

Disciples 521

Chapter 521: On A Platter

"Can be used against a Nine-leaf cultivator?" Lu Zhou was puzzled.

Zhou Wenliang continued to say, "This armor was sent by the Crown Prince, Liu Zhi. He said that a Nine-leaf cultivator will be able to activate the armor's special power. In any case, I don't believe it at all! Please examine this thoroughly, Senior Ji!" After he finished speaking, his eyes instinctively wandered to the sides again. He wondered where the other little villains were. Why were there only two repulsive men in the hall apart from the pavilion master? Naturally, he did not dare give voice to these questions.

Pan Zhong said with a sneer, "There's no need for you to tell us what to do. Since you're so good at telling others what they should do, why didn't you tell Lin Xin to personally come and apologize?"

A helpless expression appeared on Zhou Wenliang's face as he said, "Even the president can't persuade the patriarch, let alone us."

Wang Jianrang, who was kneeling at the back, hastily said, "Please examine this thoroughly, Senior Ji. The three of us are sincere in our apologies. That old fart, Lin Xin, is trying to push the Taixu Academy to destruction... As elders, we can't stay idle when the academy is being pushed onto the path of destruction!"

Lu Zhou remained silent. He rose to his feet and descended the steps. He came to a stop in front of Zhou Wenliang and studied the armor again. He flipped his palm, and the armor floated up. It was covered in fine red threads. Every detail was meticulously carved.

Although Zhou Jifeng did not understand the veins on the armor, previously, he had been ordered to make copies of the veins on the coffin. Therefore, he still had a vague recollection of the veins on the coffin. When he finally saw the veins on the armor, he exclaimed in shock, "Why do they resemble the veins on the coffin?"

Lu Zhou stroked his beard and continued to study it.

Zhou Wenliang looked up and said, "The Crown Prince, Liu Zhi, has said that the unique power of this armor will be activated when it encounters a Nine-leaf cultivator. It's only a despicable lie to fool children. Liu Zhi wants to use the Taixu Academy to keep the Evil Sky Pavilion occupied. Hence, he produced this so-called special armor to drive a wedge between us."

Lu Zhou looked at Zhou Wenliang and asked, "Why do you say that?"

"Well... This is just my opinion. If there's truly a way to deal with a Nine-leaf cultivator, the Crown Prince would have used this when the seven great sects attacked you back then. Otherwise, why did he keep the armor hidden and send the other sects to meet their deaths?" Zhou Wenliang replied.

Lu Zhou did not refute Zhou Wenliang's opinion. After all, Zhou Wenliang had a point. However, when the seven great sects laid siege on the Golden Court Mountain, nobody believed that the Nine-leaf stage existed. If Lin Xin were to don the armor, with his skills, he could stand up against cultivators of the Eight-leaf stage and below. At that time, only a Nine-leaf cultivator could take Lin Xin down.

"Senior Ji, please examine this thoroughly," Zhou Wenliang said in a clear voice.

“Only an outstanding talent can recognize current trends...” Lu Zhou turned around and paced with his hands on his back, “Put it on.”

“Huh?” Zhou Wenliang was taken aback. He did not know where this was going.

Without waiting for a reply from Lu Zhou, Pan Zhong urged Zhou Wenliang. “Get on with it. Wear it!”

“Yes, yes, yes...” Zhou Wenliang dared not dally. He hastily put on the thick and heavy armor. After donning it, he remained in his submissive position and dared not move.

Lu Zhou gauged him for a moment. The veins were basically the same as the ones on the coffin. He said tonelessly, “Stand up.”

Zhou Wenliang did as he was told. He stood up, trembling with fear and trepidation. The moment he stood up, he saw Lu Zhou raising his big wizened hand. There was a flurry of movements before he saw a shining golden palm seal shooting out of Lu Zhou’s palm.

“Ahh!” Zhou Wenliang did not expect Lu Zhou to suddenly attack him. He was completely caught off guard.

Bam!

The palm seal landed on Zhou Wenliang’s chest. He felt keenly felt the impact of the attack as he was sent flying back with his back arched

Wang Jianrang and Zhang Gong frowned as they looked at Zhou Wenliang who was sent reeling back.

The palm seal did not fade away immediately. It stuck to Zhou Wenliang tightly as he flew out of the great hall.

Thud!

When the power subsided, Zhou Wenliang lay on the ground, facing the sky. He felt as though his joints had come loose. It was a terrible feeling.

Evidently, the ‘special power’ of the armor was not triggered at all.

At this moment, Wang Jianrang was the first to react. He cried out, “Look! This item is a fake, after all!”

Zhang Gong chimed in, “Lin Xin is too despicable. He has no regard for the safety of the Taixu Academy. We were almost fooled by Liu Zhi.”

To be honest, Lu Zhou’s palm strike was that of a Two-leaf Nascent Divinity realm cultivator. It was not a Nine-leaf elite’s attack.

Lu Zhou felt helpless as well. ‘I can’t just launch a Nine-leaf attack just because I want to.’

Regardless of the strength of the blow, it was still of the Two-leaf Nascent Divinity realm.

Pan Zhong interjected, “Your control over palm seals have truly reached amazing heights, Pavilion Master.”

Zhou Jifeng. “???”

Outside the great hall, Zhou Wenliang picked himself up with difficulty. He stood outside and bowed at Lu Zhou as he said, "That was a powerful strike, Senior Ji... This armor is completely useless." One of his hands was pressed to his chest as he endured the pain and walked into the great hall again.

Lu Zhou studied the armor and the veins on it again. Nothing was triggered at all. Nevertheless, he had a hunch, just like the coffin, the armor was not a fake.

'... so, it can only be triggered by a Nine-leaf attack?'

Lu Zhou was still lost in his thoughts when a loud voice rang from outside the great hall.

"Master, your palm seal is too dazzling. I could see it clearly from afar." Zhu Honggong walked into the hall with his back bent.

"Mister Eighth." Pan Zhong and Zhou Jifeng greeted Zhu Honggong at the same time.

The three Taixu Academy's elders turned around and saw the fat and big-eared Zhu Honggong walking into the hall with his back bent. They were puzzled. Was this the Evil Sky Pavilion's Mister Eighth, Zhu Honggong? This guy? This guy was the Evil King?

When Zhu Honggong was walking past them, the ingratiating smile on his face disappeared. However, as soon as he passed them, the ingratiating smile appeared on his face again. Clearly, he had reached great heights in changing his expressions.

Pan Zhong and Zhou Jifeng were duly impressed. "..."

Pan Zhong remembered his own attempt at flattery moments ago. Compared to Zhu Honggong, it seemed like he still had ways to go.

"What is it?" Lu Zhou looked at Zhu Honggong.

Zhu Honggong said, "Fourth Senior Brother wants me to pass on a message to you. He said that the Taixu Academy has long been associated with the Imperial family."

'Is he not a disciple of the Evil Sky Pavilion? Why does he need to help someone to pass on a message?' Despite the thoughts running across his mind, Zhou Wenliang fell to his knees immediately as soon as he heard Zhu Honggong's words. "Please examine this thoroughly, Senior Ji. That's the old fart, Lin Xin's idea. The three of us have nothing to do with it."

Lu Zhou looked at the trio calmly. Nobody could tell what was running through his mind. Finally, he said indifferently, "I can feel the sincerity from three of you. Leave the armor here."

Zhou Wenliang was overjoyed. He immediately removed the armor.

Then, the trio from the Taixu Academy thanked Lu Zhou in unison. "Thank you, Senior Ji."

"Ding! Worshipped by three individuals. Reward: 3 merit points."

"But..."

"Huh?" The trio who had just relaxed tensed up again.

“Once I ascertain Lin Xin is the only one causing trouble, I’ll spare the three of you. Lock them up for now.” Lu Zhou waved his hand.

Pan Zhong and Zhou Jifeng bowed at the same time. “Understood.”

“Please examine this thoroughly, Senior Ji! Senior Ji, I’m telling the truth!” As he was dragged away, Zhou Wenliang wondered when he had misspoken. He could find any fault with his words. What was happening?

In the end, the trio was locked in the northern pavilion’s warehouse where they could even see the sun. Inside the warehouse.

Wang Jianran asked, “Elder Zhou, will you plan work?”

“Don’t worry... It’ll work.”

With his hands on his back, Zhou Wenliang said, “At the very least, Old Villain Ji didn’t outright kill us, right?”

“The problem is, now that the armor is proven to be fake, how is Lin Xin going to deal with Old Villain Ji?” Wang Jianrang asked.

Zhou Wenliang frowned. “It doesn’t matter if it’s real or not. So long as Old Villain Ji believes Lin Xin is in cahoots with the Crown Prince, it’s enough. With Lin Xin out of the picture and president Xiao Shan in Yu Province, the Taixu Academy will belong to the three of us. Old Villain Ji is a Nine-leaf cultivator, after all. He won’t be defeated that easily.”

Wang Jianrang nodded. “You’ve truly thought this through, Brother Zhou.”

Zhou Wenliang snorted. “Men die for riches while birds die for food. How can you get the cub without entering the tiger’s den?”

When the tiger’s den was mentioned, Zhang Gong said in a hushed tone, “By the way, the Evil Sky Pavilion doesn’t look as scary as I expected it to be.”

Chapter 522: Receiving the Earth Scroll Remnant Piece

Zhou Wenliang nodded and said, “You’re right. Based on our short exchange, Old Villain Ji didn’t seem as short-tempered as rumored. Also, he’s somewhat reasonable.”

“What are we going to do now?” Wang Jianrang asked.

“It’s alright for us to stay here. Once Lin Xin is dead, Old Villain Ji should release us. Most importantly, we can’t afford to say the wrong things after this,” Zhou Wenliang said warningly.

“Understood.”

...

Meanwhile, in a certain court in the southern pavilion of the Evil Sky Pavilion.

The four elders had gathered together.

At this moment, Leng Luo, Pan Litian, Hua Wudao, and Zuo Yushu took turns to study the armor. After learning about the situation with the Taixu Academy, the four of them were lost in thought.

After a moment, Lu Zhou said, "Elders, what do you think?"

Leng Luo said, "The Formation veins on the armor are fine. I've never seen them before. I don't think anyone in this world is capable of making them."

"That's what I thought as well."

"I agree," Hua Wudao chimed in.

The three elderly men exchanged a look as though commending each other for sharing the same wise opinion.

Lu Zhou looked at Zuo Yushu who remained silent.

Zuo Yushu rolled her eyes at the three old men. She muttered to herself for a brief moment before she asked, "Is this the armor really from Lin Xin, brother?"

