At this moment, Jiang Aijian walked into the hall with a smile on his face. "Old senior, please wait."

When Lu Zhou saw Jiang Aijian, he stroked his beard and asked, "Do you have any brilliant ideas?"

Jiang Aijian said with a smile, "I won't call it brilliant, but I do have an ordinary one."

"Let us hear it." "The Heaven Choice Temple is skilled in Buddhist cultivation methods that include sound techniques and healing skills." Jiang Aijian looked at the monks. "They might just come in handy, what with all the strange happenings lately." "What strange happenings?" Ever since he came back from the Three Sects, Lu Zhou had been thinking about the Nine-leaf stage. He had also been going through the scene of Yun Tianluo attempting to attain the Nine-leaf stage. He rarely asked about the happenings of the world.

Jiang Aijian said, "While you were at the Three Sects, I loitered around the area during my free time... I noticed that there were signs of withering in several places. I was curious, and I went to investigate... As I expected, the area near the Divine Capital, Rubei, Anyang, Upper Prime, and even the Mausoleum of Swords have signs of withering." He paused before continuing, "Only a grand shaman is capable of such a feat..."

Mingshi Yin could not help but feel slightly shocked as he said, "Grand shaman? The grand shaman that was lying in wait outside the Obedient Villa back then?"

Jiang Aijian nodded. "The Confucian Sects' Expansive Heavenly Energy and the Buddhist Sects' cultivation methods have much more of a suppressing effect on witchcraft. Hence... I suggest that they remain here."

Upon hearing this, Mingshi Yin rolled his eyes and said, "I thought that it would be some legitimate reason. Do you think the Evil Sky Pavilion needs reinforcements from them? What a joke. You, Abbot Xu Jing, how long do you plan on remaining in Golden Court Mountain?"

Abbot Xu Jing turned around and said, "Naturally, until the day of Benefactor Ji's great limit."

When Zhu Honggong heard this, he was about to display his loyalty by hurling abuses at Xu Jing. However, to his surprise, his master waved his hand and said, "Xu Jing."

Buddhist Master Xu Jing faced Lu Zhou reverently.

Lu Zhou said, "I appreciate the fact that you intend on repaying me. When Ba Ma is dealt with, you may leave." He thought to himself, 'I'm just worried that you won't live to see the day of my great limit.'

When Xu Jing heard this, he wondered in his mind, 'Who's Ba Ma?' However, he did not hesitate when he responded with a straightened palm, "Amitabha."

"Bring them to the northern pavilion."

"I know Buddhist Master Xu Jing. Allow me to escort them..." Zhu Honggong pulled Xu Jing out of the great hall.

The moment they were out of the great hall, Zhu Honggong grabbed Xu Jing's hand anxiously and said, "I'm so happy to meet you here. Help me remove the suppressing Formation veins from the zen tunic..." Xu Jing smiled sincerely. He straightened his palm and said, "Amitabha..."

"Quit your Amitabha-ing. There aren't that many rules in the Evil Sky Pavilion. Let's go, go, go..."

"For sure, for sure."

The two of them put an arm around each other's shoulders as they walked toward the northern pavilion. The monks who saw this were shocked and flustered.

The great hall was silent at this moment.

Lu Zhou sat down. He addressed Mingshi Yin, "Summon Elder Pan and Elder Leng here."

"Yes, master." Shortly after, Leng Luo and Pan Litian followed Mingshi Yin into the great hall.

The two of them cupped their fists slightly at Lu Zhou and sat down at the sides.

"Why did you summon us here, Pavilion Master?" Pan Litian asked.

Lu Zhou stroked his beard and said, "The others may leave."

Mingshi Yin and Jiang Aijian were stunned. They wondered what matter was so serious that they even had to leave.

Mingshi Yin waved his hand. The female disciples left the great hall.

“Master... I want to listen as well,” Mingshi Yin said after he mustered up his courage. He had a feeling what his master was about to discuss was important. In terms of closeness and trustworthiness, he felt that he was comparable to Leng Luo and Pan Litian.

Jiang Aijian bowed and said, “Uh... old senior, you can just treat me as a pillar. I’ll just stay here quietly. I won’t say anything to anyone no matter what I hear!”

Lu Zhou looked at the two of them and said, “... Since the two of you want to stay, you’ll do well to listen carefully.”

“Yes, master!”

“Thank you, old senior.”

Leng Luo and Pan Litian had an expectant expression on their faces. Surely, it was something extraordinary if the pavilion master was taking it so seriously.

Lu Zhou’s gaze fell on Leng Luo and Pan Litian. “When I was having the chess match at the Luo Sect’s holy land, I discovered a way to attain the Nine-leaf stage.”

Chapter 378 The Nine-leaf Method (Part Two)

Although Pan Litian and Leng Luo had seen and experienced many things, they were still shocked when they heard this.

Jiang Aijian lost his footing and sat limply on the chair.

Mingshi Yin looked at his master. A mixture of shock and awe could be seen in his eyes. Leng Luo said tremblingly in a hoarse voice, “You saw the answer during the chess match, Pavilion Master?”

Lu Zhou stroked his beard and nodded as he said, “Yun Tianluo sealed his method of attaining the Nine-leaf stage inside the chessboard...”

Although he had limited examples to refer to, Lu Zhou could form his own conclusions based on his past knowledge and experience.

“The Golden Lotus under the Hundred Tribulations Insight avatar is what’s stopping cultivators from attaining the Nine-leaf stage.” The four of them were stunned. For a time, they did not know what they were supposed to say. This was because Lu Zhou’s statement had basically challenged the fundamental knowledge of the cultivation world. It was common knowledge that everyone in the cultivation world strived to condense the Golden Lotus of the Hundred Tribulations Insight avatar... With a Golden Lotus, they would be an elite.

Lu Zhou spoke slowly, “When a cultivator attempts to reach the Nine-leaf stage from the Eight-leaf stage, the Golden Lotus would absorb the cultivator’s power and life... This is the truth behind the great limit.”

II

Countless cultivators have tried to attain the Nine-leaf stage throughout the years. The numerous failures led to the discovery of the truth of the great limit. The great limit deterred other cultivators

from attempting to attain the Nine-leaf stage... Gradually, it became a fact to cultivators that it was impossible to attain the Nine-leaf stage.

"The Golden Lotus is absorbing life... When I met Gong Yuandu back then, I had the same thought, but I wasn't sure. If that's the case, how much life will the Golden Lotus take away?" Pan Litian looked outside the great hall and said, "If a genius were to cultivate and attain the Eight-leaf stage in his youth, could he supply the Nine-leaf stage with his life? Take Little Yuan'er, for example." In such situations, Jiang Aijian and Mingshi Yin listened quietly without interrupting. Leng Luo shook his head. "It's not feasible... Cultivation has been around for many years. There had been no shortage of shocking talents throughout history. Yet, I don't remember any of them reaching the Nine-leaf stage." Lu Zhou said, "So... the Golden Lotus will take at least 1,000 years of life."

.11

The great hall fell silent. Even a falling needle could be heard.

,000 years... That was the longevity that only top cultivators could achieve. Most cultivators could not even make it to the Eight-leaf stage, let alone having 1,000 years to live. For them, how could they ever attain the Nine-leaf stage?

Leng Luo and Pan Litian shook their heads helplessly. At this moment, Jiang Aijian could not hold it in any longer. He bowed and said, "May I offer my two cents?"

"Let's hear it."

"When I was inside the palace, I read some books in the warehouse... Some of them contained records of the Eight-leaf stage. I didn't think much of it then about them, but now, I remember some of the information does sound similar to what you're saying, old senior..." Jiang Aijian stroked his chin and continued, "I can't really remember the original text, but there was one piece that said that a cultivator can only attain the Nine-leaf stage if he was at the Eight-leaf stage while he was still inside his mother's womb."

Leng Luo, Pan Litian, and Mingshi Yin were speechless. Although the statement was crude and ridiculous, it did bear some semblance to what Lu Zhou said.

If a cultivator was at the Eight-leaf stage in his mother's womb, he would have 1,000 years to live, and he would have a chance to reach the Nine-leaf stage. However, was it possible for someone to attain the Eight-leaf stage while they were inside their mother's womb? Mingshi Yin rolled his eyes and said, "Even if you're already at the Eight-leaf stage in your mother's womb, how are you going to guarantee that the Golden Lotus won't absorb 1,500 or 2,000 years of life?"