"Of course." Lu Zhou suddenly recalled that Zuo Yushu was originally a Confucian elite. She shared the same roots as Lin Xin.

Zuo Yushu said with a front, "To think that he has gone and colluded with the Crown Prince... I am reminded of one thing, though."

"What is it?"

"Back when I had just attained the Eight-leaf stage, I was invited to the palace to meet His Majesty. We discussed our thoughts and experiences of being at the Eight-leaf stage. His Majesty once asked if I looked forward to the Nine-leaf stage. I smiled and said there was no such thing in the world. In hindsight, the Imperial family must've long known about the Nine-leaf stage a long time ago. This armor... is surely made by a Nine-leaf cultivator," Zuo Yushu replied.

Leng Luo, Hua Wudao, and Pan Litian were inwardly shocked by Zuo Yunshu's words. It was common knowledge that the Confucian school was adept in Formation veins. There was no reason to doubt her words.

"If my observations are correct, once these Formation veins are activated, they'll produce a powerful surge of energy that Eight-leaf and Nine-leaf cultivators would find difficult to defend against!"

The others inhaled sharply upon hearing this.

Zhu Honggong wore an incredulous expression on his face as he asked "It's so powerful?"

"Of course... You're still young and inexperienced. The Confucian school is an expert in Formations. It's nothing to be surprised about."

"I'm enlightened." Zhu Honggong bowed.

Lu Zhou nodded. "I see." He raised his palm and sent a surge of energy to carry the armor over.

The four elders and Zhu Honggong retreated. They saw a faint blue light shining from between Lu Zhou's fingers. Four huge scripts could be seen around his hand. This was the technique, Abandon Wisdom.

The palm seal struck the armor.

Lu Zhou had thought the armor's special powers would not be triggered, but it suddenly buzzed.

"Stand back," Lu Zhou said gruffly.

The four elders pushed away from the ground and shot out of the great hall.

"Wait, wait, wait... me... Wait for me..." Zhu Honggong turned around and ran out.

The armor unleashed a scarlet light.

Lu Zhou did not leave. He stared at the armor. What kind of power was capable of dealing with a Nine-leaf cultivator?

Bzzt! Bzzt! Bzzt!

The armor kept vibrating. The red veins seemed to be set on fire as it spread. The veins turned into energy lines that crept into the surroundings like a spider's web.

A slight sense of unease stirred inside Lu Zhou. 'Should I use my Critical Block Card?'

Lu Zhou could sense the danger from the energy lines. It was strange, stranger than those on the coffins.

At this moment, realization dawned on him. The Heavenly Writing's Human Scroll was slightly stronger than a Nine-leaf cultivator. It was the Heavenly Writing power that triggered the special power of the armor.

Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!

"Pavilion Master!"

"Master!"

The powerful energy instantly enveloped the courtyard at lightning speed.

"Stand back!" Zuo Yushu grabbed Zhu Honggong and flew away.

"As expected, its power is comparable to the Nine-leaf stage!"

Leng Luo, Hua Wudao, and Pan Litian stayed as far as they could. The red web covering the air above them kept spreading. It spread toward the skies and eventually vanished.

Everything fell silent again soon after.

The four elders and Zhu Honggong stood unmoving, stunned. Although they were former Eight-leaf elites, they were still shocked by the strange power that emitted great danger. A frown could be seen on their faces as they looked at the courtyard. None of them dared to speak or move.

Zhu Honggong fell backward and sat limply on the ground. He began to cry out, "Master! Master... You can't die! Master!"

The four elders of the Old Age Pavilion. “???”

‘Die?’

‘That’s unlikely.’

However, the elders were uncertain if Lu Zhou was completely unharmed. After all, in their eyes, Lu Zhou was a bona fide Nine-leaf cultivator. Although the armor could unleash an energy comparable to a Nine-leaf elite, surely, the pavilion master could withstand it if he went all out?

Creak! Creak! Creak!

Strange creaking noises rang from the building at this moment.

Crack!

The entire building seemed to be made of tofu as it began to fall apart in pieces. The ground was littered with debris. The red webs of energy lines had sliced through the building with their might. The cuts were smooth and even!

Boom!

More debris crashed onto the ground, stirring up a cloud of dust.

“Oh, master! Ah... you... that’s a... Eh? Master, it’s good to see you’re unharmed!”

The dust settled.

Their vision cleared, and they saw Lu Zhou standing in his original spot with his hands on his back. He did not move at all. He was completely shrouded by a faint blue layer of electricity, protecting him from damage.

“Ding! Obtained the Earth Scroll remnant piece. Reward: 1,000 merit points.”

Earth Scroll remnant piece?

Lu Zhou glanced at the Earth Scroll on the system dashboard. As he expected, the scripts on the scroll seemed to have been activated as they jumped about. This resembled the scene when he first read the contents of the Human Scroll. This meant that he could start meditating on the Earth Scroll. He had traveled far and wide to search for it only to find it so easily. Then, he checked his Critical Block Cards. They were not triggered at all. This meant his power to silence everything had negated the blast from the energy lines. If it were not for the Heavenly Writing scroll, he would have had no choice but to use an Impeccable Card to defend against the armor’s mysterious power. For the time being, it was a win.

“Your amazing might is astonishing, Pavilion Master!”

“I’m impressed by your technique, brother.”

“Although I don’t know what this technique is, it’s certainly more powerful than an Eight-leaf move...”

Hua Wudao was stunned speechless. Then, he quickly said, “When I first came to the Evil Sky Pavilion, I could still spar with the pavilion master even if I lost. However, now, I can’t imagine sparring with you at

all. To think I've treated you as a rival... What a joke! Someone like you can only be admired but never surpassed."

The four elders offered their praises.

Zhu Honggong was taken aback by this. He was about to say something as well when Lu Zhou asked, "Old Eighth, why are you sitting on the ground?"

"Huh?" Zhu Honggong immediately raised his hand to slap his face a few times. "Master, I will deeply reflect on my actions."

"Reflect?"

Zhu Honggong continued to slap himself loudly.

"That's enough." Lu Zhou had just obtained the Earth Scroll and was in a good mood. He had no time to entertain Zhu Honggong. He said, "Tell Lin Xin that I've changed my mind. I want to see his head in seven days."

Chapter 523: Challenging Old Villain Ji

Lu Zhou walked out of the courtyard. It completely exceeded his expectations to obtain the remnant piece from the armor. When the red energy lines exploded, he discovered someone had hidden the Earth Scroll remnant in the armor. The Heavenly Writing scroll in the Melilot Graveyard was not damaged even though it had been left there for a long time. How did the armor survive for centuries? It was all due to the Earth Scroll remnant piece.

'Is this the source of the armor's so-called unique power?'

At this moment, Zuo Yushu bowed at Lu Zhou and said, "Brother, Lin Xin and I share the same roots, after all. Should I pay him a personal visit?"

Lu Zhou looked at Zuo Yushu. "If you have your cultivation base, I'd approve of this without question. However, you've severed your lotus and are recultivating. How are you going to deal with him?"

Zuo Yushu raised her walking stick slowly and tapped it on the ground. An avatar appeared behind her. No Golden Lotus could be seen under the avatar's feet; only two leaves could be seen spinning around it.

"With your help, brother, I'm now in the Two-leaf Nascent Divinity realm." A hint of pride could be seen on her face as she spoke as though she was showing. Indeed. She had the right to brag. After severing her lotus and having to recultivate, her talent was evident in how she had managed to reach the Two-leaf stage again in such a short time.

Lu Zhou shook his head. "The Two-leaf stage is too low."

Zuo Yushu's face fell.

Zhu Honggong interjected, "Don't be depressed, Elder Zuo. I'm only at the One-leaf stage... At our level, we'll be cut down in no time if we venture out there now."

“...” Zuo Yushu staggered and nearly lost her footing.

“Elder Zuo!”

“I... I’m fine.” Zuo Yushu looked at Zhu Honggong who was next to her. ‘How frustrating. Talents, cultivation base, experience, and technique, which of these am I weaker than Zhu Honggong?’ She found it difficult to accept that he was catching up to her.

“Stay here and focus on your cultivation... You’ll have plenty of chances to show your skills in the future,” Lu Zhou said before turning to leave.

“Safe journey, Pavilion Master.”

...

Lu Zhou returned to the eastern pavilion. He did not rush to meditate on the Earth Scroll. Based on his experience of meditating on the Human Scroll and when he obtained the first power, he would enter an unconscious state. However, he did not draw much attention to himself back then because of his weak cultivation base and also because he was ensconced in the hidden chamber when he was meditating.

The Imperial family was keeping a keen eye on the Evil Sky Pavilion at the moment. If there truly was a method to deal with a Nine-leaf cultivator, this armor would not be the only trump card they had.

To be safe, Lu Zhou decided to intimidate them further.

...

The next day, a letter arrived at the Taixu Academy’s main branch.

For a time, the content of the letter terrified the entire Taixu Academy.

The elders of the Taixu Academy immediately called for a meeting.

Inside the discussion hall.

Lin Xin swept his eyes across the elders who were present before he asked, “Where are Zhou Wenliang, Wang Jianrang, and Zhang Gong?”

“Patriarch, the three elders went out yesterday and have yet to return.”

Lin Xin frowned slightly. “Forget about them.”

“Patriarch, the Evil Sky Pavilion has sent another letter. This time, they’re demanding your head. This is going too far!”

It seemed like the Crown Prince’s visit had bolstered some of the elders’ confidence.

Lin Xin said apathetically, “I’ve decided to challenge Old Villain Ji three days later on Dangyang Peak. Men.”

A disciple appeared inside the discussion hall. “Yes, Patriarch.”

“Bring me my armor.”

“Understood.”

In no time at all, two disciples carried a box into the discussion hall.

When Lin Xin saw the box, he spoke in an extremely valiant manner. “Our success or failure will be determined by this.”

...

Shortly after, the news of the Taixu Academy’s Patriarch challenging the Evil Sky Pavilion’s Old Villain Ji spread like a wildfire. It was like a single pebble that gave rise to a thousand ripples.

Lin Xin, the Patriarch of the Taixu Academy, was only at the Eight-leaf stage in his prime. Where did he get the courage to challenge Old Villain Ji?

There were many differing opinions regarding this matter.

...

In the afternoon, the Hengqu Branch was also made aware of this.

The Hengqu Branch Master, Shi Hong, called for an emergency meeting with the elders.

“I think everyone has heard that Lin Xin intends to challenge Old Villain Ji on Dangyang Peak. What are your views on this?” Shi Gong asked.

“Is Lin Xin out of his mind? He didn’t even dare to provoke Old Villain Ji when he was in his prime. Why is he throwing his life away now by challenging Old Villain Ji who has entered the Nine-leaf stage?”

At this moment, the Third Elder said, “I heard that the Crown Prince, Liu Zhi, visited the Taixu Academy and had given them a boost of confidence.”

“A boost of confidence? Unless someone else in the Divine Capital has attained the Nine-leaf stage or the Ten Terminal Formation has been moved to Dangyang Peak, I don’t see where their confidence could have come from.”

The branch master, Shi Hong, shook his head and said, “Our Grand Elder, Zhang Can, is most likely killed by the Evil Sky Pavilion. There’s a chance the next target on the Evil Sky Pavilion’s list is our branch.”

The others were stunned. That was right. Making fun of the Taixu Academy was the same as making fun of their future selves.

“Second Elder, lead some of our men to Dangyang Peak and secretly observe.”

“Understood.”

...

The Big Dipper Academy.

President Zhou gathered several disciples and said, “I heard that the Taixu Academy’s Patriarch Lin Xin is challenging Old Villain Ji to a fight on Dangyang Peak. You are to investigate this but not interfere. Remember that well.”

“Understood.”

Zhou Youcai nodded and said, “If Lin Xin loses, act as though you’ve seen nothing. If Lin Xin wins, send me a letter immediately.”

“Understood!”

...

At the same time, the Sky Conduct Academy, the factions in the Divine Capital, the Crown Prince’s retainers, the Imperial guards, and the remnants of the ten great sects that survived the Evil Sky Pavilion’s slaughter sent their men to Dangyang Peak as well.

...

On the third day.

Dangyang Peak.

It was a bright and sunny day. A gentle breeze blew in the air.

Lin Xin, the Taixu Academy’s Patriarch, sat in the center of a huge rock platform in a stately manner.

Two disciples stood not far behind him. Both of them were sweating profusely due to their lack of confidence.

“Has the word been spread?” Lin Xin asked.

“It has been sent out two days ago, patriarch.”

Lin Xin looked at the sun above and said, “Help me put on the armor.”

“Yes, patriarch.”

The two disciples opened the box and took the armor out. They walked respectfully to Lin Xin’s sides.

Lin Xin glanced at the armor and asked, “Why is it wrapped in a cloak?”

“Elder Zhou said this way your magnificence would be magnified when we unveil it,” one of the disciples replied dutifully.

At Lin Xin’s age, he no longer cared for appearances. However, on this day, he felt that it was necessary to appear valiant and formidable. He donned the armor as he said, “Just as well... I’m sure many sects are here to watch me fall. I’ll show them.”

“Patriarch... we’re counting on you,” the two disciples said before retreating.

Lin Xin said with a chuckle, “I know that people in the academy and the other sects are saying that I’ve lost my mind. However, they don’t know the source of my confidence is given by His Highness, the Crown Prince...”

“Patriarch, is the armor the source of your confidence?”

“You’ll see soon enough.” Lin Xin stroked his beard and nodded.

The two disciples did not know what else to say,

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At this moment, many cultivators flew to Dangyang Peak and hid in various corners and crevices around the peak. All of them had their eyes trained on the peak.

...

When the sun was beginning to set, Lin Xin turned around and looked in the direction of the Evil Sky Pavilion. He did not see any cultivator flying toward him in the cloudless sky. He scoffed before he said, "It seems like Old Villain Ji is afraid..."

"You're right, Patriarch."

The later Lu Zhou arrived, the more confident he felt. Finally, after some time had passed, he was about to turn around and leave.

At the same moment, a flying chariot that left a glowing tail in its wake like a comet appeared on the horizon.

It was finally here!

The cultivators who were hiding around the peak saw the flying chariot as well and began to spread the word.

"The Evil Sky Pavilion's flying chariot is here."

Chapter 524: You Can't Even Beat Me, and You're Thinking of Challenging My Master?

The hidden cultivator looked at the meteor-like cloud-splitting chariot unblinking eyes, unwilling to miss even a single detail.

"It's here."

"It's truly the Evil Sky Pavilion's cloud-splitting chariot."

"I'm scared. What if Old Villain Ji goes all Nine-leaf on us and kills?"

"Scram!"

There were some cultivators gathered at the foot of the mountain as well.

When Lin Xin saw the cloud-splitting chariot, he was taken aback at first. Then, he said loudly, "Right on time. The others should stand back."

"Understood."

The Taixu Academy disciples retreated until they were off the round stone platform.

At this moment, Lin Xin was the only one left standing on the round stone platform.

The cloud-splitting chariot flew quickly. From the moment it appeared within everyone's eyes, it took only a few brief moments before it arrived above Dangyang Peak.

Lin Xin sneered as he looked up and said, "Old Villain Ji, you're finally here."

Meanwhile, the cultivators hidden among the forest and at the foot of the mountain looked up eagerly.

The cloud-splitting chariot was silent as it hovered in the air. It was motionless as though it had been frozen in time.

"Old Villain Ji... Let me have a taste of your Nine-leaf power!" Lin Xin said. As soon as he finished speaking...

Whoosh!

A spear shadow shot out of the flying chariot. The spear shadow drew an arc in the air at lightning speed before it transformed into an energy spear.

Lin Xin said, displeased and smug, "Even without my protective energy, you can't hurt me with this." After all, the armor he was wearing was made by a Nine-leaf cultivator. The intricacy of the Formation veins on the armor was mind-boggling. He had studied the veins for an entire night and was convinced the armor was one of a kind. The special power could only be triggered by a Nine-leaf attack. Anything below that could hardly get a rise out of it. It was only natural that he disdained the spear.

Lin Xin held his ground and stood motionlessly.

When the spear's tip was upon Lin Xin, it suddenly spun like an electric drill. With a final spurt, it pierced his armor.

"Sh*t!" Lin Xin reacted quickly. The instant his armor was pierced, he let out a burst of energy and sidestepped it. Alas, the Overlord Spear was too close to him. He did not manage to avoid getting his vital points pierced. The spear's tip easily sliced through the side of his waist.

The battle ended just like that.

There was no Nine-leaf technique, no extravagant palm, or energy seals. There was no battle that shocked the world or made the gods and ghosts cry.

The onlookers from the various sects were stunned. They felt as repulsed as though they had been forcibly fed flies...

'That's it?'

Meanwhile, on the flying chariot, Duanmu Sheng had the same thought. He had gone all out when he attacked. He would never hold back when he attacked even if it was just his first move. He had thrown his Overlord Spear out with all his might, but he did not expect his spear to easily stab a great Eight-leaf elite. He looked at his palms in confusion as he thought to himself, 'Did I unknowingly grow so strong while I was training all this time?'

Duanmu Sheng had hit an Eight-leaf cultivator with a single strike. Who would believe him if he told them this?

At the same time, Lin Xin lowered his head. His eyelids twitched.

The sun shone on his chest.

The Overlord Spear had pierced through his waist and was now embedded on the ground. Blood flowed down the Overlord Spear to its tip before eventually dripping on the round stone platform, looking like a river of blood. The heat from the sun dried the blood into a sticky mess.

'H-how's this possible?' Lin Xin tore his clothes, removing them. There was no special armor. He only saw ordinary armor worn by ordinary soldiers.

'A fake? This is a fake?' Lin Xin's eyes widened, and his lips trembled. He struck with his palm.

Bam!

The Overlord Spear was pushed out of his waist. He did not mind the two-fold damage he suffered as he forced the Overlord Spear out.

At this moment, Duanmu Sheng leaped off the flying chariot. He raised his hand and summoned the Overlord Spear back to him before he landed nimbly on the round platform.

On Dangyang Peak, the Evil Sky Pavilion's Mister Third, Duanmu Sheng, wielded the Overlord Spear with a hand at an angle behind him as he looked at his opponent.

Lin Xin, after suffering two blows, staggered backward. He forcibly tapped his meridian points to keep himself from toppling over. Although he was getting old, an Eight-leaf cultivator was still an Eight-leaf cultivator.

Meanwhile, the onlookers were stunned.

After a long pause, Lin Xin pressed on his chest and mumbled, "I get it... I get it now..." He chuckled as he spoke.

"What do you get?" Duanmu Sheng pointed at Lin Xin from a distance.

"Everyone wants me to die. The Taixu Academy Elders, the disciples, and the Crown Prince... All of them want me dead." Lin Xin laughed as though he had lost his mind.

Duanmu Sheng said, "You deserve to die, anyway."

"Yes, I deserve to die!" Although Lin Xin had stopped his bleeding, the spear had injured his internal organs as well. He looked at the flying chariot as he said, "I want to talk to Old Villain Ji."

After a short pause, Lu Zhou slowly rose to his feet on the flying chariot. He stood beside the helm and looked down at Lin Xin. "Lin Xin, what more do you have to say?"

When Lin Xin saw Lu Zhou, he felt invigorated. "I've never feared anyone in my life, but you, Ji Tiandao, might be the first. I do not wish to explain myself further..."

Lu Zhou placed his hands on his back and asked, "Nothing else?"

"If it's possible, I'd like to exchange a few blows with you before I die!" Lin Xin unleashed a dense stream of Primal Qi. The Primal Qi grew denser. His aura was clearly different now. It was clear he had chosen to burn his sea of Qi. This was like a struggle before his death.

The onlookers were shocked by Lin Xin's decision to burn his sea of Qi. From afar, he looked as though he was on fire. The fight had not even begun, but he was already burning his sea of Qi?

Lu Zhou said tonelessly, "You can't even defeat my disciple, and you're fantasizing about fighting me..."

"..."

Upon hearing Lu Zhou's words, Lin Xin's eyes widened as he stumbled a step back. Indeed. He could not even stop the old villain's third disciple. What right did he have to fight the old villain?

Duanmu Sheng stepped forward fearlessly. He did not fear any Eight-leaf cultivator, let alone a heavily-injured one.

Lin Xin looked at Duanmu Sheng and said, "If it weren't for this armor, you wouldn't have had a chance."

"The weak will only find excuses for themselves." Duanmu Sheng suddenly stepped forward swiftly.

Thousands of spear shadows appeared.

Bam! Bam! Bam!

They stabbed Lin Xin.

"Get lost!"

Boom!

Duanmu Sheng was pushed back by the surging power. He rolled as he retreated.

An Eight-leaf cultivator was, indeed, powerful!