Mingshi Yin's question stumped everyone. Lu Zhou glanced at Mingshi Yin.

Leng Luo and Pan Litian sighed.

They were both Eight-leaf elites. Naturally, they knew about the difficulties beneath the surface. "At the end of the day... It's still a problem that can't be solved," Leng Luo said with a sigh. "No," Lu Zhou said curtly. The four of them turned to look at Lu Zhou in unison. They saw an unbelievable expression of confidence on Lu Zhou's face.

Lu Zhou said, "Let's think about this in reverse."

"In reverse?" Jiang Aijian and Mingshi Yin scratched their heads. Leng Luo and Pan Litian could not quite understand this statement as well. No matter how they thought about it, it was a problem with no solution. "Please be clear, Pavilion Master!" Leng Luo rose to his feet.

Pan Litian dared not dawdle. He stood up as well.

Mingshi Yin and Jiang Aijian did the same. Lu Zhou's eyes were as bright as flames as he looked at everyone gathered there and said, "Since the Golden Lotus is taking life away... all we have to do is to cut it off." Leng Luo, Pan Litian, Jiang Aijian, and Mingshi Yin looked as though they had been struck by a bolt of lightning. This statement stirred up waves in their hearts.

Leng Luo and Pan Litian who had close to a millennium worth of experiences and the young Jiang Aijian and Mingshi Yin were equally stunned at this moment.

Jiang Aijian gulped. "Wait up... Let me breathe." He raised a hand and rubbed his chest before saying, "Old senior, if the Gold Lotus is severed, we'd suffer great damage. We won't be in peak condition. How're we supposed to attain the Nine-leaf stage?" The four of them had forgotten about the differences in their age. This was also a question that the other three wanted to know the answer to. Lu Zhou smiled warmly and said, "Isn't there a way to sever the Golden Lotus without being affected?"

The four of them were stunned.

From the current situation, Lu Zhou was of the opinion that there were two ways to enter the Nine-leaf stage. The first way was to fulfill the requirement of the Eight-leaf Golden Lotus and enter the Nine-leaf stage conventionally. This method was very difficult because nobody knew how many years of life the Golden Lotus would absorb. It was possible for it to absorb 1,000 or even 2,000 years... This was also the reason why Lu Zhou stocked up on Reversal Cards. The second way was to sever the Golden Lotus.

Lu Zhou's tone was calm as he said, "Have you ever thought about it... A cultivation method whereby the Golden Lotus is severed?"

The four of them gulped. Such a cultivation method was unheard of. However, who could say that it was impossible when nobody had studied it before? "A Nine-leaf stage without the Golden Lotus... That can only be regarded as a quasi Nine-leaf stage, at most," Jiang Aijian said. "Even without the Golden Lotus, it's still a realm higher. It's enough for your opponent to crush you with the difference in your levels and his avatar... From what we know now, the height of a Nine-leaf Avatar would be at least 150 feet," Mingshi Yin said. Leng Luo and Pan Litian nodded. The two of them sighed. Pan Litian said with a sigh, "I'm old. My mind isn't as sharp as you youngsters."

After saying this, Jiang Aijian and Mingshi Yin looked at Lu Zhou in unison.

Pan Litian's old face blushed. He felt slightly embarrassed. 'If I'm old, what would that make the pavilion master?'

This was awkward.

In any case, their discussion today was sure to change their previous cultivation methods. Leng Luo and Pan Litian bowed at the same time.

“It’s better to listen to you than read the books for 100 years.”

Mingshi Yin and Jiang Aijian were speechless. Lu Zhou stroked his beard in satisfaction as he nodded and said, “They’re merely thoughts... If you’re trying it out, proceed with extreme caution.” The four of them bowed deeply. They knew that they were not supposed to attain the Nine-leaf stage by severing their Golden Lotus unless they had a perfect plan or had no other choice. That method was too shocking. Naturally, Lu Zhou was merely providing them with a new way to think about this. After all, who would actually be willing to do that to themselves? Lu Zhou had the Reversal Cards. So long as he had enough of them, he could try to attempt it when he was at the Eight-leaf stage. However, it was unclear if there were any other undiscovered effects by practicing this method.