The moment Lin Xin let out a burst of Primal Qi, the wound on his waist suddenly tore and widened. He grunted in pain, causing his Primal Qi to scatter.

"Patriarch!" A figure rushed over.

Splat!

A cold light glinted in the sunlight as Lin Xin was slashed from his chest to his abdomen. His sea of Qi had been cut as well. His eyes widened as he looked at the figure who had rushed up to him. The person was smiling as he wielded a weapon that was neither a saber nor a hook. The weapon was densely wrapped in Primal Qi.

Meanwhile, the two Taixu Academy disciples did not move from their spots at all.

As the Taixu Academy's Patriarch, throughout all the long years he had lived, Lin Xin had never felt as humiliated as he did at this moment. He felt as though he had played right into his enemies' traps. Everything was a ploy.

"Despicable!" Lin Xin cursed.

"I'm sorry, cursing at me won't help you survive... You can't even beat me, and you're thinking of challenging my master? Heh!"

Chapter 525: Deterrence

Lin Xin looked at his opened chest, furious, before he looked at the flying chariot again. Then, he announced in a loud voice, "You've won."

He chose to submit to his fate. He closed his eyes and fell backward.

Thud!

The oldest Patriarch of the Taixu Academy, Lin Xin, had gone to the Yellow Springs before he even got to fight the Evil Sky Pavilion's Patriarch.

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

Duanmu Sheng stabilized himself as he landed. He looked at Mingshi Yin and said, "Sneak attack?"

Mingshi Yin hastily said, "Third Senior Brother, it's all thanks to you. Your spear strike truly shocked the world and made the gods and ghosts cry... You actually impaled an Eight-leaf expert!"

Duanmu Sheng nodded slightly. "You're not bad yourself."

"Thank you for the praise, Third Senior Brother."

While the two were flattering each other, the disciples who stood outside the round platform were frightened out of their wits. They hastily turned around to flee. Fortunately for them, Duanmu Sheng and Mingshi Yin did not consider them as opponents at all.

Meanwhile, the observers from the various sects were still in shock by the sudden turn of events. Lin Xin was an Eight-leaf elite, after all, and yet, he did not even get to fight Old Villain Ji. How could they not be shocked?

The news of Lin Xin's death spread like wildfire.

In the corner where the members of the Big Dipper Academy were hidden, their leader looked at Danyang Peak and waved his hand. "Retreat. We saw nothing today. Go..."

The disciples of the Big Dipper Academy who came to watch the battle immediately hurried away from the spot.

Meanwhile, the Hengqu Branch disciples could not understand what they had just witnessed. How were they supposed to explain how the Evil Sky Pavilion disciples killed a great Eight-leaf cultivator?

"Notify the sect master that Lin Xin is dead and that Old Villain Ji didn't even need to make a move!"

The remnants of the ten great sects were the most affected by this result. They thought they could avenge the deaths of their brethren through the Taixu Academy. Lin Xin's death dealt them another heavy blow!

"Is the Evil Sky Pavilion truly unstoppable?"

Someone sighed. "I expected too much... What a joke! How can an Eight-leaf cultivator possibly win against a Nine-leaf cultivator? It's laughable, really..."

"If I were Old Villain Ji... I would've summoned my Nine-leaf avatar and annihilate the Taixu Academy. Old Villain Ji is too merciful."

As the saying went, 'It's better to remove the roots of all troubles'.

As the hidden cultivators were leaving, the Evil Sky Pavilion's flying chariot flew toward the Taixu Academy's main branch instead of returning to the Evil Sky Pavilion...

Duanmu Sheng and Mingshi Yin had already returned to the cloud-splitting chariot.

Lu Zhou stroked his beard expressionlessly as he looked at the Taixu Academy's main tower.

Mingshi Yin said, "The eye of the Formation should be on the main tower's tip. I don't think they'll be bold enough to stop us."

Shortly after, under everyone's eyes, the cloud-splitting chariot moved to the air above the main tower.

The Taixu Academy disciples were baffled.

The cultivators who had not left yet were perplexed as well.

"What's Old Villain Ji trying to do?"

"He can't be thinking of breaking the barrier and letting loose, right?"

None of the Taixu Academy disciples dared to step out of the barrier. In the cultivation world, the reason why the major sects remained firmly established was due to their respective Formations. When the ten great sects attacked the Evil Sky Pavilion back then, Golden Court Mountain had remained untouched for quite some time due to its barrier.

"The Taixu Academy is a Confucian school, after all. Confucian schools are filled with great Formation users. I'm afraid it'll be difficult to breach their barrier."

"Indeed... Will Old Villain Ji use his Nine-leaf strength to wipe them out?"

"It's possible. In any case, an Eight-leaf cultivator can't possibly break this barrier."

At this moment, Lu Zhou stood next to the helm of the cloud-splitting chariot as he directed a palm downward. His fingers shone with a blue light as the scripts of Abandon Wisdom hovered around his hand.

The Taixu Academy disciples looked up at the main tower.

"The Confucian technique, Abandon Wisdom."

Whizz!

He pushed his palm down, touching the top of the tower. He continued pushing down, and the tip of the tower shattered in just an instant. Debris fell to the ground.

Boom!

A huge palm seal struck the barrier, and a stunning scene unfolded...

Crack!

The huge palm seal seemed to have struck a sheet of glass. A five-fingered hole appeared immediately. As the saying went, 'Pull the hair and the whole body moves

The barrier immediately dimmed!

However, the palm seal was not done yet. It traveled down.

Boom!

The main tower seemed as though it was being devoured by the palm seal as it kept decreasing in height.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

The Abandon Wisdom's palm seal finally touched the ground.

It seemed as though the entire world had fallen silent at this moment.

The tallest building in the Taixu Academy's main branch was flattened in just a blink of an eye.

The tower was gone, and there was a clear five-fingered pit on the ground.

The tower was the eye of the Taixu Academy's Formation. Now that the eye of the Formation had been destroyed, naturally, it meant that the Taixu Academy's barrier could not be mended as well. Without a barrier, everyone could enter and exit the Taixu Academy as they pleased. Anyone could come over and beat them up!

"It's over! The Taixu Academy is done for!"

Lin Xin's death had been a heavy blow to them, but the Abandon Wisdom made them despair.

The elders were extremely remorseful. Why did they have to provoke the Evil Sky Pavilion? Why did they not insist on Lin Xin apologizing? Alas, there was no remedy for regrets in this world.

Outside the Taixu Academy, the hidden cultivators gulped.

At the same time, a voice rang from the Evil Sky Pavilion's flying chariot. "I've given you a chance previously, but you didn't appreciate it... This is a small punishment for that!"

Nobody dared to speak.

The Evil Sky Pavilion's cloud-splitting chariot flew in a different direction

All of the hidden cultivators who had come to observe only had one thought in their minds at this moment; It was better not to offend the Evil Sky Pavilion. Even the Taixu Academy's barrier was destroyed by the Evil Sky Pavilion's Patriarch with a single palm strike.

...

An hour later.

The cloud-splitting chariot appeared above the Hengqu branch's main branch.

The Hengqu branch's elders and disciples were unaware of what had happened to the Taixu Academy. They took flight and looked at the cloud-splitting chariot in the skies.

The cloud-splitting flew at an impossibly high altitude in the air.

Shortly after, the Hengqu branch disciples saw a blue sword seal shooting toward them. There seemed to be an exquisite small sword in the center of the sword seal. The small sword was unleashing a strange runic power that complemented the blue radiance.

Rip!

Everyone had to cover their eyes. The collision between the sword seal and the barrier released a dazzling spark. Eventually, it penetrated the barrier and embedded itself into the ground.

Boom!

The Hengqu branch's barrier was shattered.

After the radiance faded away, the cloud-splitting chariot had already turned around and was sailing to the horizon.

...

In the Eastern palace in the Imperial city.

The Crown Prince, Liu Zhi, was clearly pleased as he hummed a little tune to himself and admired the drawings before himself.

"Your Highness, the outcome of the Taixu Academy's Lin Xin challenging Old Villain Ji is out," a eunuch said as he stood respectfully behind Liu Zhi.

Liu Zhi snorted and said, "I bet Old Villain Ji didn't expect such a powerful trump card from the Imperial family... We've been too lenient on him in the past. That's why he has grown so arrogant."

"Your Highness... the results are..." The eunuch tried to speak up.

"There's no need to say anything else... I'll explain the matter regarding the armor to my father. He's currently cultivating in seclusion. I'll take the responsibility and clear away the remnants of the Evil Sky Pavilion." Liu Zhi smiled confidently. "It won't be long before my father attains the Nine-leaf stage and unify the ten thousand tribes."

After Liu Zhi finished speaking, an expression of confusion appeared on his face when he saw the eunuch standing still with no intention of leaving. He asked, perplexed, "What are you still standing here for?"

The eunuch shook slightly as he fell to his knees with a loud thud. He stammered, "Have mercy, Your Highness... Have mercy on me... Lin Xin failed to defeat Old Villain Ji and has died on Dangyang Peak!"

Chapter 526: Perhaps This is Charisma

Liu Zhi, the Crown Prince, froze. His eyes slowly widened as he looked at the kowtowing eunuch. His voice was hoarse and stern as he said, "Come again."

“Lin Xin failed to defeat Old Villain Ji and has died on Dangyang Peak,” the eunuch replied honestly. Although he was afraid, he knew he could not lie or hide anything from Liu Zhi.

Upon hearing this, flames seemed to be lit in Liu Zhi’s eyes. His expression was complicated as he said in a daze, “How’s that possible?” He could not accept this outcome. His eyes were brimming incredulity. Then, he asked, “The special power of the armor wasn’t triggered?”

“Y-your Highness... O-old Villain Ji didn’t even fight!”

Liu Zhi. “???”

How strange. Although the special powers of the armor were not triggered, its defense was top-notch. Moreover, Lin Xin had an Eight-leaf cultivation base. As the saying went, ‘An emaciated camel is still larger than a horse’. How could Lin Xin be defeated when Old Villain Ji did not even make a move?

“Was it Yu Zhenghai? Or Yu Shangrong?” Liu Zhi asked gruffly. If Old Villain Ji did not act, then, it had to be either Yu Zhenghai or Yu Shangrong who had killed Lin Xin. Among the nine disciples, those two were the only ones who were capable of killing Lin Xin.

However, Yu Zhenghai was preoccupied with the battle at Yu Province. He would not have the leisure of leaving the battlefield to kill Lin Xin. Moreover, it was common knowledge that Yu Zhenghai was at odds with his master. Then, could it be... Yu Shangrong, the Sword Devil?

The eunuch replied, “It’s the Evil Sky Pavilion’s Mister Third, Duanmu Sheng.”

“...” Liu Zhi’s expression darkened as he asked in a deep voice, “Has Duanmu Sheng attained the Eight-leaf stage?”

“Your Highness... Lin Xin had underestimated his enemies and his stomach was impaled by Duanmu Sheng’s spear. The armor wasn’t useful,” the eunuch replied.

Liu Zhi frowned deeply. “The armor was useless?” He did not believe this. When he first received the armor, he had tested it. Ordinary Nascent Divinity cultivators could not do anything against the armor. How could this be?

The eunuch continued to say, “After Lin Xin’s death, Old Villain Ji made two moves. He broke the Taixu Academy’s barrier with a palm strike and destroyed the Hengqu branch’s barrier with his sword.”

“...” Liu Zhi no longer wanted to listen to the eunuch’s words. He closed his eyes to suppress the rage that threatened to boil over as he gruffly said, “Get lost.”

The eunuch scampered away at once.

When Liu Zhi finally opened his eyes, he mumbled, “Must I ask the old man to do something? Perhaps, I should continue asking that mysterious elite for help?” He frowned, unable to think of a good solution.

...

Meanwhile, the news of Lin Xin’s death on Dangyang Peak spread like a wildfire. If it had only been Lin Xin’s death, it would not have spread this quickly. However, the act of destroying two huge barriers with a palm and sword strike truly intimidated the various sects.

In the past, they could count on hiding behind their barriers. However, the Evil Sky Pavilion had clearly demonstrated that was no longer the case. The Evil Sky Pavilion was capable of easily breaking barriers; who would dare to stand against the Evil Sky Pavilion now? Even a major sect such as the Three Sects, with more than 20 barriers, had to tread carefully, let alone the minor sects.

This was Lu Zhou's objective for destroying the two barriers. He wanted to deter the other sects from making a move so he could focus on cultivation in seclusion.

...

When the cloud-splitting chariot returned to the Evil Sky Pavilion, Mingshi Yin said, "After master broke the barriers with a palm and sword strike, I don't think anyone will dare to look down on the Evil Sky Pavilion in the future."

Duanmu Sheng nodded and said, "Naturally... Moreover, Second Senior Brother is back. It's only a matter of time before the Evil Sky Pavilion is restored to its glory."

The cloud-splitting chariot was about to descend when a melodious tune from a flute sounded from the top of the southern pavilion. The tune was sometimes hurried and sometimes slow. There were parts that sounded like a storm while other times it softened to a drizzle.

When Mingshi Yin heard the flute song, he exclaimed, "Oh, no! That little girl, Conch, is going to attract wild beasts over!"

Mingshi Yin had the best view since he manned the helm. He looked to his left and to his right. At this moment, he saw a fine horse with a red mane, snow-white coat, and shining golden eyes circling above the Evil Sky Pavilion while stepping on auspicious clouds. He remembered Tiangou and said, "Master, a beast has breached the barrier!"

Duanmu Sheng shouted, "Cursed livestock!" He flew out of the flying chariot with his Overlord Spear in his hand before he launched himself at the steed.

Neigh!

The steed suddenly rose to two feet and neighed at the skies. It did another lap before running away.

Duanmu Sheng was taken aback as he said, "That cursed livestock has been scared away by me!"

From the top of the southern pavilion, Little Yuan'er rose into the skies and said, "Third Senior Brother, it's all your fault!"

"Huh?" Duanmu Sheng straightened his Overlord Spear. He scratched his head, not understanding Little Yuan'er's words.

"We were this close to capturing that horse! This close..."

The flute stopped playing.

Conch stood up. She looked up with a gentle gaze as she flashed a sweet smile at Duanmu Sheng. "All of you have returned!"

Lu Zhou stepped out of the flying chariot.

At this moment, Hua Yuexing flew over. She pulled on her bowstring and fired an arrow.

Whoosh!

The energy arrow went after the steed before it vanished in the air mid-flight.

Hua Yuexing frowned and said, "That horse is strange. No matter how many times I shoot, I can't seem to hit it..."

"Stop," Lu Zhou said calmly.

Hua Yuexing turned around.

"Greetings, Pavilion Master." The four Elders appeared at the base of the southern pavilion.

The female cultivators, Pan Zhong, and Zhou Jifeng looked up.

"Pavilion Master, you arrived just in time. That cursed livestock has been giving us trouble outside the barrier since morning. The elders have slashed their lotuses and are recultivating. There's nothing we could do to it," Hua Yuexing said.

Little Yuan'er pouted and said, "Master... If Conch didn't calm it down, the Golden Court Mountain's barrier would've been breached again! That wretched beast!"

The others kept voicing their opinions and venting their displeasure about the steed. It was clear the house had given them considerable trouble throughout the day.

Lu Zhou remained silent. He stroked his beard as he looked in the distance.

The steed went further and further away. When it was quite some ways away from the Evil Sky Pavilion, it came to halt, standing on auspicious clouds.

Lu Zhou looked at Conch and asked, "Did it say anything?"

Conch knew the tongue of beasts. She should have communicated with it.

Conch shook her head and said, "It doesn't want to talk."

In other words, it was not willing to communicate.

Leng Luo cupped his fists. "Even the little girl couldn't tame it. This beast is wild and might end up causing disaster. I propose that you kill it to protect Golden Court Mountain's barrier, Pavilion Master."

"I support the decision to kill it as well," Pan Litian chimed in.

Zuo Yushu said, "It's strange. Golden Court Mountain is bustling with human activity. Powerful beasts wouldn't venture into human territory, usually. Why would this beast come all the way here?"

"Perhaps this is a scheme of the Other Tribes... Don't forget, the Other Tribesman envoy, Lanni Bonar's family had even sent a coffin here. If a vicious beast such as Tiangou were to let loose here, how are we supposed to deal with it?" Hua Wudao asked.

While the others were actively discussing this matter, Lu Zhou said tonelessly, "Calm down."

He stepped into the air. He covered dozens of feet with a single stride. In the next instant, he was already above the Evil Sky Pavilion. He looked at the steed that was hovering in the distance.

“The pavilion master is making his move!”

“That cursed livestock. It’ll taste the might of the pavilion master’s invincible strike!” Pan Zhong and Zhou Jifeng’s eyes gleamed with anticipation.

Lu Zhou did not summon Unnamed. Instead, he looked at the steed and waved his hand. He said apathetically, “Ji Liang, come here.” His voice rolled out thunderously in a soundwave.

The others were stunned.

‘That horse is called Ji Liang? In any case, will it obey the old man just because he asked it to come over? Is this a joke?’

They were still fearfully respectful of Lu Zhou, but Lu Zhou’s action left them puzzled.

The cultivation world knew how difficult it was to tame a beast. Otherwise, everyone else would have been riding on mounts through the streets. Moreover, this horse, Ji Liang, could not even be controlled by Conch who was gifted in the tongue of beasts. In any case, they certainly could not voice out their thoughts.

The others were still puzzled when the steed neighed loudly. Then, it galloped toward the Evil Sky Pavilion.

Everyone else held their breaths.

That wild horse was going to tackle the Evil Sky Pavilion’s barrier again! A livestock was a livestock, after all.

‘Dear Pavilion Master, you should use your ultimate skill soon. Just kill it with a palm strike or pierce its heart with an arrow. Just do something.’

Shortly after, the steed arrived above the barrier.

Lu Zhou waved his hand and an opening appeared on the barrier.

“Uh...”

Then, there was a collective exclamation of surprise. The pavilion master had allowed the beast into the barrier?!

The steed descended through the opening. It slowed down, seemingly calm. It trotted up to Lu Zhou obediently and softly neighed. It did not attack, instead, it fell to its knees. The beast had submitted to Lu Zhou!

Upon seeing this, everyone was stunned speechless. What was happening? Was this not the same horse that was haughty and hot-tempered just moments ago? Why was it suddenly obedient and submissive now?

The four elders registered various expressions on their wizened faces.

Hua Yuexing bowed. "Uh... Pavilion Master, h-how did you do that?"

Lu Zhou stroked his beard. He smiled without saying anything, making himself seem even more mysterious. When he saw the envious looks from everyone, he nodded. He was pleased with himself. 'Perhaps, this is my charisma.'

Chapter 527: Thinking of Accepting a Disciple

Lu Zhou raised his hand and patted Ji Liang's back softly.

Neigh!

Ji Liang neighed loudly, clearly delighted.

Conch understood what Ji Liang said. She said happily, "It's greeting us!"

Hua Yuexing and the others could not understand this. Ji Liang did not seem to be greeting them at all. To them, with its fangs bared, it seemed more like it was trying to scare them. It truly looked ferocious. The others instinctively took a step back. It was better to be cautious. It was a beast, after all. They could not easily trust it. Who knew if it would suddenly turn around and attack them?

Upon seeing the others' reactions, Lu Zhou patted Ji Liang again as he said indifferently, "There's no need to be afraid."

Ji Liang rose to its feet, rose high in the sky before it dove down.

The others exclaimed in shock as they retreated.

Ji Liang landed near them and lifted its head proudly.

The people present on the scene were the elites of the Evil Sky Pavilion. The very mention of their names would strike fear in those who heard them. Yet, they seemed to be cowering before this horse.

After a while, when they saw that Ji Liang was truly not aggressive, they finally relaxed. They crowded around Ji Liang and began to study it.

Pan Zhong who was standing in front of Ji Liang heard it snorting at him. "It's quite haughty! Hey, who do you think you're looking down on?"

Neigh!

Ji Liang responded.

Pan Zhong clicked his tongue in wonder before he chuckled. "Hmm, you're quite tactful."

Conch covered her mouth and giggled before she said, "It said that you're short!"

"..."

The others burst out laughing. In any case, none of them dared to reprimand it.

Zuo Yushu observed Ji Liang for a moment. Then, she cupped her fists and asked, "Brother, where did you find this steed?"

Lu Zhou descended from the air. He placed his hands on his back and said, "I've been to the Land of Wuwang in the extreme north in the past. There are many beasts there. I was in my prime back then... but there's no need to mention that since I have a glorious past. This beast is extremely intelligent. It must've submitted itself to me back then. I'm sure that it had come to the Evil Sky Pavilion to rely on me." He did not care if the others believed him as he simply pulled out an excuse. How or why Ji Liang came was not important. What mattered was it here.

Ji Liang lifted its head and neighed.