Meanwhile, at the exit of the Mausoleum of Swords, a person with messy hair, grimy face, and dressed in rags who emitted a peculiar aura crawled out. He took step after step, hauling a thick rope over his shoulder, out of the Mausoleum of Swords... At the other end of the rope, a completely withered corpse was being brought out. The corpse was covered in old, tattered monk robes. The person continued walking. In the next second, he appeared several hundred feet away.

Chapter 380: Three Chances

This was his skill; the Snowy Mountain. It was named for how the energy blades would fall unceasingly like the snow. They appeared as light as snowflakes but were biting cold.

Yu Shangrong appeared unruffled. When he brought his sword down, the air around within dozens of meters began to stir, and energy blades appeared around him as he dove down. The energy blades of the Snowy Mountain along with the Longevity Sword stabbed Zhang Yuanshan.

At this moment, a surge of black energy appeared from where Zhang Yuanshan stood. It rose into the air like black smoke and merged with the energy blades.

Yu Shangrong’s expression did not change. He felt the force within the black energy. He was slightly confused by it but did not dwell on the matter. Instead, he focused on attacking

vigor contained within the black energy... He did not dwell upon the slight confusion in his mind. Instead, he focused on attacking. This was the attitude of a sword path elite. They might look ordinary when they were idle, but as soon as they made a move, it would be shocking. He closed the distance of several hundred meters and was upon his target in just a blink of an eye. He brought his sword down.

Bam!

Zhang Yuanshan did not dodge.

Yu Shangrong’s blade pierced Zhang Yuanshan’s heart.

Yu Shangrong’s sword that was shrouded with powerful energy wreaked havoc through Zhang Yuanshan’s Extraordinary Eight Meridians. An ordinary cultivator’s life would end once their vital organs were injured. However, Zhang Yuanshan only narrowed his eyes and joined his palms together. A peculiar wave of energy surged out of his body like a tidal wave.

Whizz!

Yu Shangrong activated his Eight-leaf Avatar and stood atop his Golden Lotus. The avatar shrunk rapidly as the Golden Lotus spun before his avatar was sent reeling when the peculiar energy landed on the Golden Lotus.

Boom!

Yu Shangrong's avatar disappeared. He hovered in the air in the distance as he looked at Zhang Yuanshan. He murmured, "Interesting."

Zhang Yuanshan's palms trembled slightly, and he calmed himself down. It seemed like he was not satisfied with this attack. He discovered that he had underestimated the Sword Devil's strength. He said in a croaky voice, "In...te...resting?"

"I've challenged many elites in the past from the nine provinces to the four seas. Naturally, there were a few who were quite a challenge. You seem to be one of them now," Yu Shangrong said as he recalled what had just taken place. If he was not experienced in combat and had underestimated his opponent, the peculiar energy would have landed squarely on his chest.

Everyone knew that Hundred Tribulations Insight avatars possessed high defense abilities. However, very few knew that the greatest defense of the Hundred Tribulations avatar didn't lie with its body but the Golden Lotus.

Yu Shangrong's Golden Lotus had blocked Zhang Yuanshan's attack.

Zhang Yuanshan smacked his chest, dislodging the Longevity Sword. Then, he held the sword in his hand and tried to break it with his right hand.

Bam!

A loud noise reverberated in the air as the Longevity Sword flew out of Zhang Yuanshan's grip toward Yu Shangrong.

Yu Shangrong raised his right hand. As though it was sentient, the Longevity Sword flew right into his grasp. "Trying to break my sword with your bare hands? You're dreaming."

The Longevity Sword was one of the best heaven-grade weapons, after all. It had reached perfect harmony with Yu Shangrong a long time ago. It had never been inferior to any weapon that it had met. It was impossible to be broken with one's bare hands.

Whoosh!

Black energy rose again from Zhang Yuanshan. If one looked closely, one would be able to see that the black energy was actually a dark purple. It was so dark that it seemed black.

The plants and trees within several hundred meters of Zhang Yuanshan began to wither.

Yu Shangrong was certain that Zhang Yuanshan's body was no longer that of a human. Otherwise, even if Zhang Yuanshan did not die, he would have been severely injured by his Snowy Mountain technique or Longevity Sword earlier. However, Zhang Yuanshan was clearly unaffected by his attack.

The black energy formed a huge circle that spanned several hundred meters.

On the green jade altar, the Nether Sect's disciples could not suppress their curiosities. They walked up to the edge and watched the battle.

The two opponents faced each other from a distance.

Whizz!

Yu Shangrong activated his avatar. The 100-foot avatar was almost as tall as the green jade altar.

The Nether Sect's disciples were thoroughly shocked by this sight. The shining golden avatar was extremely intimidating.

Bzzt! Bzzt Bzzt!

Yu Shangrong's Longevity Sword vibrated intensely. With a calm expression on his face, he shot toward the horizon, appearing in front of his avatar.

An awe-inspiring scene unfolded before everyone's watchful eyes.

The avatar's arms seemed to be moving.

The Nether Sect's disciples were confused. They had never seen nor heard about avatars with moving body parts.

The Longevity Sword was wrapped by a powerful energy, and a massive energy blade appeared. The avatar held the energy blade between its hands.

"This is my original sword skill, merging my avatar and my sword... Hm, I haven't thought of a name for it yet."

Swoosh!

The avatar brought its arms down. The huge energy blade slashed at Zhang Yuanshan.

At the critical juncture, Zhang Yuanshan swung the rope in his hand, lifting the corpse up. He had used the corpse against the energy blade!

All of a sudden, the withered corpse suddenly opened its eyes, and powerful energy surged out of it. Meanwhile, a black avatar in an upside-down position clashed with the energy blade.

Boom!

One of the Nether Sect's disciples on the green jade altar exclaimed, "Fiend Zen!"

However, this was clearly more than just Fiend Zen.

Yu Shangrong frowned as he retreated with his avatar. 'He knows how to defend himself using his Golden Lotus?' It seemed like he had been too careless. Zhang Yuanshan had copied his move. As he retreated, he saw the corpse's eyes were still open and it had joined its palm together.

"Die!" Zhang Yuanshan cried out. This was his second chance!

The black avatar flew out swiftly with the lotus in tow.

Nobody had ever witnessed such a technique before. Where could they have seen someone battling by tying a corpse to the end of the rope and to use it as a weapon?

“Don’t. Disregard. Me,” Zhang Yuanshan said stiltedly as he stomped his feet, shooting up into the air like a fired arrow. The corpse flew along with him. Along with the avatar, they formed a vertical formation.

“Mister Second!” the Nether Sect’s disciples cried out in worry.

Yu Shangrong was sent flying back at an extremely fast speed. In just an instant, his figure could no longer be seen from the green jade altar.

Zhang Yuanshan’s arms turned black. The black energy and Kong Yuan’s corpse launched wave after wave of attacks.

Zhang Yuanshan’s throat made some gurgling noise. It seemed like he was... laughing. Three beams of energy were enough to shatter Yu Shangrong’s avatar.

At this moment, a voice rang out. “Second Senior Brother!”

Then, a body of water fell from the skies like a waterfall and rained down on Yu Shangrong’s Hundred Tribulations Insight avatar.

The beams of energy landed on the incredible body of water. Above the falling water, a female avatar could be seen. It was like an ice goddess as it radiated with energy. The Amorous Hoop could be seen dancing in the body of water.

Within 1,000 meters, all the buildings were completely destroyed in just a moment.

“Blue Waves Technique? Sixth Junior Sister?” Yu Shangrong looked up. He glanced at her before he said forcefully, “Stand back!” He had already regained his footing at this time. He shot toward the opposite direction. His avatar had disappeared.

Zhang Yuanshan had a murderous expression on his face as he said in his creepy voice, “Curs.. curse you!”

The newcomer was none other than Ye Tianxin. She had done everything she could to block the attack from Kong Yuan’s corpse. However, there was still Zhang Yuanshan to contend with.

Zhang Yuanshan’s arms grew bigger and his muscles bulged. “The... third... chance... Everyone. Must... die!”

Ye Tianxin recalled her Amorous Hoop. She took Yu Shangrong’s advice and swiftly retreated with her avatar.

“Second Senior Brother, he has a grand shaman supporting him... The Enter and Return Three Souls should be able to deal with it.” As Ye Tianxin projected her voice to Yu Shangrong, she felt an energy closing in on her. Suddenly, she discovered that not only Zhang Yuanshan’s arms grew bigger, but it seemed like he had grown tentacles. Some of the tentacles were already upon her!