Conch pointed at Ji Liang and said, "Ji Liang said that's the truth."

"..."

"I'm truly impressed by your might, Pavilion Master." Hua Wudao cupped his fists.

"To be capable of taming this divine steed, I'm sure that you must have displayed your shocking strength in the Land of Wuwang, Pavilion Master."

Lu Zhou enjoyed the praises from the others. After a while, he waved his sleeve and called out, "Ji Liang."

Ji Liang understood Lu Zhou. It stepped on the clouds and galloped toward Golden Court Mountain's forests and vanished.

Lu Zhou looked at the Lantian Jade Flute hanging at Conch's waist and said, "Conch, give me your hand."

"Oh." Conch seemed to be used to this as she presented her wrist.

Lu Zhou placed two fingers on her wrist. He gauged her Extraordinary Eight Meridians. Ever since they returned from Penglai Island, he had never paid attention to her cultivation. As he expected, after being nourished by the Lantian jade for some time, her Extraordinary Eight Meridians were smoother and tougher. In other words, she was now officially a Mystic Enlightening realm cultivator. For a person who had never cultivated to begin with to advance directly into the Mystic Enlightening realm, who could have done such a thing? Finally, he removed his fingers and said, "Come with me."

"Mhm."

Lu Zhou did not talk to the others. He turned around and returned to the eastern pavilion.

Conch followed him obediently.

The four Elders sighed as they shook their heads.

Mingshi Yin asked, "Why are you sighing, elders?"

"I'm just filled with emotion by the possibility that the Evil Sky Pavilion might have another genius cultivator soon," Pan Litian said.

Zuo Yushu was a genius herself, the best of the Confucian school, in fact. Faced with the little girl who had directly advanced into the Mystic Enlightening realm, she could only admit defeat. She looked at the duo's retreating backs and said, "If it were someone else apart from brother, I would've fought to the bitter end for a disciple like her."

“Elder Zuo, I haven’t finished speaking. If I have a disciple like her, I’d give her my gourd bottle,” Pan Litian said.

Pan Zhong. “???”

Leng Luo glanced at Pan Litian and Zuo Yushu as he said, “If this were in the past, I’d destroyed what I couldn’t have. However, since it’s the pavilion master, I’m willing to yield.”

Hua Wudao remained silent. He decided to stay out of the Eight-leaf cultivators’ bragging competition.

Then, Zuo Yushu looked at Ci Yuan’er who was standing next to her and said, “Little girl, what stage are you at now?”

Little Yuan’er lowered her head and counted her fingers. Then, she said sheepishly, “I’m only at the Three-leaf stage.”

Only.

Little Yuan’er’s ‘only’ made Pan Zhong and Zhou Jifeng feel like vomiting blood.

The four elders had slashed their lotuses and were recultivating. The strongest among them were only at the Two-leaf stage now. If they did not consider everything else and just compared it this way, they were now weaker than Little Yuan’er.

Mingshi Yin said, “Little Junior Sister, should I help you...”

“No!” Little Yuan’er rejected Mingshi Yin decisively. “I’ll smash the heads of whoever that tries to do something to my Golden Lotus!” She waved her fist fiercely as she spoke.

“...”

The others took a step back. The young girl was more polite than before, but she was still as fierce, if not fiercer. They would do best not to offend her.

...

Meanwhile, in the eastern pavilion.

Lu Zhou brought Conch into the hall.

“Do you know why I called you here?” Lu Zhou asked.

Conch shook her head, indicating that she was clueless.

Lu Zhou sat down slowly and said, “Are you willing to cultivate?”

“Cultivate?”

“Just like this...” Lu Zhou raised his hand. There was a surge of Primal Qi before an energy blade materialized in his hand. The energy blade morphed between a saber, spear, rod, and prong.

Conch’s eyes gleamed as she watched. She pointed at the energy blade and applauded as she said, “That’s fun! I want to learn this.”

Fun?

Lu Zhou felt slightly helpless. However, when he thought about it, the people who started cultivating in their youth did so for various reasons. Some wanted to walk on air, some wanted to fly on swords, some wanted to traverse the lands armed with a sword, or tame beasts. There were countless reasons. "I'll test your perceptivity."

Talents and foundations were one thing. Perceptivity was also important.

Conch nodded. She walked up to the rush cushion and sat down properly.

"Hold your breath and focus your mind. Direct your thoughts toward your dantian. Can you feel the Primal Qi in your dantian? It's like seawater. Try to guide its flow... Let it flow into your meridian vessels and push it out of your body to form Qi... Condense it into energy." Lu Zhou had never taught anyone as patiently as he was right now. Perhaps, he felt there was something different about this young girl. That was also probably why he had thoughts about accepting another disciple.

"Very good," Lu Zhou said when he saw that she had successfully conjured up her Primal Qi.

This Primal Qi was the Primal Qi she obtained when she opened her five apertures after entering the Mystic Enlightening realm. Although it was a piteous amount, it was sufficient to lay down her foundation.

At this moment, Conch looked up at Lu Zhou. Her confidence clearly wavered as she asked, "Is this right?"

A soft resonating sound rang from Conch's right palm. A cluster of irregular energy that resembled a chicken's egg hovered above her head.

Lu Zhou widened his old eyes. "Uh..."

The Body Tempering stage was to train the tenacity of the body as a vessel, especially the dantian's sea of Qi. That was how it could contain Primal Qi and energy seals.

The Mystic Enlightening realm greatly heightened a cultivator's senses so that they could guide and sense Primal Qi in a practical way.

The Sense Condensing realm improved a cultivator's will. When the cultivator's will was strengthened to a certain stage, he would be able to condense Primal Qi into energy. The more profound the cultivation base, the stabler the cultivator's will would be. Eventually, the cultivator would be able to do this at will.

However, although Conch had directly advanced into the Mystic Enlightening realm, he did not expect her to easily condense her Qi into energy. Hence, he was taken aback.

Conch misunderstood Lu Zhou's reaction and thought she did not do well enough. She said softly, "I'm sorry, I can't turn it into a sword."

Lu Zhou cleared his throat. 'This little girl is thinking of forming a sword on her first try?' It was already amazing that she had managed to condense it into an irregular energy seal in the shape of an egg. To think that she was aiming for a sword! 'Keep it together. How am I supposed to be her master otherwise?'

Lu Zhou stared at Conch and asked, "I'll ask you this: Are you willing to cultivate under my guidance?"

Chapter 528: A New Little Junior Sister

When Conch heard this, a delighted expression appeared on her face. However, she did not agree to it immediately. She placed her right index finger between her lips and teeth as she mulled over it.

Lu Zhou frowned slightly. There were many who under the heavens would have loved to become one of his disciples. 'Little girl, know your place. It's a blessing on your end for me to accept you as a disciple.'

"Uh... After cultivating, can I fly?" Conch asked.

"You can."

"Can I make a golden giant like Sister Yuan'er did?" Conch asked timidly.

"You can."

"Can I defeat those monsters?"

When he heard this question, Lu Zhou did not answer immediately.

Lu Zhou did not answer in haste.

Based on Conch's talents, she should be able to control those beasts. Even a powerful beast such as Tiangou was captivated by her flute. Why would she need to defeat them? "Are you scared of them?"

"Without the flute, they're scary," Conch replied.

She had a point. Her present condition was that she did not have full control of her talent at all. If it were not for the divine steed, Ji Liang, her flute's song today would have attracted many beasts. Also... It was truly a waste if she did not cultivate with this talent of hers.

"When you start cultivating, those beasts will leave you alone," Lu Zhou finally replied.

When Conch heard this, she nodded vehemently. "Then, I'll cultivate with you."

"Good." Lu Zhou had an idea. He pointed at the rush cushion. "In that case, kneel. You'll carry out the ritual of kneeling three times and kowtowing nine times."

Conch stood up and stepped over the rush cushion. She stood before Lu Zhou and kneeled respectfully.

If he was a stickler for etiquette, he would have notified everyone in the Evil Sky Pavilion and have Conch perform this ritual before everyone. However, he felt accepting a disciple was a personal matter and would rather do away with the convoluted and unnecessarily elaborate ritual. However, the act of kneeling three times and kowtowing nine times could not be skipped. It was partly to have Conch remember that this was necessary if she were to acknowledge someone as her master. It was also to make her submit herself genuinely.

A master for a day, a father forever. With this, she was now part of the Evil Sky Pavilion...

"Master."

“Ding! Inheritance and Teaching Mission amended to 10/10. Original Ji Tiandao Teaching System is officially removed. Reward: System Upgrade Card x1; Reversal Card x10; merit points: 10,000; Famous Teacher Trains a Fine Student Mission Card.”

“System Upgrade Card: Increases the permissions of the merit points system.”

“Famous Teacher Trains a Fine Student: Supervise your disciples’ painstaking cultivation with greater strictness for at least three months.”

The series of instructions gave Lu Zhou a shock. When he had just transmigrated here, he received a notification that the teaching mission was completed. He did not give it much thought before, but he did not expect it to be officially removed.

‘I hope that my system won’t be removed with it.’

Lu Zhou called up the system dashboard at once.

The familiar interface popped up.

‘Fortunately, it’s still here. Why are you panicking? You’re already an old man.’

Lu Zhou shifted his gaze downward and saw the System Upgrade Card.

‘What does increasing the permissions mean?’

He tapped the upgrade card, and a message popped up.

“System Upgrade Card. Time needed: 5 months. Throughout the upgrade process, the system cannot be used. Are you sure you want to continue?”

“Not now.” Lu Zhou considered it for a moment. It was slightly disadvantageous to not be able to use the system’s various functions. The five months’ upgrading time was also too long for him. If someone were to come looking for trouble while during that time, he would be in a difficult situation. Moreover, the four elders and his disciples were not too powerful at the moment. It seemed like it had been the right call to eliminate Lin Xin and break the barrier of the Taixu Academy.

Lu Zhou continued scrolling down. “Famous Teacher Trains a Fine Student?”

“Famous Teacher Trains a Fine Student: Supervise your disciples’ painstaking cultivation with greater strictness for at least three months. Are you going to use it?”

“Yes.” At this moment, Lu Zhou saw a Famous Teacher Trains a Fine Student mission on the mission list. It would last for three months. He nodded and closed the system dashboard.

He returned his gaze to Conch. He calmly said, “Get up.”

“Mhm.” Conch got up happily.

“You should address me as master from now on.”

“Oh, master.” Conch lowered her body slightly in an attempt to mimic Little Yuan’er.

Lu Zhou waved his hand. A cultivation method tome about breathing from the nearby table flew toward him. "This will teach you the basics about breathing. Cultivate according to the instructions listed inside every day. You can look for me if there's anything that you don't understand."

Lu Zhou tossed the tome toward Conch.

The basic cultivation method was something every cultivator must cultivate after entering the Mystic Enlightening realm. This was the basic way to increase one's Primal Qi and widen one's dantian's sea of Qi. Then, they would choose between the directions of Confucian, Buddhist, or Daoist methods, combine it with their own advantages and inclinations, and eventually, fix the direction of their cultivation.

"Thank you, master." Conch received the tome with a dazzling smile on her face.

Lu Zhou expected to hear a notification and receive a reward from the system. Unfortunately, the system did not give him any merit points.

According to the system's treatment of his nine disciples, apart from Ye Tianxin who was banished and would not earn him any rewards, he would receive merit points as rewards so long as they acknowledged that they had returned to the pavilion.

Yet, Conch was not counted. This was awkward.

"The bright moon shines over the sea; from far away we share this moment together. Could it be... that the criterion for accepting disciples is so rigid?" Lu Zhou wondered. In the end, he decided it was pointless to dwell on it. If he truly had to recruit disciples according to the poem, he could just recruit another one when he ran into him or her. Moreover, Conch's talents were comparable to his nine disciples. She would surely become a great helper to him in the future. With this thought in mind, he brightened up.

"Anyone there?"

"Your orders, Pavilion Master?" A voice rang from outside the door.

"Summon everyone to the great hall."

"Understood."

...

Inside the great hall.

Everyone from the Evil Sky Pavilion was gathered there.

Yet, Lu Zhou was taking his time to show up.

The four elders, Duanmu Sheng, Mingshi Yin, Zhu Honggong, Zhao Yue, and Little Yuan'er stood at the side. They occasionally looked out of the great hall as they waited for their master.

The others stood at the other side.

"What's with master today? What's with all the ceremony?" Mingshi Yin wondered out loud.

"Just stay calm. We'll know once the pavilion master is here," Pan Litian said.

At this moment, Lu Zhou held Conch's hand with his other hand placed on his back as they slowly strolled in from outside the great hall.

The others turned to look.

The four elders were perceptive enough to understand what was going on when they saw Lu Zhou leading Conch here.

The four of them bowed and said in unison, "Congratulations, Pavilion Master!"

Lu Zhou brought Conch to the front and turned around to face the others. With a clear voice, he said, "I have two things to announce."

He paused.

The great hall was silent.

"From this day onward, Conch will officially be my tenth disciple."

Although the others had expected this, they were still slightly taken aback. Everyone knew about the strict requirements of becoming an Evil Sky Pavilion disciple. There were countless people who wished to become a disciple of the Evil Sky Pavilion's patriarch. Even geniuses such as Pan Zhong and Zhou Jifeng were not considered by him. It was clear just how difficult it was to become his disciple.

Pan Zhong and Zhou Jifeng felt nothing but envy at this moment. They looked at Conch before both of them and the female cultivators bowed in unison.

"Greetings, Miss Tenth."

Conch seemed reserved faced with all this situation.

Lu Zhou glanced at her.

Conch nodded. She stood before Duanmu Sheng. "Greetings, Third Senior Brother."

"Hello, Little Junior Sister."

Chapter 529: What? A New Little Junior Sister?

Since Conch was just a young girl, he did not think it was appropriate to maintain a stern expression. Therefore, he mustered up what he thought was an acceptable smile.

Conch walked up to Mingshi Yin and said, "Greetings, Fourth Senior Brother."

"Little Junior Sister, you must work hard in your cultivation. If you want to slash your lotus, you can look for me," Mingshi Yin said with a smile.

"..." Conch immediately turned toward Zhao Yue and said, "Greetings, Fifth Senior Sister."

Zhao Yue said, "I've only learned about this today so I didn't have the time to get you a welcome present. I'll get you a present in the future."

“Thank you, senior sister.”

Conch went up to Zhu Honggong. “Greetings, Eighth Senior Brother.”

“You’re very polite, Little Junior Sister,” Zhu Honggong replied.

At last, Conch finally stood in front of Little Yuan’er.

Before Conch spoke, Little Yuan’er said, “From this day on, you’re my little junior sister... I’ll protect you.”

“Thank you, Ninth Senior Sister. You’re very nice,” Conch replied.

Shortly after, Conch greeted the four elders.

Lu Zhou nodded, pleased.

After the ceremony, Conch was officially a member of the Evil Sky Pavilion.

“Old Fourth, notify Old Seventh about this...”

“Yes, master.”

Fellow disciples should know about each other’s existence.

Lu Zhou continued, “The second matter I have to announce is that I’ll be cultivating in seclusion for five months. Throughout these five months, no Evil Sky Pavilion disciple is to venture out without due cause.”

The others looked confused. The pavilion master was already at the Nine-leaf stage, why would he need to cultivate in seclusion? Constant improvement? Yes, that must have been why. The pavilion master was constantly trying to improve himself.

“Yes, Pavilion Master.”

“Yes, master.”

Everyone bowed.

Lu Zhou stroked his beard and nodded. “The disciples will stay back. The others may leave.”

Apart from Lu Zhou’s disciples, the others left the Evil Sky Pavilion’s great hall.

Lu Zhou walked up the steps. He swept his gaze across his disciples and said, “All of you should work hard and cultivate while I’m in seclusion.”

“Yes, master.”

Naturally, this simple instruction was not enough. A strict teacher would produce fine students. In that case, he would need to have strict requirements of them.

“When I’m out of my seclusion, I’ll judge your cultivation bases. If I see that you’re slacking off, you’ll be severely punished.”

His disciples shuddered. The fear they once felt while being physically abused seemed to have returned to them! They kept their heads lowered and dared not move.

Lu Zhou said, "Conch is new here. All of you should guide her."

Thud!

Zhu Honggong suddenly fell to his knees. His forehead touched the ground as he said, "Don't worry, master, I'll work hard and cultivate... Little Junior Sister is new to all this. As her senior, I'll surely help her. You can rest assured, master!"

The other disciples were rendered speechless by this display.

Although Old Eighth was shameless, his antics were needed at such crucial moments.

Lu Zhou nodded and said, "Very well."

"Master, why did you suddenly decide to cultivate in seclusion?" Zhu Honggong asked.

The others looked at Lu Zhou; they were curious as well.

Lu Zhou said, "Do I have to explain all my decisions to you from now on?"

Zhu Honggong immediately kowtowed. "I dare not, master! I was wrong!" He raised his hand and decisively slapped himself. The sound of the slap was loud and crisp.

The other disciples were still speechless.

"Bring me the Formation veins copied from the red coffin."

"At once."

Lu Zhou stood up and said, "If there's nothing else, you're dismissed."

"Rest well, master." The disciples bowed.

Lu Zhou did not return to the eastern pavilion this time. Instead, he went to the hidden chamber.

When he entered the hidden chamber, he surveyed it.

After the refurbishment, the hidden chamber was restored to its original appearance. Compared to before, it seemed sturdier now.

Lu Zhou walked up to the rush cushion and sat with his legs crossed.

Shortly after, Duanmu Sheng sent the Formation veins copied from the coffin over. Then, he left respectfully.

Lu Zhou spread the print out and examined it. "As I expected, it's exactly the same as the ones on the armor."

It was possible for these Formation veins to be purely drawn. Copying them by scrubbing in this manner was one of the ways. However, it would be extremely difficult to operate these many Formation veins.

The precision of control over Primal Qi required for this would exceed what Eight-leaf elites were capable of.

“Why did this person come here?”

He remembered the advice on the last pages of the secret tome and sighed softly. Was the Nine-leaf stage unattainable? Until now, he was not certain.

Whether it was severing the lotus or the problem with the Golden Lotus he observed from Yun Tianluo’s experience, he could not be completely certain that the Nine-leaf stage existed. After all, he was not a real Nine-leaf cultivator.

Lu Zhou shook his head to clear away the distracting thoughts. It was useless to think about these things at the moment. He decided that it was more useful to meditate on the Heavenly Writing scrolls.

Lu Zhou called up the Heavenly Writing interface.

Then, he flipped his palm. “Upgrade Card.”

He looked at the System Upgrade Card and thought, ‘The Heavenly Writing scrolls won’t be closed, right?’

“Use.” He gave the order in his mind.

The upgrade card dissolved into spots of starlight and scattered on his body. They vanished in just a blink of an eye.

At this moment, Lu Zhou noticed that apart from the Heavenly Writing’s interface that was still active, the other interfaces were now gray.

A progress bar appeared at the side. It read: Increasing permission.

Finally, it was time to meditate on the Heavenly Writing scrolls.

He was confronted with messy runes. The first impression he had was that he could not understand them. They could not understand each other. Perhaps, it was due to his experience with the Human Scrolls, he merely took a deep breath before he memorized the runes regardless if he understood them or not. All he had to do was act as though he understood them.

A moment later, Lu Zhou entered a state that he could not explain. Just like the first time he meditated on the Human Scroll, his consciousness entered a void space. There were no sounds or sensations. Everything seemed to have frozen over. Before he knew it, his eyes were shut. Under this mystical state, blue spots of starlight appeared on his body.

...

The General’s Mansion in Liang Province.

Si Wuya brought the sheets of information he gathered from various places and walked into the hall. He seemed to be in a good mood.

Yu Zhenghai noticed Si Wuya's expression and asked, "You look happy, wise brother. Do you bring good news?"

"Indeed, I do," Si Wuya said, "The first good news is that the Taixu Academy's Patriarch, Lin Xin, has been killed by Third Senior Brother with a single strike. It's currently the hottest news in the cultivation world."

"Is Third Junior Brother that bold and powerful?" Yu Zhenghai was slightly shocked.

Si Wuya told him about how the Crown Prince, Liu Zhi, had colluded with Lin Xin. Then, he offered his analysis by saying, "Master has broken the barriers of the Taixu Academy and Hengqu branch. That's a good thing for the Nether Sect."

Yu Zhenghai nodded. "You've got a point."

"The third good news is... We have another Little Junior Sister now," Si Wuya said.

Yu Zhenghai was taken aback. He said skeptically, "Another Little Junior Sister?"

"I didn't believe it at first, but I had no choice but to believe what's written in Fourth Senior Brother's letter..." Si Wuya presented the letter to Yu Zhenghai and continued to say, "We don't know this new Little Junior Sister's real name. She's going by the name Conch for now. She's talented in tune, knows the tongue of the beasts, and most importantly, she directly advanced into the Mystic Enlightening realm. Five of her apertures are already connected, and she can easily condense Qi into energy... Eldest Senior Brother, don't give me that look. That's right, she's the young lady on the heaven worship platform."

"..." Yu Zhenghai was inwardly shocked by such a talented person. He sat down and read the letter before he said, "Does he have the energy to accept another disciple at his age?"

Si Wuya spread his arms and said, "Master has already attained the Nine-leaf stage. Perhaps, his life has been extended. Moreover, Old Fourth mentioned that master has ordered his disciples to work hard on their cultivation, and they're not allowed to leave the Evil Sky Pavilion without due cause."

Yu Zhenghai shuddered as though he had just recalled some unpleasant memories. "Heh, he likes to act like a teacher as he aged. Just as well... He's a Nine-leaf cultivator, after all. Anything he says, goes. Conch... I hope that she's as likable as Ninth Junior Sister."

...

"Ding! Disciplined Yu Zhenghai. Reward: 200 merit points."

Lu Zhou was in a state of chaos. He did not seem to have heard this notification, and it did not affect his meditation.

...

Si Wuya shook his head and said, "However, I can't help but feel that the little girl is strange."

"Why do you say that?"

"Not only is she gifted in tunes, but she also directly advanced into the Mystic Enlightening realm without cultivating. Do you believe it, Eldest Senior Brother?" Si Wuya asked.

"Indeed, it seems strange. What are your thoughts, wise brother?"

"I remember that when I returned to the Evil Sky Pavilion, I went into master's room once... There was a poem hanging on the wall. The bright moon shines over the sea; from far away we share this moment together." Si Wuya beckoned a nearby subordinate over. "Bring me the four treasures of the study."

The items were delivered shortly after.

Si Wuya picked up the brush and wrote the words on the paper. Then, he listed the names of his fellow disciples beside them.

"Eldest Senior Brother, take a look at this."

Chapter 530: Flying Leaves Sword Path, and the Sword Devil's Destiny

Yu Zhenghai looked at the calligraphy paper on the table. Yu Zhenghai, Yu Shangrong, Duanmu Sheng, Mingshi Yin, Zhao Yue, Ye Tianxin, Si Wuya, Zhu Honggong, Ci Yuan'er, Conch. Si Wuya drew circles on their names. When put together, they formed the words for the poem: the bright moon shines over the sea; from far away we share this moment together.

"I never noticed this!" Yu Zhenghai was inwardly shocked by this revelation.

"That's why I suspected master wanted to recruit ten disciples from the very beginning," Si Wuya said.

"Wait." Yu Zhenghai raised a hand. "If what you say is true, why isn't Conch the 'shi' in the poem?"

Si Wuya said, "I've asked Hua Chongyang about this before. This little girl is pure and naïve. She doesn't know her own name."

Yu Zhenghai's eyes brightened. He nodded and said, "Could it be... that the little girl is master's... daughter born out of wedlock? Perhaps, she's hiding her name from us so that we won't find out about master's promiscuous past?"

Si Wuya nearly choked when he heard Yu Zhenghai's speculations.

Yu Zhenghai said, "Don't get so worked up, wise brother. I was only joking."

He was fortunate that his master was not around. If he was, Yu Zhenghai would have suffered a good beating.

It was not Si Wuya's style to badmouth his master behind his master's back.

"I've gone through the ancient texts, and I didn't find the origins of this poem, whether in the history books or collections left behind by literary masters. With master's skill in poetry, I don't think that he can even come up with a limerick. How could he have penned this magnificent poem?" Si Wuya wondered out loud.

Yu Zhenghai placed his hands on his back and said, "The world is vast and full of wonders. When master was at his peak, he traveled the nine provinces and the four seas. It's only natural for him to have encountered unusual happenings or heard some lesser-known folk songs and the likes."

Si Wuya nodded At the moment, this was the only explanation.

"Wise brother, now that we're in a good position, let's talk about business..." Yu Zhenghai was not interested in this poem. He was merely entertaining Si Wuya. He removed the calligraphy paper from the table and rolled out Yu Province's map.

Si Wuya dismissed his thoughts and focused his attention on the map before he said, "Half a year... We should pick up the pace, then. I think tonight's our best chance."

His statement was shocking.

Yu Zhenghai did not expect that. He asked, "Are we in a hurry?"

"We should strike when our enemy least expects us to."

"Good!" Yu Zhenghai smacked Si Wuya's shoulder heavily. "Your words are just what I like to hear, wise brother!"

...

Inside a room in the temporary General's Mansion in Yu Province.

A valiant-looking woman was tidying her martial attire in front of a mirror. Her hair was tied into a bun. Even her armor and sword could not hide her fair facial features.

"General Ji, you're certainly a match for men. It's up to you to defend Yu Province now," a person next to her said in an attempt to flatter her.

This woman was the only female among the eight great generals, Ji Qingqing.

Ji Qingqing said disapprovingly, "Do you think that Yu Province can be defended?"

The deputy general immediately fell to one knee. "General, you're our mainstay. You must remain strong!"

"Nonsense." Ji Qingqing frowned and placed one hand on her sword. "Four of my eight deputy generals have already been lost before the battle started. The Nether Sect is like the sun at high noon. How am I supposed to keep them at bay?"

"Uh..." the deputy general stammered, "T-the Taixu Academy's President, Xiao Shan, is bringing 1,000 disciples here as reinforcements. They'll certainly be of some help to you, General."

"That's enough." Ji Qingqing waved her hand. She did not want to discuss this further.

...

Night fell.

On the southern city gate.

A huge, dark flying chariot slowly sailed into view.

Yet, the Ji Province City remained silent.

The cultivators at the top of the gates looked up at the night sky.

“What’s that?”

“A flying chariot?”

The night was too dark. They did not have much visibility. They rubbed their eyes and widened them to look again.

Suddenly, a saber shot out from the flying chariot. The saber glowed with faint radiance. Then, there was a bright flash as the energy saber instantly enlarged. It dropped toward them like a large pinwheel. As it descended, scores of densely packed starlight shot out.

This was the famed saber technique, Great Dark Heaven Memorial’s Dark Heaven Starlight, that Yu Zhenghai, the Sect Master of the Nether Sect, cultivated.

“This is bad! The Nether Sect is here!”

Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!

They did not even have the time to light the fire signals before they activated the ballistae.

The Great Dark Heaven Memorial broke through the western city gate in no time at all.

Outside the gate, tens of thousands of Nether Sect members swarmed into the city. Their shouts resounded in the skies.

On the flying chariot, Yu Zhenghai stood with his hands on his back as he observed the battle below.

“Wise brother, what do you think?”

“Your saber technique is shocking, Eldest Senior Brother. I’m awestruck.” Si Wuya looked at the Great Dark Heaven Memorial, stunned.

The Nether Sect cultivators poured into Yu Province City swiftly. Whenever they ran into the garrison, they killed.

The flying chariot began to slowly advance. It was progressing like a hot knife through butter.

High above the southern city gate, a figure crossed his arms in the dark night skies as he looked down. He glanced at the skies to the west and shook his head disapprovingly. “What a crude way of swinging his saber. Utterly boring and ostentatious. Its lethality is low. All it has got going for it is its appearance.”

He continued to watch the battle; he did not join in. This was because the garrison soldiers were too weak. They were boringly weak. He could not bring himself to be bothered with them.

A moment later, he saw almost 1,000 individuals flying toward him in groups. Perhaps, he had been hovering in a remote part of the skies, combined with his green robes and the night skies, the people did not seem to notice him.

“Shh.” The leader raised his hand.

“President, what do we do now?”

“Let’s avoid being caught for now. We’ll take a detour and leave Yu Province. Then, we’ll launch a sneak attack on Jing Province...”

The others nodded.

“I didn’t expect Yu Zhenghai to be this powerful... It’s a fine idea to avoid him.”

Some of the Nether Sect’s elites were stationed in Liang Province to guard against the Other Tribes.

Yu Zhenghai and the others originally guarded Jing Province themselves. Now that they were launching this large-scale attack, the province was, naturally, left unguarded.

“Old Villain Ji has destroyed our Taixu Academy. I must have my revenge.”

At this moment, a voice rang from above the cultivators.

“My apologies.”

“Who’s there?!” President Xiao Shan shuddered as he looked up. He saw a green-robed swordsman hovering in the night sky.

Zing!

A faint scarlet sword flew out from behind the green-robed swordsman’s back. The sword split into two, then, it multiplied... until the sky was filled with densely packed energy swords.

Whizz!

An avatar appeared! The avatar that was missing a Golden Lotus shot toward them with thousands of energy swords in tow.

Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh!

The energy swords easily pierced the chests of the Taixu Academy disciples. They were powerless to fight back.

Xiao Shan summoned his avatar and rose higher in the air in an attempt to block the energy swords.

As soon as Xiao Shan rose into the sky, a faint smile appeared on Yu Shangrong’s face. He adjusted his grip on his Longevity Sword as he stepped forward.

There was a flurry of movements.

Five leaves circled the sword’s blade.

Before Xiao Shan could react, the leaves were already on the move. They sliced through his protective energy with uncanny sharpness.

The Longevity Sword followed closely behind the leaves, and it pierced Xiao Shan’s dantian’s sea of Qi.

Xiao Shan felt a chill spread throughout his body. His heart sank to the depths of his soul as he witnessed his disciples being stabbed by Sword Devil's Destiny. He cried out, "I'm taking you with me!" As soon as he finished speaking, he immediately detonated his dantian's sea of Qi.

Boom!

Yu Shangrong was set to be caught in the explosion. He felt the incoming wave of energy as he swung his Longevity Sword. A tidal wave of sword shadows was launched. The scene where he slashed the Fiend Zen was reenacted. He focused all his attention and worked with every fiber of his being as he swung his sword. He moved like the wind. The area within two meters of him was completely filled with the Longevity Sword's shadows.

...

On the Nether Sect's flying chariot.

Yu Zhenghai looked in the direction of the western city gate. At night, they could not see the details of the techniques or the appearance of the other person. However, it was difficult to miss the huge avatar.

"A 60-foot avatar with no Golden Lotus?" Yu Zhenghai was inwardly shocked. He was not shocked by the profundity of the person's cultivation base but at the speed at which the cultivator managed to re-cultivate to the Five-leaf stage after severing his lotus. It was a truly shocking feat.

"Eldest Senior Brother, that must be energy swords. It's most probably from the sword path elite who has been helping us," Si Wuya said.